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## **The Elite of the Elites: the U.S. Marine Raider Battalions, 1942-1944: A Case Study in Elite Military Organizations**

Stephen Mark Houseknecht

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**THE ELITE OF THE ELITES – THE U.S. MARINE RAIDER BATTALIONS,  
1942-1944: A CASE STUDY IN ELITE MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, History

By

Stephen M. Houseknecht

July 2015

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History

Missouri State University, July 2015

Master of Arts

Stephen M. Houseknecht

**ABSTRACT**

In 1942, the U.S. Marine Corps activated the Marine Raider battalions, the first American special forces units of World War II. However, the introduction of an elite subculture within the ranks of the Marine Corps, which already prided itself on being the nation's elite fighting force, resulted in conflicting cultures and competing identities. Many Marines felt that the creation of an elite within the ranks of the elite was superfluous and undesirable. The preferential treatment and widespread publicity accorded to the Raiders, combined with the Raiders' sense of exceptionalism and claims to superiority, garnered resentment among other Marines. Ultimately, the leadership of the Corps concluded that the Raider battalions were a detriment to the morale and *esprit* of the Marine Corps. Such resentment, in conjunction with the changing realities of the Pacific War in 1944, led to the end of the Raider program in early 1944. As an elite organization operating within the culture of a recognized *corps d'elite*, the Raiders present a unique case study in the nature of elitism in military cultures. This thesis examines the unique circumstances surrounding the creation of the Raiders, their rise to fame, and sudden fall from grace, concluding that the operational necessities of the late war period converged with the on-going cultural unrest within the elitist culture of the Corps to spell the end of the Raiders.

**KEYWORDS:** U.S. Marine Corps, Raider battalions, Evans F. Carlson, Merritt A. Edson, military elites, military cultures, special operations forces, Pacific War, World War II.

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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William Garrett Piston, Ph.D.  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Missouri State University

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For the Degree of Master of Arts, History

July 2015

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## **INTRODUCTION: THE RAIDER MARINES IN HISTORY**

In August 1942, the United States was at war with Imperial Japan. The Japanese opened the war by dealing the United States a stunning blow at Pearl Harbor. Throughout early 1942, the Japanese kept the Allies reeling from a stunning chain of disasters; Guam, Wake, Malaya, Singapore, Burma, and the Philippines all fell before the Japanese juggernaut. The Allies appeared powerless to stop the Japanese advances across the Central and South Pacific, but a surprise victory at the battle of Midway in June 1942 evened the odds. In an attempt to press their advantage, the Allies moved to interdict Japanese operations in the Solomon Islands, a vital location for maintaining communications with their Australian allies. In August 1942 the U.S. 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division successfully landed on the island of Guadalcanal and seized the vital airfield there. The Imperial Japanese Navy struck back hard, decisively defeating the Allied naval force in the Battle of Savo Island. Now stranded, the Marines tenaciously held on to their airfield perimeter, and waited for the inevitable counterattack. The Pacific War hung in the balance.

On a Pacific island far to the north, two figures stand together on a deserted strip of beach on a summer evening. The night is dark, ideal for a secluded conference between two of the most important men in the on-going naval struggle. The commander-in-chief of naval forces in the Pacific converses quietly with one of his most trusted admirals as they walk along the quiet beach.

Unbeknownst to them, their midnight conference is less private than they had hoped. Several hundred yards off-shore, shielded by the darkness and the sound of the

surf, two specially modified submarines of the U.S. Navy quietly surface. Figures emerge quickly and quietly from the submarines' hatches: U.S. Marines, faces covered in black, armed to the teeth with automatic weapons. The Marines, over 200 of them, debark from the submarines, but not in Higgins boats or amtracks, under the protective barrage of a naval armada. These men instead inflate small, rubber dinghies, powered by paddles and strong backs. Silently, they move towards the shore, where the admirals continue their conversation.

The rubber boats reach the shore undetected, as the surf covers any landing sounds. The Marines quickly move ashore and hide their boats in the tree line. They assemble without delay, efficiently and stealthily. The marauders waste no time, and begin sneaking towards the figures silhouetted in the moonlit beach. These men are not just any Marines – they are Marine Raiders. Specially selected from the ranks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division and hardened by months of rigorous training, they have been drilling specifically for this operation for several weeks now. They have been trained to land unobserved on enemy-held islands, wreak havoc on unsuspecting garrisons and installations, and then depart as quickly as they came. They are equipped with the best weapons the American arsenal can furnish and are all deadly marksmen. The Raiders each carried a signature knife for silently deposing of enemy sentries – the famed Raider stiletto – which they wielded with deadly efficiency.

Meanwhile, the admirals, pausing occasionally to gaze at the night sky, remain blissfully unaware that they are under scrutiny. The Raiders creep ever closer, always ready to deliver a hail of fire on their unsuspecting targets. The Raiders could not believe their good fortune: the commander of the Pacific Fleet continued to be ignorant of their

presence, though they closed the distance to 100 yards, 50 yards, 25 yards. Emboldened by their success thus far, the Raiders continued to press the advantage. Finally, with the killer Marines a mere 50 feet away, the admirals realized their peril and let out a cry of alarm – too late.

Fortunately for the two naval officers, the Raiders were not out for blood on this summer's eve. Rather, the Raiders, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson, were merely demonstrating their prowess in amphibious raiding to an audience of the very highest stature: the officers surprised this night were none other than Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC), and Admiral Raymond Spruance, the hero of Midway. The fact that both admirals had known that they were about to observe a Raider landing exercise and yet were still taken unaware only served to emphasize the Raiders' finesse and proficiency. Nimitz visited briefly with the erstwhile assassins and commended them for their performance. Previously, he had commended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion in glowing terms as a battalion that, "by virtue of morale, organization, equipment, training, and development and encouragement of individual initiative and resourcefulness, is a striking force out of proportion to its numbers."<sup>1</sup> Their performance on this training exercise demonstrated that this was no exaggeration.<sup>2</sup>

While the Raiders showcased their abilities for Nimitz, the real targets of their training were not idle. The Japanese garrison on Makin Atoll in the Central Pacific took precautions to be ready for just such a raid. Their preparations were of little avail. Just a

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Oscar F. Peatross, *Bless 'Em All: The Raider Marines of World War II* (Irvine, California: ReView Publications, 1995), 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 45, and John Wukovits, *American Commando: Evans Carlson, His WWII Marine Raiders, and America's First Special Forces Mission* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2009), 86.

few days later, on the morning of August 17, 1942, the Raiders would surprise the Japanese and almost completely annihilate them in two days of fighting. The commander of the garrison, Sergeant Major Kanemitsu, did not fare as well as the admirals. In one of the many fantastic coincidences of the war, Kanemitsu met his untimely end at the hands of Raider Sam Brown from Lieutenant Oscar Peatross' platoon – the very platoon that had surprised Nimitz and Spruance some weeks before.<sup>3</sup>

The Raiders were an elite force of U.S. Marines organized in the early days of World War II to spearhead amphibious assaults, raid enemy installations, and operate deep behind enemy lines. The Raiders performed brilliantly in the combat of the South Pacific from 1942 to early 1944, participating in campaigns on Guadalcanal, New Georgia, and Bougainville, as well as the Makin Atoll Raid. However, despite their intended use and specialized training, the Raiders were rarely employed in actual raids. Instead, they were frequently used as “shock troops,” deployed to seize or defend key objectives while operating more or less as standard Marine battalions. In light of this, the Raiders were ultimately disbanded, a mere two years after their inception and well before the end of the Pacific War.

Perhaps because of their short experience, scholarly military historians have paid scant attention has been paid to the Raiders. Generally, the Raiders are mentioned only as asides in military histories of larger scope, or even downplayed as the products of “military faddists.”<sup>4</sup> This is unfortunate, though perhaps to be expected given the small

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<sup>3</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 45-47, 54-55.

<sup>4</sup> Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, rev. ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1991): 346. For the standard treatment of the Raiders in Marine Corps historiography, see Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1965), 357-399 passim; J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, rev. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 254-288 passim; and Edwin Howard Simmons *The United States Marines: A History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 128-158 passim.

size and short lifespan of the Marine Raider battalions. Since they were disbanded by the war's end, the Raiders do not figure prominently in the literature analyzing the rise of elite special operations units in modern militaries. The aim of this study, then, is twofold. First, it re-examines the operational history of the Raiders with reference to the existent scholarship on elite special operations units. Secondly, it analyzes the dissolution of the Raider Battalions in January 1944. As will be seen, there were significant pragmatic, operational rationales behind the abandonment of the Raider concept. These reasons are readily apparent and their significance is amply appreciated in the literature on the Raiders. This study sheds light on the less often-cited conflict in institutional culture that the Raider experiment provoked. Simply put, the Raiders were an elite group, established rapidly and under secretive circumstances, within an institution that took considerable pride in being elite assault troops – the United States Marine Corps. As an elite within an elite, the Raiders thus present a unique situation for the historian. Their emergence as an elite sub-culture within the larger culture of elitism of the Corps presents an interesting case study of the potential conflicts of elitist cultures in military organizations.

Noted military historian Robert Citino has aptly pointed out that military historiography seems to have evolved, and is currently evolving, along three general lines, which he classifies as operational, “new” or social, and cultural.<sup>5</sup> These lines, according to Citino, are not exclusive, but complementary and frequently overlapping; nevertheless, they offer a convenient framework in which to consider military history.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Citino, “Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (Oct. 2007): 1070-1090. The classification of the works discussed herein into traditional operational, “new” or social, and cultural histories is a useful construct for organizational purposes, but it should be stressed that the majority of these works do not fall neatly into a single category. Furthermore, the distinctions between these genres are often vague, as Citino himself notes. “Military Histories Old and New,” 1089.

The historiography of the Marine Corps in the Pacific War follows these larger trends.<sup>6</sup>

Operational history is the style traditionally associated with both military histories in general and Marine Corps history in particular. Operational history can be considered military history in its most basic form: “the detailed analysis of who did what, where, and to whom . . . the nuts and bolts of military history.”<sup>7</sup> Concerned primarily with reconstructing the sequence of battles and the personalities and flaws of great leaders, it retains a broad appeal. Many operational histories are merely “battle books” with little in the way of critical analysis, unfortunately leading some to overlook the value of scholarly operational histories. Much sound work has been done in not only thoughtfully preserving the Corps’ World War II legacy, but in critically analyzing and explaining the Marines’ Pacific War.<sup>8</sup>

While quality scholarship in Marine Corps operational history certainly exists, notable developments have been made in the area of the so-called “new” military history. The persistence of the title “new” is ironic, as this school has not only been integrated into military history at large, but has largely come to dominate the field. Alternately referred to as the “war and society” approach, “new” military history broadens its scope

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<sup>6</sup> Jon Hoffman presents a brief survey of scholarly treatments of the Marine Corps in “The US Marine Corps,” in *A Companion to American Military History*, vol. 2, ed. James C. Bradford (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 411-429. Hoffman’s essay serves as an excellent reference on the state of Marine Corps history. However, his analysis spans the entirety of Marine Corps history, thus abbreviating his treatment of World War II.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Showalter, “A Modest Plea for Drums and Trumpets,” *Military Affairs* 39, no. 2 (April 1974): 71.

<sup>8</sup> While the complaints against popular history are often merited, to categorically dismiss the study of battles and warfare as irrelevant is not only unfair to the quality work that is being done in that area but it is to deny an important aspect of the human experience. “It would be strange indeed if a scholarly field with such broad interests did not make room for analysis of war and battle—surely not the least significant of human undertakings.” Citino, “Military Histories Old and New,” 1081. Military organizations are, after all, established with the purpose of doing battle, a feature that is nowhere more evident than in the Marine Corps, which proudly proclaims itself to be the “First to Fight.” Dennis Showalter, one of the current deans of military history, makes this point very effectively in his article, “A Modest Plea.” At risk of stating the obvious, Showalter holds that “Armies may be part of a broad framework, but like all institutions, they have a primary avowed function as well. They exist to fight, and they justify themselves on the grounds of their military efficiency.” 72.

beyond traditional battle narratives in the quest to greater understand the complexities behind warfare, the people involved in it, and its effects on them. It seeks to answer such questions as who went to war and why; what their experience was and how it changed them; how military services function as organizations; and how the military is both shaped by, and how it in turns shapes, society as a whole. It is in the realm of “new” military history that some of the most telling dynamism of recent Marine Corps historiography becomes apparent. Aside from adding considerably to the story of the Corps’ most significant wartime experience, it also helps provide a much more complete picture of the Corps on both organizational and individual levels.<sup>9</sup>

If the “new” military history is concerned with “the more humanistic side of war,” then cultural history is really just “war and society” history taken to its logical extension.<sup>10</sup> The advent of the cultural approach to the history of war has served as fresh evidence of the scholarly vitality of military history.<sup>11</sup> The examination of the Pacific War through various cultural lenses has given rise to some of the most exciting new scholarship on the Marine Corps. Cultural history seeks to deepen understanding of

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<sup>9</sup> Citino notes that “the new military history is today an integral, even dominant, part of the parent field,” quipping that “it seems silly to keep calling it ‘new.’” “Military Histories Old and New,” 1071. Though the concept of what exactly constitutes “new” military history remains somewhat elusive, it has been succinctly characterized as “an expansion of the subject of military history from the specifics of military organization and action to their widest implications, and also a broadening of the approaches to the subject.” Peter Paret, quoted in John Whiteclay Chambers, “The New Military History: Myth and Reality,” *The Journal of Military History* 55, no. 3 (July 1991): 397. For representative examples of the “new” military history as applied to the Marine Corps, consider Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, by far the best and most thorough institutional history of the Marine Corps; Gregory J.W. Urwin, *Facing Fearful Odds: The Siege of Wake Island* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); and Gregory J.W. Urwin, *Victory in Defeat: The Wake Island Defenders in Captivity, 1941-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Wayne E. Lee, “Mind and Matter – Cultural Analysis in American Military History: A Look at the State of the Field,” *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (March, 2007): 1117.

<sup>11</sup> Probably the best introduction to the topic of cultural military history is John Shy, “The Cultural Approach to the History of War,” *The Journal of Military History* 57, no. 5 (October 1993): 13-26. For a thorough examination of the developments within the cultural history of war since then, see Wayne Lee’s “Mind and Matter.” Both Shy and Wayne provide insightful discussions of the use and application of the cultural approach to military history.

events both by situating them in the context of their times and by examining how a society's culture impacts the function of its military. Cultural history differs from the more traditional approaches in its openness to interdisciplinary methodologies, such as sociology and anthropology, and its tendency to focus on military ability and conduct as results of interlocking cultural factors. Aaron O'Connell, one of the preeminent practitioners of Marine Corps cultural history, argues that studying culture is not only beneficial, but crucial, for "Not only does culture influence when and why we go to war, it shapes how we fight."<sup>12</sup> O'Connell offers a good working definition, taking "the word 'culture' to mean the whole host of ways that individuals and groups differentiate themselves from other individuals and groups."<sup>13</sup> This is the definition of culture adopted by this study. The Marine Corps, with its strong sense of exceptionalism and commitment to maintaining their own unique subculture, presents an ideal organization for the cultural historian's study. This applies even more so with the Marine Raiders.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> O'Connell offers one of the most succinct arguments in favor of adopting the cultural approach to the history of war: "After a lengthy period of dismissing race, gender, and cultural theory as irrelevant to the study of combat, most scholars of warfare are prepared now to admit what is obvious to most: our beliefs, identity narratives, and idea templates affect how we act – whether in our home lives, work lives, or, for military members, on the battlefield. Not only does culture influence when and why we go to war, it shapes how we fight: the tactics and tools we use, including the rhetorical tactics that help us understand, explain, and justify our participation in the conflict." Aaron O'Connell, "'A Harsh and Spiritual Unity': A New Look at Culture and Battle in the Marine Corps' Pacific War," *International Journal of Naval History* 7, no. 3 (December 2008): 1.

<sup>13</sup> O'Connell, "Harsh and Spiritual Unity," 4. He continues, "In short, culture is the stories people tell themselves and others about themselves. And while stories usually implies a linguistic form – something told or written with words – I use the term and its synonym 'narrative' more loosely. Rituals, traditions, uniform insignia and even habits of dress and posture tell stories too, even if they do so without words." Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> For a sampling of some of the cultural history of the Pacific War, consider John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986); Gerald Linderman, *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Peter Schrijvers, *The GI War Against Japan: American Soldiers in Asia and the Pacific During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); John Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (Boulder: Westview, 2003); Craig Cameron, *American Samurai: Myth, Imagination, and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941-1951* (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1994); and Aaron B. O'Connell, *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).



The history of Marine Raider Battalions falls within the basic structure of the historiography of the Pacific War, though the body of literature on the Raiders is considerably smaller than that available on the Marine Corps generally. The fact that the Raiders were only in existence for two years and at their height only numbered four undersized battalions also means that there is simply less for historians to work with. Despite the grandiose visions for using the Raiders to alter the course of the war, in reality the Raiders were generally only employed locally, for tactical purposes; while they served key roles in important campaigns, the ultimate outcome of the war was not definitively shaped by the Raiders. The Raiders as such had ceased to exist by the time of the defining campaigns of the late war period, which further distances them from historical consciousness.

Despite their relative obscurity within the scholarly historiography of World War II, the Raiders have been the subject of several works, and have at least held the interest of those involved with Marine Corps history. By their very nature, the Raiders make for exciting battle histories. Several non-scholarly or “popular” histories deal with the Raiders’ battle history, including Edwin Hoyt’s *The Marine Raiders* and George W. Smith’s *The Do-or-Die Men*.<sup>15</sup> Such popular accounts are great reads and help draw attention to the Raiders’ experiences, but they are of limited analytical value. Other popular histories are more relevant. One narrative of note is George W. Smith’s *Carlson’s Raid*.<sup>16</sup> Smith’s lively narrative evidences a good degree of research and

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<sup>15</sup> Edwin P. Hoyt, *The Marine Raiders* (New York: Pocket Books, 1989); George W. Smith, *The Do-or-Die Men: The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion at Guadalcanal* (New York: Pocket Books, 2003); both are enjoyable, fast-paced narratives of Raider combat exploits; however, their utility to the researcher is limited.

<sup>16</sup> George W. Smith, *Carlson’s Raid: The Daring Marine Assault on Makin* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 2001); this work is also limited in scope, as it primarily deals with the Makin Atoll Raid and covers little of the remainder of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders’ history.

insightful conclusions; however, its utility to the historian is limited by the lack of adequate documentation of sources. Jon Hoffman's *From Makin to Bougainville* offers a concise, well-researched account of the Raider experience and is a valuable reference guide and overview of the operational history of the Raiders.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the Raiders are usually mentioned in various histories of the Southwest Pacific campaigns of 1942-1944, most notably the battle for Guadalcanal.

As small units caught up in a vast war, the Raider Battalions lend themselves easily to the "bottom-up" approach of the social history style. However, here Raider historiography illustrates the futility of attempting to impose a dichotomy between traditional and "new" approaches, as the best histories of the Raiders blur the lines between the two and effortlessly incorporate elements of both. Joseph Alexander's masterful treatment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion, *Edson's Raiders*, is one example of this.<sup>18</sup> Alexander's narrative demonstrates his mastery as one of the foremost authors of Marine Corps history. *Edson's Raiders* is indispensable for the study of the Raiders. However, though the leaders of the battalion, tactics and strategy, and Raider performance in combat figure prominently in his narrative, Alexander reaches beyond the standard boundaries of traditional campaign history to frequently feature the impressions and perspectives of the enlisted men of Edson's Raiders. He skillfully employs archival holdings to create poignant glimpses of life through the eyes of the "common" Raider, such as Lee N. Minier. Despite the title, Alexander's intended scope is not a biography of Edson but a unit history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, who bore his name even after Edson's

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<sup>17</sup> Jon Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War* (Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Joseph H. Alexander, *Edson's Raiders: The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion in World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001).

promotion to other duties. *Edson's Raiders* is thus the only solid unit history to trace any of the Raider battalions from the beginning to the end of their existence.

In the absence of complete unit histories, Raider historiography is served well in several good biographies. The original two Raider battalions, unusual among Marine battalions, were both informally identified by the names of their respective commanders – Edson's and Carlson's Raiders. Thankfully, both Edson and Carlson have received attention from scholars. Marine historian Jon Hoffman's *Once a Legend* can legitimately claim to be the definitive work on Merritt Edson. Edson played a key role in the initial Raider concept, personally shaped the training and ethos of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion, and led them in their defining engagements during the Guadalcanal campaign. Hoffman, basing his work on thorough research in the extensive Edson Papers held at the Library of Congress, creates a compelling portrait and analysis of the indomitable Edson. Along the way, he also shares insights into the battalion that bore his name as well.<sup>19</sup>

The standard account of Evans F. Carlson has long been Michael Blankfort's 1947 *The Big Yankee*. Blankfort wrote this book primarily based on extensive personal interviews with Carlson, making *The Big Yankee* something of a pseudo-memoir. Indeed, Blankfort goes to such extremes to posthumously defend Carlson from his detractors that it would not be far-fetched to term this book a hagiography rather than a biography. However, *The Big Yankee* is still an invaluable source in that Blankfort includes lengthy segments of Carlson's personal diary and letters in his text. In *American Commando*, John Wukovits uses the biography of Carlson as an effective vehicle to deliver a social history of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion and their training, ideals, and

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<sup>19</sup> Jon T. Hoffman, *Once a Legend: "Red Mike" Edson of the Marine Raiders* (1994. Reprint, Novato, California: Presidio Press, Inc., 2000).

campaigns. Wukovits captures the essence of Carlson, undoubtedly one of the most unique and least understood individuals in Corps history, while simultaneously blending in social and campaign history of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion, culminating in their Long Patrol on Guadalcanal. This fine biography is most valuable to the study of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider battalion. Wukovits' tendency to accept Blankfort's account uncritically is perhaps the biggest weakness in *American Commando*; thus, while Wukovits' account is well-rounded, it tends to repeat some of the bias found in *The Big Yankee*.<sup>20</sup>

Probably the best treatment available is the work of Oscar F. Peatross, himself a veteran of the Raiders and a career Marine officer. Peatross' *Bless 'Em All* is unique in that it consists not primarily of his own memoirs. Rather, Peatross sets his sights on a much larger goal: to tell the history of all the Raider battalions. Part memoir, part history, Peatross relies not only on his own experiences, but draws extensively on the testimony of other Marines. Thus, *Bless 'Em All* is an interesting blend of historical and personal accounts of the Raiders, from their formation to their ultimate end.

Additionally, though he does not provide citations or bibliographical information, it is clear that Peatross has consulted the documented records to no small extent. Peatross does not shy away from stating his own opinion in no uncertain terms, though he does try to keep things in perspective. Besides its scope as the only attempt at comprehensive history of the Raiders, Peatross' narrative is extremely detailed and highly informative. Additionally, Peatross shows considerable talent as an author, writing in engaging prose style and occasionally referencing poems and other literature. Though the lack of documentation of source materials hinders the claim towards definitive history of the

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Blankfort, *The Big Yankee: The Life of Carlson of the Raiders* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947); Wukovits, *American Commando*.

Raiders, *Bless 'Em All* remains the most complete narrative to date.<sup>21</sup>

Aside from Peatross' history/memoir, no work has attempted to detail the operational history of all four Raider battalions. Furthermore, to the best of this author's knowledge, little if any attempt has been made to contextualize the Raiders' experience by linking their operational history with the existent scholarly literature on elite special operations units. This study humbly seeks to remedy this by incorporating the perspectives offered in the treatments of military elites and special forces. More importantly, this study will seek to incorporate aspects of a cultural approach by highlighting the inherently subjective dynamics inherent in the relationship between military elites and their parent institutions, specifically examining the cultural tension that emerged between the Marine Corps as America's *corps d'elite* and the Raiders as the elite of the Marine Corps.

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<sup>21</sup> The first two Raider battalions had the longest service, and served with distinction in the epic Guadalcanal campaign. It is understandable then, but still unfortunate, that most of the historical accounts cover primarily either the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalions. To date, the only study specifically focused on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Raider Battalions' operational history that this author knows of is Davis Tyre Lovelady's, "The Marine Corps' Third and Fourth Raider Battalions During World War II" (master's thesis, Texas Tech University, 2002).

## CHAPTER 1: ELITES AND MILITARY HISTORY

The U.S. Marine Corps has long cultivated its image and culture as the nation's elite fighting force, a tradition that was amplified during World War II. This shared culture gave the average Marine gained a sense of identity and belonging as a member of the nation's recognized *corps d'elite*. Yet the Raiders established an elite subculture within the domain of this preexistent culture of Marine elitism. They were the elite of the elites, commonly "regarded [as] nothing short of 'Supermen' in the Marine Corps."<sup>22</sup> But what exactly is meant by the term "elite"? Such terminology of superiority necessarily employs a large degree of subjective judgment. Nevertheless, the question, "what makes any given unit elite?" is well worth consideration, and is essential to an understanding of the dynamics of the Raider Marines within the Corps.

### Defining Military Elites

To hear a military unit described as "elite" or a "crack outfit" is not strange to those with even a passing knowledge of military history. Designations of military elite status often seem to be axiomatic – it is simply understood that everyone knows what is meant by elite troops. Authors generally employ the terminology of "elite" groups to emphasize the notions of superiority that inevitability accompany the concept of elitism, yet few take the time to explore the matter of what exactly constitutes an elite. Why should some units be considered elite, as opposed to others? The subjectivity inherent in

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<sup>22</sup> A.R. McKeever, "Superman Sergeant – Is Both Raider and Parachutist," Press Release, n.d. [ca. February 1943], Raiders: Press Releases—Edson's Raiders Tulagi-Guadalcanal File (hereinafter referenced as Press Releases – Edson's Raiders), History Division, Reference Branch, Marine Corps University (hereinafter referenced as HDRB).

making any such judgment is sure to invite controversy, yet the attempt to qualify what exactly is meant by military elitism, even in relative terms, is a valuable pursuit in itself. These questions assume even greater import when dealing with the Raider battalions. They can bring clarity to the controversy which seemed to surround the Raiders from day one, and lend insights into the dynamic cultural forces involved in the interaction of elites and elitist sub-cultures.

The idea of military elites is an ancient one. Ancient texts frequently feature men, individually or in small, select groups who demonstrate their prowess on the field of battle and thus earn the homage of their own people and the respect and fear of those they vanquished. Classical Greek literature has handed down more than its share of legendary figures such as Achilles and Odysseus and their wartime feats. Some military analysts have even mused that the specially selected band of men hidden with Odysseus in the famed Trojan Horse constituted a *de facto* elite striking force. Aside from the mythological wars of the Greeks, classical history is littered with small bands of warriors esteemed for their battlefield exploits. The Persians' Immortals and the Spartans' hoplites were both legendary in their own time, and their clash at Thermopylae has continued to hold popular appeal to this day.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Arthur Ferrill, "Elite Forces in the Ancient World," in *Elite Military Formations in War and Peace*, eds. A. Hamish Ion and Keith Nelson (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996): 31-41. To cite one ancient example, the military exploits of the Hebrew King David are recorded in the Judeo-Christian Old Testament, as are those of the "mighty men" in his service. The language of comparison and implied elitism is used in the accounts of both David and of his "mighty men." David gained public notoriety at the expense of King Saul: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." 1 Sam. 18:7 King James Version. The author of 2 Sam. describes the hierarchy of the "mighty men" that should be familiar to readers of military history, as the author explains how "the thirty" earned their distinctions, but "the three" were set above and beyond. Others earned great distinction for their victories as well, and yet did not quite measure up to the first sets: "[Benaiah] was more honourable than the thirty, but he attained not to the first three." 2 Sam. 23:23 KJV. Thus, even in ancient Hebrew scriptures, the idea of military elites is fully evident. John Arquilla, introduction to *From Troy to Entebbe: Special Operations in Ancient and Modern Times*, ed. John Arquilla (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1996), xvi. Martin Kitchen, "Elites in Military History," in Ion and Nelson, *Elite Military Formations*, 9-10. Jeremy Black,

The present day fascination with the last stand of King Leonidas and his band of Spartans says something about the strong appeal that continues to surround elite military units in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The current concept of elite units, historical antecedents notwithstanding, stems largely from the Second World War. Indeed, some have labeled the Second World War the “golden age” of elite units.<sup>24</sup> The popularity of elite units has exploded in first decade and a half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, spurred ever onward by the role of the “Global War on Terror” in the public consciousness. Special units performing high-stakes missions have recently been in vogue across the spectrum of public media, including several popular films. Special operations forces are standard fare for hit video games, which frequently feature high-intensity missions performed by a variety of elite special operators – including, in one case, the Marine Raiders.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from motion picture and related media, elite military formations hold a

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*Elite Fighting Forces: From the Praetorian Guard to the Green Berets* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 10-15; Antonio Santosuosso, *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War: From Classical Greece to Republican Rome, 500—167 B.C.* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1997), 42-50.

<sup>24</sup> John W. Gordon, “The U.S. Marine Corps and an Experiment in Military Elitism: A Reassessment of the Special Warfare Impetus, 1937-1943,” in *Changing Interpretations and New Sources in Naval History: Papers from the Third United States Naval Academy History Symposium*, edited by Robert William Love, Jr. (New York: Garland, 1980), 362.

<sup>25</sup> Bernd Horn and Tony Balasevicius, *Casting Light on the Shadows: Canadian Perspectives on Special Operations Forces* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2007), 135-136. In recent years, the elite U.S. Navy SEALs have enjoyed a wave of positive publicity, with no less than four major Hollywood films with SEAL heroes hit the box offices between 2012 and 2014: *Act of Valor* (2012), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *Lone Survivor* (2013), and *American Sniper* (2014). Though it may seem strange to include video games, they are rapidly becoming a relevant indicator of popular culture. This is not to say that the content of such games is particularly worthwhile; but it would be remiss for an observer of perceptions of the military in contemporary American society to ignore the fact that video games are emerging as a mass-media fully capable of influencing the perceptions and opinions of a sizeable portion of the population. The 2011 release of the third installment of Activision’s popular *Modern Warfare* series netted an impressive \$400 million on the first day of its sales alone. Shane Richmond, “Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 Breaks Sales Records,” *The Telegraph*, 11 November 2011 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/video-game-news/8884726/Call-of-Duty-Modern-Warfare-3-breaks-sales-records.html>. Activision has released more than ten games based on fictionalized special operations missions, which continue to be among the best-selling games worldwide. Keith Stuart, “Best Selling Games of 2014 Revealed,” *The Guardian*, 16 January 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jan/16/best-selling-games-of-2014-revealed-call-of-duty-and-grand-theft-auto-dominate>. Interestingly, Activision’s only subsequent return to WWII-based games, *World at War* (2008), prominently features the U.S. Marine Raiders, allowing the user to play through a highly-fictionalized version of the Makin Atoll Raid.



great deal of staying power in mass-market military history books as well. To cite just one example, one line of popular military history books, under the heading of the “Elite” series, encompasses a bewildering array of units and groups under that umbrella, ranging from the Afrikakorps to the Zulus. Books on “elite” or “special” units are much more likely to become best-sellers than those on, say, logistics experts or transport ships’ crews. Napoleon’s army may have marched on its stomach, but the modern reader is far more likely to find books on his Imperial Guard than on the cooks who kept their stomachs full. Leaving aside possible contentions about quality of research and analysis for the moment, a common deficiency of most such works is the cavalier method in which they employ the language of military elites.<sup>26</sup>

In most literature dealing with military elites, vagueness and elasticity of definition seems to be the rule rather than an exception. Author Michael Lee Lanning holds that in addition to such factors as special selection, unconventional missions, and rigorous training, the true elites are “those who do the dirty work, and do it well . . . . These blood warriors are the best at what they do.”<sup>27</sup> But vagueness, romanticism, and overly broad generalizations as to what constitutes a military elite are by no means limited to popular narratives. Noted military historian Jeremy Black himself bases his

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<sup>26</sup> The “Elite” series of books from Osprey Publishing includes titles ranging from the very specific (e.g. “Japanese Paratroop Forces of World War II,” or “The Guards Divisions, 1914-1945”) to the impossibly broad (e.g. “The Vikings,” or “American Frontier Lawmen, 1850-1930”), as well as numerous titles focused on specific tactics rather than units. As stated, the target audience for this series is the general interest reader, not the scholar. This is by no means the only example of such arbitrary application of the “elite” moniker. Books in this vein nevertheless constitute a considerable portion of the military history books consumed by the general public and are often found in abundance on the shelves of major book retailers. Osprey Publishing, “Elite series,” <https://ospreypublishing.com/store/military-history/series-books/elite>. Accessed June 22, 2015. Robert Citino raises the question of the responsibility of the scholarly historian towards the market of popular histories: “the sustained popularity of military literature places a certain demand on the entire historical profession. Millions of people continue to read these books, and someone is going to be writing them.” “Military Histories Old and New,” 1081.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Lee Lanning, *Blood Warriors: American Military Elites* (New York: Ballantine, 2002), 3.

survey of the most notable fighting elites in history on the rather subjective premise that “elite fighting forces” are simply “those elements of a power’s armed forces singled out in some way as special fighting groups for particular tasks.”<sup>28</sup> Hallmarks of elite units, in his estimation, include such factors as fearlessness in face of death, spearhead roles, professionalism and expertise, loyalty, and adaptability. The overly broad nature of such a definition quickly becomes apparent in *Elite Fighting Forces*. Small, select bands such as the Swiss Pikemen and Rogers’ Rangers are lumped in together with considerably larger formations, even vague generalizations such as “The Few” (i.e. the Royal Air Force pilots of the Battle of Britain), the Streltsy of Ivan the Terrible, Mosby’s Rangers of the American Civil War, and whole Soviet “Shock” Armies. They do make for interesting reading, but such broad lines do not provide an appreciably better understanding of what it means to be an elite military unit. Others define elites in negative terms; that is, they are defined for what they are *not*, via comparison with non-elite units. Thus, elites frequently become anything different from the ordinary. For example, John Arquilla offers a definition of special forces “as that class of military (or paramilitary) actions that fall outside the realm of conventional warfare during their respective time periods.”<sup>29</sup>

Even among serious treatments of military elites and of special operations forces the *de facto* rule seems to closely mirror Justice Potter’s infamous dictum: it “may be indefinable [But] I know it when I see it.”<sup>30</sup> The difficulty in clearly explaining all the factors encapsulated in the term “elite” (in relation to military groups that is) is understandable. Militaries are not lifeless machines, easily explained in the language of

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<sup>28</sup> See Black, *Elite Fighting Forces*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Arquilla, introduction to *Troy to Entebbe*, xv-xvi.

<sup>30</sup> *Jacobellis v. Ohio* 378 U.S. 184 (1964).

the laboratory and of the hard sciences, but are composed of numerous individuals, of people. While modern militaries tend to be highly regimented and bureaucratic, one cannot ignore the humanistic aspect if one expects to gain any reasonable understanding of their institutional dynamics. This applies even more so when the discussion centers on elite units. Even the very descriptor “elite” depends largely on subjective factors, such as perceptions of both those within and without the group in question, leading unavoidably to differences of opinion on who exactly qualifies as an “elite” force and which forces are more “elite” than others. Much like Justice Potter, many authors find themselves falling back on intuitive but amorphous definitions.

Clearly, to delve into a discussion of elite military units is to engage a topic at once over-hyped and under-analyzed. As the esteemed military historian Dennis Showalter puts it, “If discussions of military elites have a common denominator, it is the challenge of establishing a working definition of ‘elite.’”<sup>31</sup> While it may seem elementary, any serious attempt to treat an elite military unit in light of their historical context must “begin at the beginning” by exploring just what it means to be considered an elite.

### **What Is an “Elite”? Visions of Elitism in Social Science**

Comparison of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century French aristocrat and a 19-year old U.S. Marine on Peleliu in 1944 would likely reveal only one commonality: both would consider themselves to be elites, distinctly superior to the masses outside of their own cultural sphere – yet they would also have much different conceptions of what the term “elite” itself. The very

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<sup>31</sup> Showalter, “German Army Elites in World Wars I and II,” in Ion and Nelson, *Elite Military Formations*, 135.

word “elite” is laden with connotations of superiority, select status, and specialty or scarcity. Given its origins in the Old French, where it referred to persons specially elected, usually for church leadership, it may be taken as axiomatic that “elite” is inextricably bound up with notions of exclusivity, superiority, and – unsurprisingly – small size.<sup>32</sup> Naturally, the conceptions of elitism go hand in hand with the ideas of aristocracy and ruling classes. The division of mankind into social strata has been occurring since ancient times. However, the credit for popularizing the language of elitism primarily belongs to 19<sup>th</sup>-century sociologist Vilfredo Pareto. Based on his assumption that “every branch of human activity” could be more or less precisely measured and quantified, Pareto defined the elite as “a class of the people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity.”<sup>33</sup> For his vision of *de facto* elite rule as a practical reality in ostensibly democratic societies, Pareto is commonly credited with originating modern elite theory. Gaetano Mosca, another prominent contributor to classical elite theory, held that: “In all societies—from societies that are very meagerly developed and have barely attained the dawns of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies—two classes of people appear—a class that rules and a class that is ruled.”<sup>34</sup> According to Mosca, no matter the nature of a society, the real power would inevitably be wielded by a minority.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines “elite” as “The choice part or flower (of society, or of any body or class of persons).” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “elite,” accessed July 10, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/>.

<sup>33</sup> Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society [Trattato di Sociologia generale]*, vol. 3, *Theory of Derivations*, ed. Arthur Livingstone, trans. Arthur Livingstone and Andrew Bongiorno, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), 1422-1423. Pareto’s stance was that, “The outstanding idea in the term ‘elite’ is superiority.” *Mind and Society*, 1421n1.

<sup>34</sup> Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, ed. Arthur Livingston, trans. Hannah D. Kahn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939), 50.

<sup>35</sup> As John Scott explains, though the concept of elitism may very well have its roots in the works of Gaetano Mosca, the growth of elite theory actually “owe[s] a great deal to the interest encouraged by

Pareto and Mosca dealt explicitly with political, economic, religious, or other social elites. While not particularly concerned with the nature of military elitism (except insofar as prominent members of the military may become ruling elites), their works offer insights into the nature of elitism. While their specific definitions of what constitutes an elite vary to a greater or lesser degree, “there was a substantial consensus [among Pareto, Mosca, and Robert Michels] on the ‘inferior’ nature of the mass.”<sup>36</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset offered a somewhat different view of elites. Looking beyond social divisions such as upper and working classes, Ortega identified the elite “select man” as the one who “demands more of himself than the rest.”<sup>37</sup> His elites are perceived of as those who strive for excellence, particularly in intellectual life. In his binary system, they stand in stark contrast to the “mass-man.” Ortega’s conception of elitism sees the elites as those standing in stark contrast to the rise of the “mass-man” phenomena brought about by the homogenization of the industrial age.<sup>38</sup> Thus, it is apparent that even among the fathers of elite theory, elites are implicitly defined in negative terms – that is, the elite is that which is not the mass. The logical extrapolation of elite theorists’ attempts to delineate

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Parateo’s introduction of the *word* elite and his placing of it in a formal framework of political analysis.” John Scott, “Pareto and the Elite.” In *Vilfredo Pareto: Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries*, edited by Joseph V. Femia and Alasdair J. Marshall (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 9.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Nye, *The Anti-Democratic Sources of Elite Theory: Pareto, Mosca, Michels* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1977), 8.

<sup>37</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1932; repr.1960), 15: “When one speaks of ‘select minorities’ it is usual for the evil-minded to twist the sense of this expression, pretending to be unaware that the select man is not the petulant person who thinks himself superior to the rest, but the man who demands more of himself than the rest, even though he may not fulfil in his person those higher exigencies. For there is no doubt that the most radical division that it is possible to make of humanity is that which splits it into two classes of creatures: those who make great demands on themselves, piling up difficulties and duties; and those who demand nothing special of themselves, but for whom to live is to be every moment what they already are, without imposing on themselves any effort towards perfection; mere buoys that float on the waves....The division of society into masses and select minorities is, then, not a division into social classes, but into classes of men, and cannot coincide with the hierarchic separation of ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ classes.”

<sup>38</sup> Ortega, *Revolt*, 58. The language of Ortega y Gasset’s elite theory is often incorrectly appropriated to support various political positions. John Graham notes that “*Revolt of the Masses* has been more often extolled or damned than carefully analyzed.” *The Social Thought of Ortega y Gasset: A Systematic Synthesis in Postmodernism and Interdisciplinarity* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 278.

an elite is that the only way to have “elites” is to make that which is “non-elite” out to be distinctly inferior. Perceptions of elites and elitism, it seems, inherently rest upon the contrast, stated or implied, between superior and inferior.

### **Elites and Military Organizations**

Most theorists and philosophers who have dealt with the nature of elitism have done so in terms of social, political, economic, or cultural elites. Notwithstanding the connections between the study of elites in society and of those in the military, it must be noted that the study of military elites does differ in significant ways. The different standards for determining elite status often rely on similar rationale as that of the elite social science theorists, but the differences are quite significant, enough so as to justify the separate study of military elitism as a separate phenomenon.

Of course, in many cases there is a confluence of social, economic, and political elites with the dominant military elites. The annals of military history offer any number of examples in which the lines between military and sociopolitical elites were blurred or even nonexistent. The samurai of medieval Japan were clearly both a social and military elite class, while in prerevolutionary European armies the officer corps was drawn entirely from the aristocracy. Military elites have also long been defined by their proximity to the nation’s rulers, frequently as the ruler’s bodyguard. For this reasons, such units have typically valued political loyalty to the leader and often their members were hand-picked for that very purpose. The Roman Praetorian Guard, one of the earliest units commonly described as an elite, was formed as the emperor’s bodyguard. The Praetorians, now often presented as “a cliché-ridden synonym for a crack band of loyal

troops,” are actually presented in the works of Tacitus as ruthless makers – and murderers – of emperors.<sup>39</sup> Others have claimed that the Tsarist Russian Guards played a similar role following the death of Peter the Great, as they “played a great role in the making and unmaking of emperors and empresses.”<sup>40</sup> Numerous European militaries have at various times retained distinguished guards units, with probably the most illustrious of such units being the Guards Regiments of Great Britain.<sup>41</sup>

However, the advent of mass armies and warfare on an industrial scale brought significant changes in the nature of military elitism. As societies, and hence their militaries, have become more egalitarian – or at least, less aristocratic and more bureaucratic – the impetus behind military elites has shifted away from heritage and social standing. From World War II to the present, military elite status has become increasingly synonymous with battlefield performance and technological proficiency. The increasing specialization of warfare roles and technological advances have given rise to many units claiming elite status. As elite analyst and military historian Bernd Horn rightly states, the study of military elites from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward must necessarily move beyond the traditional, sociology-centered view, which considers military elites in terms of political, economic and cultural factors. “Rather,” Horn claims, the study of military elites must now “relate to the relationship of a given group within its *own*

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<sup>39</sup> Kitchen, “Elites in Military History,” 7.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph L. Wiczynski, “The Mutiny of the Semenovskiy Regiment in 1820.” *Russian Review* 29, no. 2 (April 1970): 167. Wiczynski makes the argument that the mutiny of the Semenovskiy Regiment in 1820 served to spread seeds of dissent in Russian society, and served as a foreshadowing of the Revolution to come.

<sup>41</sup> Shuzo Uyenaka, “Daimyo in the Sengoku Period, 1467-1590,” in Ion and Nelson, *Elite Military Formations in War and Peace*, 43-72; Kitchen, “Elites in Military History,” 18-19; Lawrence Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 153-154; 187-188; Julian Paget, *The Story of the Guards* (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1977).

institution [i.e. the military establishment].”<sup>42</sup> Thus, to gain an understanding of what it means to be an elite military unit in the post-World War II age, the unit in question should be considered in light of its relative status, conceived of broadly as its status within the military as a whole, or more narrowly as within its parent branch, corps, or even division. For the purposes of this study, it would do little good to compare the Marine Raiders with the makeup of 1940s American society as a whole. This study instead attempts to view the Raider Battalions specifically in relation with their parent institution, the U.S. Marine Corps, as it existed in the 1940s.

Given the inevitable subjectivity which must tinge any discussion of elite units, there is a great deal of diversity and variety within the field of military elite studies. Admittedly, some of the variation is explained by the changing nature of warfare in different times and places. For example, some observers continue to insist on older models of elitism reminiscent of the aristocratic overtones of the term. Such approaches are typically focused on the higher echelon leadership of the military, and tend to equate rank with elite status. This has its merits, as leadership is certainly one of the most important factors in determine the superiority or inferiority of a unit. French General Paul Ducournau maintained that “There is [sic] no such thing as elite soldiers. There are average soldiers commanded by elite leaders.”<sup>43</sup>

While this view may have some merit when dealing with armies composed of mass conscription, it does not seem to be the best view of the modern, increasingly specialized armies of the post-World War II era. Most authors, at least among those writing on military elites in the modern era, reject the personality-based definition, with

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<sup>42</sup> Horn, “Love ‘Em or Hate ‘Em,” 34.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Douglas Porch, “The French Foreign Legion: The Mystique of Elitism,” in Ion and Nelson, *Elite Military Formations in War and Peace*, 118; Horn, “Love ‘Em or Hate ‘Em,” 34.



its “Great Man” overtones, and instead emphasize some aspect of unit functionality or performance. A formation’s history and battle-proven status is frequently cited as evidence of its elite *esprit*. Before the advent of highly specialized training regimens, a units’ battlefield performance was nearly the only factor (beside traditional, aristocratic heritage) in determining a units’ claim of elitism. In the U.S. Civil War, for example, units earned such descriptors as the “Stonewall Brigade” in the Army of Northern Virginia, or the “Iron Brigade” in the Army of the Potomac; such popular labels were merely recognition of those units’ perceived prowess. In addition, apparent disregard for personal safety in the face of imminent death is often cited as a justification for the elite moniker. Service history and willingness to stare down death and embrace high-stakes conditions are commonly held themes in discussion of military elite units. These are admittedly essential elements; however, to rely on them alone seems insufficient for a discussion of the increasingly specialized militaries of recent military history. Observers and commentators on elite units from World War II to the present day have increasingly considered such factors as selection and selectivity, rigorous and specialized training, and the unconventional or technically demanding nature of their assigned missions. As a notable example, Roger Beaumont in his study of military elite forces emphasizes that for a unit to be considered a true elite, it must be composed of volunteers, have high physical and mental standards for acceptance, have distinct uniforms and insignia, exist relatively outside the norms of regular military discipline, and receive substantial publicity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hans Koch marries the leadership-oriented concept of elite units with the performance record method: “Military elite formations emerged in the course of time, or they did not. Indeed, one may go so far as to say that within an eighteenth-century context a specially trained military elite force did not exist. What mattered in the end was the quality of leadership provided, and by and large the Frederician army had a disproportionately high quality within its officer corps.” “The Prussian Guards in the Eighteenth Century,” in Ion and Nelson, *Elite Military Formations in War and Peace*, 109. Horn, “Love ‘Em or Hate ‘Em,” 34. Koch takes issue with willingness to die as the measure of elite status, noting that brazenly accepting

## Elite or Special Operations?

A brief survey of the literature on military elite units from World War II to the present highlights one of the inherent difficulties in discussing such units with any degree of precision: namely, the pronounced tendency to conflate “elite” with “special operations.” This confusion, while understandable, is detrimental and is brought about by non-specific employment of terminology. Andrew Hargreaves calls particular attention to the necessity of distinguishing between special forces and *corps d’elite* units. Hargreaves acknowledges that “most such [special operations] units can be considered elites, but not all elites are specialist formations. Special forces are more than units that purely wage war at a high standard; *they wage a unique form of warfare* that separates them from conventionally oriented bodies.”<sup>45</sup> Elite and special operations units are inevitably related, often so closely that it seems to be splitting hairs to insist on hard and fast lines between the two types of units. Nevertheless, there remain significant differences of “status, selection, and size” separating elite formations and special forces units.<sup>46</sup> No strict delineation can be drawn between elite and special operations, for

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inevitable death was not the norm in the Prussian Guards: “On the whole they were trained to fight as effectively as they could and to defy death not to succumb to it. This was, of course, an age in which death was still accepted as the ultimate fact of life, an age that had no artificial cult of youth, where the old mostly died within the family fold, not in senior citizens homes or hospices.” Koch, “Prussian Guards,” 109. Roger Beaumont, *Military Elites: Special Fighting Units in the Modern World* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), 2-3. In practical application, Beaumont’s approach is of little use for the study of the Raider battalions, for he lumps a variety of different units together under the banner of “military elites” with little attempt at limiting his discussion. His interpretation of military elites includes the U.S. Navy’s PT boat crews in WWII, paratroopers of sundry nationalities and conflicts, the various international contingents serving in the Spanish Civil War, and the Japanese *kamikaze* pilots. He places particular emphasis on the rise of the technological elites, including the RAF Pathfinders, submarine crews, and the Allies’ experimental tank battalion in France.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew L. Hargreaves, *Special Operations in World War II: British and American Irregular Warfare* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 6 (emphasis added).

<sup>46</sup> James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 6.

“some special operations can be undertaken by elements of conventional units or *corps d’elite*” and special forces have frequently “been squandered in unsuitable conventional missions to perform the tasks better suited to conventionally equipped or organized *corps d’elite*.”<sup>47</sup> But as James Kiras argues, “A crucial difference between special forces and *corps d’elite* is that the former operate in small units relative to their conventional brethren and lack the organic support of the latter.”<sup>48</sup>

The task of delineating exactly what qualifications a unit must meet in order to be justly considered a special operations unit is no mere trifle. While many have considered special forces as encompassing “actions that fall outside the realm of conventional warfare,” there remains, as analyst James Kiras cautions, the danger that “Too broad a definition, however, opens the door to gross interpretation.”<sup>49</sup> Special forces units by their very nature defy strict definition, as they are necessarily the exceptions, the units that fall outside the boundaries of their respective military services. However, the attempt to add qualitative factors to the definition of special operations has produced laudable results. Political scientist Eliot Cohen theorized that a combination of perpetually being assigned “missions that are—or seem to be—extremely hazardous,” requiring only a few, highly trained troops, and achievement of a “reputation—justified or not—for bravura and success,” qualified a unit as an elite force.<sup>50</sup> For Cohen, elements such as special insignia, all-volunteer status, high selectivity, and rites of

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<sup>47</sup> Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy*, 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Arquilla, *Troy to Entebbe*, pp. xv-xvi; Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy*, 4. If the loose, anything-outside-of-ordinary type of definition is adhered to, he cautions, then such reprehensible groups such as the *SS Einsatzgruppen* execution squads would be qualified as special operations; or as Bernd Horn puts it, “simply put, being different and/or performing a unique task is far from being a *de facto* elite.” “Love ‘em or Hate ‘em,” 36.

<sup>50</sup> Eliot Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians: Elite Military Units in Modern Democracies* (Cambridge: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1978), 17.

passage are other indicators or manifestations of elitism. Analyst Colin Gray suggests that “Special operations have as their core identity the overt or covert conduct of a desperately dangerous raid by a relatively few elite fighting men for high operational or strategic stakes.”<sup>51</sup> James Kiras also emphasizes the unorthodoxy of special forces, asserting that “special operations fill a military void that is unachievable conventionally and there is an elevated political or military risk associate with their failure.”<sup>52</sup> Conversely, Bernd Horn downplays the specialized missions aspect, maintaining that “elite status entails rigorous selection process, special training and equipment, as well as the bestowing of special privileges (i.e. higher pay, special dress, badges and insignia).”<sup>53</sup> In his study of British special forces units in the North African campaign, John Gordon proposes a straightforward and effective classification of special operations: “uniformed soldiers specifically organized to carry out the high-risk functions of raiding, harassing, and intelligence gathering on the flanks or behind enemy lines.”<sup>54</sup> While not as detailed as some of the other parameters suggested, Gordon’s definition appears to be the best balance between simplicity and precision. This study will follow Hargreaves’ lead in adopting Gordon’s parameters for defining World War II-era special operations units.<sup>55</sup>

The distinction between special operations and elites is admittedly vague, but it is necessary to gain a more thorough understanding of the U.S. Marine Raiders of World War II. The Raiders were clearly a special operations unit from their earliest days. As will be demonstrated, the Raiders qualified as a special force by any definition used.

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<sup>51</sup> Colin Gray, *Explorations in Strategy* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996), 144.

<sup>52</sup> James Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy*, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Horn, “Love ‘em or Hate ‘em,” 36

<sup>54</sup> John Gordon, *The Other Desert War: British Special Forces in North Africa, 1940-1943* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1987), xvii.

<sup>55</sup> Hargreaves, *Special Operations in WWII*, 9.

They fit Gordon's description of special operations units perfectly. But the Raider experiment was unique in that the Raiders were a special operations unit carved out of an establishment of military elites – the U.S. Marine Corps. This makes them unique to among World War II-era special forces. The Raiders in essence were the elite special operations force of a *corps d'elite*. The cultural tension between the competing claims of elitism would prove to be a constant factor throughout the Raiders' history.

The Raiders' parent institution, the U.S. Marine Corps, had a preexisting reputation as a *corps d'elite*. However, categorizing the whole of the Marine Corps as special forces would be to stretch the meaning of that term beyond reasonable limits. Even the small, prewar Corps could not strictly be considered a special operations outfit. Yet the Marines were a specialized force filling an important and rather neglected niche in the American military: they were amphibious assault specialists.<sup>56</sup> The Marine Corps of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century featured many of the trappings of an elite force, including rigorous selection, all-volunteer status, and distinctive uniforms and insignia. More precisely, the Marine Corps of World War II fits squarely within the Cohen's concept of an elite force. They were organized for the express purpose of "missions that are—or seem to be—extremely hazardous," namely amphibious landings against hostile shores, a particularly deadly exercise.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, they had clearly achieved the "reputation—justified or not—for bravura and success," they accepted a relatively small percentage of those who wished to join, and they had "an exclusive camaraderie in which the

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<sup>56</sup> "For about two decades before the outbreak of the Second World War the marines had been establishing themselves as specialists in amphibious warfare." Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory and Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951; repr.1965), 3.

<sup>57</sup> Cohen notes that "for this reason airborne units have long been considered elite since parachuting is a particularly dangerous way of going into battle." *Commandos and Politicians*, 17. The same applies to amphibious landings in WWII.

newcomer can only take part after an exacting rite of passage.”<sup>58</sup> The World War II-era Marine Corps was thus not a special force strictly defined, but they served as America’s most prominent *corps d’elite* of the 1940s.<sup>59</sup>

Claims that that Marine Corps constituted a *corps d’elite* in America’s World War II military are often made anecdotally. It was axiomatic – the Marines of World War II were America’s best, the “First to Fight.” Observers frequently noted that “The Marines simply assumed that they were the world’s best fighting men.”<sup>60</sup> Historian Allan Millett points out that the Marine Corps has long maintained an elitist image, largely as a result of its small size. Later experience in the First World War “fused the elitist strains of size (which implied selectivity), military discipline, and combat performance. Subsequent wars reinforced this elitist tradition.”<sup>61</sup> One of the best attempts to define the processes by which the Marine Corps earned its claims to elitism in the crucible of Pacific combat is by Dennis Showalter. Showalter’s approach is helpful in this regard. Showalter recognizes that specialization is an inherent aspect of military elites, but his focus is primarily on *corps d’elite* rather than special operations. His cogent analysis provides a tripartite view of what it means to be an elite unit, and illustrates that World War II was the crucial period for the Corps’ evolution into a recognized military elite.<sup>62</sup>

Showalter suggests that military elites can be loosely categorized as Guardsmen, Technicians, and Warriors. Guardsmen, the most traditional type of elite unit, are distinguished largely by their selective recruiting, volunteer status, and a general sense of

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<sup>58</sup> Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 17- 18.

<sup>59</sup> Horn, “Love ‘em or Hate ‘em,” 36; and Beaumont, *Military Elites*, 2-3.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Sherrod, *Tarawa: The Story of a Battle* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944), 35

<sup>61</sup> Allan Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, xvii.

<sup>62</sup> Dennis Showalter, “The Evolution of the U.S. Marine Corps as a Military Elite,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 63, no. 11 (November 1979): 44-58. Showalter gives an expanded and slightly modified view of the nature of military elites in his essay, “German Army Elites”; however, the present study adopts his method as applied to the Marine Corps directly.

being set apart. Technicians gain recognition as an elite via honing a special set of skills beyond the pale of ordinary service. Showalter's Warrior elites combine the selectiveness of the Guardsmen and the specialized mission of the Technicians, but place primary importance on proven combat ability; once their reputation as Warriors is earned, these elite units frequently serve as shock troops employed in dire situations. The Corps' status as an all-volunteer force through most of the First World War, combined with highly effective public relations coverage and legendary successes in France, helped to evolve the Corps into a their role as Guardsmen. The development and perfection of amphibious warfare doctrines during the interwar period and World War II— a strategy that many military minds believed impossible – demonstrated their ability as Technicians. But it was their emphasis on the role of the individual Marine as a rifleman of highest quality – “the men who set the standards of performance on the battlefield”<sup>63</sup> – that established their presence as Warrior elites. Showalter thus lays out a convincing case that the Marine Corps can indeed be considered a military elite force, one that fully cemented its legacy as such during World War II.<sup>64</sup>

This tripartite approach presents a unique perspective with which to analyze the history of the Marine Raider battalions. Viewed through the prism of Showalter's evolution of elites, the operational history of the Raiders illustrates their evolution along a parallel path towards becoming a sort of small-scale *corps d'elite* unto themselves. The Raiders' subculture promoted perceptions of not just specialized troops but as a Warrior elite all of their own – a Warrior elite frequently misunderstood by and sometimes at odds with their parent institution, the Marine Corps. The growth of a parallel subculture,

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<sup>63</sup> Showalter, “Evolution of the Marine Corps,” 54.

<sup>64</sup> Showalter, “Evolution of the Marine Corps,” 45-46. Showalter also identifies several “pseudo-elites,” including “media” and “performance” elites.

one which was frequently perceived as competing for the loyalties of its members in a Corps that valued cohesion and loyalty as virtues of the highest order, created no small tension within the Marine Corps' institutional culture. In many ways the Raiders' experience of cultural tension was similar to that of other elite special operations units. But their parallel evolution as Warrior elites within a larger group of Warrior elites added a distinct edge to the friction. The animosity towards the existence of the "elite within the elite" was a significant factor in their downfall, yet it remains underexplored in the existing literature on the Raiders. It is hoped that a consideration of the above factors as Raiders' operational history is re-examined will illuminate some of the cultural factors contributing to the brevity of their existence in World War II.



## CHAPTER 2: THE RAIDER EXPERIMENT

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, violently thrust the United States into the Second World War. While war with Japan had certainly been foreseen by military planners, actual military capability to wage war against the Axis powers in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific was woefully inadequate. The events of December 1941 and the early months of 1942 brought this home to the American people, as news of defeat and disaster for America and its allies flowed in continually: Pearl Harbor, Guam, Wake Island, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines – all fell before the juggernaut of Imperial Japan. The “chronic unpreparedness” of the U.S. military became, in the words of one historian, the “midwife of the birth of the Raiders.”<sup>65</sup> Desperate for a solution, a way to strike back at the everywhere victorious Axis powers both to boost flagging morale on the home front and to demonstrate American resiliency in the face of hardships, the American military turned to special operations endeavors. This trend affected the Marine Corps as well. America’s first special operations units were manned with U.S. Marines.<sup>66</sup> The Marine Corps’ establishment of Raider battalions was by no means simple or inevitable. In fact, the impetus for their creation came from the timely convergence of several widely disparate threads. How each of these threads came together is rarely examined in entirety.

### **Merritt A. Edson and the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion**

During the interwar period, the Marine Corps had seized upon the development

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<sup>65</sup> Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Gordon, “An Experiment in Military Elitism,” 362.

and perfection of amphibious warfare doctrine as its primary mission. Despite assertions to the contrary, visionaries in the Corps insisted that “an assault of defended beaches was feasible and that, indeed, future wars would demand the execution of such operations.”<sup>67</sup> The Marine Corps Schools at Quantico pioneered this effort, resulting in publication of the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* in 1935. The theories set forth in this document were put to the test in a series of Fleet Landing Exercises (FLEXs) held annually from 1935 to 1941, which provided much-needed field testing of interwar amphibious doctrine. Marine Major General Holland M. Smith, then commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade (later 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division), played a prominent role in these exercises. The efficiency of the ship-to-shore movement and cooperation between Navy and Marine units increased with practice, but the FLEXs also brought to light certain shortcomings in amphibious practice which could prove disastrous to landing in the face of a powerful enemy. Foremost of the problems encountered was the shortage of craft specifically designed for carrying troops to shore. In the absence of suitable landing craft in sufficient numbers, the first wave of Marines ashore would find themselves in a precarious situation until the landing craft could return to the ships and bring the second wave ashore.<sup>68</sup>

To remedy this tactical dilemma, Smith began considering supplements to the

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<sup>67</sup> Kenneth J. Clifford, *Progress and Purpose: A Developmental History of the United States Marine Corps 1900-1970* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1973), 43. Allan Millett writes that the need for amphibious capability gave the Marine Corps a chance to “fill an important void in its organizational existence. An amphibious assault specialty represented a focused wartime mission that would once and for all make it distinct from the army.” “Assault from the Sea: The Development of Amphibious Warfare between the Wars,” in *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, ed. Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 52-53.

<sup>68</sup> See Isley and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, 36-44, and Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 44-48, for the story of the evolution of the *Tentative Manual*, which would ultimately become *Landing Operations Doctrine, U.S. Navy 1938* (FTP 167). See also Holland M. Smith, *The Development of Amphibious Tactics in the U.S. Navy* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1992), 25-34; Anne Cipriano Venzon, *From Whaleboats to Amphibious Warfare: Lt. Gen. “Howling Mad” Smith and the U.S. Marine Corps* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 63-68.

landing force. One potentially useful solution involved “special, highly mobile troops for use as an amphibious spearhead.”<sup>69</sup> In summer 1941, Smith oversaw a series of joint training exercises, landing on the coast near the Marine Corps base at New River, North Carolina. During the earlier FLEX 6 and 7, Smith had experimented with landing company-sized forces of Marines in advance of the main assault. These companies were transported close to shore on fast destroyer-transports (APDs), and made shore landings via rubber boats. In the summer 1941 exercises, Smith embarked the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines (1/5),<sup>70</sup> on APDs and utilized them to make a surprise landing in the “enemy” rear area. Smith’s intentions for 1/5 became apparent when they were exempted from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division’s movement to New River. Instead, they remained at Quantico for a special mission, operating outside of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division chain of command and reporting directly to Smith himself.<sup>71</sup>

In June 1941, shortly before the landing exercises, Smith had personally selected Colonel Merritt A. Edson to command 1/5. Edson was a veteran officer, who had earned

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<sup>69</sup> Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 13.

<sup>70</sup> The standard Marine regiment at that time consisted of a headquarters-and-service company, a weapons company, and two or three battalions. From the early 1930s onward, the term “regiment” was understood in the regimental designation; e.g. the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment was known as simply the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. Battalions were listed as component units of their parent regiment; e.g. the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. This battalion designation was commonly abbreviated as the battalion number over the regimental number, a practice followed in this paper; hence, 1/5 is read as the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. See Gordon L. Rottman, *U.S. Marine Corps World War II Order of Battle: Ground and Air Units in the Pacific War, 1939-1945* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 2002), 15-17.

<sup>71</sup> Venzon, *Whaleboats to Amphibious Warfare*, 70-71. The APDs were WWI-vintage destroyers with two of their boilers and stacks and their torpedo tubes removed to make room for transporting infantry. They were first used during the FLEXs in the 1930s. During WWII, a total of 133 new APDs were constructed and served throughout the conflict and into the Korean War. The APDs worked closely with the Raiders from 1942 to 1944, and proved vital to the success of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division at Guadalcanal. It has been said that “The story of these little ships has never been told. They lived in harm’s way from day to day. Few survived. Their casualty rate in KIA and missing was staggering . . . . To my mind, no group in the Pacific accomplished so much with so little.” Merrill B. Twining, *No Bended Knee: The Battle for Guadalcanal*, ed. Neil Carey (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1996), 40, 93. For more on the APDs, see Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 4; Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 13-17; and Curt Clark, *The Four Stack APDs: The Famed Green Dragons; The APD Destroyer Sailors of World War Two* (Paducah, Kentucky: Turner Publishing, 1998). Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 17; Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 2-3.

a reputation as an expert in counter-guerrilla warfare during the Corps' campaigns in Nicaragua during the 1920s, as well as a permanent nickname – “Red Mike” – a reference to his reddish beard grown while in the field there. His Coco River Patrol of 1928 remains one of the legendary exploits of the Corps. Edson played a major role in the formulation of the Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual* of 1940, and was well-known as a small arms expert *par excellence*. Most importantly, he was “a proven leader who could get the most out of men when the going was rough.”<sup>72</sup> Although not an imposing figure by typical standards, Edson impressed all who worked with and under him for his meticulous attention to details and planning, his almost superhuman dedication to his mission and his Corps, and his utter fearlessness in the face of danger.<sup>73</sup>

Under Edson's leadership, 1/5 began evolving along a unique path, separate from their fellow 5<sup>th</sup> Marines battalions. Edson realized that 1/5 needed much reorganization if it was to continually be embarked on the APDs. While the APDs provided a fast transport capable of fire support for the landing parties, their troop capacity was smaller than the typical transport. Use of the standard infantry battalion organization during the New River exercises resulted in splitting of units, much confusion, and “extremely unsatisfactory” results.<sup>74</sup> Knowing that “the organization must be made to fit the capacity of the carrying ship,” Edson restructured the entire battalion around the APDs.<sup>75</sup> Each company would have a maximum of 130 enlisted men and 5 officers, thereby allowing

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<sup>72</sup> Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 131.

<sup>73</sup> Hoffman *Once a Legend*, 52-94, 122-123. War correspondent Richard Tregaskis portrays his first impressions of Edson in *Guadalcanal Diary* (New York: Random House, 1943), 80, and further gives one of the best personal portraits of Edson in “The Best Soldier I Ever Knew,” *Saga*, February 1960 (copy held in Merritt A. Edson File, HDRB).

<sup>74</sup> Edson to H.M. Smith, “Recommended Organization for a Battalion Embarked on a Destroyer Transport,” 8 February 1942, 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion Unit File, Archives and Special Collections, Gray Research Center, Marine Corps University (hereinafter referenced as MCUA), p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Edson to H.M. Smith, “Recommended Organization,” 8 February 1942, 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion Unit File, MCUA, p. 2.

the entire company to fit in a single APD. This would grant 1/5 considerable tactical flexibility, as the battalion could quickly and efficiently be deployed at a platoon or company level with a minimum of confusion. Under the new organization, heavy weapons which would hinder mobility were exchanged for lighter versions. Edson further began intensive training of the battalion, with heavy emphasis on two of his hallmarks: individual marksmanship and physical conditioning. His experience in Nicaragua had ingrained in Edson the importance of being self-sufficient in the field, a belief he brought to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion with his heavy emphasis on “field work, physical fitness, map reading and terrain appreciation, combat marksmanship, and night operations.”<sup>76</sup> In the words of one Marine, “Edson’s training soon began to separate the men from the boys. Each day became tougher than the last and each march longer than the last, usually with added equipment.”<sup>77</sup>

It was clear that Edson’s 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was gearing up for some specialized purpose, but exactly what that purpose would be remained somewhat unclear. What was clear, however, was that 1/5, known informally as the “APD battalion,” was only nominally a part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. Divisional staff officers grumbled that Edson’s battalion was “the playthings of Corps Headquarters.”<sup>78</sup> As the Corps’ efforts to prepare for war acquired new urgency in December 1941, Smith officially recognized this reality by detaching 1/5 from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division entirely. On January 6, 1942, Edson’s battalion was designated the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion; it would be attached directly

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<sup>76</sup> Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 21.

<sup>77</sup> Joe Murphy, quoted in Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 23; Edson to H.M. Smith, “Recommended Organization,” 8 February 1942, 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion Unit File, MCUA, p. 3; Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 3; see also Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 142-144.

<sup>78</sup> Gerald C. Thomas, Oral History Interview Transcript (hereinafter referenced as Thomas transcript), MCUA, 231.

to the Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet. However, the evolution from the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion to the Marine Raider Battalions was by no means inevitable. In fact, but for the convergence of several other forces, from within and without the Corps, on the Commander-in-Chief, Edson's Separate Battalion might have remained little more than a footnote in the history of the Corps.<sup>79</sup>

### **Evans F. Carlson**

One of the impulses behind the creation of the Raider battalions was Evans Fordyce Carlson. In a Corps that takes pride in the lively characters populating its history, Carlson stands out as one of the most colorful, most controversial, and definitely the most enigmatic. After serving as an Army officer in France in the First World War, Carlson found himself disenchanted with civilian life. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1922, saying "I'd rather be a buck private in the Marines than a Captain [*sic*] of industry," though he quickly earned an officer's commission.<sup>80</sup> He had his first taste of China when he was stationed in Shanghai from 1927 to 1929. China and the turbulent events there would come to be the defining influences in Carlson's life. Like Edson, Carlson learned the nature of guerrilla warfare first-hand in Nicaragua, serving a tour of duty there in 1930 and earning a Navy Cross for his bravery in the face of Nicaraguan bandits. His experiences in Nicaragua taught him the utmost necessity for securing the support of the local populace in order to effectively combat guerrillas; he also discovered first-hand that if a leader "took an unusual interest in their [his troops'] welfare, and had

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<sup>79</sup> Joel D. Thacker, "The Marine Raiders in World War II," unpub. manuscript, Historical Division, HQMC, 8 November 1951, Merritt Austin Edson Papers (hereinafter referenced as Edson Papers), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereinafter referenced as LOC), p. 2; and Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Blankfort, *The Big Yankee*, 121.

proved himself to be valiant in battle, his men would follow him with unwavering devotion.”<sup>81</sup> In 1935, after a second tour in China, then-Captain Carlson was assigned to serve on President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Marine guard detachment at Warm Springs, Georgia. The President struck up a friendship with Carlson, a friendship which would last the rest of their lives. The young captain seems to have developed a case of hero-worship of the charismatic President. Carlson remained “devoted to him not only as our President, but also (and primarily) because of the things he stands for as a man.”<sup>82</sup> An associate of Carlson’s would later recall that “Carlson was prouder of his relationship with President Roosevelt than of anything else that had ever happened to him.”<sup>83</sup>

Carlson returned to China in 1937 for his third tour, one which would indelibly shape the rest of his life. In addition to his official duties as a U.S. Marine officer, Carlson also served, strictly off the record, as a sort of personal scout for the President. Roosevelt had approached Carlson before he left for China, asking him to “do something for me while you’re there. I want you to drop me a line now and then – direct to the White House. Let me know how you’re doing. Tell me what’s going on.”<sup>84</sup> And write Carlson did: he sent no less than nineteen letters direct to President Roosevelt from March 1937 to October 1938, describing in detail the conditions in war-torn China.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Evans Carlson, “The Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 21, no. 3 (August 1937): 11.

<sup>82</sup> Carlson to M.A. LeHand, 1 Jan 1939, Evans F. Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>83</sup> Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 6; “Brigadier General Evans Fordyce Carlson, USMCR,” Evans Fordyce Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 173.

<sup>85</sup> These letters range in length and scope from brief notes to several pages. Copies of this correspondence are held in the Carlson Collection, MCUA. Roosevelt apparently did enjoy reading Carlson’s reports. On at least one occasion, when some time had lapsed between receipt of Carlson’s letters, Roosevelt personally inquired as to why he had not received any lately and asked his secretary, M.A. LeHand, to “write him a very nice letter telling him how much we appreciate his letters, etc.” F. D. Roosevelt to P.S.[LeHand], 26 April 1938. On another occasion, Miss LeHand informed Carlson, “I cannot tell you how interested we all have been in your letters. The President asks me to tell you to please keep it up.” LeHand to Carlson, 21 Oct 1937. Both in Carlson Collection, MCUA.

Carlson's sympathy for the Chinese struggles had been steadily growing for some time, boarding even on the obsessive. His third tour there proved definitive for coalescing his philosophy of leadership. Carlson struck up friendship with journalists Edgar and Helen Snow, and met with leaders of the Communist Chinese army, including Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung. Mao and Chu Teh were legendary in 1930s China, famous for leading the Long March to escape from the Nationalists. Following the Japanese invasions of coastal cities (including the infamous "Rape of Nanking"), the Communist Red Army ostensibly allied themselves with the Nationalist government against the Japanese. Under the new moniker of the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army, Mao's forces waged guerrilla warfare against the Japanese in occupied northern China, relying on quick strikes and the support of the populace to help frustrate the militarily superior Japanese. The rumors of the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army's unorthodox emphasis on political training to "inculcate in their 'initiates' the spirit of willing service," and their ability "to win victories over the Japanese when no other armies in China can do so," compelled Carlson to go see the Chinese Communist guerrillas in action.<sup>86</sup> As he explained it, "I must *see* how these ideas and theories actually work out in practice . . . . No knowledge can equal that which is derived from personal observation."<sup>87</sup>

After securing permission to join the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army as a naval intelligence

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<sup>86</sup> Carlson to Miss LeHand, 24 Dec 1937, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>87</sup> Carlson to Miss LeHand, 24 Dec 1937, Carlson Collection, MCUA (emphasis in original). As a young officer, Peatross once asked Carlson for some reading suggestions for personal improvement. Carlson responded by recommending ten books – all about China. Peatross concluded that, "Carlson's world view apparently did not extend beyond China, probably because of his over-specialization in this field." Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 6. The formation and role of Mao's Red Army in the years leading up to WWII are described in Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2013), 328-346; and Robert Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History*, vol. 1 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), 321-368. Mao's tactics were summed up in his refrain: "The enemy advances, we withdraw; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue." Quoted in Boot, *Invisible Armies*, 333.



observer, Carlson accompanied them on a guerrilla campaign across Japanese-occupied territory, a campaign that would cover nearly one thousand miles traveling by foot or horseback – “the toughest bit of marching I have done in my twenty odd years of campaigning.”<sup>88</sup> He found that the Japanese counter-guerrilla efforts were frustrated because “the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army is like an eel; it squirms in and out between the Japanese units. Perhaps it would be better to compare it to a swarm of hornets harassing an elephant; they strike and disappear, cut lines of communication, attack repeatedly during the night so that the opponents cannot sleep. I can well believe the Japanese officer who remarked in his diary: ‘The 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army gives me a headache.’”<sup>89</sup> Carlson’s ideas of guerrilla warfare, initially formed in the battle against Sandino in Nicaragua, came to maturity with the Chinese guerrillas.

Carlson was convinced that the most significant contribution of the Chinese Communists was their commitment to what he called “ethical indoctrination.”<sup>90</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army was as dedicated to its brand of socio-political principles as it was to its war against the Japanese. In the pursuit of equality, traditional distinctions between officers and enlisted men were abolished. Emphasis was placed on educating everyone, from the peasants to the lowliest foot-soldier, in the reasons for the on-going struggle. Meetings were regularly held in which the soldiers were informed in great detail not only the battle plan, but the rationale that lay behind implementing it (“Men who know most fight best,” as Chu Teh explained).<sup>91</sup> At the regular after-action meetings, all ranks were given free

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<sup>88</sup> Carlson to Miss LeHand, 4 March 1938, Carlson Collection, MCUA. Wukovits, *American Commando*, 11-14.

<sup>89</sup> Carlson to LeHand, 24 Dec 1937, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>90</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 201-202. Carlson’s use of the term “indoctrination” is in the context of a 1940s professional military man, primarily meaning thorough education or training, e.g. “amphibious landings indoctrination.”

<sup>91</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 202.

opportunity to critique the plan and its execution in the spirit of self-criticism.<sup>92</sup>

Evans Carlson has been appropriately described as “a romantically-inclined idealist who espoused the Ten Commandments, the Declaration of Independence, and the brotherhood of man,” who was also “eminently gregarious and highly impressionable.”<sup>93</sup> His life was lived in a constant attempt to match his actions with his ideals; high on that list were the principles of the equality of mankind, the inherent virtue and inevitable triumph of democracy, and utter selflessness in devotion to one’s fellowman. What he saw at work amongst the Communist guerrillas thoroughly engrossed him, and ultimately directed the remaining course of his life. As he related it, “If this program was actually practised [*sic*], then I had stumbled upon Utopia. The prospect was thrilling.”<sup>94</sup> His passionate commitment to the democratic ideal served as a double-edged sword: it gave him relentless intensity but blinded him to a more critical assessment of causes he backed and leaders he so admired. “I try to be objective and impartial,” he wrote, “but I must admit that my admiration for the courage and resourcefulness of these people, who are fighting against tremendous odds, is thoroughly aroused.”<sup>95</sup> Carlson’s self-styled “ethical indoctrination” would have lasting implications for the eventual creation of the Raiders.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Such was Carlson’s romanticized version of the conduct in the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army, as summarized in Blankfort, *The Big Yankee*, 24, 200-202.

<sup>93</sup> Kenneth E. Shewmaker, “The American Liberal Dream: Evans F. Carlson and the Chinese Communists, 1937-1947,” *Pacific Historical Review* 38, no. 2 (May 1969): 208-209.

<sup>94</sup> Evans Carlson, *Twin Stars of China: A Behind-the-Scenes Story of China’s Valiant Struggle for Existence by a U.S. Marine who Lived & Moved with the People* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1940), 82.

<sup>95</sup> Carlson to LeHand, 15 Aug 1938, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>96</sup> Carlson remains a particularly difficult individual for a biographer to summarize. Michael Blankfort’s *Big Yankee* is a valuable source, especially since it contains lengthy excerpts from Carlson’s letters and diaries, but it is heavily colored by the author’s intent to rehabilitate Carlson’s reputation in the years following his death. John Wukovits offers a biography of overall good quality in his recent *American Commando*, a work which should prove especially valuable for those unfamiliar with Carlson and his 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders. However it is focused almost entirely on the WWII period of his life and often uncritically accepts Blankfort’s presentation. More in-depth treatments of his deeply held and often misunderstood sociopolitical ideals can be found in Phyllis A. Zimmerman, “Military Missionary: The Riddle Wrapped in a Mystery inside an Enigma that Was Evans F. Carlson,” in *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected*

During his time with the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army, Carlson learned from Mao and others that the Japanese war effort was supplied to a large extent with trade with the U.S. He perceived this as nothing short of betrayal of democracy in the pursuit of profit, and “he made a vow that he would bring the truth to his fellow countrymen.”<sup>97</sup> Almost immediately after arriving back to Hankow in August 1938, Carlson held a conference with several reporters, going into great detail about what he had recently witnessed. The press was thrilled to have such rare stories. Carlson’s superiors, however, were less pleased. Carlson’s outspoken views on the situation in China and his loquacious communication with the press outside of official channels resulted in an official reprimand. Carlson, “tired of attempting to adjust my action to the arbitrary whims of a superior officer,” decided to resign from the Marine Corps in protest, a move he hoped would “enable me to express my convictions, especially on international affairs, without embarrassment to the naval service or to the government.”<sup>98</sup> For the next several years, Carlson busily engaged in writing and lecturing across the country. He wrote several

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*Papers from the Fourteenth Naval History Symposium, Held at Annapolis, Maryland, 23-25 September 1999*, ed. Randy Carol Belano and Craig L. Symonds (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 251-264; and Shewmaker, “American Liberal Dream.” As will be discussed in chapter 5, Carlson was in his own lifetime recognized as an enigmatic, charismatic, and polarizing figure. The same could be said of him today, albeit to a lesser extent – authors tend to either hold him up for hero worship or else demonize him as a deluded Communist. At the least, his snap character judgments prevented circumspection. As an example of Carlson’s romantic tendency to exalt certain political leaders to superhuman levels, bordering on hero worship, consider his pronounced tendency to compare his idols to Abraham Lincoln: Franklin D. Roosevelt “has the heart and sympathetic understanding of Lincoln” (quoted in Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 172); Mao Tse-Tung was “a humble, kindly, lonely genius, striving here in the darkness of the night to find a peaceful and an equitable way of life for his people” (Carlson, *Twin Stars*, 170-171); Chu Teh, in whom “intuitively I felt that I had found a warm and generous friend,” exhibited “the kindness of a Robert E. Lee, the humility of an Abraham Lincoln, and the tenacity of a U.S. Grant” (Carlson, *Twin Stars*, 65-66). As Max Boot points out in his discussion of Mao’s guerrillas, the Red Army (and its iteration as the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army) under Mao and Chu Teh were not as benevolent and moderate as they were perceived by Westerners, including Carlson’s friends Edgar and Helen Snow and Agnes Smedley. In fact, both Mao and Chu Teh were equally as capable of committing atrocities in the name of their cause as their vilified opponents, Chiang Kai-Shek and the Japanese. Boot points out that Mao effectively used journalists like the Snows to influence Western opinion and to present a favorable image for his cause. Carlson fits into this category of impressionable Westerners as well. *Invisible Armies*, 333 – 339.

<sup>97</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 244.

<sup>98</sup> Carlson to Thomas Holcomb, 19 November 1939, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

articles and books. He publically advocated for an embargo of Japan and for support of the Chinese Communists, whom he insisted were the true friends of democracy in Asia. Carlson made one final trip to China, as a civilian this time, in 1940 to observe the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives. It was on this tour that he picked up the slogan that the Raiders would later make famous – “Gung Ho,” which Carlson translated as “work together.”<sup>99</sup>

By late 1940, Carlson’s observations had convinced him that Japan would soon be ready to wage war against the U.S. As early as January 1941 he was confidently asserting that Japan would attack the U.S. within ninety days. He felt duty-bound to return to the U.S. and offer his services as a U.S. Marine once again to the Commandant. Holcomb gladly accepted him back into the Marine Corps as a major in the Reserves. Once back in uniform, Carlson was assigned to active duty with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines in California. Carlson also took the time to write to Commandant Holcomb, volunteering for service with any commando or guerrilla units that might be created and offering his

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<sup>99</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 25. Carlson translated “Gung” as “work,” and “Ho” as “together” or “in harmony,” leading roughly to his intended meaning of “work together in harmony.” Albert F. Moe points out that the translation was actually an error of the sort that foreign learners of Chinese dialects are prone to make, but that all the same, “*Gung ho (kung ho)* is neither a phrase nor a slogan. It is not, and never was, a Chinese battle cry, as has been alleged.” See Moe, ““Gung Ho,”” *American Speech* 42, no. 1 (February 1967): 26-27; F. Tillman Durden, “Finds China Runs ‘Occupied’ Area,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1938; “American Tours Shansi War Zone,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1938; “Foreign News: Behind the Lines,” *Time*, August 22, 1938. James McHugh, a Marine officer in China and acquaintance of Carlson’s, wrote later: “It was obvious, of course, that the Office of Naval Intelligence read the story in the *New York Times* before they got his [Carlson’s] own message out of code and that the two were practically identical. Which is a fine way to compromise a code.” James McHugh, “The Carlson Incident,” unpub. manuscript, Carlson Collection, MCUA; Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 249; Carlson, *Twin Stars of China*; Carlson, *The Chinese Army: Its Organization and Military Efficiency* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940); “Marine Captain Quits in China to Avoid Gag,” *New York Times*, September 24, 1938; “Embargo of Japan Urged,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1940; “American’s Study Finds China Firm,” *New York Times*, January 8, 1941; “Small World,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1941; Evans F. Carlson, “Policy Towards Japan: The United States Should Take a Strong Stand in the East,” *Hartford (CT) Courant*, January 30, 1940; and Wesley S. Griswold, “A Yankee Major with the Chinese Armies,” 2 parts, *Hartford (CT) Courant*, March 17 and March 24, 1941; Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 280-281.

own suggestions as to how such a unit should be organized.<sup>100</sup>

### **Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and William Donovan**

It is doubtful that Carlson's suggestions were the defining factor in the creation of the Raider battalions, though many of Carlson's admirers would like to think so.

Complete credit for the creation of the Raiders cannot be given exclusively to Edson's 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion either. Both certainly provided key components, but the catalyst for the decision to form Raider battalions came from outside the ranks of the Corps, a fact that set the Raiders on a different trajectory from other Marine Corps units. The developments of the Marine Corps in the pre-war period, including Smith's and Edson's development of the APD Battalion and Carlson's advocacy for guerrilla units, provided fertile soil for the creation of a unique sort of special operations unit. However, the impetus for springing special operations units into existence must frequently come from some high-ranking patron figure, often a romantically-inclined wartime leader. This was especially true in the early 1940s when such concepts were new and unproven. The Raiders found a patron in President Roosevelt himself, though he did not arrive at his conclusions without assistance from some colorful figures.<sup>101</sup>

In June 1940, with Britain reeling from the disaster at Dunkirk, Prime Minister

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<sup>100</sup> "American-Japanese War in 90 Days Prophesied," *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 1941; Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 285-290.

<sup>101</sup> Gordon suggests that the "key proposal" to create raiding units came from Carlson; "An Experiment in Military Elitism," 365. Wukovits also adopts this interpretation; *American Commando*, 30-31. Jon Hoffman argues that though Carlson's influence is the most common explanation, "Edson, rather than Carlson, could lay claim to fathering every aspect of the initial raider concept except the name." *Once a Legend*, 155. His case is convincing; however, it seems unlikely that the raider concept as developed by Edson would have gained as much momentum as it did without the outside influences brought to bear in early 1942. Political patronage was frequently the deciding factor in the creation and maintenance of special operations formations, including such storied units as the Commandos and the Green Berets. Eliot Cohn points out three prominent examples of political patronage by a leader with a romantic view of war: Churchill and the Commandos, John F. Kennedy and the Green Berets, and Moshe Dayan and the Israeli paratroops. Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 35-44.

Winston Churchill, turned to the concept of raiding targets in Axis-occupied Europe – if only to demonstrate to the British people and the world that Great Britain was not yet out of the fight. Declaring that “The passive-resistance war . . . must come to an end,” Churchill called for “a vigorous, enterprising, and ceaseless offensive against the whole German-occupied coastline.”<sup>102</sup> Such an offensive called for “specially trained troops of the hunter class, who can develop a reign of terror down these coasts [occupied Europe] . . . on the ‘butcher and bolt’ policy.”<sup>103</sup> He realized that, “If we are to have any campaign in 1941, it must be amphibious in its character, and . . . will depend on surprise landings of lightly equipped, nimble forces.”<sup>104</sup> Quickly dubbed “Commandos,”<sup>105</sup> these highly-trained, well-equipped, and mobile units engaged in some of the most spectacular raids of the war against German installations in Norway, France, and elsewhere. They played a valuable role in bolstering beleaguered British morale. Though America had yet to enter the war, the exploits of the Commandos attracted a great degree of attention in the American imagination. The American press seized upon the new British “mystery unit,” which was reportedly “toughened by long marches on skimpy rations . . . [able to] swim in full battle equipment, handle all sorts of weapons and explosives, even master the pressure points of jujitsu,” to give the public some exciting copy.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 246-247

<sup>103</sup> Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 246-247. Churchill, ever the dreamer, also called for the creation of parachute units, raids by tanks, and cross-Channel artillery, as well as promotion of espionage on the Continent.

<sup>104</sup> Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 466.

<sup>105</sup> The Commandos derived their name from the fast, aggressive Boer guerrilla units that had discomfited the British in the Boer War. Boot, *Invisible Armies*, 184-197. For more on the creation of the Commandos, see Hargreaves, *Special Operations in WWII*, 18-27.

<sup>106</sup> “Answers on Action,” *Time*, October 20, 1941. Evelyn Waugh, “Commando Raid on Bardia,” *Life*, November 17, 1941, is a representative example of the publicity the Commandos received in the U.S. The *New York Times* featured numerous articles on the Commandos between January 1941 and January 1942, ranging from front-page specials to brief mentions. See James MacDonald, “Britons Training to Invade Europe,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1941; “British Describe Commandos’ Raid,” *New York Times*,

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, America found itself equally beleaguered. The destruction of much of the Pacific fleet was followed by news of the fall of Guam, Wake, and the Philippines. In rapid order the Japanese acquired domination of practically the entire Pacific theater. Immediately after learning of the Pearl Harbor attack, Churchill travelled to Washington to confer with Roosevelt, arriving on December 22, 1941, for the ARCADIA conference. In between conversations on grand strategy, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox discussed a smaller scale item: the creation of American Commandos.<sup>107</sup>

Central to this high-level discussion was a top secret proposal by William “Wild Bill” Donovan. Donovan, a hero of the First World War and personal friend of the President, had recently been appointed director of the Office of Coordinator of Information (OCI). The functions of this newly-established intelligence agency were deliberately vague, and Donovan was casting about for a mission.<sup>108</sup> He suggested to the

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November 15, 1941; David Anderson, “Thrust at Norway is Made by British,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1941; Ralph Walling, “Norse Base Razed in Commando Raid,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1941; “8 Nazi Ships Sunk in Raid on Norway,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1941; “Keyes’ Son Is Slain in Bold Libya Raid,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1941; David Anderson, “Commandos Raid Lofotens; Seize Nazis, Block Shipping,” *New York Times*, January 2, 1942; “Surprise Tactics Successful,” *New York Times*, January 2, 1942; “The Commandos,” *New York Times*, January 2, 1942. See also “British Commandos Raid Hitler’s Europe,” *Life*, January 26, 1942; “Insistent Nuisance,” *Time*, December 8, 1941, “Keyes v. Rommel,” *Time*, January 12, 1942; and “Fifteen Minutes,” *Time*, January 12, 1942.

<sup>107</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 608. This conference, known as “ARCADIA,” is summarized briefly in the editorial essay by Francis L. Loewenheim, Harold D. Langley, and Manfred Jonas, eds., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence* (New York: Saturday Review, 1975), 86. For a good survey of the sequence of high-level discussions that ultimately provided the impetus for Commandant Holcomb to create the Raider battalions, see Robert E. Mattingly, “The Worst Slap in the Face the Marine Corps Ever Was Given,” in *New Aspects of Naval History: Selected Papers Presented at the Fourth Naval History Symposium, United States Naval Academy, 25-26 October 1979*, ed. Craig L. Symonds, et.al. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981), 373-385. Mattingly discusses this process in more detail in *Herringbone Cloak—GI Dagger: Marines of the OSS* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1989), 2-6. *Herringbone Cloak* is an invaluable resource on the machinations behind the creation of the Raiders, chiefly because of Mattingly’s extensive “Appendix B,” which consists of facsimile reproductions of numerous documents, both official and personal, from the individuals involved.

<sup>108</sup> Kermit Roosevelt, *War Report of OSS* (New York: Walker, 1976), 9-15. This was partially due to the nebulous nature of the intelligence work the OCI was embarking on, as well as the need to assuage the

President, “That there be organized now, in the United States, a guerrilla corps independent and separate from the Army and Navy, and imbued with a maximum of the offensive and imaginative spirit. This force should, of course, be created along disciplined military lines, analogous to the British Commando principle.”<sup>109</sup> The unstated implication was that such a force would be under Donovan; and the Marine Corps was the most promising recruiting grounds for a unit separate from Army and Navy.

President Roosevelt was obviously influenced by numerous factors, including Donovan’s memo and his previous communications with Evans Carlson. The President, like most Americans at the time, was impressed by the exploits of the British Commandos. Roosevelt’s counter-part, Churchill, had personally championed the Commando concept in the face of reluctance by the British military establishment. Churchill’s primary concern in December 1941 was securing American support for projective offensive operations in the European theater, though he did propose that the Japanese must be forced to overextend their resources by constant hounding. Commandos would be a good way to fulfill this purpose. The exact details remain somewhat murky. What is clear is that the creation of specially-designated Commando units for use in the Pacific was discussed amongst the ARCADIA attendees, including Secretary Knox (Donovan was not privy to ARCADIA). Churchill later credited Roosevelt with initiating the discussion, but he heartily endorsed the concept:

When you told me about your intention to form commando forces on a large scale on the California shore I felt you had the key. Once several good outfits are prepared, any one of which can attack a Japanese-held

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jealousy of established agencies, such as the FBI, that OCI would not encroach on their functions. See Corey Ford, *Donovan of the OSS* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 108-109.

<sup>109</sup> Donovan to F.D. Roosevelt, 22 December 1941, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 236.



base or island and beat the life out of the garrison, all their islands will become hostages to fortune. Even this year, 1942, some severe examples might be made causing great perturbation and drawing further upon Japanese resources to strengthen other points.<sup>110</sup>

While it is difficult to discern precisely which of the aforementioned influences factored most strongly in the President's thinking, the immediate consequences of the ARCADIA discussions reverberated through the Navy Department. Ironically, Donovan's memo appears in retrospect to reflect merely his search for a specific mission to help define his new agency. Events unfolded in an entirely different direction: the OCI was soon transformed into the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), giving Donovan a much more suitable role and apparently ending his commando visions. But Donovan's "old friend," Frank Knox, ensured that the idea was pursued with more enthusiasm in the Navy Department.<sup>111</sup>

On January 8, 1942, Admiral Ernest King, Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet (COMINCH), sent a memo to Major General Thomas Holcomb, Commandant of the Marine Corps, informing him that "the President is much interested in the development and use of the equivalent of British 'commandos,' [And] The Secretary [Knox] told the President that you have such groups in training."<sup>112</sup> This appears to be the first time that Holcomb became officially privy to the high-level discussions

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<sup>110</sup> Churchill to F.D. Roosevelt, 4 March 1942, in Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas, eds., *Secret Wartime Correspondence*, 185. It is certain that Roosevelt did read Donovan's memo and encouraged him to take action on it, though the President remained rather non-committal. Roosevelt, *War Report of OSS*, 16. See also Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 653.

<sup>111</sup> Ford, *Donovan of OSS*, 162. Donovan does not appear to have pressed the issue beyond his initial 22 December memo, at least as far as the Marine Corps was concerned. It is worth noting that the 22 December memo and the matter of creating a separate commando force out of the ranks of the Marine Corps is not even mentioned in Ford's biography of Donovan – which is indicative of the amount of actual interest Donovan had in forming a unit of Marine Commandos. His newly-created OSS would be responsible for "unorthodox warfare, guerrilla activities behind enemy lines, contact with resistance groups, subversion, sabotage." Ford, *Donovan*, 126-128.

<sup>112</sup> Ernest King to Holcomb, 6 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 237.

surrounding the commando question. In addition to this unwelcome intrusion, Holcomb was informed in subsequent days that not only would his Corps have to provide the manpower for this new force, but it would have to commission Wild Bill Donovan as a Brigadier General in the Corps. This was cause for grave concern for the Commandant. It represented a threat to the integrity of the ranks of Marine officers, a case of external interference in the Corps' internal affairs that would have debilitating effects on morale and cohesion.<sup>113</sup>

Holcomb was not inclined to passively accept this imposition without giving full voice to the concerns of the Corps. On January 14, he alerted the commanders of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Divisions (Maj. Gen. H. M. Smith and Brigadier Gen. Charles F.B. Price, respectively) of this development and requested their "frank expression of opinion" on the Donovan prospect.<sup>114</sup> Smith responded forcefully against it, stressing the inevitable resentment that would accompany an appointment most would see "as political, unfair, and a publicity stunt."<sup>115</sup> Smith strongly emphasized that to bring in a non-Marine would publically deface the Corps' reputation: "It would be stressed that the Marines had to go outside their own service for leaders."<sup>116</sup> Price was more circumspect in his reply. Officially, he opined that Donovan would be qualified for the job, but that it would only be prudent to undertake the so-called "Commando Project" if it could be done without thinning the ranks of experienced personnel and officers from existing combat units. "If, on the other hand, our very limited resources in trained officers must be further dispersed

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<sup>113</sup> Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 9-12.

<sup>114</sup> Holcomb to H.M. Smith, 14 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 245. An identical letter was sent to Charles F.B. Price on the same day.

<sup>115</sup> H.M. Smith to Holcomb, 16 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 252.

<sup>116</sup> H.M. Smith to Holcomb, 16 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 253. Smith pointed out that having Donovan (whose personal access to Franklin D. Roosevelt was well-known) put in charge would parallel the experience of Lord Mountbatten – "both are 'royal' and have easy access to the highest authority without reference to their own immediate superiors."

and if the best of the adventurous spirits and ‘go-getters’ among our men must be diverted from the Fleet Marine Force,” Price stated that he would “recommend seriously against assuming this additional commitment.”<sup>117</sup> Privately, Price held strong reservations about the situation, which he revealed in a personal letter to Holcomb sent the same day as his official response. Price intuited that Holcomb was not necessarily putting forward the Commando idea of his own initiative.<sup>118</sup> Such external tinkering with the inner workings of Corps was the crux of Price’s concerns. Confidentially, Price feared “the grave danger that this sort of thing will develop into the tail which will wag the dog eventually. I know in what quarters the idea of foisting this scheme upon the Marines originated and I opine that if it is developed along the lines of a hobby in the hands of personnel other than regular Marine officers it could very easily get far out of hand and out of control as well.”<sup>119</sup>

Holcomb apparently felt the same way. Later that week, Holcomb confided to a personal friend that “The Donovan affair is still uppermost in my mind. I am terrified that I may be forced to take this man. I feel that it will be the worst slap in the face the Marine Corps was ever given.”<sup>120</sup> With his own staunch opposition to Donovan’s appointment augmented by the opinions of two senior Marines, opinions representative of the rest of the officer corps, Holcomb was able to squelch the talk of forming Donovan’s

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<sup>117</sup> Price to Holcomb, 16 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 247-248.

<sup>118</sup> “It appears pretty clear to me that you are in a position of having to comply and that nothing can be done about it so please accept my sympathy.” Price to Holcomb, 16 January 1942, Thomas Holcomb Collection, MCUA.

<sup>119</sup> Price to Holcomb, 16 January 1942, Holcomb Collection, MCUA.

<sup>120</sup> Holcomb believed that accepting Donovan would amount to the “worst slap in the face the Marine Corps was ever given because it involves bringing an outsider into the Marine Corps as a leader in our own specialty that is, amphibious operations . . . . It will be bitterly resented by our personnel . . . and I am afraid that it may serve to materially reduce my usefulness in this office, if any, because I am expected and properly so to protect the Marine Corps from intrusions of this kind.” Holcomb to Samuel Meek, 19 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 254.

commandos from Marine ranks. In this case, “the OSS marched to the aid of the Marines,” as Donovan moved on to head America’s new “Oh So Secret” intelligence agency and did not pursue the “Commando Project” any further than his original memo.<sup>121</sup>

Donovan or no, Holcomb could not be rid of the demand for commando-style units. In the midst of his fending off the potential Donovan threat, Holcomb received a parallel proposal from within the ranks of the Corps for organizing Marine Corps “Commandos.” Though it came from a junior officer, the proposal carried more weight than usual: its author was none other than James Roosevelt, captain in the Marine Corps Reserve and son of the President.<sup>122</sup>

James Roosevelt had a unique Marine Corps career. In 1936, he entered the Marine Corps as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Reserves at his father’s behest, in order to serve as an aide on a trip to South America. James decided to stay in the Marine Reserves, but admitted “I do not feel my age or experience would justify my holding such a rank in the case of actual call to service.”<sup>123</sup> He resigned his commission and was then re-commissioned as a Captain in September 1939. His intimate connection with the President made him the perfect choice for several special missions. In August 1941, William Donovan personally requested to have James Roosevelt detached for temporary duty as the OCI’s Liaison Officer. After Pearl Harbor, James requested transfer back to

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<sup>121</sup> Gordon, “An Experiment in Elitism,” 365.

<sup>122</sup> For a succinct biography of James Roosevelt’s life and service up to 1941, see Wukovits, *American Commando*, 23-30.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas Holcomb, “Synopsis of Service of Major James Roosevelt, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve,” 29 May 1941, James Roosevelt File, HDRB. Years later, James wrote that, “I thought I should justify my rank by going out on maneuvers and things like that, and of course I was totally out of my depth. I didn’t know what I was doing. So I eventually resigned my commission. Later I went back in as a captain, but that time I went into training and worked for it. In time I even earned my rank.” James Roosevelt and Bill Libby, *My Parents: A Differing View* (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1976), 234.

active duty with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division in California. There he shared a room with an acquaintance from Franklin D. Roosevelt's time at Warm Springs – Evans F. Carlson. Carlson was quickly impressed with the younger Roosevelt, discovering that James “saw pretty much eye to eye with me on matters social, economic, political and military.”<sup>124</sup> Carlson's idealism proved very influential. Roosevelt's January 13 letter to Commandant Holcomb clearly reflects Carlson's influence. In James Roosevelt's estimation, the situation in the Pacific called for daring action modeled on the daring raids of the British Commandos and the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army in China. Arguing that such guerrilla actions and raids “fits the entire tradition of action and boldness held by the Marine Corps,” and that “there are many officers and men [within the Corps] with experience in Nicaragua who have had similar experience [by this he almost certainly meant Carlson],” Roosevelt proposed that such units would be an efficient remedy to the Japanese onslaught, raiding captured islands, the Philippines, and “even more devastating action frontally by landing on Japan proper.”<sup>125</sup>

Roosevelt's letter arrived in the midst of Holcomb's correspondence with Smith and Price. It only added to Holcomb's troubles – in addition to fending off romantic Commando intrusions into the Corps, he now had the President's own son urging adoption of Carlson's special operations guerrilla units for quixotic raids on Japan.

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<sup>124</sup> Carlson to F.D. Roosevelt, 2 March 1942, Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>125</sup> J. Roosevelt to Holcomb, 13 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 238-239. In spring of 1941, James Roosevelt, accompanied by Marine Major Gerald Thomas, went on a fact-finding tour for his father, touring China and the Middle East and reporting on the war efforts there; for description of this intelligence tour, see Allan R. Millett, *In Many a Strife: General Gerald C. Thomas and the U.S. Marine Corps, 1917-1956* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 138-149; and Thomas transcript, MCUA, 137-217. James' work with the OCI was mostly administrative in nature; K. Roosevelt, *War Report of OSS*, 11; James Roosevelt, Oral History Interview Audio File (hereinafter Roosevelt interview), October 25, 1979, Oral and Visual History Section, History Division, Marine Corps University (hereinafter OVHS); Holcomb, “Synopsis of Service,” Roosevelt File, HDRB; Roosevelt and Libby, *My Parents*, 267; James knew Carlson to some extent before 1941, due to Carlson's association at various times with his father; but this was the first opportunity that James and Carlson had to work together personally; Wukovits, *American Commando*, 23.

Though Donovan was out of the picture, the ideas of a commando force had already been sown and taken root in too many influential minds for the concept to merely fade away quietly. This became painfully obvious on January 24, when Admiral Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC), informed Marine Maj. Gen. Clayton B. Vogel, commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint Training Force in California, that “it is desired that immediate steps be taken to organize and train four ‘Commando’ type units in your force. Details of organization, development, and training are left to your discretion.”<sup>126</sup> Nimitz further ordered the transfer of the APD fleet from Virginia to California, signaling that these new raiding units would be operating in the Pacific theater. As of February 4, there was still uncertainty as to the exact nature of these units, which for all practical purposes existed only on paper.

Holcomb recognized that by this point that the creation of commando forces in some form was inevitable. The idea was supported by the President, as well as Secretary Knox, Admiral King, and Admiral Nimitz, and had started to create a stir amongst the public. However, rather than protest Nimitz’s order, Holcomb sensed an opportunity to at least maintain full Marine Corps control of the new commando units, thereby avoiding their becoming “a tail which will wag the dog.”<sup>127</sup> Merritt Edson and the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion gave Holcomb the perfect opportunity to comply with the directives from on high while still maintaining the integrity of the Corps.<sup>128</sup>

In a February 4 memo to King, Holcomb acknowledged Nimitz’s call for the

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<sup>126</sup> Nimitz to Vogel, 24 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 255. Years later, James Roosevelt expressed his belief that had Nimitz not actively sought the creation of a Commando unit, the Raiders would probably have never come into existence. Roosevelt interview, OVHS.

<sup>127</sup> Price to Holcomb, 16 January 1942, Holcomb Collection, MCUA.

<sup>128</sup> News of top-level discussions of commando units leaked to the press in late January, causing no small degree of speculation and excitement. Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 15.

creation of commando-style units, but maintained that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division (out of which those units were to be carved) was already too understrength to furnish the personnel. However, he pointed out that Edson's battalion "has been in existence for years and has been undergoing intensive training in the execution of small-scale amphibious raids and surprise landings for the past year."<sup>129</sup> Holcomb sought to regain the reins on the commando initiative by proposing to send a reinforced company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion to California to serve as the nucleus for the new raiding unit, to be known as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Separate Battalion. However, King made the increasing impatience of the Navy Department clear in a memo to Holcomb a few days later:

Will you please have your people follow up and follow through on the equipment and ammunition (for training) of 'Commando' troops with first priority for units on the West Coast (Pacific Fleet)[?] By equipment is meant everything needed to make the 'Commando' units effective – to include, for instance, demolition, portable radio, rubber boats, special weapons, etc.<sup>130</sup>

Merely designating "Separate Battalions" was not going to suffice to appease the demand for commandos, yet Holcomb found a way to gain institutional victory in the sparring over the commando project. Writing to Vogel on the day after receiving King's memo (February 10), Holcomb confided that though the Donovan question appeared to have died down, "the idea is too strongly imbedded to remain dormant very long unless we move promptly to broaden our amphibious training in such way as to head off any outside interference."<sup>131</sup> Holcomb outlined the course of action: "in view of COMINCH's memorandum, herein quoted, and as a means of forestalling the Donovan case, we must act and act quickly. We must prepare ourselves particularly for one of our

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<sup>129</sup> Holcomb to King, 4 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 259.

<sup>130</sup> King to Holcomb, 9 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 264.

<sup>131</sup> Holcomb to Vogel, 10 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 265. An almost identical letter was sent to H.M. Smith on the following day.

important missions, viz: the execution of amphibious raids.”<sup>132</sup> Full training and equipping of the Separate Battalions was to be “of *first priority*.”<sup>133</sup> Of course, to do so would involve “some sacrifice for the time being of the other units [of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division] in the matter of experienced personnel and equipment,” but Holcomb felt that, “in view of the situation now facing us, it is imperative that we get underway at once.”<sup>134</sup> Holcomb concluded by underscoring the urgency now attached to the Commando project: “It is really a matter of grave concern to me, as it may have a very important influence on our future.”<sup>135</sup> Holcomb, always attentive to how the changing attitudes in Washington could affect the Corps for good or ill, was keenly sensitive to the mounting pressure from high authorities who wanted some American equivalent to the vaunted British Commandos. Although the Donovan proposal ultimately amounted to little more than speculation, Holcomb recognized the need to act fast to placate the authorities while still maintaining internal control of the special operations experiment. Edson and the Separate Battalion, prepared under Smith’s earlier, more conventional parameters, provided Holcomb with his solution.

Holcomb retained his staunch disapproval of the term “Commando,” for as he continued to insist, the Marines already *were* America’s elite amphibious troops, easily the equal of any Commandos.<sup>136</sup> He believed that “the term ‘Marine’ was ‘sufficient to indicate a man ready for duty at any time, and that the injection of a special name, such as

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<sup>132</sup> Holcomb to Vogel, 10 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 267.

<sup>133</sup> Holcomb to Vogel, 10 February 1942 (emphasis in original), reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 267.

<sup>134</sup> Holcomb to Vogel, 10 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 267.

<sup>135</sup> Holcomb to Vogel, 10 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 268.

<sup>136</sup> See “Gen. Holcomb Likens Marines to Commandos: Says Rigorous Training of Corps Prepares Men for Daring Amphibious Raids,” *NY Herald Tribune*, February 24, 1942, held in Edson Papers, LOC (attached to letter, G.A. Percy to Edson, 25 February 1942).



“Commando,” would be undesirable and superfluous.”<sup>137</sup> This opinion was shared by most in the Marine Corps. Holcomb consulted both Vogel and Smith for suggestions for a better name for the two Separate Battalions, noting that “I don’t like the term ‘Commando’; we are looking for a better term – one more fitting for the Marines.”<sup>138</sup> Smith suggested the title 1<sup>st</sup> Shock Battalion, which he felt was superior to the accurate-but-bland terminology employed by Edson, who called his unique unit the 1<sup>st</sup> Destroyer (APD) Battalion.<sup>139</sup> James Roosevelt had included a suggestion that his proposed guerrilla unit could be “called ‘Rangers’ or some other appropriate name.”<sup>140</sup> It remains unclear who deserves credit for the exact term, but Holcomb ultimately decided on a title that was straightforward, yet sufficiently unique to the Corps: the U.S. Marine Raider Battalions.<sup>141</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion was officially re-designated the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion on February 16, 1942. For the new 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, this was little more than a name change; they continued their aggressive training regimen under the command of Merritt Edson. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Separate Battalion followed suit shortly, and was re-designated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Raider Battalion on February 19, 1942. This new special operations unit was the

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<sup>137</sup> Joel Thacker, “The Marine Raiders in World War II,” Edson Papers, LOC, p.2.; Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 27.

<sup>138</sup> Holcomb to Vogel, 10 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 268; Holcomb to Smith, 11 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 272.

<sup>139</sup> Smith to Holcomb, 9 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 273; Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 153.

<sup>140</sup> Roosevelt to Holcomb, 13 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 240.

<sup>141</sup> Hoffman credits General Price with coining the term “Raiders.” *Makin to Bougainville*, 5. Alexander claims Price’s suggestion was to adopt the term “Commando,” and that the term “Raider” was Holcomb’s own invention. *Edson’s Raiders*, 29. Whatever the case may be, the final authority rested with Holcomb, and per his decision, Raiders is the title now etched in Marine Corps history. Like Holcomb, Smith asserted that “All Amphibious Force Marines are considered as commandos.” H.M. Smith to Holcomb, 16 January 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 252. The equivalence of U.S. Marines to British Commandos was stressed in Corps publications as well. See Frank X. Tolbert, “Hit and Hold,” *Leatherneck* 25, no. 7 (July 1942): 30-32 – “He’d have to black up. That’s about all. Then any seasoned U.S. Marine ‘would fit in quite handsomely’ on the raids of the British Commandos. So said Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten when he visited Washington this month.”

fulfillment of Carlson's long-held dreams, for General Price selected him to serve as the commanding officer of the new battalion. For his executive officer, Carlson selected none other than James Roosevelt.<sup>142</sup>

### **Suspicion of Outside Interference**

In order to fully appreciate the tension created by the Raiders within the culture of the Marine Corps, one must consider the unique perspective shared by most Marines. Many Marine officers sincerely believed that dabbling in experimental special operations posed an existential threat to the Corps they were trying to build and defend. In his landmark history of the development of Corps culture during and after World War II, Aaron O'Connell draws attention to the "minority status, sense of persecution, and paranoia that have always been a dominant cognitive frame in Marine Corps culture."<sup>143</sup> Though the Marine Corps had existed within the U.S. Navy since 1798, prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century they remained a small force of sea-going soldiers, neither fully Army nor fully Navy. On numerous occasions between the American Revolution to the Second World War, the Corps had come dangerously close to being abolished; such institutional memories of threat from other services were a crucial factor in shaping the mindset of Marines. O'Connell posits that "A feeling of being persecuted, already well established in their service history, instilled in Marines a feeling of hypervigilance . . . . That hypervigilance and the group cohesion which flowed from it were the engines of the Marines' cultural power and success."<sup>144</sup> This hypervigilance meant that Marines, especially those in senior positions, were extremely wary of external interference in

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<sup>142</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 5.

<sup>143</sup> O'Connell, *Underdogs*, 10.

<sup>144</sup> O'Connell, *Underdogs*, 11.

Marine Corps internal affairs. All such attempts were greeted with suspicion as potential efforts to marginalize the Corps and subvert its unique role in national defense.<sup>145</sup>

The Raiders represented Holcomb's concession to the realities of the mood of America's top leadership in the depressing days of early 1942. The maneuverings of Holcomb and his top generals successfully forestalled any direct outside interference in the internal organization and chain-of-command of the Marine Corps. To be sure, the impetus for the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion had come not from politicians or the Navy Department, but from Holland Smith's experiences with the FLEXs. Yet an important aspect of the Raider concept that was developed by Edson, under Smith's command, was the incorporation of the Raiders as one weapon among many in the Corps amphibious assault arsenal. Edson deliberately shaped his battalion with a view towards a supporting role in larger-scale amphibious assaults; his 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders were designed not only to function as independent companies for raids and reconnaissance missions, but also to serve in joint operations with normal infantry battalions. This supplementary role was very much in line with the ethos of Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC), namely the establishment of the amphibious assault as the Corps' primary mission. Amphibious assault was the Corps' defining feature, the justification for their continued existence which preempted the charge of many that the Corps merely duplicated the efforts of the Army. As historian Joseph Alexander put it, "Any other missions – especially the creation of a large-scale, elite commando force – that diluted or distracted from this primary role would be decidedly unwelcome."<sup>146</sup> Holcomb made this clear in his letters to Vogel and Smith, in which he plainly stated "I want to emphasize that I consider the

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<sup>145</sup> The institutional survival of the Corps is described in Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., "The Cat With More Than Nine Lives," *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 80, no. 6, (June 1954): 658-671.

<sup>146</sup> Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 28.

so-called ‘Commando Operations’ only one feature of normal Marine Corps work.”<sup>147</sup>

Thus, in Holcomb’s mind the Raiders would be an ancillary force that could serve a useful purpose in support of amphibious operations. With that in mind, Holcomb sought to use Edson’s battalion as template, the pattern which the newly founded 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders should follow. As it turned out, Evans Carlson had other plans. The external interest of influential figures continued through 1942, leading HQMC to handle them with kid gloves. King continued his interest in the training of the Raider battalions, inquiring about their training progress again in March.<sup>148</sup> Carlson maintained his correspondence directly with the Commander-in-Chief, informing President Roosevelt of the details of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion’s missions, organization, and training.<sup>149</sup> Roosevelt continued to take a personal interest in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, not the least because his own son was its executive officer. He responded warmly to Carlson’s updates, remarking that “What you tell me about the new outfit is most interesting and surely there will be a chance to use it.”<sup>150</sup> Such investment by high-level authorities outside of the Corps would become a defining feature of the Raider battalions. As has been noted of many other units the Raiders experience – indeed, their very existence – was directly tied to the interest of high-ranking benefactors. The continued attraction of non-Marine leaders to the Raiders fed into the perceptions of favoritism and eventual resentment that ultimately contributed to the Raiders’ early disbandment.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Holcomb to Vogel, 10 February 1942, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 267.

<sup>148</sup> Charles L. Updegraph, Jr., *Special Marine Corps Units of World War II* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1972; repr. 1977), 4.

<sup>149</sup> Carlson to F.D. Roosevelt, 2 March 1942, Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>150</sup> F.D. Roosevelt to Carlson, 12 March 1942, Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>151</sup> Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 35-44.

### CHAPTER 3: THE RAIDERS AS A MILITARY ELITE

Following the formal establishment of the Raider Battalions in February 1942, it did not take long for them to show the signs of an emergent, elite subculture. The fostering of a unique group subculture is a common feature of military units of all varieties, but is especially pronounced among elite units. It is no surprise then that the Raiders quickly began to establish their own distinctive subculture within their parent culture, that of the Marine Corps at large. From their initial days, the Raider battalions began establishing the Raider mystique, quickly establishing themselves as premier special operations units. Even more than their special mission purpose, the Raiders were set apart by their natural evolution into a distinctly elite force, advancing rapidly from Guardsmen to Technicians and finally Warrior elites. However, the emergence of a parallel subculture, one which mimicked the same features as the parent culture, introduced elements of friction in the Marine Corps.<sup>152</sup>

#### **The Marine Corps as a Military Elite**

As Showalter expertly frames it, the Marine Corps prior to and including the First World War had achieved a solid reputation, both on the battlefield and in the media. However, an elite designation based on reputation alone, in the absence of certain other factors, yields what Showalter labels a “pseudo-elite.”<sup>153</sup> During the First World War,

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<sup>152</sup> “The division is . . . the center of accomplishment, esprit, and morale . . . . Any organization will do. Specialized units made use of the same spirit – Merrill’s Marauders, the Rangers. In each case, a small, self-sufficient combat outfit. The division, the basic American fighting unit, fulfills the soldier’s need for identity.” Thomas H. Farnsworth, “The Division,” *United States Army Combat Forces Journal* 2, no. 1 (August 1951): 18-19. See Horn and Balasevicius, *Casting Light on the Shadows*, 125.

<sup>153</sup> Showalter dubs such units media elites or performance elites. “Evolution of the Marine Corps,” 46.

the Marine Corps “took its first step towards true elite status by maintaining its status as a volunteer force until September 1918.”<sup>154</sup> As Showalter explains, with the advent of the draft, the idea of an all-volunteer Marine Corps rapidly became one of the most defining features of service in the Corps. “And the Marine brigade’s achievements and image combined to support the Corps’ emerging status as America’s version of the Old World’s guards formations, a force of men who had placed themselves above the ordinary soldier not by simple physical measurements, but democratically, by the free moral act of volunteering.”<sup>155</sup> Marine recruiting during the First World War was designed around this very logic, as “recruiters stressed that the Corps was still an all-volunteer, elite service, an appeal that spared the Corps the residual contempt for conscripts and allowed it to attract the most adventurous, physically fit men.”<sup>156</sup> With an overwhelming number of volunteers, the Corps was able to maintain stringent acceptance standards, rejecting about 25 percent of would-be volunteers and lending much credence to the claim that the Marine Corps of World War I was filled with “the cream of the 1917 volunteers.”<sup>157</sup>

Maintaining their status as an all-volunteer force with the most difficult entrance standards became a crucial aspect of the Marine Corps identity, as it defined their claim to Guardsman elite status. This continued in the Second World War. As mobilization for war slowly got underway in the pre-war United States, the Marine Corps adhered to its highly selective standards, rejecting some 79 percent of applicants in 1940.<sup>158</sup> After the shock of Pearl Harbor, the Marine Corps’ recruiting appeals to the “nation’s toughest,

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<sup>154</sup> Showalter, “Evolution of the Marine Corps,” 48.

<sup>155</sup> Showalter, “Evolution of the Marine Corps,” 48.

<sup>156</sup> Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 289.

<sup>157</sup> Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 289.

<sup>158</sup> Some 48,609 out of 61,723 applicants were rejected for various physical, mental, or moral reasons. David J. Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory: Thomas Holcomb and the Making of the Modern Marine Corps, 1936-1943* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 74.

most physically fit, and most patriotic youths to wear the ‘Globe and Anchor’” resulted in a massive influx of eager volunteers of high quality – “some of the finest men it [the Corps] had seen since World War I.”<sup>159</sup> Many of the men who volunteered for service in the Marine Corps were motivated by intense patriotism and the desire to prove their manhood, combined with eagerness to get into action. The eagerness of volunteers to join the Corps meant that the Corps could maintain their high standards. Even following the mandated acceptance of men inducted under the Selective Service Act in 1943 the Marine Corps fought – and mostly succeeded – to preserve its all-volunteer reputation. As David Ulbrich relates, “Marine recruiters and raw recruits alike took several steps to circumvent the Selective Service Act while still following policies in the letter, if not the spirit, of the law.”<sup>160</sup> Despite the rapid growth of the wartime Marine Corps to unprecedented levels, the Corps remained distinctively smaller than the other service branches. The reputation of the Marine Corps as the “First to Fight” continued to attract “many thousands of men of the finest physical types, and of a high degree of education and personal initiative,” giving them the “character of hand-picked organizations.”<sup>161</sup> This relatively small size, combined with their all-volunteer image and rigorous standards, gives credence to Showalter’s perception of the World War II-era Corps as America’s Guardsmen.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 360.

<sup>160</sup> Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory*, 163.

<sup>161</sup> Robert R. Palmer, “The Procurement of Enlisted Personnel: The Problem of Quality,” in *United States Army in World War II: The Army Ground Forces: The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, eds. Robert R. Palmer, Bell I. Wiley, and William R. Keast (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1948; repr. 1991), 4-5.

<sup>162</sup> “For all its expansion, however, the Corps remained a numerical elite. It made up less than 5 percent of the 16.3 million Americans who served in the armed forces in World War II.” Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 439. Recruiting efforts focused on two areas: enlisting eligible 17-year-olds into the Marine Corps Reserve to be activated and sent to boot camp after turning 18, and on identifying those draftees who would preferred to serve in the Marine Corps. Recruiters then persuaded these draftees to be voluntarily discharged and

The Marines were very aware of their elitist self-perception and did all in their power to encourage it. The training of Marines centered on the idea that being a Marine was more than learning a new trade or acquiring a new skill-set. Rather, the recruit training process is most often described as a total transformation, one that can be considered the adoption of a new identity or even initiation into a religious order. Marine General Victor H. Krulak stressed the importance of recruit training as “the true beginning. There, in a form of mystical alchemy, young men from diverse sources experience total immersion in an environment where the essential Marine Corps virtues are perceived, understood, and finally accepted as dogma.”<sup>163</sup> Having completed the challenge of boot camp, the newly-minted Marine “has passed the initiation into an elect fraternity and, without knowing it, he has become an elitist.”<sup>164</sup> Marine historian Aaron O’Connell asserts that initiation into the culture of the Corps was in fact the most vital part of a prospective Marine’s training, for “much of recruit training during World War II was designed not to impart specific skills but to ritualize the recruit’s induction into a new culture.”<sup>165</sup>

The central component of the Marine Corps culture of elitism is what O’Connell aptly describes as the narrative of Marine exceptionalism – “a set of claims asserting unconditionally that Marines were, and always have been, unique and superior to all

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reenlisted as regular Marines, thus sparing them the “USMCR-SS” (Selective Service” designation). More than two-thirds of the 224,323 draftees who joined the Corps during the war opted for this route. For a discussion of recruiting literature and stated motivations for joining the Corps, see Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory*, 115-116; for discussion of the Corps’ reaction to the draft, see Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 374, and Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory*, 161-164.

<sup>163</sup> Victor H. Krulak, “‘This Precious Few . . .’ The Evolution of Recruit Training.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 66, no. 4 (April 1982): 48. Krulak elaborates: “What happens to the young man who aspires to be a member of the Marine fraternity begins with a reduction of all to a common denominator . . . . None is different than the other. None is better than any other. After this egoectomy they start—all the same—from an initial zero, and they are rebuilt from there.” 50.

<sup>164</sup> Krulak, “These Precious Few,” 54.

<sup>165</sup> O’Connell, *Underdogs*, 37.



other military services.”<sup>166</sup> As O’Connell explains, induction into the Marine culture took the form of a symbolic exchange between the Marine and the Corps, with the Marine giving total commitment of priorities, ideology, and even identity, to the Corps in exchange for the privilege of belonging to the elite. “The result,” O’Connell concludes, “was a lasting bond, formed by shared stories and a broad network of kinship that encompassed both the living and the dead. And while some Marines probably considered the Corps nothing more than a job, for the majority it was much more: a vocation, an identity, and even a family.”<sup>167</sup> Representative of the outlook of many World War II Marines was Major Richard Kennard, who believed that the “only answer as to why the Marines get the toughest jobs is because the average leatherneck is a much better fighter.”<sup>168</sup> Correspondent Robert Sherrod observed that “The Marines simply assumed that they were the world’s best fighting men.”<sup>169</sup> This powerful culture of elitism served the Marine Corps well during the brutal fighting in the Pacific theater, as it bonded Marines together as members of a tight-knit fraternity in the face of unspeakable hardships and violence.<sup>170</sup>

### **The Raiders as Guardsmen**

It was within this context of a self-consciously elitist Marine Corps culture that the

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<sup>166</sup> O’Connell, *Underdogs*, 27.

<sup>167</sup> O’Connell, *Underdogs*, 27.

<sup>168</sup> Kennard added that the average Marine “has far more guts, courage and better officers . . . . These boys out there have a pride in the Marine Corps and will fight to the end no matter what the cost.” Richard Kennard to William Kennard, February 21, 1945, in Richard C. Kennard, *Combat Letters Home: A U.S. Marine Corps Officer’s World War II Letters from Peleliu, Okinawa and North China, September 1944 to December 1945* (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Dorrance, 1985), 64.

<sup>169</sup> Robert Sherrod, *Tarawa*, 35.

<sup>170</sup> Aaron O’Connell discusses the effects of combat on Marine *esprit*, and how trauma actually served to strengthen the cohesion of Marine Corps culture among most, if not all, Marines. See his article, “Harsh and Spiritual Unity.”

Raiders began their existence. The Raiders largely constituted “double-volunteers,” for all of their volunteers were recruited from the ranks of the Marine Corps, men who had already volunteered for a service that prided itself on the hazards and difficulty of joining it. As might be expected, the Raiders tended to attract the most dedicated, aggressive, competitive, and ambitious Marines – the ones most eager for action. The Raiders quickly acquired a reputation as the “suicide units of the Marine Corps,”<sup>171</sup> From their earliest days the Raiders could claim to be the “*crème de la crème*, the Marine of the Marines.”<sup>172</sup> The phrase “cream of the cream” accurately describes the effect of concentrating so many energetic and competitive Marines into two small battalions. Such concentration of talent among small, elite units is one of the most oft-heard criticisms of elite units, and in fact would constitute one of the most persistent criticisms of the Raiders throughout their existence.<sup>173</sup>

Merritt Edson formed his 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion from the previous 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion, itself the former 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. During their time as the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion, Edson had already begun the process of refining them into a rugged, special-purpose battalion. Edson wanted “to bring the battalion . . . to as high a state of physical fitness as possible,” knowing that his assault troops would be performing missions beyond the scope of a standard infantry battalion.<sup>174</sup>

With the start of the war and the formal creation of the Raider battalions, Edson intensified his efforts to get the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders ready for battle. In doing so, he began to

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<sup>171</sup> When Marine combat correspondent Frank Cannistraci asked a veteran NCO, “Just what is a Raider battalion?” he was told that “They are the suicide units of the Marine Corps.” “‘Suicide,’ I said to myself, ‘what the hell did I get myself into?’” Frank Cannistraci, unpub. memoir, Frank Cannistraci Collection, MCUA, p.10.

<sup>172</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 9.

<sup>173</sup> Horn, “Love ‘Em or Hate ‘Em,” 36.

<sup>174</sup> Edson to Marion Dawson, 21 January 1942, Edson Papers, LOC. Edson incorporated a vigorous training schedule, including aspects of the Marine Parachute Battalion’s training regime.

establish them as a distinctly elite force. Richard Tregaskis, a war correspondent and admirer of Edson's, wrote of him:

Edson also knew the value of morale, and he would remind his troops often that they were being trained to be the very best. 'He poured into the minds of his boys,' says an old Raider sergeant, 'that they were the best, second to none...that no matter what they got into, they'd be able to get out of it. He build a terrific amount of confidence.'<sup>175</sup>

The effects of his training were evident to those outside the battalion. The 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion was commended for its performance as a "well trained, efficient battalion . . . . Their morale was of the highest, and they were at all times possessed of a strong initiative."<sup>176</sup>

Edson's efforts to transform the APD battalion into a self-sufficient raiding force took a serious blow almost immediately after receiving the Raider designation. In an effort to make the establishment of the newly-formed 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion easier on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, Commandant Holcomb ordered a reinforced company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders to the West Coast to serve as the nucleus for their 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider counterparts. In complying with this order, Edson effectively lost a full rifle company (Able Company), plus a machine gun and a mortar section – approximately one third of his effective strength in February 1942. With combat service imminent, Edson now found himself tasked with a serious restructuring of the battalion he had invested so much time in training.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Tregaskis, "Best Soldier I Ever Knew." The insistence on being the best was a hallmark of Edson's leadership. Consider his comments to the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines after assuming command of that regiment in October 1942: "It is my intention that this regiment become the best disciplined, the best appearing and the best trained regiment in the Marine Corps. Only by doing so will you become the best and toughest fighting regiment in the Corps." Edson, Regimental Memorandum, 6 December 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>176</sup> This description comes from the umpire's report of landing exercises and maneuvers on the Chesapeake Bay. Quoted in Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 149.

<sup>177</sup> Holcomb to Charles F.B. Price, 4 February 1942, Holcomb Collection, MCUA; Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 4-5; Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 29. In addition to this detachment, several of Edson's

Well before the transfer of Able Company, Edson had pointed out that acquiring replacements for the APD battalion could be problematic. Experience in the previous landing exercises had taught him that, “replacements received at the last moment, who may not be temperamentally [*sic*] nor physically fitted for this type of duty and who have received no prior specialized training, are seldom satisfactory.”<sup>178</sup> With the dramatic influx of new recruits into the Marine Corps in the first months of 1942, experienced officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) were in high demand across the Corps. Finding replacements trained to the level of the Marines he had lost to transfers would be difficult, but Edson turned this situation into an opportunity.

Though he may have been forced to accept some recruits fresh out of training, Edson used the restructuring of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders as an opportunity to establish it as an all-volunteer outfit. Some of the original members of 1/5 and the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion were unsettled by the abrupt loss of many veterans and subsequent influx of newcomers when it became the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders. To restore their confidence in the new Raider battalion, Edson made every member of the battalion either volunteer for continued service as a Raider, or else be transferred, no questions asked, to elsewhere in the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. Most chose to remain with Edson’s Raiders. To this cadre were added the new Raiders. Edson directed that “the men [replacements] will, for the most part, be selected volunteers,” and volunteers were often interviewed by Raider officers to ensure their suitability.<sup>179</sup> During early 1942, Marine recruits performed their rifle range qualifications at Quantico (to relieve some of the overcrowding on Parris Island), where, due to shortages of infantry

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officers and NCOs were transferred to England as official observers of the British Commandos. Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 29.

<sup>178</sup> Edson, “Recommended Organization,” 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion Unit File, MCUA, p.14.

<sup>179</sup> Edson to Clifton Cates, 2 Mar. 1942; and Edson to R.S. Brown, 6 March 1942, both in Edson Papers, LOC; Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 31-32.

NCOs, numerous Raiders doubled as instructors. Raider NCOs serving as rifle-range instructors had an opportunity to observe the recruits closely; those who seemed promising were encouraged to volunteer for the Raiders for a chance at hazardous duty. Edson further bolstered his ranks by sending two of his company commanders to recruit men from within the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division at New River, North Carolina, much to the annoyance of its commander, Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift.<sup>180</sup>

As the reputation of the Raiders spread, they had no problem attracting volunteers. Private Lee Minier explained his decision to join the Raiders to his mother:

I volunteered for service with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion and was accepted. This outfit corresponds to the British Commandos and also is a spearhead for landing parties. We operate from destroyers and land in rubber boats. One must be able to swim....I only hope this outfit is as good as they say it is. They call it a suicide outfit. But I notice a lot of Marines try to get into it. One of the requirements is that you must volunteer and are not asked to join and must realize what you are asking for.<sup>181</sup>

The rapidly evolving Raider mystique drew offers of service from seasoned NCOs such as Marine Gunner B.M. Bunn, a decorated veteran of Nicaragua, as well veteran commissioned officers.<sup>182</sup>

The selection of officers in his battalion was of particular importance to Edson. Edson requested the transfer of Major Joseph Berry to be his executive officer. Edson pointed out that Berry had excellent credentials and, most importantly, was “aggressive,

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<sup>180</sup> Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 31-32; Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 155-156.

<sup>181</sup> Lee Minier to Jolette Minier, 23 Feb. 1942, Lee N. Minier Collection, MCUA.

<sup>182</sup> B.M. Bunn to Edson, 28 March, 1942, Edson Papers, LOC. Though Edson politely declined Bunn's initial offer of service (Edson to Bunn, 31 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC), Bunn eventually did join the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders. He served with distinction, earning a commission and rising to the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. Bunn was killed on New Georgia during the assault on Bairoko. See Frank X. Tolbert, “Preacher's Kid,” *Leatherneck* 26, no. 11 (November 1943), 34. Major Homer Litzenberg requested to be transferred to fill an opening as Edson's Executive Officer. Litzenberg to Edson, 26 January 1942, Edson Papers, LOC. Edson “consider[ed] it an honor when officers of your rank and experience are willing and desirous of serving under my command,” but had already selected an executive officer at the time. Edson to Litzenberg, 31 January 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

an excellent troop leader, and an able staff officer.”<sup>183</sup> Edson was not above invoking the Raiders’ favor with high command in his attempt to secure Berry’s transfer, frankly explaining that “COMINCH [Adm. King] has directed these two battalions be organized and trained for active operations at the earliest possible date. As a result, the Commandant has directed that we be given priority on personnel and equipment over other units in the Corps.”<sup>184</sup>

Edson also found only three of his five incumbent company commanders suitable for special operations works and petitioned for the transfer of officers that he personally knew to be “younger, more active and aggressive...well-grounded in infantry tactics.”<sup>185</sup> Additionally, Edson requested lieutenants of “above average ability for their rank...”<sup>186</sup> Edson was not given true *carte blanche*. Many of his requests were rebuffed, including his petition for Berry. He did receive the transfer of Major Samuel B. Griffith II, a veteran officer recently returned from observing the British Commandos. Griffith would prove to be a valuable asset and capable leader for the Raiders. Nevertheless, he ensured that the officers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders were much more “hand-picked” than in any other Marine battalion; indeed, it has been claimed that they were “the most eminently qualified and experienced ever assembled in one Marine battalion.”<sup>187</sup>

On the West Coast, Evans Carlson’s newly-minted 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion had no

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<sup>183</sup> Edson to H.M. Smith, 16 Feb. 1942, Edson Papers, LOC. Smith forwarded Edson’s request to the Commandant, “recommending favorable consideration in view of the special training required of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion and the necessity for providing personnel with above average ability for this unit.” Edson to H.M. Smith, 16 Feb. 1942; H.M. Smith to Holcomb, 23 Feb. 1942, both in Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>184</sup> Edson to Cates, 2 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>185</sup> Edson to H.M. Smith, 17 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC. Edson indicated that two of the named officers “have expressed a desire for this duty,” suggesting that he had communicated with them, directly or indirectly, prior to writing to Gen. Smith.

<sup>186</sup> Edson to H.M. Smith, 17 Feb. 1942, Edson Papers, LOC. Edson further requested that he retain only regular officers, not activated reservists.

<sup>187</sup> Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 11; H.M. Smith to Edson, 25 Feb. 1942, Edson Papers, LOC; Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 159; Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 34-36.

pre-existing template like 1/5 provided the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders. Carlson had to create the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders out of whole cloth. This was not particularly troubling to him; in fact, Carlson recognized that this represented the just the opportunity he had been waiting for. On learning of his appointment as the Commanding Officer (CO) of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion, Carlson elatedly wrote his father:

At last I have received a break. Today I was placed in command of a special unit with carte blanche to organize, train, and indoctrinate it as I see fit. There is nothing like it in existence in the country. Naturally, I'm delighted. I will hand pick my personnel. Jimmy Roosevelt is to be my executive officers . . . Things seem to be moving in a direction that I have so long urged and had almost despaired of seeing materialize. But now I have been afforded the opportunity to practice some of the precepts I have been preaching these past years.<sup>188</sup>

Carlson proceeded to fill the ranks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders with volunteers from the ranks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division. During his tenure as regimental operations officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines in 1941, Carlson had put the regiment through a grueling march and field exercises, a simulation of his trek with the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army, in the mountains of southern California. The pace and conditions were so demanding that many dropped out along the way; however, Carlson had made special note of those who rose to the challenge. Now that he commanded his own battalion, he sought to persuade the survivors of the miniature "long march" to join the Raiders. The remainder of the volunteers were recruited from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, which was then receiving a flood of new recruits. Most of these recruits came from the Western states and were presumably already accustomed to the rigors of outdoor life.<sup>189</sup>

Carlson had a very clear goal in mind for his Raider battalion from the outset. In

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<sup>188</sup> Carlson to Thomas Carlson, 5 February 1942, quoted in Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 8.

<sup>189</sup> Peatross, Oral History Interview Transcript (hereinafter Peatross transcript), MCUA, 60-62; Wukovits, *American Commando*, 35.

order to achieve those goals, he had to have the right kind of Marine. Carlson and James Roosevelt recruited and personally interviewed prospective Raiders – enlisted, NCO, and officer. The rumor quickly circulated through the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division that Carlson was searching for “the *crème de la crème*, the Marine of the Marines,” for his new “rugged, suicide” outfit.<sup>190</sup> Prospective Raiders were questioned thoroughly, and given no illusions as to what they were signing up for: “I promise you nothing but hardships and danger . . . When we get to battle, we ask no mercy, we give none.”<sup>191</sup> His first questions were the same for all: “Why do you want to fight? What’s the war about? What’re we fighting for?”<sup>192</sup> Carlson was most interested in the attitudes of his volunteers, telling James Roosevelt not to take “a man who doesn’t give a damn about anything. But if he has a deep feeling about wanting to fight, even for the wrong reasons, take him. I know I can shape him into wanting to fight for the right reasons.”<sup>193</sup> With some 3,000 Marines expressing interest in joining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, Carlson could and did select only the most qualified.<sup>194</sup> Carlson boasted, “We have combed 6000 men to secure the 600 which comprise this organization.”<sup>195</sup>

Though the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalions developed along divergent lines, they both shared a commitment to an all-volunteer status. Edson’s 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders had proven themselves under his training regime, and the restructuring of that battalion brought an influx of volunteers, as well as certain officers specifically selected by Edson. Though it was not technically all-volunteer, it certainly was one of the most (if not the most)

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<sup>190</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 9.

<sup>191</sup> Quoted in Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 12.

<sup>192</sup> Quoted in Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 11.

<sup>193</sup> Quoted in Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 11.

<sup>194</sup> Blankfort gives the figure of 3,000 in *Big Yankee*, 12.

<sup>195</sup> Carlson to F. D. Roosevelt, 2 March 1942, Carlson File, HDRB.F



specially tailored outfit in the 1942 Marine Corps. Carlson's 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders were quite literally hand-picked, "double volunteers" eager to set themselves apart from the norm. In both cases, the Raiders were quickly establishing their mystique as the elite of the Marine Corps. The Raiders could easily be considered ranking among the Guardsmen elites as delineated by Showalter.

### **The Raiders as Technicians**

The Raiders' status as Technician elites emerged as a natural function of their special operations mission. The Marine Corps' institutional mission of amphibious assaults – a type of assault so hazardous as to be deemed all but impossible by most other militaries during the interwar period – made them the recognized experts during World War II. According to Showalter, the development and skillful execution of the amphibious war in the Pacific was a major factor in cementing the Marine Corps' status as an elite military institution. But the Raiders took that amphibious training and expertise to a new level.<sup>196</sup>

Amphibious assault doctrine as developed during the 1930s called for the assault of beaches which were presumably heavily defended. Overcoming this disadvantage required amassing both naval and air superiority in the area. Such superiority allowed for the methodical bombardment of defenses, including both naval gunfire and air support.

The landing force would take advantage of the confusion and destruction wrought by the

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<sup>196</sup> See Holland Smith's comments on the Battle of Gallipoli, and the different lessons gleaned from it by different militaries, in *Development of Amphibious Tactics*, 18-20; Showalter, "Evolution of the Marine Corps," 50-51. Allan Millett explores this issue further in his essay, "Assault from the Sea." Millett argues that while Japan possessed the most tactical experience in amphibious landings at the onset of WWII, "The American forces that eventually defeated the Japanese were already well developed by the time the Japanese Army began its China campaign in 1937, and in the four remaining years of peace the navy and the marine corps brought their understanding (if not their capability) of amphibious operations to a level unequalled in Britain or Japan." "Assault from the Sea," 70-71.

bombardment, but still relied on heavy firepower to rapidly expand the beachhead. The assault of defended beaches proved to be one of the more complex endeavors of World War II, involving precise coordination between services on all levels, a massive logistical effort, and the continued reliance on supporting arms and firepower. However, the Raiders were designed to fulfill a special role, a different type of amphibious mission. The Raiders, as originally conceived by Smith and Edson, served as the fast striking force that would supplement the main thrust of the amphibious invasion.<sup>197</sup> They were focused on quick, quiet insertions, either for surprise strikes on strategic targets or securing beachheads for the main assault forces. The Raiders were roughly analogous with the paratroops, another type of special forces unit birthed in World War II. Like the paratroops, the Raiders could directly supplement an assault force, strike at targets on the enemy's flanks and rear areas, or create diversions to distract the enemy's attention from the main thrust. Also like the paratroops, the Raiders were designed to be self-sufficient for brief periods, but relied on either relief by conventional forces or extraction in relatively short order.<sup>198</sup>

From the outset, the Raiders had to prepare for a variety of potential missions, including reconnaissance, diversions, raids, flank attacks, or even full landings in support of conventional troops. Never certain exactly what they would be called upon to do, the Raiders knew that they had to be prepared to be self-sufficient in any situation. Once they were in battle, they would be on their own for the most part, and thus had to develop

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<sup>197</sup> Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 147.

<sup>198</sup> See H.M. Smith, *Development of Amphibious Tactics*, 43-45, for a brief description of standard preparations for an assault on a Pacific island. The comparison of the Raiders with airborne troops was made by Edson himself, with the notable exception that, "A parachute battalion, once committed, must operate in the general forces. They cannot withdraw from action by the same route which they used at the beginning of the engagement. On the other hand, an APD battalion should always have some chance of withdrawal from the beach and reembarkation on its destroyer transport." Edson, "Recommended Organization," 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion Unit File, MCUA.

certain capabilities over and above standard amphibious assault training. The Raider battalions were designed to be as mobile and flexible as possible, and to get the maximum offensive effectiveness out of a light infantry battalion. This was reflected in their grueling and highly specialized training. The specialized training they received to perform raids and other special warfare missions established the Raiders as emergent Technician elites.

The entire structure of the Raider battalions was designed around the operating capacity of the fast APDs. However, the Raiders anticipated using even more unconventional platforms, such as submarines, to insert to their mission areas when needed. Edson envisioned his Raiders as specialized light infantry, performing hit-and-run raids in support of larger amphibious operations. Even before formal designation as a Raider battalion, Edson had anticipated that the missions of his APD battalion:

[M]ay embody any or all of the following:

- (a) Reconnaissance.
- (b) Feints or demonstrations.
- (c) Raids.
- (d) Secondary landings or diversions on one or both flanks of a main landing.
- (e) Flank attacks aimed at lines of communications or reserves in rear of the main beach defense.
- (f) Seizure of an initial beach head to cover the landing of the force.
- (g) Main landing executed as a combat team attached to a regiment or an infantry division.<sup>199</sup>

Raider training was shaped by the need to be able to respond to any of these contingencies. Edson wanted his Raiders to be flexible, equally able to operate as a whole battalion or as individual companies. His anticipation of operating in “detachments varying in strength from a platoon or a company . . . to the entire

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<sup>199</sup> Edson, “Recommended Organization,” 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion Unit File, MCUA, p.1.

battalion,” often “on two or more widely separated and mutually unsupported beaches,” explained his pressing insistence on initiative and ability to operate independently.<sup>200</sup>

To assure the element of surprise meant that the Raiders had to master stealth landings. While the Raiders were capable of working in a variety of landing craft, their favored method of ship-to-shore transport was rubber boats. Edson’s Raiders emphasized night operations with the rubber boats, eventually perfecting their methods to the point where they could disembark, land, and move towards their objectives without verbal commands. In addition to the difficulty of mastering night landings, Edson further anticipated that the most ideal beaches would be the most defended. Raider landings would more likely “be executed on beaches protected by a coral reef or other natural obstacles . . . and which are backed by steep cliffs or rugged terrain.”<sup>201</sup> He concluded that, “mobility will be a primary factor” for the Raiders. Since they had no capacity for motor transport organic to their battalions, the Raiders would take into battle on that which could be carried by hand, and “this equipment should be as light as possible commensurate with adequate firepower.”<sup>202</sup>

Edson’s training regime reflected his understanding of the role the Raiders would fill. Encouraging individual initiative and aggressiveness to seize the offensive momentum were hallmarks of Edson’s training program: “During conferences with his junior officers, Colonel Edson outlines the broad pictures and allows the juniors to supply the details subject to his approval . . . . With all his strictness, Colonel Edson keeps the

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<sup>200</sup> Edson, “Recommended Organization,” 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion Unit File, MCUA, p.2.

<sup>201</sup> Edson, “Recommended Organization,” 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion Unit File, MCUA, p.2.

<sup>202</sup> Edson envisioned the Raiders using, “rubber boats, X-ray boats, yoke boats, yoke ramp boats, or rubber boats [*sic*], or a combination thereof.” “Recommended Organization,” 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion Unit File, MCUA, p.2. William McCahill (Division of Public Relations, USMC), unpub. Press Release, 14 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC, pp. 5-6.

welfare of his men uppermost in mind.”<sup>203</sup> Physical fitness was a top priority, with a heavy emphasis on endurance and speed on hikes over rough terrain. Lee Minier of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders wrote of hikes of 15 to 20 miles a day, with part of the march spent running “like the devil himself was after us.”<sup>204</sup> Correspondent William McCahill, after observing the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders’ training regime at Quantico, marveled at the “perfect physical conditioning of the First Raiders.”<sup>205</sup> Edson, himself an expert with a rifle, placed a heavy emphasis on small arms proficiency for his Raiders. He considered it “essential that every officer and man in this battalion become thoroughly indoctrinated in the spirit and technique of hand-to-hand fighting.”<sup>206</sup> He wrote directly to Commandant Holcomb to secure the re-activation of retired Marine Col. A.J. Drexel Biddle, widely acknowledged as “the best instructor of the Marine Corps” for teaching hand-to-hand and bladed weapon techniques.<sup>207</sup> He frequently sent his men for specialized training, so they could then instruct the battalion. As Edson learned in Nicaragua, knowledge of the jungle, how to navigate through it and how to fight in it, was of utmost importance. Consequently, land navigation (both day and night) and “wood lore” were stressed in Raider training.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> McCahill, unpub. Press Release, 14 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC, p.3; Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 158-160.

<sup>204</sup> Minier to Jolette Minier, 7 March 1942, Minier Collection, MCUA.

<sup>205</sup> McCahill, unpub. Press Release, 14 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC. McCahill wrote that “Colonel Edson expects his men to reach a maximum speed of seven miles in an hour, half running and half walking. On longer hikes they average between three and five miles [in an hour], moving fast and quietly.”

<sup>206</sup> Edson to Holcomb, 3 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>207</sup> McCahill, unpub. Press Release, 14 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC, p.4. A.J. Drexel Biddle was world renowned for his prowess with bladed weapons of all kinds, and especially for his style of “bayonet fencing,” as described in his book, *Do or Die*, rev. ed. (Washington D.C.: Leatherneck Association, 1944). For more on Drexel Biddle’s one-of-a-kind life, see P.Hicks, “Fabulous Fighter,” *Leatherneck* 31, no. 9 (September 1948); and A. Arsenault, “Col. Biddle and the Bayonet,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 67, no. 3 (March 1983). As Edson explained to Drexel Biddle, “I know of no one however, so capable as you, to put this sort of instruction across as it should be done.” Edson to Drexel Biddle, 21 January 1942, Edson Papers, LOC. Drexel Biddle eagerly made time in his own busy schedule to teach his trademark hand-to-hand combat techniques to the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders. He found the Raiders “an especially brilliant and wonderful command.” Drexel Biddle to Edson, 20 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>208</sup> “Colonel Edson has never been known to get lost on a march and constantly follows his maps and demands that his juniors rely upon maps, the starts and wood lore.” McCahill, unpub. Press Release, 14

Lee Minier described the rigorous training of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders while they were at Quantico in early 1942. Some days were spent marching in the Virginia hills before executing maneuvers and field problems all night; others found the Raiders learning to handle their rubber boats on the Potomac River in the cold of winter, only to depart on an all-night hike that same evening. He wrote to his mother in tongue-in-cheek fashion, “I’ve been thinking I’d like to raise hell with the Colonel about this and several other things I want straightened out around here. But seriously the Colonel is a pretty good egg and walks with the rest of us wherever we go.”<sup>209</sup>

On the nation’s other coast, Carlson likewise trained his freshly recruited Raiders to a razor’s edge. Carlson wanted his men to become accustomed to living under less than ideal conditions, so he had them establish a Spartan camp at a location known as Jacques Farm at Camp Elliott, California, where the bulk of their training occurred. He held that “In order to lick the Japanese we must out-hike, out-smart and out-shoot him,” and hence in the training of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders “emphasis is on speed of movement on foot, endurance, self-sufficiency and great fire-power.”<sup>210</sup> Carlson shared with Edson a firm belief that “Conditioning for long marches loaded with field equipment is a ‘must’ on the training schedule.”<sup>211</sup> In his view, “The entire training program should be so framed as to develop the prime requisites of initiative, resourcefulness, control of small groups in the jungles, stalking, instantaneous reaction in ambushes and aggressive action at all

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March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC, p.3. McCahill also noted that “Colonel Edson demands that his men be specialists. Every month junior officers submit names of men for snipers school, demolition, munition, instrument, armorer and motor transport schools.” unpub. Press Release, 14 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC, p.2.

<sup>209</sup> Minier to Jolette Minier, 7 March 1942, Minier Collection, MCUA.

<sup>210</sup> Carlson to F.D. Roosevelt, 2 March 1942, Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>211</sup> Carlson to Holcomb, 27 January 1943, Carlson File, HDRB.

times.”<sup>212</sup> The men endured constant physical training, supplemented by rapid-pace hikes of twenty miles or more; they were drilled in every conceivable discipline they may need: “Calisthenics, swimming, running, hiking, jungle tactics, map reading, camouflaging, jungle hygiene, demolitions, sharpshooting, street fighting, cliff scaling, and sniping.”<sup>213</sup>

In describing the missions of the Raiders, Carlson laid out similar goals as those of Edson, with one notable addition. Carlson envisioned his Raiders as a force capable of “(1) Hit and run raids; (2) Spearhead landing operations calling for landing by stealth in rubber boats on beaches ordinarily regarded as inaccessible . . . (3) Guerrilla operations for a protracted period behind the enemy’s lines.”<sup>214</sup> Inspired by his experience with the Chinese and hoping to return to aid their fight against Japan, Carlson incorporated a heavy emphasis on guerrilla warfare. He wanted his battalion to be as self-sustaining as possible for operations deep behind enemy lines. For this end, Carlson placed great value on what he called “individual cookery,” training each Raider to carry and prepare his own rations, as often as not consisting of a minimal amount of rice, with some dried food or food concentrate cubes.<sup>215</sup> This would be supplemented by food “liberated” from the enemy and by living off of the land, as Carlson had learned to do in China with the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army.

The Raiders’ perfection of specialty crafts, such as the fast-strike raid, guerrilla operations, and stealth insertions via rubber boats, demonstrates their accession to the Technician elite as laid out by Showalter. Additionally, their honing of a particularly

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<sup>212</sup> Carlson to Holcomb, 27 January 1943, Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>213</sup> Wukovits, *American Commando*, 47. Wukovits describes the training at Jacques Farm in some detail, *American Commando*, 47-55; see also George Smith, *Carlson’s Raid*, 55-67.

<sup>214</sup> Carlson to Holcomb, 27 January 1943, Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>215</sup> Carlson to Holcomb, 27 January 1943, Carlson File, HDRB

demanding form of amphibious assault made the Raiders a highly specialized subset of Technician elites. As a force drawn from a body of elite “shock troops,” and then given specialized training to perform an extraordinary mission, the Raiders truly were a doubly elite force, the special operators of a *corps d’elite*. The Raiders present a rather unique case among the special forces units of the Second World War, though certain parallels can be drawn with other specially purposed units, such as the specially trained *Fallschirmjager* unit that led the German assault on Eben Emael or the Pathfinder Force of RAF Bomber Command. It was not mere self-selection or self-proclamation that set them apart. The Raiders truly were a highly-trained and specialized group of U.S. Marines.<sup>216</sup>

### **The Raiders and Internal Conflicts**

Proceeding from their initial formation in February 1942, the Raiders established their reputation quickly. As new members were assimilated into the Raider ranks and training proceeded apace, a distinctly elite subculture evolved rapidly, establishing a separate identity for the Marine Raiders. However, this evolution did not proceed inevitably or smoothly. The Raiders, whose very origins were in strife, continued to be plagued by institutional strife – not only with their brethren in the Marine Corps at large,

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<sup>216</sup> James Kiras posits that the German striking force that seized Eben Emael in 1940 were a *de facto* special forces unit drawn from the ranks of a *corps d’elite* (the *fallschirmjagers*), due to the specialized training they received to accomplish their mission. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy*, 6. The paratroopers of Para Assault Detachment Koch were specially selected and trained specifically for that mission, representing “the cream of the cream of the fighting men.” James Lucas, *Kommando: German Special Forces of World War Two* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1985), 58. John Terraine discusses the creation of Pathfinder Force within RAF Bomber Command, and the resistance they encountered, in *A Time for Courage: The Royal Air Force in the European War, 1939-1945* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 498-503. On the preexistent culture of elitism in the RAF, see Michael Paris, “The Rise of the Airmen: The Origins of Air Force Elitism, c. 1890-1918,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 1 (January 1993): 123-141.



but also within the Raider battalions.

When the Raiders were initially established, Holcomb desired to build the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders on a foundational company of Edson's already proficient 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders.<sup>217</sup> Edson dutifully detached Able Company to California. Upon arrival, Captain Wilbur Meyerhoff of Able Company found that "the set up was quite different than we had anticipated."<sup>218</sup> Rather than accepting them, Carlson made the former 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders go through the same process as the raw-recruit volunteers.

The majority of Carlson's volunteers from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division were recruits fresh out of boot camp, lacking in experience but full of desire. Carlson did not see that as a disadvantage. In fact, he preferred it that way, in order to ensure that they would be "amenable to his training philosophy and uncorrupted by that of others."<sup>219</sup> When he received word that a reinforced rifle company of Edson's 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders was en route, Carlson was not at all pleased. He promptly dissolved Able Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion, and required those who were willing to re-volunteer for service with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders. Subjected to such indignity, only "About half the transferees volunteered for this [Carlson's] battalion and, of them, about fifty were accepted."<sup>220</sup> Those who did then had to pass his psychological screening interview. This of course was taken as a profound insult by the former 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, even with those few who were accepted into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders: "This was a hell of a mess and most of us tried to 'qualify' . . . we were proud . .

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<sup>217</sup> Holcomb to Price, 4 February 1942, Holcomb Collection, MCUA.

<sup>218</sup> Meyerhoff to Edson, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>219</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 13.

<sup>220</sup> Meyerhoff to Edson, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC. Price told Edson that "Maj. Carlson commanding the Second special Bn. has refused to accept [any] more than 3 officers and 51 of the men. The balance has been distributed in the units of the [2<sup>nd</sup>] Division where no one wanted them." Price to Edson, 17 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

. and just could not stand rejection by the West Coast mob.”<sup>221</sup> Carlson was not about to let his organization be colored by the methods and ideas of Edson. One officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders later accused Carlson of deliberately segregating the former Edson’s Raiders “to prevent contamination of his raiders.”<sup>222</sup> The remainder of Able Company was dissolved and scattered across various billets in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division. Meyerhoff reported of his former company:

The majority of the men were sorry to leave the First [Raider] Battalion. Many were disappointed when the dissolution of “A” Company Reinforced was effected, for the remainder of the company was scattered at random throughout the Fleet Marine Force. I did not particularly like the transaction for, although many good men were transferred to the [2<sup>nd</sup>] Raider Battalion, there still remained the nucleus of an excellent line company. However, the Division did what it deemed best.<sup>223</sup>

Some twenty seven members of former Able Company petitioned Edson himself for return to the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, pleading that “We would gladly pay our fare back to get into our former outfit again if such is possible.”<sup>224</sup> Edson was furious about this *fait accompli*, but he had no authority to recall them after they were detached from his command.<sup>225</sup>

The rejection of Able Company infuriated Edson. He never forgave Carlson, whom he had never held in high regard anyway. As if learning his loss had been almost completely in vain was not bad enough, Price rubbed salt in the wound by insinuating that the “very bad impression” made by the former 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders was Edson’s fault: “Either there is an entirely different impression in the East as to what these men are to do and the type of men required effectively to do it or someone has made a serious bust.”<sup>226</sup> Price

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<sup>221</sup> John Apergis, quoted in Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 14.

<sup>222</sup> Charles Lamb, “Comments on Raid on Makin Island Manuscript,” 29 August 1956, Carlson Collection, MCUA, p.5.

<sup>223</sup> Meyerhoff to Edson, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC .

<sup>224</sup> Harvey Florence, et.al., to Edson, 15 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>225</sup> Edson to Pfc. Florence, 19 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>226</sup> Price to Edson, 17 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

hinted that an official complaint was in the offing, warning Edson that “the angel of wrath is abroad.”<sup>227</sup>

Edson responded to Price’s accusations bluntly, noting that he was “pretty sore about” Carlson’s rejection of Able Company<sup>228</sup> He could see no reason why his Raiders would fail to pass the muster. He made his grievances abundantly clear in his rebuttal to Price:

The implications in your letter, tended only to increase my anger and disgust at what I consider to be an unjust and prejudicial attitude . . . . I do not know what you or Carlson expected to get. I do know what I sent you: a well trained rifle company, machine gun platoon and 81-mm mortar section, which represented more than a third of my battalion. In my opinion, and in the opinion of others who have seen it perform in the field and in maneuvers, it was, until I sent this detail to Carlson, the best battalion on the east coast and as good or better than any similar outfit in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.<sup>229</sup>

Noting that his company had been composed almost entirely of veterans of several years’ service, including time spent in intensive training with 1/5 and the APD Battalion, Edson reasoned that “It is unbelievable that they have no place in any organization which is made up largely from recruits as I believe is the case in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.”<sup>230</sup> Rejection of most of them and their subsequent dispersal at random throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was “not so much a reflection upon the quality of men sent as upon the prejudicial attitude and ignorance of the officers under your command.”<sup>231</sup>

Edson did not shy away telling Price in no uncertain terms exactly what he thought of Carlson – “Whatever Carlson’s so-called standards may be, his refusal to accept three out of four of these men only confirmed my opinion that the Marine Corps

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<sup>227</sup> Price to Edson, 17 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>228</sup> Edson to Price, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>229</sup> Edson to Price, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>230</sup> Edson to Price, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>231</sup> Edson to Price, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

had lost nothing by his resignation a few years ago and has gained nothing by his return.”<sup>232</sup> As for Carlson’s executive (upon whom Price had attempted to shift some blame), Edson noted, “It is true that Jimmie Roosevelt has connection with high officials in this country. It is also true that he is a reserve captain with very limited military experience as an officer in the Marine Corps.”<sup>233</sup> Edson frankly acknowledged, even welcomed, the possibility of an official complaint, but noted that if and when such complaint was made, he would involve his “immediate superior in command” –Holland M. Smith.<sup>234</sup> This broadside gave Price pause, and he immediately struck a more conciliatory tone. Edson had “entirely missed the point,” Price claimed, since his letter “was intended in the most benevolent and friendly spirit.”<sup>235</sup> Price astutely decided to let the matter drop.

As Marine historian Joseph Alexander summed up the situation, “A natural rivalry emerged between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalions, but an unfortunate enmity also developed and festered, a resentment that stemmed almost entirely from the mandated transfer of the reinforced rifle company from Edson to Carlson during February 1942.”<sup>236</sup> It took years for this rivalry to die down. Questions over the chronology and origins of the Raiders persisted through the post-war years, with many erroneous public assertions that Carlson was the sole originator of the Raider concept. The oft-repeated claim that the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders were “first in name, but not origin,” caused Edson and other veterans of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders no small annoyance.<sup>237</sup> Even after the war, many veterans of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider

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<sup>232</sup> Edson to Price, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>233</sup> Edson to Price, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>234</sup> Edson to Price, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>235</sup> Price to Edson, 25 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>236</sup> Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 30.

<sup>237</sup> Murrey Marder, “Raider Carlson—Maverick Marine,” *Washington Post*, June 1, 1947, in Edson Papers, LOC. R.D. Heinl, Jr., of the Marine Corps Historical Division, mailed this clipping to Edson with the

Battalion remained aloof from their 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider counterparts. Veterans of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, at the suggestion of Lew Walt, formally established the Edson's Raiders Association in February 1950. Membership was open only to those who had served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders; former 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders were excluded.<sup>238</sup> Walt felt this decision was fully justified, for "As Raider battalions, there was no special feeling of comradeship or any close physical association between the four Raider battalions. In fact, there was an opposite type of feeling between the First and Second Raider Battalions, at least throughout the first months of their existence."<sup>239</sup>

Thus, solidarity was lacking between the two specialized, elite battalions. Though they both shared the name and reputation of "Raider Marines," they shared little else. The intra-Raider strife occasioned by differing personalities and visions of the Raiders' mission and purpose can be seen as a microcosm of the strife that ensued between the Raiders and the main body of the Marine Corps, and is just one illustration of the potential pitfalls of conflicting loyalties that can accompany the creation of elite units.

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above segment highlighted. Heintz further included official records clearly showing that the 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Battalion was not only established months before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Separate Battalion, but also that it received official designation of 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion did. After drawing his attention to this error, Heintz offers to write a corrective letter to the *Washington Post*. Blankfort's *Big Yankee* did much to advance this claim as well. Blankfort notes that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders cherished the belief that they had been cheated out of their rightful recognition as the "first" Raiders: "We never forgave them [Edson's Raiders] for being called the "First," when we were the First. But Headquarters gives even numbers to all West Coast units, and odd numbers to the East Coast. Edson formed his battalion after us but in the East; so we were the Second and they were the First." *Big Yankee*, 302. Of course, as Heintz pointed out in his correspondence with Edson, this is patently incorrect; nevertheless the charge persisted for years.

<sup>238</sup> Edson gives a brief description of the founding of the Edson's Raider Association in Edson to Robert Starnes, 23 May 1951, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>239</sup> Lew Walt to S.B. Griffith II, 8 Sept 1950, Edson Papers, LOC. Walt was responding to Griffith's suggestion that, "the base should be broadened and the title changed to 'Marine Raiders Association.'" Griffith to Walt, 26 July 1950, Edson Papers, LOC. His initial proposals to merge were voted down; however, the currently existing U.S. Marine Raider Association and Foundation welcomes veterans of all four Raider battalions. U.S. Marine Raider Association and Foundation, "Membership," <http://usmarineraiders.org/membership/>. Accessed June 25, 2015.

## Preferential Treatment

The nature of their mission and the circumstances surrounding their creation practically guaranteed that there would be friction between the Raiders and the Marine regular ground forces. The seeds of jealousy against the Raiders were sown in their early days when the Raiders enjoyed favored status in almost every area. Much of the friction started as resentment of preferential treatment, both real and perceived. The Raider method of acquiring personnel garnered much bitterness among other Marines. The Marine Corps had a general shortage of experienced personnel in early 1942; officers and NCOs with the experience and training provided by years of service in the Corps were in high demand as the Corps sought to rapidly train and assimilate thousands of raw recruits, transforming them from fresh recruits to battle-ready Marines. The coopting of prime personnel, officer and enlisted, by the Raiders was one of the foremost complaints leveled against them. The Raiders, with their promise of exciting clandestine action and special operations *élan*, siphoned off a disproportionate number of bright, energetic officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted Marines. This drain on resources came at a time when men could scarcely be spared.<sup>240</sup>

In later years, Vandegrift complained of the difficulties caused to his 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in March 1942 when “Merritt Edson, armed with appropriate orders, arrived to comb our units for officers and men deemed suitable for his 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion . . . . Edson’s levy against our division, coming at such a critical time, annoyed the devil out of

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<sup>240</sup> The Raiders were not the only special purpose organization in the Corps at this time. The Marine Corps had also established parachute battalions, experimental glider battalions, defense battalions, and barrage balloon detachments. For more on these units, see Updegraph, *Special Marine Corps Units*.

me, but there wasn't one earthly thing I could do about it."<sup>241</sup> Vandegrift's West Coast counterpart, Charles Price, faced a similar predicament when Evans Carlson began recruiting Raiders out of the already depleted ranks of the new 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division. Carlson enjoyed wide latitude in his recruiting, picking out the cream of the crop to form "a really handpicked outfit."<sup>242</sup> Price felt that his best course of action was to handle the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders with kid gloves, as "this commando business is a hobby with high authorities in our nation and Capt. James R. is the Executive of the Bn."<sup>243</sup> Outsiders quickly perceived that Carlson had "top priority of men and material in the Fleet Marine Force here" – as one 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider officer put it, "no one interferes with us. No red tape."<sup>244</sup> By drawing away these volunteers, the Raiders concentrated some of the best and brightest Marines in the Corps into two individual battalions.<sup>245</sup>

The concentration of high achieving personnel into select units is a common criticism of elite units of all varieties. Segregation of military bodies in this way is often

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<sup>241</sup> Alexander A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Asprey, *Once a Marine: The Memoirs of General A.A. Vandegrift* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), 100.

<sup>242</sup> Price to Edson, 17 Feb 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>243</sup> Price to Edson, 17 Feb 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>244</sup> Meyerhoff to Edson, 20 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC; Apergis to Edson, 19 Feb 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>245</sup> The drain on the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division was compounded by their subsequent orders to detach enough men to form the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, plus one battalion of artillery, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Brigade's mission to Samoa. Vandegrift "stripped other units mercilessly" to outfit the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*, 100. The drain on the manpower of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division carried serious consequences. When the division sailed for New Zealand in May 1942, Vandegrift "made the understatement of my life when I reported to General Holcomb that 'the Division has not yet attained a satisfactory state of readiness for combat.'" Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*, 101. All the drains of experienced NCOs and officers, combined with the lack of training time for the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division before rushing into action on Guadalcanal, seriously hampered Vandegrift's strategy on Guadalcanal: "The state of morale and training of the division's Marines made the division better suited for defense than attack. The troops had not had meaningful training or physical conditioning for months...Except for some field grade officers and a handful of aging sergeants, the division had no proven combat leadership." Millett, *In Many a Strife*, 180. Even before the formation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, numerous experienced personnel had been detached from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division to provide for a variety of other needs. Holcomb wrote to Price in January, "I know how distressed you must be in seeing your division torn apart. I think it is one of the most tragic things that can happen to a command and yet I consider the detachments were completely justified." Holcomb to Price, 17 January 1942, Holcomb Collection, MCUA.

perceived to have a negative effect on the “non-elite” units. As the discussion of elite theory in previous chapters illustrates, elites are typically defined in negatives – hence, elite status confers not only explicit superiority to the elite group, but also implies the inferiority of the remaining, “non-elite” group. In a Corps which considers each Marine a member of an elite force, elevating one unit as even more elite than the Corps norm carries the potential for conflict – conferring such elite status on special units can be interpreted as casting negatives on the elite status of the remainder of the Corps.<sup>246</sup>

Another factor which contributed to the perceptions of elitism and separate status that surround the Raiders was their unorthodox requirements for special weapons and equipment. The Raiders frequently requested – and received – weaponry above and beyond that of the standard Marine infantry battalion. Both Edson and Carlson believed that the success of the Raiders depended on their ability to move rapidly and bring concentrated firepower to bear, and structured their new battalions accordingly. With his rifle companies trimmed down to fit onboard the APDs, Edson knew that the Raiders could only rely on those weapons that were man-portable. He made modifications to his battalion accordingly. The 81mm mortars of the standard infantry battalion were replaced by the lighter 60mm mortars. The standard platoon of 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders had a “armament, all of World War I vintage [like the rest of the Marine Corps], but by no means ineffective, consisted of six .30-caliber, bolt action, Springfield [1903] rifles and two .30-caliber Browning automatic rifles (BARs).”<sup>247</sup> Edson’s requisitions were usually taken seriously, though hampered by shortages. When he called the quartermaster at HQMC to request additional light machine guns for his battalion, he was referred directly

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<sup>246</sup> Bernd Horn, “Love ‘Em or Hate ‘Em,” 36.

<sup>247</sup> Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 10.



to the Commandant with the quartermaster's advice that "I believe your request will meet with approval, in view of the specific duties assigned to your battalion."<sup>248</sup> Unable to procure the new M1 Garand rifle, and with Thompson submachine guns in scarce supply, Edson requested an increased supply of scoped Springfield 1903 rifles for his rifle companies, and a supply of Reising submachine guns for Raider officers and NCOs. Some of his requests were fruitless, such as his requests for the experimental Johnson light machine gun and for Bangalore torpedoes, though he did acquire twelve Boys .55 caliber anti-tank rifles special ordered from Canada. Though still bound by the general scarcity of combat weapons and ammunition in early 1942, Edson still managed to ensure that his outfit was armed with the best that could be had at the time.<sup>249</sup>

On the West Coast, Evans Carlson enjoyed almost as free a hand in acquiring the latest weaponry for his Raiders as he had in recruiting them. Like the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders limited the size of their rifle companies to fit the capacity of the APDs. However, in the attempt to achieve the maximum firepower possible, Carlson turned his attention to procuring as many automatic weapons as could be found, with enviable success. Unlike Edson's Raiders, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders would go into battle equipped with the new M1 Garand semi-automatic rifle, numerous Thompson sub-machine guns, and additional BARs. As 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider officer Oscar Peatross stated, "The firepower of our Raider squad (three BARs, three Thompson submachine guns, and four M-1 rifles . . .) was now superior to that known to exist in any unit of comparable size in the world and

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<sup>248</sup> Notes on telephone exchange between John D. Blanchard and Edson, 17 Jan 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>249</sup> Alexander notes that Edson sent this "laundry list" directly to the Commandant. *Edson's Raiders*, 54. Before receiving the Reising SMG, staff NCOs and officers had been armed only with Colt 1911 pistols. The .45 caliber Reising SMG had performed well in state-side testing, but proved to be woefully unreliable in the warzone. See Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 64-66. Bangalore torpedoes were not naval torpedoes, but a type of demolition charge used to destroy fortifications. Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 54-55. Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 64; E.M. Ransford to Edson, 20 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

was far superior to that of the rifle squad of the Marine infantry battalion (two BARs and six Springfield rifles).”<sup>250</sup> Similar to the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders carried 60mm mortars, the Browning light machine gun, and the Boys AT rifle; they also became fond of the Winchester shotgun for use in jungle firefights. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders further gained notoriety for their unique fighting knives. The Raider stiletto, a nimble weapon designed to neutralize enemy sentries, was specially designed for the Raider battalions. Later, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders also adopted the “Gung Ho knife,” a unique, all-purpose Bowie knife that proved very useful in jungle environments. Both of these unique blades became iconic symbols of the Raiders.<sup>251</sup>

Non-standard weapons were not the only thing separating the Raiders from other Marine infantry battalions. They also distinguished themselves via an array of unique uniform items and equipment. Both Raider battalions were issued “Raider boots.” Similar to the jump boots of the airborne divisions, these coveted boots were a significant improvement over the standard issue “boondockers” of the day. The 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders had their share of unique uniform requests. Part of the impetus for customizing the gear came from the Raiders themselves, as they “never hesitated to let their officers know how they felt about the weapons and gear they were expected to carry into combat [and] Edson and

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<sup>250</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 16.

<sup>251</sup> Carlson’s philosophy was based on his belief that “It is particularly important that, when we meet him [the Japanese soldier], we be able to muster superior fire power. In the last category we have a distinct advantage, for we possess automatic weapons of a portable character which are distinctly superior to the weapons possessed by the enemy.” Carlson to Holcomb, 27 January 1943, Carlson File, HDRB. On the special knives used by the Raiders, see R.G. Rosenquist, Martin J. Sexton, and Robert A. Buerlein, *Our Kind of War: Illustrated Saga of the U.S. Marine Raiders of World War II* (Richmond, Virginia: American Historical Foundation, 1990), 164-173. The Raider stiletto was modeled after the famed Fairbairn-Sykes knife used by the British Commandos; it became indelibly linked to the Raiders. The Gung Ho knife was likewise designed and manufactured specifically for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders. Alexander notes that the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders also had their share of the Raider stilettos, but quickly developed a preference for the more practical, standard-issue Ka-Bar knife; they did not receive the Gung Ho knife. *Edson’s Raiders*, 66-67. Of course, the Raiders generally carried standard issue bayonets as well.

Griffith listened.”<sup>252</sup> Edson further wrote to the Commandant directly, requesting a litany of non-standard items, including camo helmet covers, air compressors for inflation of rubber boats, and collapsible bicycles – in vain, as it turned out, as none of these items would be forthcoming. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders customized their uniforms even more. Lt. Apergis reported that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders “has priority on equipment out here. So far we have special uniforms and aviation helmets . . . We have a ten inch shoe which is similar to the ones the Colonel has [i.e. Raider boots].”<sup>253</sup> Carlson frankly admitted that “The whole thing [uniform] is unorthodox, in the military sense, but it will do the job. Our pack, for example, is designed from a hunting jacket. It doesn’t look smart, but it enables a man to carry the essentials of life on long, swift marches with a minimum of inconvenience.”<sup>254</sup> He dryly added that such ideas “are meeting with opposition from the orthodox brass hats.”<sup>255</sup>

The almost unlimited access to specialized weapons and gear certainly made an impression throughout the rest of the Marine Corps. Even rumors that would otherwise be outlandish seemed plausible for the Raiders. One officer matter-of-factly repeated a rumor that “As you know, Carlson had bows and arrows.”<sup>256</sup> Besides starting rumors, such treatment generated resentment, as can be sensed in the derision more orthodox Marines had for the “Boy Scout equipment” Carlson had attempted to implement.<sup>257</sup> A final aspect of the Raider battalions that remains rather unique to them is their indelible

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<sup>252</sup> Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 67.

<sup>253</sup> Apergis to Edson, 19 February 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>254</sup> Carlson to F.D. Roosevelt, 2 March 1942, Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>255</sup> Carlson to F.D. Roosevelt, 2 March 1942, Carlson File, HDRB. Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 54. Lee Minier of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion, wrote home describing their special boots, “like parachute troops wear.” Minier to Jolette Minier, 14 March 1942, Minier Collection, MCUA. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders also used the Raider boots; Shapely, Oral History Interview Transcript (hereinafter Shapely transcript), MCUA, 78.

<sup>256</sup> Victor H. Krulak, Oral History Interview Transcript (hereinafter referenced as Krulak transcript), MCUA, 72.

<sup>257</sup> Shapely transcript, MCUA, 74.

association with the names of the first two Commanding Officers of the Raider battalions. Even though both Edson and Carlson were eventually promoted out of their battalions, they were and continue to be known as “Edson’s Raiders” and “Carlson’s Raiders,” something of an anomaly among Marine Corps infantry battalions.

### **Carlson’s Gung Ho Raiders: A Special Case**

Carlson’s battalion presents a special case in Marine Corps history. It would hardly be an exaggeration to describe Carlson’s Raiders as not just a hand-picked outfit, but a hand-crafted one. Carlson intended more than the creation of the most efficient guerrilla outfit in the world. He intended to make the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders quite possibly the most unique battalion of the war – certainly the most unique in the Corps. Almost everything about them diverged from Marine Corps norms, and from military norms generally. This of course did not usually engender much enthusiasm from the majority of Marine Corps officers, prompting reactions ranging from indifference to antipathy. The resentment garnered by Carlson’s unorthodox methodologies was certainly a major factor in the disdain that many career Marines felt towards the Raider battalions.<sup>258</sup>

**Executive Privilege?** Carlson’s personal relationship with the Commander-in-Chief, Franklin D. Roosevelt, raised eyebrows among his fellow Marine officers. His continued personal correspondence with the President, completely independent of the normal chain of command, was viewed with suspicion by many. Their correspondence,

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<sup>258</sup> Oscar Peatross recalls that in early 1942, “it was common knowledge that many Marine officers, including some in high places, were strongly opposed to the formation of super-elite units such as the Raiders. They argued that the Marine Corps itself was an elite organization and the implementation of proposals such as Carlson’s meant nothing less than ‘to gild refined gold, to paint the lily.’ Consequently, we wondered how he was able to secure approval of his proposal in the face of so much strong opposition.” *Bless 'Em All* 13.

established during Carlson's China days, continued through the creation of the Raiders. The President responded as warmly to Carlson's updates as he had to his China reports: "I am delighted to have your letter and to know that all goes so well with you. What you tell me about the new outfit is most interesting and surely there will be a chance to use it."<sup>259</sup> Carlson's correspondence with Roosevelt was hardly a secret, leading to the widely held belief that "Second Raiders will never need any artillery support. Carlson's always got twenty-one guns [a slang reference to the President] in his hip pocket."<sup>260</sup>

The fact that Roosevelt's son conveniently served as Carlson's executive officer did nothing to assuage the widely-held impressions of presidential favoritism. James Roosevelt recognized that Carlson's personal access to the President generated unfavorable impressions, even before the Raider experiment was launched.<sup>261</sup> Despite his lack of traditional experience, Roosevelt did earn the respect and admiration of the Marines he served with. Said Raider James Alverson, "If you are ever around and you hear it said that Jimmie Roosevelt got where he is because he is the President's son, tell 'em to say it rather softly if there are any marines around."<sup>262</sup> Raider officer Oscar Peatross admired Roosevelt's tenacity and willingness to serve in the most hazardous combat duty, despite his pedigree and history of gastrointestinal illness. The Raiders, Peatross noted, could see that "He [Roosevelt] was thin, he wasn't very strong or robust sort of person, but a very gutty person, very much a doer. Well, from that point of view I

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<sup>259</sup> F.D. Roosevelt to Carlson, 12 March 1942, Carlson File, HDRB. Of course, Roosevelt had even more reason to be attentive to Carlson's status in 1942 – the well-being of his oldest son.

<sup>260</sup> Twining, *No Bended Knee*, 142.

<sup>261</sup> James Roosevelt, "Evans Carlson: A Personal Memoir," in *New Aspects of Naval History: Selected Papers Presented at the Fourth Naval History Symposium, United States Naval Academy, 25-26 October 1979*, eds. Craig L. Symonds, et.al. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981), 388.

<sup>262</sup> "This outfit that I am with is a tough bunch, who don't give a damn for anybody or anything... [But] they swear by him." "Marine Sizes Up Jimmy," newspaper clipping held in Roosevelt File, HDRB.

think everybody admired him.”<sup>263</sup> Fellow 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider officer Charles Banks echoed this perception, noting that Roosevelt “was a very fine officer and a born politicians. I think he was a real credit for the Marine Corps, and I think he did a damn good job in the Marine Corps.”<sup>264</sup>

In addition to being a capable executive officer, James Roosevelt proved a boon to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion. The Raiders found that “having the President’s son as our executive officer was a big help in procuring special arms and equipment.”<sup>265</sup> Roosevelt’s name on a requisition letter was also known to magically procure sizeable numbers of everything from jungle hammocks to Raider boots. Roosevelt’s postwar explanations of his role in early 1942 are conflicting. He once admitted that Carlson had assigned him to requisition for specially issued Raider boots, knives, and state-of-the-art radios, but denied that his father had anything to do with the requisitions. He pled naivety, stating “But I guess now, being realistic, the fact that I, as the son of the President, would walk into the quartermaster’s office and say ‘I gotta have this and I gotta have that,’ maybe was the part of the reason at least that we got it.”<sup>266</sup> In later years, James Roosevelt was even more candid about his role, claiming that he undertook such requisitions on his own initiative, asserting that “I was able to use my influence to get ‘Carlson’s Raiders’ the special equipment we needed . . . . And of course there was some resentment at our getting equipment others could not get.”<sup>267</sup> Regardless of which version is closest to the truth, the perception that James endowed Carlson with special privileges persisted.

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<sup>263</sup> Peatross transcript, MCUA, 70.

<sup>264</sup> Charles L. Banks, Oral History Interview Transcript (hereinafter referenced as Banks transcript), MCUA, 18.

<sup>265</sup> Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 16.

<sup>266</sup> Roosevelt interview, OVHS.

<sup>267</sup> Roosevelt and Libby, *My Parents*, 270; Roosevelt, “Evans Carlson,” 388.

Peatross, himself a 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider and supporter of Carlson, aptly described the perceptions within the Raider battalion in no uncertain terms: “Well, Carlson had [James] Roosevelt with him, you know, and he was the son of the ‘great king.’ He could get most anything he wanted between the two of them.”<sup>268</sup> Such was the perception amongst the Raiders, who benefited from the familial associations of their executive officer, to say nothing of perceptions of those outside the Raiders.

**Raider Innovation.** In keeping with his generally unorthodox character, Carlson brought a unique structure and practices to his Raider battalion. Some of his methods were met with cold suspicion by his fellow Marines, while others had a permanent impact on the basic structure of the Marine Corps for years to come. Carlson’s most notable innovation was the development and refinement of the fire team as the basic structure of the Marine infantry company.

Carlson’s virtual *carte blanche* did in fact have some limitations, but he still managed to tailor the organization of his battalion to better suit his concept of the Raiders’ mission. The most significant change implemented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders was the reorganization of the rifle squad, then typically composed of nine Marines: six riflemen, two automatic riflemen, and a squad leader. Concerned that this arrangement was unwieldy in actual combat scenarios because the squad leader would not be able to keep in close contact with each member of his squad, Carlson called together his Raider officers to brainstorm a new method. The result was the subdivision of the squad into

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<sup>268</sup> Peatross transcript, MCUA, 64. Peatross theorized that “if he [Carlson] didn’t get it one way, that is, through the normal chain [of command], why I’m convinced they got back to the White House and the word came out of there. Maybe not the President himself but somebody, anybody phones from the White House, it’s power, as you know. So, he got a free hand.” Banks also believed that Franklin D. Roosevelt had intervened on the Raiders’ behalf: “Well, this was pretty high level, I think he [James Roosevelt] talked to his father about it. He had a pretty direct line, you know.” Banks transcript, MCUA, 17.

three “fire teams” of three men each, all under the command of the squad leader. Each fire team was designed to “provide the squad leader optimum control over his men and their firepower.”<sup>269</sup> The fire teams each included two men and a fire team leader, who reported in turn to the squad leader; under this arrangement, the squad leader now only had to coordinate his three fire team leaders, while the fire team leaders coordinated the fire and maneuver of their fire team members. This system paradoxically allowed for both increased command and control and increased small unit independence, as it was considerably easier for the three man fire team to react and respond to any variety of situation than it was for the standard nine man squad. Carlson ensured that his fire teams were built around automatic weapons; each fire team included a BAR, a Thompson submachine gun, and a new M1 Garand semi-automatic rifle for the team leader. “This type of organization,” he reasoned, “has the advantages of mobility, flexibility, and great fire power. It provides a team which can hold its own against an enemy force three or four times its strength, and can easily destroy any force of equal strength.”<sup>270</sup>

The innovative approach of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion, with some modifications, became the standard operating procedure for the entirety of the Marine Corps by the end of the war. Carlson is frequently described as the originator of the fire team idea and practice, but there is some question on this matter. Seeking adequate command and tactical control of small units on the battlefield was certainly not new to the Marine Corps; tactical units based on groups of three or four date back to ancient times. Various examples of them had cropped up in the American military from the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century onward; the Marine Corps’ counter-guerrilla operations in Nicaragua further refined

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<sup>269</sup> Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 15.

<sup>270</sup> Carlson to Holcomb, 27 January 1943, Carlson File, HDRB.



small-unit doctrine. In 1940, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines deployed four-man teams to help suppress riots in China. There is evidence that the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Parachute Battalion had experimented with three-man fire teams even before the outbreak of hostilities, deploying them in summer of 1941. Credit is occasionally given to Lieutenant Colonel Homer Litzenberg's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 24<sup>th</sup> Marines, who formally adopted the fire team after conducting rigorous field testing at Camp Pendleton in the summer of 1943; however, Litzenberg freely acknowledged that the Raiders had been operating in fire teams for some time before the 3/24 experiments. Carlson's biographer, Michael Blankfort, suggests that Carlson and his fellow Raiders fought tooth-and-nail against HQMC to get the fire team idea approved and gives Carlson sole credit for the idea's eventual adoption by the rest of the Corps. While it is unclear exactly where the idea of fire-teams originated, it is generally agreed that "What the Raiders *should* get credit for is the first use of the fire team under fire."<sup>271</sup>

Furthermore, it is feasible to claim that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders brought the fire team to the

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<sup>271</sup> Lee Holmes, "Birth of the Fire Team," *Marine Corps Gazette* 36, no. 11 (November 1952): 22 (emphasis in original). For good overviews of the development of the fire team, see Holmes, "Birth of the Fire Team," 16-23, and W.H. Russell, "Before the Fire Team," *Marine Corps Gazette* 68, no. 11 (November 1984): 71-76. Recall that both Edson and Carlson served in Nicaragua, as did many of the officers who led the Corps through WWII, which certainly shaped their understanding of small-unit tactics. On the use of four-man riot teams, see Wallace M. Greene, "The Employment of the Marine Rifle Company in Street Riot Operations," *Marine Corps Gazette* 24, no. 1 (March 1940): 49-53, 62. Holmes cites a letter from Colonel R.T. Vance, noting the existence of three man fire teams in the parachute battalions before the war. "Birth of the Fire Team," 22. The other parachute battalions followed suit shortly thereafter; however, there is some question as to whether this was implemented as the formal battalion structure or as a more informal arrangement. Jon Hoffman indicates that the three-man fire team was adopted only informally and later than Vance claims, in 1943. Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting: U.S. Marine Corps Parachute Units in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1999), 31. The interviewer in Keith Kopets, ed., "The Origins of the Fire Team: Excerpts from an Interview with Homer L. Litzenberg, 27-30 April 1951," *Marine Corps Gazette* 84, no. 12 (December 2000): 43-44, holds the impression that 3/24 originated the fire team, though Litzenberg acknowledges that the idea did not originate with him. Blankfort attempts to give all the credit to Carlson and his 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders: "They wrote memoranda through channels and outside of channels; they made trips at their own expense to Washington; they did everything that men driven by the strength of righteousness could do." *Big Yankee*, 17. Holmes calls Blankfort's account into question: "Carlson's biographer, Michael Blankfort, states that to Carlson goes credit for the fire team, but as he puts the date as February, 1942, it is apparent that the Parachute battalions had it earlier." "Birth of the Fire Team," 22.

rest of the Marine Corps, albeit in an indirect manner. Though Edson relied on the standard nine-man squad structure, his executive officer, S.B. Griffith, was fascinated with the fire team concept, even going so far as to visit Carlson's California training camp to see it in action. Later, when Griffith succeeded Edson as the CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion, he would implement the fire team in the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders for their battles in New Georgia. The utility of the three man fire team made an impression on 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Captain Houston Stiff. Forced stateside by combat wounds, Stiff was reassigned as CO of Company L, 3/24, and began implementing the three man fire team idea he had used in the Solomon Islands. Stiff's new commanding officer (Litzenberg), was duly impressed. Litzenberg proceeded to initiate the 3/24's experiments with the fire team, setting in motion the events that led to its adoption by the entire Marine Corps later in the war. Thus, while Blankfort embellishes Carlson's role, it is accurate to ascribe his 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders with being the pioneers of the fire team concept that the Marine Corps came to embrace and continues to use today.<sup>272</sup>

**The Gung Ho Method.** While the fire team concept would prove to be his most far-reaching contribution, Carlson wanted to do far more than change the structure of his squads. He intended nothing less than a grand social experiment, in which his egalitarian

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<sup>272</sup> Griffith had both served in China and been an observer of the British Commandos with their famed "buddy system" (his co-observer in England was Wallace Greene, who wrote the article on the four man riot squad). Griffith continued to play a crucial role in this process, heading up the board which recommended adoption of the fire team to HQMC. Unlike Carlson, Griffith was a legitimate expert on China and was fluent in Chinese. After retirement from the Marine Corps, he earned a Ph.D. in Chinese military history from Oxford University and wrote several books, including translations of Sun Tzu and Mao Tse-Tung. See "Brigadier General Samuel Blair Griffith II, USMC," Samuel B. Griffith II File, HDRB; Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 58, 242-243; and Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 11. On the process leading to the adoption of fire teams by HQMC, see Lewis Meyers, "Developing the Fire Team," *Marine Corps Gazette* 30, no. 2 (February 1946): 59-60; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 406; Rottman, *Marine Corps Order of Battle*, 160-161; and Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*. Vol. 5, *Victory and Occupation* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1968), 696-701.

ideals would be put into action.<sup>273</sup> Carlson's training regimen proceeded along parallel tracks. The grueling physical exertions of Raider training were one track. The other was civic education. As Carlson saw it, education – or in his terminology, “ethical indoctrination” – was every bit as vital to their success as Raiders and as men as their combat training. Carlson told his Raiders of his journey with 600 Chinese guerrillas of the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army on a forced march over fifty-eight miles of mountainous terrain. He marveled that not a single soldier had fallen out during the trek. Carlson once asked one of the peasant guerrillas if he was tired. The guerrilla replied that, “If a man has only legs, he gets tired.”<sup>274</sup> Carlson later elaborated on the significance of this event for his system of Raider training:

It dawned on me the day I completed a march of 58 miles (93 kilometers) without sleep with a column of 600 men, without a man leaving the column, an unprecedented record. What could be the stimulus? It could be nothing else than the desire, the will of each individual to complete the task. Here was the secret weapon of this great Army. Through systematic education each member had received what I came to call ethical indoctrination. He knew why it was necessary to endure great hardships and to make great sacrifices. He knew the value of freedom. There was created within him a desire to do his duty no matter what sacrifice or effort it entailed because he knew the performance of that duty was an essential step in the direction of attaining the victory which would insure freedom.<sup>275</sup>

Carlson was convinced that it was necessary for his Raiders to know the cause they were fighting for – to know *why* they were willing to lay down their lives. Carlson recognized the value of *esprit de corps*, of fighting men willing to risk everything for their fellow Marines. But, while *esprit de corps* was “mighty important, and the Marine Corps has

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<sup>273</sup> Carlson wrote his father in early February 1942, “Things seem to be moving in a direction I have so long urged and had almost despaired of seeing materialize. But now I have been afforded the opportunity to practice some of the precepts I have been preaching these past year.” Quoted in Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 8.

<sup>274</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 24.

<sup>275</sup> Carlson, “Methods of the U.S. Marine Raiders,” Carlson Collection, MCUA, p.2.

got it to a high degree,” Carlson believed that “when the going gets toughest, when it takes a little bit more drive to keep sane and to keep going, and a man is hungry and tired, then he needs more than *esprit de corps*. It takes conviction.”<sup>276</sup> Ethical indoctrination was Carlson’s attempt to instill in his Raiders such a conviction, based on knowledge, reason, and unwavering commitment to democratic ideals.<sup>277</sup>

One of his first actions was to implement the Chinese phrase “Gung Ho” – which he interpreted as “work together” – as the motto of Carlson’s Raiders. “Gung Ho” quickly became their hallmark slogan and has since entered the American lexicon at large, though it has strayed from its intended meaning. Michael Blankfort describes Carlson’s explanation of this Chinese slogan to his quizzical Raiders:

“The Chinese have two words for ‘working together,’” he said. “*Gung*, meaning ‘work’; *Ho*, meaning ‘harmony.’ *Gung Ho!* ‘Work Together!’ That is the end result of ethical indoctrination.” He went on to explain that Gung Ho was important to all of them, because they were Americans—for it gave them the chance to practice the democracy they believed, where no man should have privileges over another man and where discipline comes from knowledge.... “We will strive,” he said, “for ethical indoctrination, and so I propose that Gung Ho be the spirit and slogan of our Raider Battalion.”<sup>278</sup>

The Gung Ho Raiders would thus be a democratic experiment carried out in the unlikeliest of places. While rank structure and military discipline were not completely abolished, they were minimized to an unprecedented degree. Officers were accorded respect based not on rank but on perception of their merit – or lack thereof – by the enlisted men. Many privileges commonly accorded to officers, such as separate messes

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<sup>276</sup> Quoted in Sherrod, *Tarawa*, 37.

<sup>277</sup> Of this *esprit de corps* within the Marine Corps, war correspondent Robert Sherrod famously wrote that, “The Marines fought almost solely on *esprit de corps*, I was certain. It was inconceivable to most Marines that they should let another Marine down, or that they could be responsible for dimming the bright reputation of their corps. The Marines simply assumed that they were the world’s best fighting men.” *Tarawa*, 35.

<sup>278</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 25.

and sleeping quarters, were abolished. Carlson wanted all of his officers to “cheerfully and willingly forego those superficial privileges which ordinarily insulate offices from their men and impair mutual sympathy and understanding. They must share the hardships and privations of those they lead and prove by their character and ability their qualifications for leadership. Only in this way could full confidence be engendered and a harmony of spirit prevail.”<sup>279</sup> Officers were expected to issue only orders that could be rationally defended to subordinates, who were themselves encouraged to participate in the decision-making process and offer their own opinions. He lived by his refrain, “I like men who think.”<sup>280</sup> After-action critiques in which every man present was permitted to offer suggestions and criticisms were standard practice in the Raiders.<sup>281</sup>

On the presumption that well-informed men make better warriors, Carlson made weekly “Gung Ho meetings” a central component of Raider training. These open forum meetings usually opened with singing, followed by informal talks by Carlson on topics ranging from the value of democracy to the grand strategy of the war effort. James Roosevelt frequently discussed world events, explaining the events leading to the world

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<sup>279</sup> Carlson, “Address of the Commanding Officer . . . on the Occasion of the First Anniversary of the Organization of the Battalion,” Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>280</sup> Quoted in Lucas, unpub. article, n.d. [ca. 1943], Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>281</sup> See Moe, “Gung Ho,” for more details on the origins of this phrase and its adoption by society at large. On minimization of rank and privileges, see Wukovits, *American Commando*, 53-54. Sherrod commented on the lack of rank distinction: “[Carlson’s] experience as an observer with the Communist Chinese Eighth Route Army convinced him that social distinctions because officers and enlisted men must be abolished, and that every officer must prove himself before he can command the complete respect of the men in his command.” *Tarawa*, 35. Carlson said, “Only competent officers who were ready and willing to lead on the basis of merit were selected . . . Discipline was based on knowledge and reason instead of on blind obedience. Individual initiative and resourcefulness were encouraged” “Methods of the U.S. Marine Raiders,” Carlson Collection, MCUA, p.2. Carlson later explained his reasoning to Holcomb: “In the development of initiative discipline in camp as well as in the field should be of a positive rather than a negative nature. Specific orders should be few and rigidly enforced. Men who learn to live by specific rules are inclined to wait for orders when they encounter perplexing problems in the field. They should be encouraged to think for themselves . . . Commanding officers should consider carefully each contemplated order of a restrictive nature to determine whether the order really is necessary for the welfare of the command or whether it is dictated by a traditional habit of demanding uniformity in all things. In war uniformity can be a curse, impairing initiative and easing the enemy’s problem of determining our habits and probably [*sic*] reactions.” Carlson to Holcomb, 27 January 1943, Carlson File, HDRB.

war, showing how America had become involved and why America needed to seek total victory. In his time with the Raiders, Marine correspondent Jim Lucas observed that Gung Ho meetings could be quite spontaneous, with Raiders bringing complaints, suggestions, or questions up for discussion as a unit. Lucas noted that “Not infrequently, when an enlisted man has ‘griped’ about the orders of one of his superiors, the officer is called on to explain it to the battalion. Some heated arguments have followed, and usually end with both sides understanding the other.”<sup>282</sup> Carlson held that “the force which impels men to carry on when going is tough and victory appears to be remote is a deep spiritual conviction in the righteousness of the cause for which he fights and in the belief that victory will bring an improved social pattern wherein his loved ones and the loved ones of future generations will enjoy a greater measure of happiness and well being than was his lot.”<sup>283</sup> He was careful not to preach party politics. “We tried,” he recalled, “to educate them politically—by that I don’t mean we told them whom to vote for, but what to believe in.”<sup>284</sup> The Gung Ho meetings were rather free-wheeling affairs; discussion topics ranged from strategy and the nature of the enemy to such theoretical issues as “The Kind of Social Order We Want after the War” and the desirability of mandatory income limits of \$25,000 after the war. Light topics, such as home-spun comedy acts, poetry recitations, and singing, also featured prominently in the Gung Ho meetings, as did special guests, including Secretary Knox and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Lucas, unpub. article, n.d. [ca. 1943], Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>283</sup> Carlson, “Address of Commanding Officer . . .” Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>284</sup> Quoted in Sherrod, *Tarawa*, 37.

<sup>285</sup> Smith, *Carlson’s Raid*, 59; Wukovits, *American Commando*, 57-58; Jim Lucas, *Combat Correspondent* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944), 100. Wukovits notes that the Raiders did not respond to Carlson’s hypothetical income cap as enthusiastically as he imagined they would, preferring to keep their own chances at striking it rich open. Lucas describes an amusing incident at one Gung Ho meeting: “The

Carlson took the opportunity that the Gung Ho sessions afforded him to elaborate on his favorite topic – the war in China. He harbored the sincere belief that his Raiders would eventually spearhead the return of the Marines to China. Such a belief undoubtedly shaped his outlook in forming the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion as a guerrilla warfare outfit. His Chinese dream took hold in at least some of the Raiders, who eagerly awaited their chance to fight in China. Throughout their training, many Raiders came to identify themselves according to Carlson’s vision, as they loudly proclaimed in song: “We’re Raiders—For Democracy. We work together; that’s why we’re free. Gung Ho! Gung Ho! Gung Ho! Ho!”<sup>286</sup>

Of course, the idea of a group of elite “Raiders for democracy” is itself paradoxical. The concept of elitism, laden with connotations of inherent superiority, is in direct tension with the egalitarian impulses of democracy, especially such an idealistic version as Carlson espoused. But Carlson’s system lent itself to paradox in many ways. Consider his insistence on the primacy of the group – the soul of Gung Ho – at the same time he “tried to encourage individualism.”<sup>287</sup> This could stem in part from his natural optimism and faith in mankind, his single-minded focus on the doctrines flowing out of 1930s China, or his zealous dedication to what he perceived as his higher calling. Likely, it was a combination of these factors. Phyllis Zimmerman presents the complexities of Carlson’s character and idealism in a nutshell when she discusses his belief that the

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week before,’ Colonel Carlson said with a grin, ‘We discussed “Shall the Soldier be permitted to vote?” One of the boys was a southerner, and we got back into the civil war. It almost ended in a riot.’” Lucas, unpub. article, n.d. [ca. 1943], Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>286</sup> Navy Department Press Release, “‘Carlson’s Raiders’ Have Battle Cry,” 6 September 1942, Carlson File, HDRB. “Colonel Carlson now has one burning desire –to take his men back into China and join with its defenders in pushing the invader Japs back into the sea. His enthusiasm is contagious, and his men will not consider their mission a success until ‘the old man takes us back.’” Lucas, unpub. article, n.d. [ca. 1943], Carlson Collection, MCUA. Peatross recalled that “Carlson’s world view apparently did not extend beyond China, probably because of his over specialization in that field.” *Bless ‘Em All*, 6.

<sup>287</sup> Sherrod, *Tarawa*, 37.

Chinese Communists represented “a kind of ‘Revolutionary Christianity’ characterized by truth, honesty, selflessness, love and working for the betterment of people.”<sup>288</sup> Such ideals were the guiding influence on Carlson’s life. He made every effort to remain true to his faith in the good of mankind and the inherent virtue of democracy, even when it tended to launch him on crusades that appeared doomed from the outset. As John Wukovits points out, “The quixotic nature of Carlson blinded him to the difficulties. He planned to democratize an organization that, by its very nature, relied on autocracy.”<sup>289</sup> By 1944, it was clear that for all his zeal, Carlson had enjoyed approximately the same level of success as Don Quixote had against his windmills.

The Gung Ho method was not accepted by all hands in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders. Some veteran Marines, NCOs and officers, viewed the Gung Ho method with skepticism or outright disdain. Those who disapproved usually found Carlson’s methods “adolescent, but in view of the enthusiasm around them, they kept their feelings to themselves.”<sup>290</sup> Others, such as Charles Lamb, “could not understand or digest Carlson’s double talk,” and were more openly “distrustful of his words and methods.”<sup>291</sup> More orthodox Marines soon shied away from the Raiders as their reputation spread. Then-Major Alan Shapely recalled that Carlson personally asked him to volunteer for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders; but when Shapely heard Carlson say “Well, we don’t pay any attention to rank in the Raiders,” he “decided it was a hell of an outfit to be in and I’d have nothing to do with it.”<sup>292</sup>

Carlson himself admitted that it was difficult to get his communitarian ideals to take hold

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<sup>288</sup> Zimmerman, “Military Missionary,” 256. Zimmerman offers a sympathetic treatment of Carlson, painting him as an oft-misunderstood idealist; hers is probably the best, succinct treatment of this enigmatic Marine.

<sup>289</sup> Wukovits, *American Commando*, 53.

<sup>290</sup> Zimmerman, “Military Missionary,” 259.

<sup>291</sup> Lamb, “Comments on the Raid on Makin Island,” 29 August 1956, Carlson Collection, MCUA, p. 3-4.

<sup>292</sup> Shapely transcript, MCUA 70.



at first, for the “Gung Ho spirit” was hindered by “our native background [as Americans] in which greed and rugged individualism predominated.”<sup>293</sup> In his estimation, “Lack of adequate faith is the real cause for our failure to bring the Gung Ho spirit to its highest perfection.”<sup>294</sup> Conversely, many of the Raiders, especially the younger, enlisted Marines, took to the Gung Ho spirit enthusiastically after becoming accustomed to it. Carlson’s popularity with the enlisted men soared. Oscar Peatross recalled fondly that “there is no doubt in my mind that the rank and file of the 2d Raider Battalion would have followed Carlson to hell and back on his command, ‘Follow me!’”<sup>295</sup>

### **The Raiders as Special Operations Elites**

As Gung Ho took hold and their training progressed, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion quickly became a cohesive fighting force and a highly efficient – if unconventional – one at that. By April 1942, Admiral Nimitz was convinced that “the battalion, by virtue of morale, organization, equipment, training, and development and encouragement of individual initiative and resourcefulness, is a striking force out of proportion to its numbers.”<sup>296</sup> Their baptism by fire would come soon enough. Both of the Raider battalions would play roles in the Allies’ first major counteroffensive of the Pacific War.

However, even before their baptism by fire, signs were showing that the Raider

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<sup>293</sup> Carlson, “Address of Commanding Officer . . .” Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>294</sup> Carlson, “Address of Commanding Officer . . .” Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>295</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 14. The popularity with the enlisted men, accompanied by resentment of officers, was not unique to Carlson; it is an attribute he shared with such distinguished Marines as Lewis “Chesty” Puller, who purposefully established his reputation as a hero for enlisted men and antagonist for officers. According to Jon Hoffman, this emphasis on the well-being of the enlisted men at the expense of traditional officers’ privileges was part of a transition in the Corps “from an old culture where officers put great store in their privileges to one in which they placed greater emphasis on leading by example even when they were not on the battlefield.” Jon T. Hoffman, *Chesty: The Story of Lieutenant General Lewis B. Puller*, UMSC (New York: Random House, 2001), 145.

<sup>296</sup> Quoted in Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 16-17.

battalions were evolving a distinct subculture befitting their role as the special operations “shock troops” of the Marine Corps. For example, the Raiders of Edson’s Able Company protested their reassignment across the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division strenuously. They wanted to return to the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, for “We feel we could do more for our country and the Marine Corps in an outfit we are best suited for and like best.”<sup>297</sup> The attitude developing among the Raiders is evident in some of the marching songs that were popular in their ranks.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders proudly boasted:

Oh we are Edson’s Raiders  
We’re the members of a band  
Although we’re few in number  
We’re the finest in the land . . .  
There’s A and B and C and D  
But no more company E  
A finer bunch of real Marines  
There never has been seen<sup>298</sup>

Not to be outdone, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders were fond of singing a ditty written by Raider Vernon Akers:

In the memory of men, there were those who were brave  
And fought like the heroes of old;  
But none of the fame who carry the name  
Of Carlson’s Raiders so bold . . .

They carry machine guns like pistols, they say,  
And a knife that was tempered in hell;  
And the Raiders all claim no mortal by name  
Could use them one quarter so well.

They whisper of Raiders who gambled with death  
And fought like the demons of old,  
And those who were there are willing to swear  
By Carlson’s Raiders so bold.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Florence, et.al., to Edson, 15 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>298</sup> Author unknown, “We Are Edson’s Raiders,” Box 24, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>299</sup> Vernon C. Akers, “Carlson’s Raiders,” reproduced in Rosenquist, Sexton, and Buerlein, *Our Kind of War*, 227.

These humorous lyrics offer a glimpse at the emergence of a separate, Raider identity. This began during training, as “Marines became Raiders—Carlson’s Raiders.”<sup>300</sup> Years after the war, former Raiders recall feeling a degree of separatism. For instance, Raider Lowell Bulger once assured an interviewer that, “We considered ourselves an elite force.”<sup>301</sup>

The unique identity that came with being a Marine Raider was complemented by the addition of the Raider patch, a fearsome emblem of the Raiders’ deadly skill in battle. The Raider patch originated with Evans Carlson’s print of a skull silhouette over crossed scimitars, which became the emblem of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders. The skull-and-scimitar logo apparently remained unique to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders. After the Guadalcanal campaign, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division adopted an official patch, with the name “Guadalcanal” inscribed vertically on a red numeral “1,” set against a blue diamond background featuring the five stars of the Southern Cross constellation. An enterprising member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion then substituted a skull in place of the “1,” thus creating the famed Raider patch which eventually came to be associated with all four of the Raider battalions. The evolution of the Raider patch as a specific insignia setting them apart as specialized elite Marines has parallels to the development of unique insignia and other trappings common to elite units.<sup>302</sup>

The Raiders then were not only evolving as a special operations unit, but as a

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<sup>300</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 16.

<sup>301</sup> Lowell Bulger, quoted in Patrick Guide, “Raider Battalion,” Press Release, Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, CA, n.d., in Raiders: Marine Raiders Association File, HDRB.

<sup>302</sup> This logo graced their camp signs in Hawaii. Carlson also had it printed on paper-backed stickers with the intent that “they may be used at the scene of raids in the manner of visiting cards.” The stickers never panned out; the tropic humidity caused them all to stick together in a wad of paper and paste. Carlson, “Memorandum to All Company Commanders: Battalion Insignia,” Carlson Collection, MCUA. On the development of the Raider patch, see Rosenquist, Sexton, and Buerlein, *Our Kind of War*, 149-151; and Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 29. On the use of distinct insignia in elite units, see Beaumont, *Military Elites*, 2-3.

miniature *corps d'elite*; indeed, an elite of the elites. This sense of elitism contributed to the rise of a separate, Raider identity which was gradually superimposed over the standard Marine Corps identity. Raider historian Oscar Peatross identified the common factor amongst all four of the eventual Raider Battalions as “a spirit far transcending that implied by *esprit de corps*—a *gung ho* spirit, as it eventually came to be called, that inspired individuals to accept as standard a level of performance that elsewhere would have been termed ‘outstanding’ and marked them as unique among Marines.”<sup>303</sup> The sense of separateness and self-recognition as elites among elites would serve the Raiders well as they fought against desperate odds in the South Pacific, and earned their reputation as Warrior elites. Yet the very culture of elitism that fostered such a high degree of camaraderie within their ranks subtly alienated them from their fellow Marines in non-Raider units, carrying the seeds of their own dissolution.

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<sup>303</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 295.

## CHAPTER 4: THE RAIDERS AS WARRIORS

By mid-1942, the Raiders exhibited all the central features of both Guardsman and Technician elites. They had extensive, specialized training, and self-selected status. They were developing many of the other trappings of elitism as well and fostering their own unique subculture. However, they had not yet had an opportunity to put their potential to the test. That would change soon enough. The Raiders were to play a role in the first Allied counter-offensive against Japan, where they would quickly earn Warrior distinction in the jungles of the South Pacific.

The Raiders claimed Warrior status for themselves from the outset. Raider Lieutenant W.S. LeFrancois claimed that “Graduates of the [Raider] course were rightfully considered men among men by other marines, and were very proud boys.”<sup>304</sup> The Raiders were able to project this impression of elitism to those outside their ranks because they wholeheartedly believed it themselves. According to LeFrancois, the Raiders’ creed was, “The individual man is a big shot in a raider group. You are a fighter who will kill the Japs [*sic*] . . . You are supermarines. You will strike hard and fast. You will win.”<sup>305</sup> They would prove beyond doubt that such boasts were not exaggerated (or at least, only slightly exaggerated) by backing them up with a stellar combat record during 1942 and 1943. But due to a variety of factors, the Raiders never solidified their role as special operators. Instead, the combat history of the Raiders, while certainly among the most distinguished Marine units of the war, reflects the most common pitfall of World War II-era special operations forces – that is, they served more often as “shock

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<sup>304</sup> W.S. LeFrancois, LeFrancois, W.S. “We Mopped Up Makin Island,” pt.1, *Saturday Evening Post*, December 4, 1943.

<sup>305</sup> LeFrancois, “We Mopped Up Makin Island.”

troops” than as a mobile striking force.

Complete recounting of the Raiders’ battle history in a single volume would be a worthwhile endeavor, but it far exceeds the scope of the present study. No study of the Raiders would be complete without a discussion of their battlefield performance, however. As this account is centered on the institutional history of the Raiders and their place in the Marine Corps, this study will rely instead on the existent combat narratives and analyses to briefly illustrate the Raiders’ history as Warriors.

### **The Pacific Theater in 1942**

The first half of 1942 was a bleak time for the Allies. The panic and despondency that ran rampant with the general American public after Pearl Harbor only increased as each new month brought new hammer blows from the Japanese. The Japanese immediately followed up on their victory over the U.S. Fleet with a well-coordinated Pacific blitz across the Pacific and Southeast Asia. By mid-year, the Japanese began establishing bases in the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, threatening the shipping lifeline between Australia and America (see Appendix A). In April 1942, the Japanese began construction of a permanent airfield on the island of Guadalcanal in the lower Solomon Island chain. Though it did not portend such at the time, the beginning of construction on Guadalcanal made it one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in the South Pacific.<sup>306</sup>

President Roosevelt fully recognized the need to bolster flagging morale in the

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<sup>306</sup> Ronald Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 100-119, 185-186; John Costello, *The Pacific War* (New York: Quill, 1982), 129-172, 251-253, 314-320. Spector’s *Eagle Against the Sun* is the standard treatment of the Pacific War from the American perspective; Costello’s *Pacific War* has a broader scope and sometimes has more detail, especially in areas of significant British and Australian involvement.

early months of 1942. Despite the lack of resources to challenge the Japanese Navy in open battle at this stage of the war, Allied high command cast began casting about for any way to strike back at the Japanese. In January 1942, the Navy sent carriers *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* to raid Japanese forward bases in the Marshall Islands – a raid whose small strategic significance was wildly over-blown in the American press. In April, Army Air Force Colonel James Doolittle pulled off one of the most celebrated raids of the war, flying twin-engine B-25 bombers off the deck of the *USS Hornet* for a low-level bombing raid on Tokyo. Though little physical damage was done, the “Doolittle Raid” had tremendous psychological impact on both the Americans and the Japanese, who scrambled to respond to the loss of face inflicted on them.<sup>307</sup>

In the aftermath of the Doolittle Raid, the Japanese high command committed to several more offensive measures in the Pacific. The Japanese military has been accused of succumbing to a bad case of “victory disease” in 1942, as they over-extended their resources with continued land and sea offensives. Their plan to seize Port Moresby was stymied in the Battle of the Coral Sea, a tactical stalemate turned strategic victory for the Allies. The tide of the war took an even more dramatic turn at the Battle of Midway in June 1942, a decisive victory for the U.S. Navy. The hitherto unstoppable Japanese military now shifted the defensive, consolidating their gains in New Guinea and the Solomons, thereby setting the stage for America’s first counter-offensive land campaign – and the Raiders’ baptism by fire.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, 149-150, 233-236; Costello, *Pacific War*, 153-155, 196-197.

<sup>308</sup> Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, 158-177; Costello, *Pacific War*, 253-263, 278-309, 316; Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. 4, *Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, May 1942—August 1942* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1949; repr. 1964), 21-64. Two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion were sent to Midway to help repel any attempted landing by Japanese ground forces; they endured the Japanese air raid on the island, but as events unfolded, no invasion materialized and the Raiders were soon sent back to Hawaii. Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 18-28.

The Allies goal in the South Pacific was to climb up the “ladder” of the Solomon Islands chain to capture the strategic Japanese stronghold at Rabaul on New Britain (see Appendix B). Securing the first rung on the ladder to Rabaul fell to the Navy and Marine Corps. Operation WATCHTOWER would take the first step by securing the almost-completed airfield on Guadalcanal, thereby establishing air superiority in the southern Solomons. The urgent need to secure the airfield before the Japanese could establish a major base there precluded the thorough preparations that ordinarily take place before an amphibious landing; many Marines would come to call it “Operation Shoestring,” due to the seemingly perpetual shortages. Besides lacking adequate supplies for extended action, Gen. Vandegrift’s 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division was not at full strength, having detached its strongest regiment to garrison Samoa. To compensate for this loss, the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion and the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion were attached to Vandegrift’s command for WATCHTOWER.<sup>309</sup>

### **Edson’s Raiders on Guadalcanal**

On August 7, 1942, the first Allied offensive in the Pacific began auspiciously as the fleet arrived undetected off of Guadalcanal. While the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal and rapidly secured the airfield (which the Marines re-named Henderson Field), the Raiders landed on the small island of Tulagi across Sealark Channel from Guadalcanal (see Appendix C). Edson chose his landing beaches with surprise in mind, choosing to land on the more difficult beaches on the western side of the island rather than the more accessible – and hence better defended – beaches elsewhere (see Appendix

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<sup>309</sup> Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 363-365; Richard B. Frank, *Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 53.



D). The Raiders landed on Tulagi not as stealthy infiltrators but as assault troops, and accordingly went ashore in Higgins boats in lieu of their customary rubber craft. They took no casualties in the landing and quickly secured the cross-section of the island. They then warily advanced southeastward towards the harbor.<sup>310</sup>

The Raiders faced only sporadic and ineffective resistance during the morning but encountered spirited resistance around noon, suffering several casualties. For the rest of the afternoon the Raiders engaged in a firefight with the Japanese defenders over the grounds of the former British installation. At nightfall the Raiders settled in hasty defensive positions and awaited the inevitable counter-attack. The Japanese did not disappoint. They attacked aggressively several times throughout the night, combining infiltration tactics with several of their hallmark *banzai* attacks. The Raiders proved up to the challenge of their first night combat, beating back the repeated attacks with machine guns, hand grenades, and bayonets. Typical of the *élan* displayed by the Raiders was Private First Class Edward Ahrens. Finding himself at the center of a *banzai* charge, Ahrens refused to give ground. Captain Walt found him in the morning, mortally wounded and moments from death. He had killed 11 Japanese troops around his foxhole plus 2 more in his foxhole on top of him. Ahrens died before Walt could get medical assistance, but not before telling the captain “The bastards tried to come over me last night – I guess they didn’t know I was a Marine.”<sup>311</sup>

Their numbers decimated in the failed attacks, the remaining Japanese troops barricaded themselves in caves scattered across the rugged southeast tip of Tulagi. The entire Japanese garrison fought to the last man rather than surrender. The Raiders, whose

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<sup>310</sup> They were reinforced by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, which served as a reserve; later 2/5 landed and swept the north half of the island while Raiders advanced south. Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 72-73.

<sup>311</sup> Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 99.

only support weapons were 60mm mortars, had to improvise methods to clear the remaining caves without becoming casualties themselves. Led by Sergeant Angus Goss' demolition platoon, the Raiders relied on TNT strapped to sticks, supplemented by an abundance of personal courage, to destroy the last pockets of resistance. Edson declared Tulagi secured on August 8, though the "mop-up" phase continued for several days. Thirty-eight Raiders died and fifty-five more were wounded in taking Tulagi, while 347 (of the 350 total) Japanese troops perished.<sup>312</sup>

At evening on August 8, all seemed well: the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division had secured Henderson Field against virtually no opposition. The 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion had run into a much more difficult time than expected in their landing on Gavutu-Tanambogo near Tulagi, but those islands too would be mostly secure by the evening of August 8. That night, Allied fortunes took a turn for the worst when a force of Japanese cruisers surprised the Allied fleet near Savo Island. In one of the worst defeats in U.S. Navy history, four Allied cruisers and a destroyer were sunk in minutes while the Japanese escaped practically unscathed. With his protection gone, Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, commander of the amphibious force, had no choice but to withdraw his vulnerable transports to friendly waters, leaving the Marines dangerously short on ammo, rations, and medical supplies.<sup>313</sup>

With their naval lifeline cut, Henderson Field assumed even greater importance for Vandegrift's 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. Maintenance of air superiority by the "Cactus Air Force" was the only way to stave off the Japanese navy. The struggle for Guadalcanal evolved as a series of naval and air strikes and counter-strikes as both sides struggled to

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<sup>312</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 10.

<sup>313</sup> On the Gavutu – Tanambogo landings, see Jon Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, 4-13; on the Battle of Savo Island, see Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 83-123; Griffith, *Battle for Guadalcanal*, 56-67.

gain naval and air superiority in the area. For the Marines on Guadalcanal, always undersupplied and beleaguered by tropical diseases, rampant malaria, continual bombardment, and repeated attempts to retake Henderson Field, the APDs were their lifeline. Meanwhile, the Japanese likewise relied on destroyers to ferry men and materials to Guadalcanal. These destroyers made their runs by night to avoid attack from American aircraft, and usually shelled the Marine positions along the way; the Marines soon dubbed these runs the “Tokyo Express.”<sup>314</sup>

After defending a major attack on his perimeter at the Tenaru River on August 21, General Vandegrift recalled the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders and the battered remnants of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion to the main island to assist with the defense of Henderson Field against imminent Japanese offensives. On September 8, the Raiders headed east on a makeshift flotilla of APDs and converted tuna boats to disrupt the landing of Japanese reinforcements in the vicinity of Tasimboko village. By a stroke of good fortune, the Raiders’ landing went unopposed, as those Japanese troops in the area fled from what they believed to be a large-scale assault force. Expecting only a small force, the Raiders quickly realized that they had landed not far behind a rather larger body of troops – Japanese Major General Kiyotake Kawaguchi’s 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Kawaguchi’s main body had already headed inland on its way to attack the Marine perimeter, leaving only rearguard troops to watch his supply stores at Tasimboko. The Raiders drove off the rearguard and proceeded to wreck Kawaguchi’s supply dump, including several artillery

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<sup>314</sup> “Cactus” was the code name given to Guadalcanal; the Cactus Air Force was composed of Marine Corps, Navy, Army, and New Zealand squadrons. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 367-368. Peatross pays this tribute to the APDs: “These gallant APDs were virtually the only U.S. Navy combatant vessels remaining in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area, and they served valiantly in a number of roles . . . . These little ships were the workhorses of the critical days of the campaign, the unsung heroes of Guadalcanal.” *Bless ‘Em All*, 92. Also see Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, 197; Costello, *Pacific War*, 331.

pieces and large quantities of food and ammunition, pilfering what they could and destroying much of the rest before withdrawing back to the perimeter. The Raiders had not yet seen the last of Kawaguchi's brigade. Usually remembered as a minor event in the Guadalcanal campaign, the Tasimboko Raid was actually one of the Raiders' finest moments.<sup>315</sup>

Operating with a combination of speed, surprise, and aggressiveness, the Raiders had lived up to their billing as a special operations force. One member of Vandegrift's staff would later compare the Tasimboko Raid with Sir Francis Drake's raid on Cadiz in 1587, claiming that Edson staged "a classic example of the brilliant employment of hit-and-run tactics by a raider," while Oscar Peatross held that the Tasimboko Raid was one of the signal accomplishments of any of the Raider battalions.<sup>316</sup> The destruction of Kawaguchi's artillery pieces and vital supplies, the Raiders significantly weakened his ability to mount a sustained action against the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. Furthermore, though they would not know this until later, the raid provoked a response by the Japanese that was out of proportion to the small striking force: convinced that Edson's battalion was a much larger force, they nervously redirected several battalions to the area in order to counter the perceived threat.<sup>317</sup>

On September 10, Vandegrift moved the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders and the remnants of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion (which had been mauled in the fight for nearby Gavutu-Tanambogo

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<sup>315</sup> Millett, *In Many a Strife*, 187-189; Tregaskis, *Guadalcanal Diary*, 204-214; Griffith, *Battle for Guadalcanal*, 100-103, 107-109; Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 107-132. Peatross notes that early indications from Martin Clemens' coastwatchers indicated only a small Japanese force present at Tasimboko; later reports of a larger force were discounted. *Bless 'Em All*, 94.

<sup>316</sup> Twining, *No Bended Knee*, 94. Oscar Peatross later wrote that, "All told, the Tasimboko raid was one of the most successful ever conducted by Marines." *Bless 'Em All*, 95-96.

<sup>317</sup> Later, the Japanese bombed and strafed Tasimboko furiously, believing it occupied by a large Marine force; in fact, they merely inflicted further casualties on the survivors of Kawaguchi's rear echelon. Griffith, *Battle for Guadalcanal*, 108, 118.

Island) to new positions on a small, grass-covered ridge south of the airfield (see Appendix E). Ostensibly this would give the Raiders and Paramarines a much-needed rest. However, the “rest area” quickly turned out to be the scene of some of the most desperate fighting of the campaign. Edson had deduced – correctly, as it turned out – that the spine of the ridge provided the best possible opportunity for Kawaguchi to advance on Henderson Field. Should the Raiders fail to hold, Kawaguchi would be able to sweep over the ridge and have virtually unopposed access to Henderson Field. The Raiders were well aware of this. The terrain did not favor the defenders: the exposed, grass-covered ridge was surrounded on all sides by dense jungle, allowing the Japanese to get close before being seen, and the coral formation of the ridge thwarted Marine attempts to dig defensive positions. Edson readied his men, arranged for artillery support, and waited. On the night of September 12, following a bombardment by Japanese navy vessels, Kawaguchi launched his first attacks on the ridge. The Japanese fought fiercely, but the thick jungle foiled Kawaguchi’s plan for a single, decisive attack as his disorganized units attacked piecemeal throughout the night. The Raiders fought the Japanese back and held the ridge, though Kawaguchi’s men did succeed in pushing Edson’s right flank back, essentially isolating the ridge as a salient surrounded on three sides by the Japanese-occupied jungle (see Appendix F).<sup>318</sup>

The Raiders, weary from nearly five days of continuous action, received little respite on September 13. Based on the intelligence estimates that Kawaguchi still had

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<sup>318</sup> Gerald Thomas, Vandegrift’s operations officer, concurred with Edson. Vandegrift was not himself convinced that Kawaguchi would attack from that direction, but Thomas and Edson were able to persuade Vandegrift to move the Raiders to a “rest area” – on the ridge. Millett, *In Many a Strife*, 189-192; Griffith, *Battle for Guadalcanal*, 110-112. Edson’s Ridge has been likened in significance to Little Round Top at Gettysburg. Matthew Stevenson, “Guadalcanal,” *American Scholar* 59, no. 3 (June 1990): 367. One member of Vandegrift’s staff observed that, “Edson commanded a group of exhausted men—men who were nevertheless active and alert, intent on fulfilling their defensive mission; their awareness of the gravity of the situation was obviously far greater than our own.” Twining, *No Bended Knee*, 98.

nearly 3,000 fresh troops in the jungles around the Ridge, Edson warned his men, “They were testing. Just testing. They’ll be back.”<sup>319</sup> The Raiders and Paramarines consolidated their positions around the perimeter of the Ridge, improving the fields of fire for their machine guns so that the attackers would have to cross 100 yards of open field under fire. After dark on the evening of September 13, the Japanese launched a series of concentrated attacks on the Ridge, primarily composed of the two battalions that had not participated in the previous night’s fight at the Raiders, nearly 2,000 men. Kawaguchi’s brigade attacked three times between 2100 and 0230, each time more desperate than the last. Edson called for continuous artillery fire from the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines’ 105mm howitzers; as the battle grew more heated, he requested the fire to be placed nearly on top of the Raider lines. Near midnight, the Marines conducted a limited withdrawal to a makeshift perimeter around Edson’s command post on the high point of the Ridge, a small grassy knoll. It was a desperate night, perhaps the most crucial of the campaign: “About 300 Marines gripped the knoll—the last defensive position before Henderson Field—in a horseshoe-shaped line . . . . All the while Edson moved the artillery barrage closer and closer, but still the Japanese came.”<sup>320</sup> (See Appendix F). Marine historian Joseph Alexander says of the grim combat on the Ridge, “This was one night when the Marine rifle became more useful as a bayonet mount than as a firearm.”<sup>321</sup> At this point in the fight, the Raiders passed the word, “Nobody moves, just die in your

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<sup>319</sup> Quoted in Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 199.

<sup>320</sup> Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 239. Frank further notes that “the soul of the defense this night was Merritt Edson. A scant 10 or 20 yards behind the firing line—his clothes were pierced at the collar and waist by bullets—he controlled the battle with his rasping voice, exhorting the steadfast and excoriating those few who wavered: ‘Go back where you came from. The only thing they’ve got that you haven’t is guts.’” *Guadalcanal*, 240.

<sup>321</sup> Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 176.

holes.”<sup>322</sup> They did just that for the remainder of the night, repelling the enemy several more times with small arms fire, grenades, and hand-to-hand fighting. At first light, elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, filtered into line to augment Edson’s force, while artillery and air strikes pounded the remnants of Kawaguchi’s shattered battalions, effectively ending the immediate threat to Henderson Field. The Raiders had lost 135 men and the Paramarines had lost 128; 59 of these casualties were killed in action, including 37 Raiders.<sup>323</sup> But they had decimated the Japanese brigade, permanently thwarting Kawaguchi’s attempts to recapture the ridge. Kawaguchi’s brigade suffered 708 killed and 505 wounded, many of whom would die of their wounds on the arduous trek back to the coast.<sup>324</sup> Now legendary as Edson’s Ridge in Marine lore, the defense of the ridge is certainly one of the high points of Raider history. There the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders earned their reputation as the “do or die men.”<sup>325</sup>

Badly in need of rest and decimated by both casualties and tropical illnesses, the Raiders continued to serve in the defense of Henderson Field until mid-October 1942, serving in several difficult actions along the Matanikau River and incurring more casualties. When they departed Guadalcanal on October 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion registered only one quarter effective strength – some 200 Raiders. Edson praised the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders as “among the best of the fighting organizations that the Marine Corps ever produced,” and claimed that they had “achieved honor and praise throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, the U.S. Marine Corps, the country at large far out of proportion to the

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<sup>322</sup> Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 202.

<sup>323</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 16; Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 110.

<sup>324</sup> Griffith, *Battle for Guadalcanal*, 121; Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 16. Besides the danger of American air raids, Kawaguchi’s brigade would quickly come to regret the loss of their medical supplies and foodstuffs in the Tasimboko Raid as they suffered the march back to the sea under starvation conditions.

<sup>325</sup> George Doying, “Red Mike and His ‘Do or Die’ Men,” *Leatherneck* (March 1944): 15-17.

strength of the battalion as compared to the entire Marine Corps.”<sup>326</sup> Vandegrift commended the Raiders as well, stating that the Raiders “proved themselves to be among the best fighting troops that any service could hope to have . . . . [T]he Commanding General [Vandegrift] wishes to state that he considers it a privilege and an honor to have had troops of this calibre [*sic*] attached to his command.”<sup>327</sup> Though they suffered greatly in doing so, the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders had unquestionably established their reputation as Warrior elites.<sup>328</sup>

### **Carlson’s Raiders and the Makin Atoll Raid**

Meanwhile, Carlson’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders had not been merely observing the war from the sidelines. In an attempt to divert Japanese attention and reinforcements away from Guadalcanal, Admiral Nimitz launched the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders on one of the most daring raids of World War II. Two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, about 220 men, were selected to raid the Japanese installation on Makin Atoll in the Central Pacific. The Raiders would be transported by submarine, a first in American history. Carlson’s goals were to destroy the enemy garrison and seaplane refueling facilities on Butaritari Island, the largest island of the atoll, and to gather any intelligence possible. On the strategic level, Nimitz hoped that a raid in the hitherto secure Gilbert Island chain would cause the Japanese to divert reinforcements to the Central Pacific and away from the battle raging in the Solomons. Companies A and B of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders embarked from Pearl Harbor on August 8 for a

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<sup>326</sup> Edson, “Battalion Order No. 1,” 21 September 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

<sup>327</sup> Vandegrift, “Division Bulletin Number 40a-42: Commendation of Raider Battalion, Parachute Battalion, and Eleventh Marines . . .” 19 September 1942, Alexander A. Vandegrift Collection, MCUA.

<sup>328</sup> By September 14<sup>th</sup>, the Raiders had suffered 33 percent casualties, not counting numerous tropical illnesses. The 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion, which had taken 55 percent casualties by the same date, was evacuated off of Guadalcanal on September 17. Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 17.



claustrophobic nine-day journey to the target aboard the *USS Nautilus* and *USS Argonaut*.<sup>329</sup>

On August 17, 1942, the submarines surfaced off Butaritari Island, only to find themselves in the midst of a rain squall and heavy seas. Compounding their struggles was the fact that the unreliable outboard engines all failed in the surf, leaving the Raiders to paddle to shore. One boat, carrying Lieutenant Oscar Peatross' platoon, became separated from the rest of the force and eventually landed well apart from the main body. The rest of the Raiders landed just before dawn and began moving towards their objectives, but they lost the element of surprise when one of their own men stumbled and accidentally discharged a burst from his BAR (see Appendix G). The enemy alerted, Carlson made a snap decision, ordering A Company to cross the island quickly and begin moving southwest towards the enemy positions.<sup>330</sup>

Here in the early morning hours Carlson's plan went awry. The alerted Japanese garrison put forth a defense which belied their small numbers, based on machine gun nests well-concealed in the underbrush, supported by numerous snipers in the tops of coconut trees. The crucial factors to victory in a raiding operation – speed and mobility – slipped away as the Raiders proceeded to engage the dogged Japanese defenders individually and in disjointed small unit actions. Their momentum faded into a firefight lasting several hours, ending in two Japanese *banzai* counterattacks which the Raiders easily dispatched. They also thwarted an attempted landing by several Japanese seaplanes in the island's lagoon, destroying both planes with their Boys .55 caliber rifles, and successfully called in indirect fire from the *USS Nautilus* on two patrol boats in the

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<sup>329</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 43-50; Wukovits, *American Commando*, 89-97.

<sup>330</sup> Carlson, "Operations on Makin, August 17-18, 1942," 21 August 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

harbor, destroying both. Ensuing Japanese air raids succeed only in mistakenly bombing the remaining Japanese positions on the island, doing no harm to the Raiders.<sup>331</sup>

Meanwhile, Peatross' platoon had not been idle. Landing to the southwest of the main body, they were practically in the rear of the Japanese force. Radio failure precluded his attempts to coordinate with Carlson, so Peatross took the initiative and led his men to harass the enemy rear area, destroying the island's radio station, capturing the enemy headquarters and killing the garrison's commander, Sgt.Maj. Kanemitsu. Still unable to contact Carlson, Peatross' platoon departed for the submarines around 1930 that evening. Miraculously, of all the boats theirs alone had a working engine, and they made it to the *Nautilus* safely.<sup>332</sup>

By early evening, it was increasingly apparent that the Raiders would not be able to fulfill their mission before the set rendezvous with the submarines that night. Carlson believed that a sizable contingent of Japanese remained on the island. Snipers continued to fire from the treetops, and the natives reported that the seaplanes and patrol boats had unloaded reinforcements (these reports later proved inaccurate). Unaware that they had virtually annihilated the Japanese garrison already, Carlson had his men withdraw to the beach for rendezvous with the submarines in accordance with the original timetable. Now his plan came completely unraveled, for the surf off of Makin was considerably heavier than anyone had anticipated. Their engines dead, the Raiders were left to row. The Raiders made every effort to get to the submarines, only to have their craft repeatedly overturned in the surf. With each capsized boat and return to shore, the Raiders grew more exhausted and lost more equipment. Carlson called the attempt "a

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<sup>331</sup> Wukovits, *American Commando*, 106-119; Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 66-72.

<sup>332</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 52-57.

struggle so intense and so futile that it will forever remain a ghastly nightmare to those who participated.”<sup>333</sup> Several boats somehow reached the submarines, their occupants looking “like pale shadows of the men I had last seen early that morning...nothing less than zombies.”<sup>334</sup> The remaining 120 Raiders (including Carlson and James Roosevelt) were stranded on shore. Only a handful of the marooned Raiders even had weapons, for almost all of their equipment had been lost in the repeated overturning of their boats. In Carlson’s estimation, “the situation was extremely grave”; he later confessed that “This was the spiritual low point of the expedition.”<sup>335</sup>

At this “spiritual low point,” the seeds of yet another Carlson controversy were sown. Numerous failed attempts left the majority of Carlson’s men ragged and worn out. Many had no weapons and some were even down to just their shorts, having stripped their uniforms to avoiding drowning in the surf. At some point during the night, a note offering the surrender of the remaining Raiders was written and delivered by Captain Ralph Coyte to one of the few living Japanese soldiers on the island. This note was later recovered by the Japanese and used in propaganda broadcasts. Who exactly wrote the note, and under whose orders? The signature on the note was rendered illegible by water damage, though it seems probable that it was Coyte. It remains unknown under whose authority it was written.<sup>336</sup> No reference to the thought of surrender appears in the after-action reports. Carlson’s biographer, Michael Blankfort, references a hysterical private

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<sup>333</sup> Carlson, “Operations on Makin,” 21 August 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>334</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 58.

<sup>335</sup> Carlson, “Operations on Makin,” 21 August 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>336</sup> Smith, *Carlson’s Raid*, 155; Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 78. Over the course of his interviews with surviving Raiders, John Wukovits found that, “some Raiders contend that Carlson advocated a capitulation, others either vehemently deny the allegation or claim to know nothing.” Wukovits, *American Commando*, 134. Wukovits’ account of the surrender controversy is the most recent analysis, and one of the best available. *American Commando*, 131-141. George Smith also presents a detailed analysis in *Carlson’s Raid*, 153-163.

muttering about the need to surrender, only to have some sense slapped into him by his sergeant; in Blankfort's account, Carlson remains imperturbable.<sup>337</sup> This was the first and only reference to any possible talk of surrender, leading George Smith to conclude that it "was intentionally hidden from the public for almost half a century."<sup>338</sup> James Roosevelt later claimed that the surrender issue came up during a midnight "Gung Ho" meeting and was promptly dismissed.<sup>339</sup> George Smith finds this account implausible, as Carlson appears to have deliberately excluded Roosevelt from the discussion for the simple reason that the fate of the President's son was weighing heavily on his mind; Peatross' account supports this contention.<sup>340</sup> Carlson also had numerous wounded Raiders to consider, not to mention the lack of ability of his exhausted, mostly unarmed Raiders to defend themselves against probable Japanese reinforcements in the morning. Carlson overestimated the number of enemy soldiers still on the island, relying largely on faulty reports by the natives. His fears were reinforced by a brief but violent encounter by one of the Raider sentries with a small Japanese patrol, leaving Carlson with "the worst dilemma of his military career."<sup>341</sup> George Smith contends that "Carlson, the consummate egalitarian, deviated from one of his core principles and apparently decided

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<sup>337</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 60-61.

<sup>338</sup> Smith, *Carlson's Raid*, 153.

<sup>339</sup> "We voted to stay and try to escape." Roosevelt, *My Parents*, 272. When pressed on the matter, Roosevelt claimed that a Raider, "whose name I will never reveal as long as I live," brought up the possibility of surrender during a Gung Ho meeting that night, and in the spirit of Gung Ho, Carlson let the idea be discussed and ultimately voted down. Roosevelt, response to question from audience, in Roosevelt, "Evans Carlson," 398.

<sup>340</sup> Smith, *Carlson's Raid*, 153-154. Peatross states that, based on post-war interview with Coyte, "[Carlson] implied that he felt personally responsible for the safety and well-being of the President's son and indicated that he felt the death of Jimmy Roosevelt might seriously hamper the war effort and was ready to go to any extreme to save him. As far as I have been able to determine, Major Roosevelt was not present at this meeting [the supposed surrender meeting] and, based on my personal impression of his character and what I have heard and read about his relationship with his father, probably would have objected strongly to being a pretext for surrender, had he been present." Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 77

<sup>341</sup> Wukovits, *American Commando*, 134.

to unilaterally surrender his force without entertaining much, if any, debate at all.”<sup>342</sup> Jon Hoffman concurs that Carlson made the decision himself, “without much input from the others.”<sup>343</sup> John Wukovits, on the other hand, admits that “at a minimum, [Carlson] contemplated the surrender issue,” but raises the question of why, if Carlson was so concerned about Roosevelt, would he entertain the thought of allowing the Japanese to capture him alive to be used as a propaganda tool.<sup>344</sup> Most Raiders accept Peatross’ account of that night: Carlson, after much discussion with his officers (excluding James Roosevelt) decided that surrender was the most humane course of action and sent Coyte out to find a Japanese officer to parley with; the rest of the Raiders, meanwhile, were understandably upset to hear rumors of surrender.<sup>345</sup> Questions abound to this day, and as the surviving Raiders pass away, there is little chance that the exact account will ever be known. Charles Lamb probably put it best when he wrote that “The full story of the Makin raid probably will never be recorded in its entirety except in the Book of Time for the archives of the Great Historian.”<sup>346</sup>

By the next morning, the surrender issue became a moot point when the Raiders discovered that the Japanese garrison had been virtually eliminated, save a few snipers. The Raiders spent the day dodging intermittent but ineffective airstrikes and demolishing enemy installations on the island. On the night of August 18, the submarines moved to

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<sup>342</sup> Smith, *Carlson’s Raid*, 154.

<sup>343</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 8.

<sup>344</sup> Wukovits, *American Commando*, 138.

<sup>345</sup> Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 77-78. Wukovits, *American Commando*, 134.

<sup>346</sup> Lamb, “Comments on the Raid on Makin Island,” 29 August 1956, Carlson Collection, MCUA, p.1. For his part, Lamb was openly disgusted by Carlson’s attempted surrender: “The first time that I heard the word ‘surrender’ was when I was informed by Carlson, in the presence of Roosevelt, that a surrender note had been written . . . . Evidently the details of surrendering and the writing of the note had taken place while I was away. I have no personal knowledge of the details. Regardless of who wrote the note . . . the commanding officer had full knowledge of the note . . . . Certainly a commanding officer deserves criticism if his estimate of the situation is so erroneous as to condone the writing of a surrender note and then discover that there is no opposition.” p.11.

the calmer seas on the lagoon side of the island and the Raiders finally succeeded in getting aboard, bringing their wounded with them. Back at Pearl Harbor, the Raiders took stock of their losses, officially listed as 18 killed in action and 12 missing in action, presumed drowned.<sup>347</sup> Tragically, in the confusion surrounding the extraction, 9 Marine Raiders were left ashore. Their exact fate was not known until after the war. Later captured by the Japanese, these Raiders were executed on nearby Kwajalein Island. The Japanese officers involved were convicted of war crimes in 1946; two received life imprisonment, and Vice Admiral Koso Abe, who ordered their execution, was hanged. In 1999, a team of forensic scientists from the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory traveled to Makin to make positive identification of the remains; they discovered a total of 19 Raiders buried on Butaritari, making the final toll 19 Raiders killed in action, 9 captured and executed, and 2 missing, presumably lost at sea.<sup>348</sup>

Questions abounded as to Carlson's conduct on the raid. Even his harshest critics admitted that Carlson seemed impervious to enemy fire and completely unconcerned for his own safety, yet the apparent breakdown of command and control raised doubts as to the practical utility of his methodology. Charles Lamb, a Raider lieutenant who openly disdained Carlson's Gung Ho style, found it "debatable if there was any command from the time of the landing until the return of Carlson to the submarine."<sup>349</sup> In addition to conducting a wildly disorganized battle, Lamb charged that the "work together" spirit of

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<sup>347</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 9.

<sup>348</sup> Wukovits, *American Commando*, 170-173. On the issue of how Raiders could be left behind, see Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 81; Wukovits, *American Commando*, 149-151, 170-173. Raider Brian Quirk took exception that the nine Raiders were "left behind," insisting that they were "accidentally lost," most likely in the failed attempts to reach the submarines and washed ashore elsewhere on the atoll. Smith, *Carlson's Raid*, 227. On the fate of the captured Raiders, see Tripp Wiles, *Forgotten Raiders of '42: The Fate of the Marines Left Behind on Makin* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2007).

<sup>349</sup> Charles Lamb "Comments on the Raid on Makin Island," 29 August 1956, Carlson Collection, MCUA, p.11. Lamb did concede that "[Carlson's] courage under fire was beyond question."

Gung Ho proved to be a complete fallacy during the attempt to return to the submarines, instead being replaced by an individualistic, every-man-for-himself attitude. Lamb's comments cast Carlson in the worst possible light, and are colored by their author's "extreme personal dislike for Carlson."<sup>350</sup> However, Carlson did not seem to exercise close command of the Raiders during the action of August 17, instead allowing the action to devolve into a series of independent small-unit actions in which the Raiders displayed great individual courage but little coordination. Peatross attributed this in large part to Carlson's temporary departure from his normal command philosophy by reflexively deploying A Company into the operating area designated for B Company, resulting in the intermixing of both companies and diminished control.<sup>351</sup> As the attempted departure from the island was repeated thwarted by the surf, unit cohesion came unraveled, despite Carlson's presence on the beach with them. Even the Raiders' fire-teams began dissolving as groups of men began piling in boats confusedly, attempting to brave the surf paddling with rifle butts or even palm fronds. In the confusion, Carlson apparently forgot about the 20-man covering force still holding the perimeter around the beach. The confusion surrounding the extraction and the discussion of surrender in the face of a much-reduced enemy tended to raise doubts about the effectiveness of the Gung Ho method in actual combat. Most damningly in the eyes of many was the uncharacteristic caution that seized Carlson on August 17, when he "persisted in overestimating the

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<sup>350</sup> Says Lamb, "It is a fact, that to a majority of Carlson's Raiders, 'Gung Ho' was synonymous with 'Hooray for me, I've got mine.' Proof of this was evidenced in the disgraceful conclusion and last few hours on Makin when it was every man for himself." "Comments on the Raid on Makin Island," 29 August 1956, Carlson Collection, MCUA, p.12. Lamb made no secret of his contempt for Carlson and his "double talk and ridicule of the Marine Corps," stating outright that "during this period with the Raiders I developed an extreme personal dislike for Carlson and was very distrustful of his words and methods. He was cognizant of my attitude." "Comments," p.3.

<sup>351</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 66.

enemy's strength or, even worse, underrating his own."<sup>352</sup>

Carlson realized that the raid had not gone as planned and acknowledged as much in his after-action report. The exact reasons for his temporary bout of hesitancy remain a mystery. It is probable that, given Carlson's prior experience working with indigenous populations in China, he took the exaggerated reports of the native islanders at full value, causing him to believe that he was greatly outnumbered. Reports by natives figure prominently in his after-action report. Based on their information, which was hindered by the significant language barrier, Carlson both over-estimated the original number of Japanese troops on the island and credited them with landing additional troops throughout the day. Peatross, though critical of the conduct of the battle, points out that on the first day, Carlson had to assume that Peatross' own platoon was lost and quite possibly killed or captured; therefore, as far as Carlson knew he had suffered over 18 percent casualties in his small force.<sup>353</sup> Carlson's most recent biographer defends his actions as being prompted by an excessive concern, perhaps even subconsciously, for the safety of James Roosevelt.<sup>354</sup> Carlson himself confessed to having reached a "spiritual low point" in the

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<sup>352</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 75. Though it is impossible to say for sure, it is likely that had the attempts to reach the submarines not been thwarted, Carlson may have accidentally left the entire covering force behind. Smith, *Carlson's Raid*, 144; Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 8.

<sup>353</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 75. This is a valid point; however, Carlson later acknowledged that he gained knowledge of Peatross' situation at "about 1400" on August 17, which still leaves little explanation as to his decision-making that evening. Carlson, "Operations on Makin," 21 August 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>354</sup> Wukovits, *American Commando*, 169-170. Carlson had previously written a letter to the President, promising to watch out for James' safety. Carlson to F.D. Roosevelt, 2 March 1942, Carlson File, HDRB. This of course raises the question as to why a person with Roosevelt's significance was involved in such a hazardous operation in the first place. Omar Pfeiffer, an officer on Nimitz' staff, claims that he personally informed Roosevelt that he was to remain in Hawaii with the rest of the battalion, only to be "sent for by Admiral Nimitz, who told me that Captain Roosevelt had reported to him my vetoing the idea of his accompanying the raid on Makin but that he [Nimitz] had authorized Captain Roosevelt to go on the raid. (What politics can do to a chain of command)." Omar Pfeiffer, Oral History Interview Transcript (hereinafter referenced as Pfeiffer transcript), MCUA, 196.



evening of August 17.<sup>355</sup> Carlson did ruefully confess that he had made a poor estimate of the situation on the first night, concluding: “Finally, I would invite the attention of all military leaders to the illustration provided by our situation at Makin on the night of August 17<sup>th</sup> which emphasizes a truth that is as old as the military profession: no matter how bad your own situation may appear to be, there is always the possibility that the situation of the enemy is much worse.”<sup>356</sup>

Carlson felt that the Makin Raid was a worthwhile venture if only for the experience and lessons learned. His report makes no mention that surrender was even considered. Interestingly enough, Carlson decided to forego the Gung Ho self-critiquing that was a hallmark of his program after the Makin Raid. Some Raiders later insisted that this was a deliberate cover-up of Carlson’s own instigation. Peatross believed that Coyte and Private William McCall (the couriers with the surrender note), were ordered to keep quiet about it by Carlson, who was himself acting on orders from Nimitz.<sup>357</sup> According to Omar Pfeiffer, the Marine officer on Nimitz’ staff who passed the report to Nimitz, Carlson’s original report included the words, “If I had heard a Japanese voice say, ‘Surrender,’ I would have surrendered.”<sup>358</sup> Pfeiffer relates that after reading it, Nimitz angrily exclaimed:

“Pfeiffer, have you read this? . . . I’ve never heard of anything like this in all my life. There is not so much iron in that man [Carlson] as I thought. You take this report back and get a hold of that young man and

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<sup>355</sup> Carlson, “Operations on Makin,” 21 August 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>356</sup> Carlson, “Operations on Makin,” 21 August 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA. Carlson devotes a paragraph in his report to praising the native Gilbertese, who were “most cooperative throughout.” He took time on August 18 to instruct them in how to form a local constabulary and requested them to arm themselves with surplus Japanese weapons and form a resistance group.

<sup>357</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 79, 82. Raider Ben Carson would later claim that he had overheard Carlson order Coyte and McCall to “forget about the surrender note...if you want to be a hero you can’t talk surrender.” Quoted in Smith, *Carlson’s Raid*, 156. However, many years had passed by the time Ben Carson made this statement, and there is little way to verify it.

<sup>358</sup> Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 198.

tell him that no report from my command will have any word, or even idea, of surrender in it!”

I took the report, returned to my office, and sent for Carlson. When he came, I told him that he would have to delete any ideas of surrender or any statement of surrender from his report. Carlson said, “It’s true, and it will stay in the report.” I said, “Oh, no it won’t. It comes out or you go out.” Whereupon Carlson took the report with him and in time it was returned to me with the objectionable content removed.<sup>359</sup>

Thus, evidence suggests that the cover-up of the surrender discussion occurred at Nimitz’ behest; in eliminating it from his own reports, and ordering Coyte and McCall to do so as well, Carlson was acting under high authority. Nimitz, an erstwhile supporter of the Raider concept, was clearly displeased with Carlson. In his own report of the action to Admiral King, Nimitz took Carlson to task on several points. He pointed out that on the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup>, there were “only a few Japanese soldiers left alive, yet such is the effect of boldness in a few resolute men that it seemed to the Raider commander at this time that he was still opposed by a large force.” In his conclusions, Nimitz noted that offensive momentum must be maintained if the raid is to be successful, yet “After the first part of the engagement, the Raider force did not strike aggressively.” He further suggested that henceforth “Native reports should be considered with suspicion.”<sup>360</sup>

Nimitz’ personal disappointment with Carlson did not prevent him from lauding the raid as one of the high points of the war to date. He informed King that the raid had

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<sup>359</sup> Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 198. Pfeiffer swears that he remembers Carlson’s exact words “to this day,” but his claims are rendered suspect by his incorrect memory of details on other aspects; for example, he claims that James Roosevelt lost his glasses on landing and Carlson then led him around by the hand all day, when no such thing happened. Also, the reader must consider that Pfeiffer was no fan of the Raider concept generally, nor of Carlson personally.

<sup>360</sup> Nimitz to King, “Solomon Island Campaign – Makin Island Diversion,” 20 October 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA. As Wukovits points out, this report, which specifically mentions the bravery and fortitude of both the Marines and the submarine crews, pointedly omits mention of Carlson by name, and was copied to numerous high-level Navy commanders and the Commandant. *American Commando*, 166-167.

“succeeded in all its purposes,” and further claimed that a sizable number of Japanese ships had been diverted to the Gilberts from the Solomons because of the raid.<sup>361</sup> Nimitz arranged a hero’s welcome for the Raiders and submariners at Pearl Harbor and personally visited with several Raiders to congratulate them on their achievements. Official Navy press releases in the days following the raid glorified the Raiders as warriors without peer. In the “first official mention of the Raiders,” they were billed as almost superhuman fighters:

The men of the Raider Battalions are hand-picked from a flood of volunteers for these doubly hazardous assignments. As fully trained Marines, they constitute from the beginning a powerful force adept at close-range fighting and schooled in amphibious warfare...In rigorous training these men become specialists in rubber boat operations...they learn every technique of gouging, strangling, knifing, bayoneting and otherwise putting an enemy out of action . . . . The Raider Battalions carry a relatively large number of automatic rifles and sub-machine guns, in addition to the semi-automatic Garand rifles and pistols. Every Raider is taught to shoot from the hip with whatever weapon he carries . . . . He also carries a knife . . . . Besides its obvious use as a dagger, the Raider learns to throw it accurately and with force enough to kill or disable an enemy at close range.”<sup>362</sup>

Clearly, this was not a force to be trifled with. America now had both an answer to the Japanese and an equivalent to the British Commandos.<sup>363</sup>

Carlson’s Raiders became instant celebrities as the exaggerated language used in the Navy Department’s press release was echoed nationwide.<sup>364</sup> They occupied front-page columns across the country, including several front-page spreads in the *New York Times*, and were celebrated in the many of the periodicals of the day, including *Time*

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<sup>361</sup> Nimitz to King, “Makin Island Diversion,” 20 October 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>362</sup> Navy Department Press Release, “Marines’ Special Raider Battalions Go Into Action at Makin and Solomons,” Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>363</sup> Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 83, 122; Roosevelt and Libby, *My Parents*, 272-273.

<sup>364</sup> As a representative example, consider the article, “Marine Corps ‘Raider’ Battalions Employed in Solomons Offensive,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1942, which essentially reprints the majority of the aforementioned Navy Department press release verbatim.

magazine.<sup>365</sup> Early reports of the battle made much of the raid as being “our own brand” of commando-style attack, and claimed “at least eighty enemy killed” in exchange for “moderate” losses to the Marines.<sup>366</sup> Subsequent reports added to the aura of Raider invincibility, inflating the number of casualties inflicted to “about 200 Japanese marines.”<sup>367</sup> A later story inflated this figure even more, claiming that 350 Japanese soldiers had been killed on Makin.<sup>368</sup> The media reveled in tales of Carlson’s Raiders, whom they labelled “The Roughest and Toughest.”<sup>369</sup> W.S. LeFrancois wrote a gripping first-hand account in two parts of the action on Butaritari Island for the *Saturday Evening Post*.<sup>370</sup> Much was made of James Roosevelt’s presence on the raid, and of the gifting of a Japanese battle flag captured on Makin to the President himself.<sup>371</sup> The raid was even

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<sup>365</sup> For example, in August and September 1942, Carlson’s Raiders were featured in prominent front-page spreads in the *New York Times* three times: on August 22, August 28, and September 18; see “Forty Hours on Makin,” *Time*, September 7, 1942; “Carlson’s Heroes,” *Time*, January 25, 1943.

<sup>366</sup> “Foe Belted on Isle,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1942. The article stresses that this raid was a distinctly American venture, not an aping of the British commando raids in Europe and North Africa. This is significant, especially considering that the public pressure for the American military to also engage in dramatic, hit-and-run raids was one of the early factors in consideration during the creation of the Raider Battalions. It is also of interest that one of the three major events to dominate the headlines of the *New York Times* in August 1942 was the Dieppe Raid, which the wartime press did its best to spin as a great success (the other two events were the Makin Raid and the Battle of Guadalcanal). See Raymond Daniell, “Hit-and-Run Fight,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1942; “Raid Heroes Sing on Return Home,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1942; Raymond Daniell, “Raid Is Assessed,” *New York Times*, August 21, 1942; and “11 in Dieppe Shot, Many Reported Held,” *New York Times*, August 29, 1942 (all of which were front-page features). Furthermore, the *Times* was very interested in showing that the Americans were not merely observing the British from the sidelines, but were getting involved into the commando business on their own. See “Army Forms 2 Air-Borne Divisions and U.S.-Canadian ‘Commandos,’” *New York Times*, August 7, 1942; Meyer Berger, “U.S. Rangers in Dieppe Raid Were Pupils of Commandos,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1942. This seems to be a representation of the nation’s psychological need to prove, both to themselves and to the world, that America was very much still in the fight.

<sup>367</sup> Robert Trumbull, “Marines Wiped Out Japanese on Makin Isle in Hot Fighting,” *New York Times*, August 28, 1942.

<sup>368</sup> “Tokyo’s Version of Makin,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1942.

<sup>369</sup> F. Tillman Durdin, “The Roughest and Toughest,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 8, 1942.

<sup>370</sup> LeFrancois, “We Mopped Up Makin Island,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 2 pts., December 4 and 11, 1943.

<sup>371</sup> “White House Hails Raid,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1942; “President Rejects Japanese Gift Flag,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1942; “Jimmy Roosevelt’s part in Makin Attack Comes as Complete Surprise to President,” *Cincinnati Post*, August 22, 1942, held in Roosevelt File, HDRB; “Carlson’s Heroes,” *Time*, January 25, 1943.

featured in *Yank*, the weekly Army paper.<sup>372</sup>

With so much publicity for the heroes of Makin, it was little surprise that a film was soon made about their raid. LeFrancois' *Saturday Evening Post* account provided the inspiration for a script by Lucien Hubbard. With Commandant Holcomb's permission, Carlson himself served as an advisor to the film and approved of the final release. Starring popular leading man Randolph Scott as "Colonel Thorwald," the movie, *Gung Ho!*, served as an excellent wartime "morale booster."<sup>373</sup> Certainly not one of the better films to come out of wartime Hollywood, it was favorably received at the time. One critic wrote that "the settings are true and the fighting on the island is as hot and lurid as any that we've seen."<sup>374</sup> Not surprisingly, though it was a hit with the public, veterans of the raid found it overly exaggerated and generally disliked it.<sup>375</sup>

As recognized in the official Marine Corps history of the war, the Makin Raid's "greatest asset was to home-front morale."<sup>376</sup> It gave fuel to the assertion that America was no longer on the defensive and had "jarred Tokyo's propagandists out of their smug complacency."<sup>377</sup> It has been compared, both in the days following and years later, to the famed Doolittle Raid in terms of its boosting power on the home front, possibly even greater. Raider Oscar Peatross felt that, "to the man in the street, the picture of a handful of Marines landing from submarines to engage the enemy in a face-to-face shootout on

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<sup>372</sup> Merle Miller, "Transport Maghakian's Revenge," *Yank* 2, no. 45 (April 28, 1944): 8-9.

<sup>373</sup> Matthew Bernstein, *Walter Wanger: Hollywood Independent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 192.

<sup>374</sup> Bosley Crowther, "'Gung Ho!' a Lurid Action Film About the Makin Island Raid . . . Opens at the Criterion Theatre," *New York Times*, January 22, 1944.

<sup>375</sup> Holcomb to Carlson, 3 July 1943, Carlson Collection, MCAU; Bernstein, *Walter Wanger*, 192; Smith, *Carlson's Raid*, 212-214.

<sup>376</sup> Frank O. Hough, Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, vol. 1, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1958): 285.

<sup>377</sup> Selden Menefee, "Tokyo Propaganda Changes Tune," *New York Times*, September 6, 1942; "Tokyo's Version of Makin," *New York Times*, September 7, 1942.

his own turf was somehow more heroic, more in the American tradition, than bushwhacking him from a high flying bomber.”<sup>378</sup> As Carlson put it, “The public was tired of hearing bad news, and our little raids gave them the sort of news they wanted to hear.”<sup>379</sup> In the summer of 1942, with victory in the Pacific still very much up for grabs, the public was desperate for heroes. Carlson’s Raiders gave them just that.<sup>380</sup>

Notwithstanding its boost to public morale, the Makin Raid had mixed results in a strategic sense. Officially, the raid is remembered as only “partially successful” in its military aims, for it “attracted much attention in the stateside press but its military significance was negligible.”<sup>381</sup> Ironically, the survivors of the raid themselves generally were incredulous at their treatment as heroes, believing that the operation had “been one big foul up.”<sup>382</sup> Supporters of Carlson point to Nimitz’ claim of the “formation of a Makin relief force” as proof that despite proportionately high losses, Carlson’s Raiders prevented that many more Japanese troops from besieging the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division on Guadalcanal. This view is shared by the standard Navy history of the war.<sup>383</sup>

However, it is doubtful that the Japanese actually redirected any troops designated for the Guadalcanal campaign solely on the basis of the raid. Marine historian Jon Hoffman corroborates this claim, noting that the Japanese “immediately guessed the size

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<sup>378</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 86

<sup>379</sup> Quoted in “Col. Roosevelt, He See Eye-to-Eye, Says Carlson,” Waterbury (CT) *Republican*, 9 June 1943, in Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>380</sup> W.H. Lawrence, “We Have a Blitzmaker Too,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 22, 1942.

<sup>381</sup> Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *History of Marine Corps Operations*, vol. 1, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, 285-286.

<sup>382</sup> Raider Sgt. Buck Stidham, quoted in Wukovits, *American Commando*, 168.

<sup>383</sup> Nimitz to King, 20 October 1942, “Makin Island Diversion,” Carlson Collection, MCUA; Morison, *Coral Sea, Midway, and Submarine Actions*, 240. Peatross makes this argument quite passionately in *Bless 'Em All*, 86-87, concluding that, “Looking backward over half a century with the acuity of 20/20 hindsight, I still believe that the bottom line of the balance sheet for the Makin raid justifies the operation.”

and purpose of the operation and had not let it alter their plans for the Solomons.”<sup>384</sup>

Charles Updegraph takes a slightly more optimistic view of the raid’s utility, arguing that some elements of a force from Truk Island did actually head towards Makin following the raid, but that “the Makin Island raid might best be viewed as a testing ground for the Raider concept, inconclusive in itself, but of marked value in later operations.”<sup>385</sup>

The harshest criticism of the raid came the following year after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division stormed Tarawa Atoll, some 90 miles from Makin in the Gilberts chain. The raid had alerted the Japanese to the inherent weaknesses of their defenses in the far reaches of their Pacific empire, resulting in considerable fortification of previously lightly-defended Tarawa. In 76 hours of the most ferocious fighting yet seen in the Pacific, the Marines took the island at a cost of 3,407 casualties, including over 1,000 dead.<sup>386</sup> General Holland M. Smith penned in his memoir that “Carlson’s raid on Makin in August, 1942, was a spectacular performance . . . but it was also a piece of folly. The raid had no useful military purpose and served only to alert the Japanese to our intentions in the Gilberts. The massive fortification of Tarawa dates from that raid.”<sup>387</sup> Smith’s claim about Tarawa is generally accepted by the leading figures in Marine history.<sup>388</sup>

Thus, the first – and as events would prove, the only – attempt to use the Raiders for their intended purpose failed to live up to the promises of early war commando

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<sup>384</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 9.

<sup>385</sup> Updegraph, *Special Marine Corps Units*, 14. For example, Kawaguchi’s brigade continued its advance to Guadalcanal as scheduled; Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 143, 198-199. George Smith finds that this argument mostly consists of “wishful thinking,” and concludes that “The Makin operations was completely unnecessary and was not repeated elsewhere.” *Carlson’s Raid*, 222, 224. Even Nimitz’ biographer frankly admitted that, “There was no indication, however, that the attack had influenced the Japanese to effect an immediate redistribution of their forces.” E.B. Potter, *Nimitz* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1976), 184.

<sup>386</sup> Joseph Alexander, *Utmost Savagery: The Three Days of Tarawa* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 231. Evans Carlson reportedly said of Tarawa, “This was not only worse than Guadalcanal, it was the damnedest fight I’ve seen in 30 years of this business.” In *Utmost Savagery*, 201.

<sup>387</sup> Holland M. Smith and Percy Finch, *Coral and Brass* (1948; repr. Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 1989) 132.

<sup>388</sup> Alexander, *Utmost Savagery*, 28-31; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 393; Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 9.

aficionados. On one hand, with the outcome in the Solomons in doubt, one can hardly fault Nimitz' attempt to aggressively employ the Raiders to possibly take some of the pressure off of the defenders of Henderson Field. In summer of 1942, planners could hardly have foreseen what the Japanese reaction would be or the future course of the Central Pacific campaign in 1943. The Raiders thus were hampered by the law of unintended consequences, and by a lack of willingness of top-level commanders to utilize the Raiders in long-range missions again in the face of the mixed results of the first attempt. The utility of special operations units is often determined by the ability of high-level leadership to conceive of strategic missions for them, and by willingness to employ them on such missions. After the failure of the Makin Raid, few strategic missions for the Raiders were even devised.<sup>389</sup>

### **Carlson's Raiders and the Long Patrol**

Carlson knew that Makin had not provided a true test of the efficiency of his Gung Ho methodology. His Raiders had their chance for redemption on Guadalcanal in November 1942. Carlson pressed his superiors throughout the fall of 1942 for a chance to get back into action. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders finally got to Guadalcanal, albeit in a roundabout way, when R. Adm. Turner selected the Raiders to assist in one of his ventures on Guadalcanal. Though Turner's involvement with the Raiders was very brief, he had an outsized impact on their trajectory.

Turner was notorious among Marines for his interference in Marine affairs and frequent dabbling in novelties. Turner was aggressively dedicated the Marines on Guadalcanal and made great efforts on their behalf even when his superiors despaired of

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<sup>389</sup> Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, 149.



success; however, he also sought to micromanage Marine actions well beyond the scope of landing operations.<sup>390</sup> Vandegrift privately held that Turner was prone to having “half-baked” ideas about the conduct of landing operations.<sup>391</sup> The Guadalcanal campaign revealed some of the deficiencies of the prewar arrangements for command relations between Navy and Marine officers once the amphibious force was ashore. Turner sought to determine the deployment of Marine units on Guadalcanal according to his own ideas, ideas which frustrated Vandegrift as unwelcome distractions from the main task. As former Raider-turned-historian Samuel Griffith wryly noted, “Vandegrift’s constant problem in dealing with his nominal superior in the chain of command was to keep the sailor in his nautical place.”<sup>392</sup> The situation finally reached a point critical enough that Commandant Holcomb himself visited Guadalcanal in October 1942 to help formally sort out the command relationships once the landing force was ashore.<sup>393</sup>

Turner was convinced that the most effective way to beat the Japanese was to land small contingents of Marines all over the north shores of Guadalcanal, thereby denying the Japanese anywhere to land reinforcements. He was intrigued by the possibility of using Marines to execute numerous, small-scale landings in Japanese rear areas – precisely the sort of mission the Raiders were designed to fulfill. With the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders spent in the defense of Henderson Field and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders employed by Nimitz in the Central Pacific, Turner peremptorily ordered the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines in Samoa to collect

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<sup>390</sup> Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 227-228.

<sup>391</sup> Vandegrift to Holcomb, 11 August 1942, Holcomb Collection, MCUA. Turner always seemed to be pursuing some “strange obsessions.” Twining, *No Bended Knee*, 97. Pfeiffer recalls that Turner once even attempted to mandate changes to the equipment issued to every individual Marine to include long-handled axes for cutting through the jungle, which Pfeiffer thought “represented the height of folly.” Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 193.

<sup>392</sup> Griffith, *Battle for Guadalcanal*, 141.

<sup>393</sup> Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 371. David Ulbrich covers Holcomb’s visit and its results in, “Thomas Holcomb, Alexander A. Vandegrift, and Reforms in Amphibious Command Relations on Guadalcanal in 1942,” *War & Society* 28, no. 1 (May 2009): 113-147, and *Preparing for Victory*, 143-149.

volunteers to form a “2<sup>nd</sup> Provisional Raider Battalion” – and further stated his intention to have the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Marines do the same once they arrived. As one can imagine, such external interference did not sit well with Marine officers. Admiral Nimitz, on Commandant Holcomb’s advice and hearty approval, vetoed Turner’s scheme, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Provisional Raider Battalion was dissolved before it even got started.<sup>394</sup>

Though foiled in his idea of a Raider battalion in every Marine regiment, Turner held doggedly to his concept of landings elsewhere on Guadalcanal. When the actual 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion arrived in his area, Turner soon found a use for them. He planned the construction of a second airstrip east of Henderson Field, and accordingly designated an Army infantry regiment, a Marine Defense Battalion, and a Navy Construction Battalion to land at Aola Bay on November 4. The landing beaches were to be secured by two companies of Carlson’s Raiders, who would land in advance of the main force.<sup>395</sup>

Thus, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders finally came to Guadalcanal in early November 1942. Two companies went ashore under Carlson’s command at Aola Bay as the spearhead for the airfield construction force. Carlson hoped to secure a mission more suitable for his

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<sup>394</sup> In fact, the initial disagreement between Turner and Vandegrift stemmed from Turner’s intention to divert much-needed reserves to alternate operations. Even during the critical period of mid-September, Turner was proposing to disperse the few reinforcements sent to Vandegrift, the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, at various locations on the island; the desperate struggle of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders on Edson’s Ridge convinced him of Vandegrift’s contention that the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines were needed in the Henderson perimeter. Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 227-228, 232-233. On Turner and the proposed “Provisional Raider Battalions,” see Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 371; Griffith, *Battle for Guadalcanal*, 141; Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*, 183; and Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory*, 143-144. George Carroll Dyer offers Turner’s side of the story in *The Amphibians Came to Conquer: The Story of Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner*, vol. 1 (1971; repr. Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 1991), 448-452. The most complete account of the response to Turner’s provisional raider scheme by the Marine Corps, incorporating pertinent excerpts from the high-level correspondence, is found in Updegraph, *Special Marine Corps Units*, 14-17.

<sup>395</sup> In their correspondence in late September, Vandegrift and Turner appear to be discussing two different battles altogether – as Vandegrift discusses the build-up of Japanese troops to his west and requests the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders be dispatched to help him along the Matanikau River, Turner blithely dismisses these concerns and indicates his plans to send break the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders into company-sized forces to seize Japanese outposts elsewhere on Guadalcanal and on other islands altogether. Vandegrift to Turner, 28 September 1942, Vandegrift Collection, MCUA.

Raiders once ashore, and had briefed his remaining companies to be ready to come to Guadalcanal on a moment's notice. Admiral Turner's vision of an Aola Bay airfield proved to be misguided – one historian later termed it “one of the silliest actions of the entire Pacific war.”<sup>396</sup> All construction efforts were thwarted by the dense jungle and swampy terrain in the area, and construction was eventually halted.<sup>397</sup>

Carlson, however, was more successful: he finally got the mission his Raiders were built for. By November the tide of the battle was beginning to favor the Americans and Vandegrift sought to launch an offensive to the west past the Matanikau River. However, Japanese Colonel Toshinano Shoji's regiment threatened the perimeter from the east. Vandegrift here found a way to use the unique skills of the Raiders to perform valuable service for the upcoming offensive. Vandegrift delayed his western offensive and dispatched the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry (Army) to destroy Shoji's detachment. Shoji managed to escape the Americans' double envelopment. Cut off from the coast, he was forced to circumnavigate the American perimeter to rejoin Japanese forces west of the Matanikau. Shoji's force, though battle-weary, still numbered approximately 3,000 troops, a force Vandegrift could not afford to let wander to his east while simultaneously trying to mount his own offensive to the west. On November 5, Vandegrift sent a message via airdrop to Carlson: the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders were tasked with harrying the Shoji detachment, reporting on its movements and engaging the Japanese in guerrilla warfare while also providing Vandegrift with vital intelligence as to remaining

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<sup>396</sup> Griffith, *Battle for Guadalcanal*, 186.

<sup>397</sup> Vandegrift had warned Turner of the unsuitability of the terrain near Aola Bay prior to the landings, based on information obtained from Martin Clemens' coastwatchers and native scouts. After nearly a month of futile labor, Turner admitted defeat – and moved the construction of his airfield to nearby Koli Point instead. Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 420-421.

Japanese strength east of Henderson Field.<sup>398</sup>

Carlson leapt at the chance provided here. He proceeded to lead his Raiders on a month-long patrol behind enemy lines, engaging the Japanese in true guerrilla fashion (see Appendix H). They operated almost completely independently, just as Carlson had envisioned when he fashioned the battalion. As Richard Frank put it, “For all practical purposes, Shoji and Carlson disappeared into the deep jungle to fight their own campaign for a month.”<sup>399</sup> They survived mostly by living off the land, supplemented by rations carried inland by their native guides or by airdrop and whatever they could glean from dead Japanese, making do with a subsistence diet of mostly “rice-and-whatever” – that is, whatever they could find.<sup>400</sup>

On the Long Patrol, the Raiders received valuable assistance from native guides throughout their patrol, giving them a tangible advantage over the Japanese. Besides providing information on the local geography, the native scouts kept the Raiders well-informed of Japanese movements and provided the only link that the Raiders had with friendly forces on the coast. It is interesting to note that Carlson’s trust in the intelligence provided by the natives on Guadalcanal served him far better than it had previously on Makin. This is not to say that the Gilbertese were inherently untrustworthy or sympathetic to the Japanese. However, the natives on Guadalcanal not only had training and organization provided by the Australian coastwatcher system, they also had had

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<sup>398</sup> Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 415-424; Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 20.

<sup>399</sup> Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 424.

<sup>400</sup> Peatross describes their initial rations as being four days’ worth of “rice, fatback, raisins, and tea or coffee...four packages of cigarettes and four D-rations—a thick chocolate bar that supposedly could sustain a man for a day....Although rice was a common ingredient in all their dishes, these Raiders-cum-chefs showed great ingenuity in the ‘rice-and-’ combinations they attempted. Venturing well beyond the mundane rice-and-raisins, they experimented with rice-and-fatback, rice-and-chocolate, rice-and-coffee, and rice-and-tea. Some of the more daring souls even tried rice-and-whatever, the ‘whatever’ being various locally procured ingredients whose exotic appearance usually discouraged requests for identification but encouraged the bolting of one’s food.” *Bless ‘Em All*, 137.

several months' worth of experience in campaigning on their home island. They were led by the indomitable Sergeant Major Sir Jacob Vouza, a hero in his own right who had already cheated death at the hands of the Japanese. Vouza did yeoman's work for the Allies throughout the Guadalcanal campaign. Furthermore, the native scouts reported directly to Major John Mather of the Australian Army, who worked with Carlson to assign daily missions and communicate orders to the scouts. This system proved much more effective than the makeshift communication Carlson attempted with the Makin islanders, and Carlson's Raiders benefited greatly from the assistance of Mather's corps of scouts. Carlson's high regard for native intelligence and assistance was vindicated on Guadalcanal, and more in line with his experiences in China.<sup>401</sup>

Carlson set out into the jungle with his two companies as soon as he received Vandegrift's instructions; the other three companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders came ashore at Tasimboko on November 10 and marched to join him. He would lead his Raiders on a patrol all the way around the perimeter, from Tasimboko to Mount Austen on the southwest point of the Henderson Field perimeter, engaging the Japanese where possible and gathering intelligence. The Raider companies operated largely independently:

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<sup>401</sup> For his service, Vouza was awarded the Silver Star, the Legion of Merit, and was eventually knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for long and distinguished service to the British Empire. See Tom Bartlett, "Sir Jacob Vouza," *Leatherneck* (May 1984): 33; and Ann A. Ferrante, "Sergeant Major Sir Jacob Vouza," inset essay in *First Offensive: The Marine Campaign for Guadalcanal*, by Henry I. Shaw, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1992), 22. The Marine Raiders Association later established the Vouza Scholarship Program for children native to the Solomon Islands, which continues to this day. See "Vouza Scholarship Fund 10 Years Old," *Marine Corps Gazette* 65, no. 12 (December 1981): 10; and U.S. Marine Raiders Association and Foundation, "Projects," <http://usmarineraiders.org/raider-foundation/projects/>. Peatross notes that Mather was "an indispensable aide" to Carlson, "he [Mather] being the only person in the battalion who understood the local pidgin well enough to extract from the natives the information Carlson needed. The hybrid language was a mixture of Melanesian words, an English word here and there, and many gestures . . . In addition to the basic language problem, there was a difficulty with geographic nomenclature—the natives had their own, regional names for the various villages, trails, and streams, and they had almost no concept of time and space, such things as minutes and yards meaning next to nothing to them. Mather, however, always managed to make sense out of the natives' words and gestures." *Bless 'Em All*, 153.

Carlson's plan was "to fan out strong combat patrols to search for the enemy . . . . Once contact is made, I will concentrate the patrols as needed to destroy the enemy."<sup>402</sup>

Throughout November, the Raiders harassed the Japanese force, exploiting the element of surprise to inflict much larger numbers of casualties on the enemy than they suffered themselves. They engaged the enemy in numerous small-unit actions, as well as a larger, battalion-sized action near Asamama village. Carlson's Raiders proved their prowess as jungle warriors: courage and resourcefulness were the norm during the Long Patrol.

In mid-November, Vandegrift tasked the Raiders with locating and destroying a Japanese heavy artillery piece, nicknamed "Pistol Pete" by the Marines, which had been shelling them from the slopes of Mount Austen for some time. Carlson's Raiders spent the remainder of the month patrolling towards Mount Austen and the headwaters of the Lunga and Tenaru Rivers. The Raiders made their way to the top of Mount Austen, destroying several untended artillery pieces along the way, on December 3. They occupied the vacant enemy positions there, from which they promptly ambushed a patrol of Japanese troops ascending the mountain. The next day, Carlson led his exhausted Raiders down the slope of Mount Austen into Vandegrift's perimeter.<sup>403</sup>

Carlson's Long Patrol has been remembered as "one of the great combat patrols in the history of the Corps."<sup>404</sup> They trekked some 150 miles through inhospitable, enemy-occupied jungle. They were isolated in the deep jungle for nearly a month, from November 6 to December 4, and they killed 488 Japanese at a cost of 16 Raiders killed in action and another 18 wounded in action. These figures do not tell the true story, for the

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<sup>402</sup> Quoted in Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 136.

<sup>403</sup> On the Long Patrol, see Wukovits, *American Commando*, 174-253, and Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 139-168.

<sup>404</sup> Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, 372.

jungle proved to be just as much the Raiders' foe as the Japanese were. Of the surviving Raiders, 225 men had to be evacuated for medical treatment due to a myriad of jungle conditions, from malaria and dysentery to ringworm and jungle rot.<sup>405</sup> When Raider historian Jon Hoffman examined the effects of illness and poor conditions, he found that "Carlson's men became disabled at an astonishing rate due to inadequate rations and the rough conditions"; he further emphasizes that the in two companies (C and E Companies) that had been on Guadalcanal for the duration of the entire patrol, sickness casualties were so high that only 57 of their original 133 Raiders were able to endure the entire campaign without being evacuated for illness.<sup>406</sup> A Marine who observed them shortly after their emergence from the jungle noted, "They were definitely a seedy looking lot. Virtually all the survivors of that solid month in the jungle had malaria, many were a bright yellow with jaundice, all were haggard and worn from what they had been through, but in spirit they were still a cocky and self-confident outfit."<sup>407</sup> However, their efforts were not in vain.<sup>408</sup>

Though Shoji's force eluded complete destruction, his troops suffered far worse than the Raiders: by the time he rejoined the main Japanese contingent, he had only 700 to 800 survivors of his 3,000-man force, "of whom but twenty to thirty retained the ability to fight."<sup>409</sup> The Raiders had provided Vandegrift with the intelligence he needed for the offensive to the west. Vandegrift gratefully recognized Carlson's Raiders with an official unit citation for "the consummate skill displayed in the conduct of operations, for

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<sup>405</sup> Cleland Early of E Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, wrote that "Enduring the living conditions was worse than the combat." Letter quoted in Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 167.

<sup>406</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 22

<sup>407</sup> Graham Garrett, "Back to Makin," *Marine Corps Gazette* 28, no. 2 (February 1944): 16.

<sup>408</sup> By map measurement, all this hiking only covered approximately 40 miles of straight-line distance – "It was not at all uncommon, especially in the mountains, to hike as much as 600 yards (300 yards uphill and 300 yards downhill) to advance only one-third that distance on the map." Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 167.

<sup>409</sup> Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 424.

the training, stamina and fortitude displayed by all members of the battalion and for its commendably aggressive spirit and high morale.”<sup>410</sup>

In retrospect, the Guadalcanal campaign represents the high point of the Raiders’ service history. It was on Guadalcanal and nearby Tulagi that the Raiders earned their distinction as Warrior elites, men capable of fighting in any circumstances against seemingly impossible odds – and winning. The Raider experience from August to December 1942 mirrors the process suggested by Showalter almost exactly: though they were already distinguished by their all-volunteer status and specialized training, they earned their role of Warrior elites of a particularly distinguished caliber. The one attempt to utilize the Raiders as more of a strategic force, the Makin Raid, did not return the results Nimitz had anticipated. However, the Raiders had proven their worth as a special operations force on the operational and tactical levels. Their most impressive successes as a raiding force – the Tasimboko Raid and the Long Patrol – hinged on highly mobile campaigns that struck the enemy where he was not prepared, inflicting damage, gathering intelligence, and moving on before allowing a concentrated counter-attack. In many ways, the lower Solomons campaign vindicated the vision of the Raiders as originally put forth by H.M. Smith and Edson in late 1941, as a specialized force, supplementary to the main amphibious landing force, capable of operational-level raids to assist with the main amphibious landing in a variety of ways. As the Long Patrol indicated, there was a place for Carlson’s vision of a deep-penetration, guerrilla force as well – under the right circumstances. Unfortunately for Carlson’s Raiders, the high attrition rates seemed to indicate that the Pacific islands were not the right environment for such guerrilla

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<sup>410</sup> Vandegrift, “Division Circular Number 38a-42, Citation of 2d Raider Battalion for outstanding service,” 7 December 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 370.



campaigns.<sup>411</sup>

However, their recognition as elite Warriors brought new challenges for the Raiders. Showalter states that “because of the quality of their personnel, warrior elites frequently tend to lose their specific mission orientation and become general-purpose shock troops.”<sup>412</sup> This transformation is starkly illustrated on Edson’s Ridge, where the out-gunned Raiders fought off a numerically superior enemy, making up for their lack of heavy armament and small numbers with their tenacity and fighting spirit. The transition from Technician specialists to Warrior shock troops was subtle, occasioned by necessity in the desperate situation Vandegrift was in throughout much of the WATCHTOWER campaign. Subsequent events would speed this transformation and make it permanent – thereby sealing the fate of the Raider battalions.<sup>413</sup>

### **Changes to the Raiders**

The Guadalcanal campaign brought not only accolades but concurrent changes in the command and structure of the Raider battalions, including the expansion of the Raider program. The addition of more Raiders was precipitated at least in part by Turner’s audacious proposal to create numerous “provisional Raider battalions.” Commandant Holcomb, with Admiral Nimitz’ support, diffused this idea with aplomb, but he did concede that additional Raider battalions appeared desirable for the circumstances in the Solomons campaign. Accordingly, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Raider Battalion was activated on Samoa on September 20, 1942, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Harry “the Horse” Liversedge. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Raiders were composed mainly of volunteers from Marine units

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<sup>411</sup> Showalter, “Evolution of the Marine Corps,” 46.

<sup>412</sup> Showalter, “Evolution of the Marine Corps,” 46.

<sup>413</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 96.

garrisoning Samoa, plus small contingents of veterans from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalions. An additional battalion, the 4<sup>th</sup> Raider Battalion, was created on October 23, 1942, in California under the command of Major James Roosevelt. In February 1943, the 4<sup>th</sup> Raiders were granted extra personnel allotments in order to form a permanent Raider Training Camp at Camp Pendleton. Finally, in March 1943, all four Raider battalions were placed under the umbrella of the new 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Regiment, with Liversedge commanding.<sup>414</sup>

In addition to gaining new sister battalions, the original two Raider battalions underwent significant command changes. Shortly after the battle of Edson's Ridge, Vandegrift tapped Edson to command the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders passed to S. B. Griffith, Edson's executive officer. Though wounded in the Raiders' actions along the Matanikau in late September, Griffith returned to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders and proved to be an able commander in his own right. The promotion of Griffith ensured a large degree of continuity for the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, though he did introduce a slightly modified version of Carlson's fire-team, with good results.<sup>415</sup>

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders the command changes brought wholesale changes to their battalion. Carlson led his weary Raiders back to Espiritu Santo on December 18, 1942, to recover and re-train after their ordeal on Guadalcanal. In keeping with his guerrilla philosophy, Carlson kept his Raiders in an austere camp to build toughness. Isolation and rugged living had been an important part of his training methods at Jacques Farm earlier; however, in this context, it seems to have backfired on him. The ever-present tropical

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<sup>414</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 23-25; Updegraph, *Special Marine Corps Units*, 16-17, 24; "4<sup>th</sup> Marine Raider Battalion," unpub. manuscript, Historical Section, HQMC, 16 May 1949, Raiders: 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Raider Battalion File, HDRB.

<sup>415</sup> Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 201-203, 237; Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 212-214.

illnesses – malaria, dengue fever, jaundice, dysentery – continued to persist. “As the sick list grew, morale slumped, and for all practical purposes the battalion was noneffective.”<sup>416</sup> Carlson’s attempts to re-energize the men by appealing to the Gung Ho spirit – “Lack of adequate faith is the real cause for our failure to bring the Gung Ho spirit to its highest perfection” – were not as effective as he hoped.<sup>417</sup> Defenders of Carlson have pointedly accused Marine high command of setting up Carlson to fail by denying his battalion needed services and liberty in Wellington, New Zealand, but other officers within the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider also noted the rumblings of a discipline and morale problem in the weary Raider ranks. When the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Regiment was formed, Carlson was promoted to executive officer of the regiment. This came as a “double blow” to Carlson – he not only lost his battalion, but was passed over for command of the Raider Regiment.<sup>418</sup>

Carlson was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Alan Shapely, a tough and thoroughly orthodox veteran. He had not been impressed with Carlson’s Gung Ho pitch in February 1942, and what he saw in Espiritu Santo did little to change his mind. The Gung Ho experiment in the Marine Corps came to a sudden and abrupt halt with Shapely’s accession. (The last bastion of Gung Ho in the Corps ended when Carlson’s protégé, James Roosevelt, had to be sent stateside because of malaria in April 1943). Shapely “lined up the battalion and told them I was going to change practically

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<sup>416</sup> Peatross recalls that the number of sick eventually resulted in 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders being informally designated medically unfit for combat duty. Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 171-173.

<sup>417</sup> Carlson, “Address of the Commanding Officer . . .” Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>418</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 174; Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 310-313. Peatross claims that the only replacements sent to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders were the “brig rats,” allegedly on Carlson’s own insistence that the Raiders had the best personnel to reform them. *Bless 'Em All*, 172.

everything . . . I just changed things completely, and made it into a regular battalion.”<sup>419</sup>

Military courtesy, such as saluting of officers and addressing one another by rank, were reinstated. Those who protested were granted transfers, though surprisingly few took Shapely up on this offer. Carlson and his methods had been extremely popular with many of the enlisted men, and many of Shapely’s changes were received only grudgingly at first. By some accounts – notably Blankfort’s unabashed apology for Carlson – the men hated Shapely for killing the spirit of Gung Ho. Charles Banks, who served with the 4<sup>th</sup> Raiders and later commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, believed that

Shapely was a good leader. The Raiders had gotten a little cocky . . . . Shapely was the Edson type of guy, the typical Marine type of guy. Carlson was a maverick . . . some of these people that he had trained and selected had lost the Marine Corps way of doing things, and one of the first thing[s] Shapely said when he took over as regimental commander [of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines] was, ‘This is going to be a Marine regiment.’ I think Shapely did a hell of a good job in organizing the regiment, and the results showed later . . . . Some of those guys [the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders] I guess were spoiled, and it was tough to go back to conform to the rules.<sup>420</sup>

Shapely himself does not remember too much trouble with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion. He recalled that “Initially I found some [opposition], but then I had a tremendous amount of support, particularly from the noncommissioned officers.”<sup>421</sup> Raider officers and senior NCOs welcomed the changes as much needed improvements. Gone were the days of Carlson’s reveling in his men’s ability to subsist on “rice-and-whatever,” as Shapely immediately set his Raiders to work improving their camp, which was moved to the island of New Caledonia. Peatross recalls that after a brief period of training under Shapely, “our training program was moving along quite smoothly, and progress through

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<sup>419</sup> Shapely transcript, MCUA, 77. Shapely later bragged to Pfeiffer that the change in heart was so complete among the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders that, “‘If you want to get killed, go out into that company street and shout, ‘Gung Ho.’”” Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 228.

<sup>420</sup> Banks transcript, MCUA, 22.

<sup>421</sup> Shapely transcript, MUCA, 77.

each phase was marked by significant improvement in the physical well-being and morale of the troops.”<sup>422</sup> Reinforcements arrived, creating a good balance of combat-proven troops and eager new Raiders. Significantly, the training regime Shapely instituted shifted dramatically. Rather than guerrilla warfare, the Raiders began training in attacking fortified positions. This proved to be an accurate assessment of the Raiders missions in the upcoming months.<sup>423</sup>

With Guadalcanal secured in January 1943, high command began planning for the seizure of the next rung on the long ladder to Rabaul. Throughout 1943, the four Raider battalions would serve in a number of ways to help the Allies reach the top.

The new 3<sup>rd</sup> Raiders got their feet wet during Operation CLEANSULATE, the seizure of the Russell Islands, when they stormed Pavuvu Island. They found no enemy ashore but the ever-hostile jungle: in the four weeks they occupied Pavuvu, many of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Raiders came down with the sundry jungle diseases ubiquitous to the South Pacific. As Jon Hoffman bluntly put it, “the hard-hitting capabilities of the Marine battalion were wasted on CLEANSULATE,” as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Raiders served as a garrison force for an

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<sup>422</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 178. One of Shapely's first actions as CO was to move the Raiders to a new camp on New Caledonia and institute better hygiene requirements, which helped alleviate the rampant illness that had plagued the Raiders since their return from Guadalcanal. Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 175; Shapely transcript, MCUA, 76-79.

<sup>423</sup> Shapely believed that the Makin Raid had been a “fiasco.” After taking command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, Shapely “had a long talk with Evans Carlson, whom I knew very well; and he explained this Gung Ho business . . . I didn't concur in any of this.” Shapely transcript, MCUA, 74, 76. To his credit, Carlson sought to make the transition easier by throwing his parting support behind Shapely. Lucas, *Combat Correspondent*, 105. After Roosevelt's departure, command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Raider Battalion passed to Michael “Mickey” Currin. “4<sup>th</sup> Marine Raider Battalion,” unpub. manuscript, 16 May 1949, 4<sup>th</sup> Raider Battalion File, HDRB. Shapely transcript, MCUA, 77. Blankfort employs some very strong language in his account – “the awesome drunken hate which only enlisted men can have for an officer they despise. They hated Shapely, and even more they hated the authorities who put him in command.” Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 316-317. This must of course be taken in perspective, for Blankfort's account is truly a more of a hagiography than a biography, and no attempt at balance or contextualization is made. Furthermore, Blankfort took some degree of artistic liberty with his account of the end of Carlson's Raiders. Lamb wrote that “my tour of duty in the second raiders served under Carlson was the most difficult and unpleasant duty I have experienced during my entire career in the Marine Corps. The tour of duty in the same organization served under Alan Shapely was the most pleasant.” Lamb, “Comments on the Makin Raid,” 29 August 1956, Carlson Collection, MCUA, p.14. Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 174-178.

unoccupied island – hardly a mission suitable for a mobile striking force.<sup>424</sup>

## **New Georgia**

Though uneventful, the seizure of the Russells cleared the way for Admiral Halsey's planned attack on New Georgia. Dubbed Operation TOENAILS, the offensive focused on the recently built airfield at Munda Point (see Appendix I). Capture of Munda itself fell to the Army's 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, but two battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Regiment would support this mission by capturing vital harbors on other points of the island. The Eastern Landing Group, consisting of the 4<sup>th</sup> Raider Battalion and the 103<sup>rd</sup> Infantry (Army), were to land at Segi Point and move to attack Viru Harbor; afterwards, the Northern Landing Group, made up of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion and two Army infantry battalions, all under the command of Col. Liversedge, would land at Rice Anchorage and proceed overland to capture Enogai Inlet and Bairoko Harbor.<sup>425</sup>

The immediate goals of the Eastern Landing Group were to seize Viru Harbor and nearby Vangunu Island. Lieutenant Colonel "Mickey" Currin landed with two companies of his 4<sup>th</sup> Raider Battalion at Segi Point on June 20. (His other two companies attacked Vangunu Island across the channel; working in conjunction with an Army battalion, they secured the island the following day). Currin's goal was the capture of Viru Harbor, heavily defended from seaward but vulnerable to overland attack, probably because even the native islanders considers the swampy jungles surrounding it to be impenetrable. Moving via rubber boats as close as he dared, Currin led his Raiders on a three-day trek through jungles even worse than Carlson's Raiders had endured on the

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<sup>424</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 26.

<sup>425</sup> For an excellent account of the campaign on New Georgia, see Brian Altobello, *Into the Shadows Furious: The Brutal Battle for New Georgia* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 2000).

Long Patrol – thick underbrush, indiscernible trails, steep hills and valleys punctuated by rivers swollen by the onset of rainy season (see Appendix J). Nearing the objective, he detached two platoons to attack the lightly defended village of Tombe east of the harbor. Meanwhile, he led the main force on a forced march through the night to attack the main installation at Tetemara west of the harbor. In 16 rain-drenched hours stumbling and hacking through the jungle in the dark, with only two 20-minute rests, the Raiders covered a scant 7 miles – but they were in position to attack by morning on July 1. A fortunate coincidence aided the Raiders, as a squadron of American dive-bombers arrived for an unannounced airstrike on Tetemara, driving the Japanese to take cover temporarily in the jungle. The Raiders on the east side of the harbor had little trouble dispatching the garrison at Tombe with no losses to themselves. Currin's main force surprised and overwhelmed the initial line of Japanese defenders. They pressed on through the morning despite increasing resistance and a driving rain squall, destroying enemy bunkers individually with hand grenades and TNT. By evening, the Raiders were in possession of the harbor; they had suffered 8 Raider KIA, and 15 WIA, and killed at least 48 Japanese soldiers.<sup>426</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Raiders proved themselves well against both the Japanese and the jungle. They had operated largely as Raiders were intended to, using their mobility to advance over terrain considered impassible to launch a surprise attack.

On the northwest coast of New Georgia, the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders, accompanied by Liversedge's regimental HQ, set out on a similar mission as the 4<sup>th</sup> Raiders had recently accomplished. The Northern Landing Group (the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders and the Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry) executed a night landing at Rice Anchorage on July 4 and set

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<sup>426</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 30. The campaign of the Eastern Landing Group against Viru Harbor and Vangunu Island is discussed more fully in Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 27-31, and Altobello, *Into the Shadows Furious*, 75-104.

off across Dragon's Peninsula towards Enogai Inlet (see Appendix K). They faced similarly terrible conditions as Currin's Raiders had previously, compounded by the flooding that came with rainy season. S. B. Griffith later recalled that approximately 1,200 men had to ford the flooded Tamakau River over a single log bridge using toggle ropes for handrails – an operation which took the bulk of a day to complete.<sup>427</sup> On July 7, the procession made contact with the enemy, driving a company of Japanese from Triri village. Liversedge sent the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry, south to block the trail to Munda, while the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders attacked north from Triri to Enogai Inlet. With their three-days' rations exhausted, the Raiders were spurred on by desperation. Though slowed by firefights and false trails, the Raiders were able to find and exploit a small trail unknown to the Japanese, enabling them to flank the installation at Enogai. After a two-hour firefight, the Raiders attacked Enogai station on July 10, charging down the hill with bayonets fixed and guns blazing –Raider Thomas Pollard explained, "That stunt is just as hair raising to them as it first was to us" – driving the Japanese defenders out with heavy casualties.<sup>428</sup> The Raiders had lost 54 of their ranks killed and 94 wounded, but had killed approximately 350 Japanese.<sup>429</sup> As Currin's 4<sup>th</sup> Raiders had done at Viru, the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders exploited their light load and mobility to penetrate almost impassable terrain obstacles. They attacked Japanese defenses with tenacity and ingenuity, despite their exhaustion and hunger, fully living up to the Warrior reputation they had won at Guadalcanal.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> S.B. Griffith, "Action at Enogai," *Marine Corps Gazette* 28, no. 3 (March 1944): 16.

<sup>428</sup> Pollard, quoted in "Meet the Marine Raiders Who Took Enogai Inlet," in *Leatherneck* 26, no. 11 (November 1943): 72.

<sup>429</sup> Hoffman, *Making to Bougainville*, 32.

<sup>430</sup> The capture of Enogai is treated in detail in Altobello, *Into the Shadows Furious*, 149-167; Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 255-274; and Griffith, "Action at Enogai."



After an arduous trek on short rations and the sharp fighting around Enogai inlet, Griffith's 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion could only field about half of its combat strength.

Liversedge accordingly dispatched a messenger to Turner on July 11, requesting that Currin's 4<sup>th</sup> Raiders be transported to Enogai. It was July 18 by the time they arrived, and they were only about two-thirds strength themselves. In the two weeks that had elapsed since the landing at Rice Anchorage, the situation had changed considerably.

The Japanese garrison at Bairoko Harbor was fully aware of American intentions and had received reinforcements. Further, they had constructed a formidable defense, composed of log-and-coral bunkers set along the four parallel ridges between Bairoko and Enogai; the bunkers were positioned to have interlocking fields of fire, and the ground was preregistered so their heavy 90mm mortars would have deadly accuracy. The Raiders here faced their toughest target yet.

The Raiders moved out early on July 20 to attack Bairoko (see Appendix L). In absence of any artillery or naval gunfire support, Liversedge had requested air support several times in the previous days, but radio failure prevented his message from getting through. The Raiders attacked armed with their M1 rifles, BARs, and grenades, with light 60mm mortars providing their only supporting fire. Lacking the firepower to damage bunkers, the Raiders had to rely on maneuvering close enough to destroy each bunker by hand using grenades or TNT charges. Many Raiders died in the attempt. Their casualties grew extensive as the Japanese machine guns and heavy mortars took their toll, but they pressed on. By late afternoon, the Raiders had managed to penetrate two of the four lines of bunkers and could see the harbor. In the words of historian Brian Altobello, "This was the classic moment where the commander was supposed to commit

his reserve. But Liversedge had none to commit.”<sup>431</sup> With casualties already over 25 percent and nightfall rapidly approaching, Liversedge ordered the Raiders to withdraw. Liversedge can hardly be criticized for his decision. The Raiders were low on ammo, out of water, outgunned, and had suffered nearly 30 percent casualties by the end of the day: 47 killed and 200 wounded.<sup>432</sup>

Bairoko thus became the only time in the Raiders’ history that they had failed to take an objective. With the bloodletting at Tarawa still some months in the future, Bairoko “may have been the bloodiest combat and hottest fire fight of the war up to that time.”<sup>433</sup> It would be a blatant mischaracterization of the Raiders’ Warrior spirit to claim that they failed for any lack of courage. On the contrary, the failure of Bairoko was a symptom of both the changing nature of the Pacific War and of the inherent limitations of special purpose troops. This was evident to those in the Raider ranks and those in high command. Peatross bitterly wrote years later that the failures of Bairoko were “in conception and support, which was the business of higher headquarters, and the failure of Bairoko must be on their conscience.”<sup>434</sup> Of more significance to the future of the Raider program was the official view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: “Such lightly armed troops cannot be expected to attack fixed positions defended by heavy automatic weapons,

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<sup>431</sup> Altobello, *Into the Shadows Furious*, 190. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry was tangled in the jungle to the south along the Munda trail and had been intermittently engaged with Japanese forces during the day; lacking radio contact, Liversedge was not able to recall them to support the attack.

<sup>432</sup> Marine historian Jon Hoffman opines that “The failure to seize the objective and the severe American losses were plainly the result of poor logistics and a lack of firepower.” *Makin to Bougainville*, 34. Liversedge did not make this decision arbitrarily, but sent runners to Griffith and Currin to find out if further advance was feasible. Griffith fully supported Liversedge in his decision; see his comments in Henry I. Shaw, Jr., and Douglas T. Kane, *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, vol. 2, *The Isolation of Rabaul* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1963), 141.

<sup>433</sup> John Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1952), 118. Griffith believed that Bairoko was the premonition of Tarawa. “Tougher Jap Defenses: Marine Colonel Here First Met New Tactics When Raiders Stormed Bairoko,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 1, 1943, held in Griffith File, HDRB.

<sup>434</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 231.

mortars, and heavy artillery . . . . Failure to relieve the Marine Raiders by regular infantry units supported with artillery after the Marines had accomplished the task of seizing the beachhead is on a parallel with the failure to relieve the first [*sic*] Marine Division at Guadalcanal.”<sup>435</sup>

At the same time the Raiders were laying claim to their status as a subset of Warrior elites, they were drifting ever further afield from their original role as lightly-armed, highly-mobile troops. Misallocation as line troops was a common downfall of special operations units in World War II as “hard-pressed generals desperate for manpower saw elite troops as super-infantry rather than as specialists.”<sup>436</sup> The New Georgia campaign showcased both the strengths and weaknesses of the Raider battalions. At Viru and Enogai, the Raiders had defied the odds, moving across seemingly impassible terrain, achieving victory in both places despite being outnumbered by utilizing stealth and surprise to the fullest. But at Bairoko, the Raiders encountered an alerted, well-armed enemy behind prepared defenses, against which even the Raider spirit could not make up for the lack of the heavy weaponry and supporting fire needed to reduce bunkers. The Raiders in 1943 found themselves being employed in one of the most common misuses of special operations troops, as their Warrior virtues were exploited by pressing them into service as general purpose shock troops.

### **Bougainville: Beginning of the End**

In November 1943, the Allies climbed the next rung of the ladder towards Rabaul – the island of Bougainville. The Raiders saw their share of the fighting there, though

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<sup>435</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Daily Digest, TOENAILS,” 22 July 1943, p.2, excerpted in Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons*, 119.

<sup>436</sup> Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 60.

Bougainville spelled the “beginning of the end for the Raider organization.”<sup>437</sup> Operation CHERRY BLOSSOM witnessed the complete transition of the Raiders from a special operations role to that of a standard infantry battalion. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Raider Battalions – temporarily designated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Provisional Raider Regiment under Shapely’s command – were attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division for the landings at Empress Augusta Bay (see Appendix M). They went ashore on D-Day, November 1, in conjunction with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Marines. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Raiders assaulted the Japanese machine gun nests on Pururata Island in the bay then moved ashore on D+1. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders landed on the left flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, as they moved to secure Cape Torokina. Both battalions moved inland to establish roadblocks on the Piva Trail. They fought intermittently against Japanese patrols and turned back several attacks on their position for the next several days, before moving to division reserve on November 10. The Raiders spent the next two months on Bougainville largely waiting in reserve, punctuated by occasional patrols or stints on the line. They remained in reserve, busied by carrying supplies to the front or helping off-load ships on the beaches, until they returned to Guadalcanal on January 11, 1944.<sup>438</sup>

### **“Put Away Your Boots and Knives”**

The Marine Corps’ experiment in military elitism came to an end not long after the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Raider Battalions left Bougainville. Once the elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider

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<sup>437</sup> Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 237.

<sup>438</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Provisional Raider Regiment was only in existence for the Bougainville operation, and was disbanded in January 1944. Updegraph, *Special Marine Corps Units*, 35. For a more complete treatment of the Bougainville campaign, see John Chapin, *Top of the Ladder: Marine Operations in the Northern Solomons* (Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1997); and Harry Gailey, *Bougainville 1943-1945: The Forgotten Campaign* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

Regiment were assembled again on Guadalcanal, the regiment was formally disbanded. The decision to end the Raider program in early 1944 was occasioned by the top-level command changes in the Corps, as Alexander A. Vandegrift succeeded his mentor Thomas Holcomb as Commandant on January 1, 1944, bringing with him his trusted assistant Colonel Gerald C. Thomas to serve as the new Director of Plans and Policies at HQMC. It was no secret that Vandegrift and Thomas were not in favor of the proliferation of specialist units within the Marine Corps, but the choice to end the Raider experiment did not originate with Vandegrift. Holcomb's previous Director of Plans and Policies had initiated a study of the desirability of specialized units in the Marine Corps the previous fall. The results of the study, put forth by the War Plans Division, Office of the Chief Naval Operations in December 1943, laid out the intention to transform the Raiders into a more standardized infantry regiment. Vandegrift thus had only to act upon decisions that had been arrived upon previously.<sup>439</sup>

Though disbanded, the Raiders did not merely fade away. Instead, on February 1, 1944, the former Raiders were chosen to reconstitute one of the Marine Corps' most storied regiments, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. Known as the "China Marines" for their long service in Shanghai, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had fought gallantly in defense of the Philippines and held out on Corregidor until the bitter end. Rather than establishing a completely new regiment, Vandegrift recommended that the Raiders be used as the cadre for re-establishing the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. By assuming the traditions and honors of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, the Raiders "would symbolize the turning of the tide of the war from defeat into victory,"

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<sup>439</sup> Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 372-373; Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory*, 129-132, 174-175; Millett, *In Many A Strife*, 223-225; Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 40; Updegraph, *Special Marine Corps Units*, 34.

thereby ensuring that the legacy of the famed 4<sup>th</sup> Marines would survive.<sup>440</sup>

Shapely, who assumed command of the new 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, fully recognized the significance of the new chapter in the Raiders' history, adopting the slogan "hold high the torch" for his new regiment. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines seized Emirau Island in March 1944, thereby completing the isolation of Rabaul that the Raiders had helped to begin in August 1942. Later they added the names of Guam and Okinawa to the roll of battle honors of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, serving with distinction in both those campaigns. After Japan's surrender, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines were among the first wave of American troops to land in occupation of Japan, and later had the moving experience of liberating the surviving members of the original 4<sup>th</sup> Marines from a POW camp.<sup>441</sup>

Reactions to the news of the loss of their Raider status varied from sad resignation to anger at the departure of a valued and hard-earned identity as members of an elite subset of Marines. Oscar Peatross recalls that "The initial reaction was sheer disbelief, then came indignant resentment at what was felt to be betrayal, and finally bitter resignation."<sup>442</sup> The main consolation was their designation as the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, which Commandant Holcomb had promised would be remade out of particularly distinguished units. Some Raiders appear to have rationalized that this explanation was enough. Lee Minier wrote home that even though the Raiders were now "a regular line regiment," he could at least be confident that "The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines were the most famous regiment in the

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<sup>440</sup> Kenneth W. Condit and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *Hold High the Torch: A History of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1960), 242. On the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, see James S. Santelli, *A Brief History of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1970), and Condit and Turnbladh, *Hold High the Torch*.

<sup>441</sup> Condit and Turnbladh, *Hold High the Torch*, 241-360; Santelli, *Brief History of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines*, 26-35.

<sup>442</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 293. He further notes that the "bitterness was especially strong among the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, for they were losing their battalion as well as their elite status."

corp [*sic*] . . . . Now it is organized again and is really going to be a crack outfit.”<sup>443</sup> For many Raiders, the end of the Raider Battalions came as a violent shock, representing the collapse of a close-knit subculture and unique identity as select members of the Marine Corps’ elite battalions. Gone were their specialized units, shared elite subculture, and the trappings of elitism such as their famed Raider patch – that “proud symbol of uniqueness.”<sup>444</sup> Captain Arthur Haake, veteran of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Raider Battalions, composed a eulogy poem, one which was considered “Perhaps the most eloquent expression of our resentment at the loss of identity.”<sup>445</sup> Haake’s lyrics poignantly capture the feeling that accompanied the sudden end of the Raider experiment.

Here’s some news to make you hot:  
They’re doing away with the best they got,  
And throwing us in with the common lot,  
For we’re the last of the Raiders.

So put away your boots and knives,  
As souvenirs of your Raider lives,  
And do your fighting with your wives,  
For we’re the last of the Raiders . . . .

First we’re Jekyll, then we’re Hyde,  
As four battalions get shanghaied,  
But in this deal our hands are tied,  
For we’re the last of the Raiders.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Minier to Jolette Minier, 20 February 1944, Minier Collection, MCUA. But in a separate letter, Minier noted that many of the original Edson’s Raiders had requested transfers to other units. Minier to Jolette Minier, 4 February 1944, Minier Collection, MCUA. See also Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 293-294.

<sup>444</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 294.

<sup>445</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 293.

<sup>446</sup> Arthur A. Haake, “Last of the Raiders,” reproduced in Rosenquist, Sexton, and Buerlein, *Our Kind of War*, 237.

## CHAPTER 5: THE LAST OF THE RAIDERS

The experience of the Marine Raider battalions, from their rise to prominence to their eventual misuse as shock troops, largely parallels that of many other special operations units of World War II. However, the Raiders' situation as a special operations elite within an existing *corps d'elite* added some unique elements to their service history and untimely end. "Forces of this sort," John Gordon aptly notes, "have never been easy to evaluate [for] they tend to generate more emotion than rationale analysis."<sup>447</sup> The downfall of the Raiders has been explained as everything from a matter of pure pragmatism to suspicion of personal vendetta. There admittedly were practical reasons for ending the Raider battalions which alone would likely have been sufficient to spell the end of the Raiders as a special operations force. However, underlying the overtly military rationales offered are several more subjective motivations. These subjective rationales are usually referenced only indirectly in "official" sources, but can often be detected in more candid source material such as oral history interviews and memoirs. In an examination of the decision to transform the Raiders into a regular infantry battalion, subjective factors frequently emerge, such as resentment of undue publicity, perceptions of favoritism, and implicit competition with the larger Marine Corps culture. These are intertwined with the more quantifiable causes, making full discussion of them difficult. However, the subjective aspects of the reaction to the Marine Raiders offer an interesting glimpse of the operation of elite military cultures and presents a unique opportunity to consider the dynamic of establishing an elite subculture within a prior elite body with its

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<sup>447</sup> Gordon, "An Experiment in Military Elitism," 363.



own distinctive group identity.<sup>448</sup>

### **Operational Necessity: The Pragmatic Approach**

The operational rationale in favor of disbanding the Raider battalions in favor of reinforced infantry battalions was straightforward and highly pragmatic. The war in the Pacific had changed almost completely in character. The early days of the war were characterized by Allied weakness on almost every front in the Pacific, faced off against a seemingly invincible enemy whose only apparent weakness was hubris. By January 1944 the tables had turned. The Allies no longer operated in fear of Japanese naval and air superiority. Though the Japanese remained a deadly foe and were far from beaten, it was clear that the U.S. Navy virtually commanded the sea and sky and could project massive force almost at will. The war was by no means over – indeed, the hardest fighting remained ahead in both Europe and the Pacific – but momentum had clearly shifted. On the home front, American morale had rebounded from the post-Pearl Harbor low, buoyed by Allied offensives in every theater of operations, lessening the apparent need for small-scale raids to boost morale. It has been said that special operations are often forces of desperation, turned to in hope of compensating for weakness and restoring confidence. Once the weakness has been remedied, the need for special operations for morale boosting purposes is considerably lessened. This was certainly true of the Raiders.<sup>449</sup>

The Raiders had been created with a view towards a prolonged campaign of strikes and counter-strikes (attacks met with enemy counter-attacks), where their speed and small size could be used to hit the enemy and withdraw. The Solomons campaign

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<sup>448</sup> Much of the following analysis applies to the other specialist units within the Marine Corps, as discussed by Updegraph, *Special Marine Corps Units*; the present effort will focus on the Raiders.

<sup>449</sup> Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, 143.

roughly followed this pattern, most notably at Guadalcanal. By the time the Marines' role in the Bougainville campaign and the isolation of Rabaul came to an end in early 1944, the attention of the Marine Corps was drawn to the Central Pacific where Admiral Nimitz was initiating a new phase of the war characterized by "island hopping" across the Central Pacific to isolate Japan. The battles the Marines fought for the remainder of the war would not be characterized by the desperate, makeshift measures of "Operation Shoestring" in August 1942, but by amassing the full weight of American sea, air, and land power, bringing America's industrial capabilities to bear to pound enemy fortifications into rubble. In light of the massive armadas assembled, landing fully-equipped Marine divisions, complete with organic artillery and armor elements, supplied by Marine logistics and supported by air strikes from Marine aviation, raids by small, elite units did not seem as necessary or useful as they had in 1942.<sup>450</sup>

Also significant were the changes in Japanese strategy after their defeats in the Solomons. With their offensive capability melting away, Japanese high command turned to a defense of attrition. On each successive amphibious assault, the Marines faced ever more complex fortifications manned by increasingly fanatical defenders who preferred death to surrender. Neutralizing such fortified islands was a costly undertaking, one

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<sup>450</sup> Allan Millett suggests that, "Essentially, the Corps fought four different ground wars against the Japanese: the jungle warfare of the South Pacific, the atoll warfare of the Gilberts and Marshalls, the mobile warfare of the Marianas, and the cave warfare of Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Each war made its special demands, and the Corps met them." *Semper Fidelis*, 440. According to Vandegrift, in the Central Pacific, "that type of organization [Raiders] was not necessary." Alexander A. Vandegrift Oral History Transcript (hereinafter referenced as Vandegrift transcript), OVHS, 968. Though many have pointed out the changing nature of the Pacific War, I am indebted to Lieutenant Commander Russell Evans (USN) for his Marine Corps Command and Staff College lecture on the evolving nature of the "strike" and "counter-strike" nature of the early Solomons and the fundamental shift occasioned by American superiority in arms. Seen in these terms, the Raiders provide a "strike" capability, while the defense battalions provided the capability to resist the enemy's "counter-strike." As Evans stressed in his lecture, however, the overwhelming American air, naval, and ground superiority of 1944-1945 was unique to that specific point in time – warfare on an unprecedented scale, with the nation on a total-war footing – and should not be considered a normal operating scenario.

which required heavy firepower and coordination of supporting arms (air strikes, naval gunfire, and artillery), plus the “uncommon valor” of the individual Marines tasked with taking the next island.<sup>451</sup> The Raiders were designed around almost exactly the opposite type of mission: they came lightly armed, utilizing only what they could carry, to surprise and overwhelm the enemy in vulnerable areas, with a view towards withdraw or relief by conventional forces in relatively short order. It was not a matter of their lack of ability to adapt to the brutal, cave-busting tactics of the late-war years – consider the success of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines at Guam and Okinawa – but merely that, outfitted as Raider battalions, they were not designed for such missions. Bairoko was ample demonstration of this fact; the Raiders there met their only defeat. The very fact that the Raiders advanced as far as they did at Bairoko bears testimony to their resourcefulness, teamwork, and courage. Hand grenades and small arms and 60mm mortars could only go so far against the “jungle Maginot lines” the Marines began encountering from 1943 onward.<sup>452</sup> Marine tactics began calling for automatic weapons to provide covering fire for a heavily-armed assault or demolition platoon to advance on bunkers with high explosives and flamethrowers, supplemented by artillery or tank support whenever possible – tactics the exact opposite of what the Raiders were trained and equipped to do.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Excerpt from Nimitz’ famous remark that, “Among the Americans who served on Iwo [Jima] Island uncommon valor was a common virtue.” Quoted in George W. Garand and Truman R. Strobbridge, *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, vol. 4, *Western Pacific Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1971), 712.

<sup>452</sup> “How to Take a Pillbox,” *Leatherneck* 27, no. 7 (June 1944): 25.

<sup>453</sup> The Raiders are given due tribute in the official Marine Corps history of the war: “the seven-hour attack by men armed with only grenades, rifles, and light machine guns against an enemy of near equal strength barricaded in heavily fortified bunkers stands as one of the finest examples of personal courage in Marine annals. It is to the raiders’ credit that victory over these overwhelming odds was at one point very nearly in their grasp.” Shaw and Kane, *History of Marine Corps Operations*, vol. 2, *Isolation of Rabaul*, 147. “How to Take a Pillbox,” 24-27.

Marine historian Joseph Alexander suggests that the root cause of the Raiders' demise was the rapid technological advancement during the war, identifying the commissioning of the Navy's first fast carrier, the *USS Essex*, on December 31, 1942, as the beginning of obsolescence for the Raiders.<sup>454</sup> His point is compelling: the significant changes in technology and tactics simply outran the need for special operations battalions. Similarly, Oscar Peatross used the different but complementary positions on a football team as a fitting analogy: "To me, it seemed nothing less than foolhardy to downgrade the Raiders; to misapply us as regular infantry, to use wide receivers as linemen just because a moment had arrived in the war when finesse was not needed."<sup>455</sup> By early 1944, the Raiders found themselves specialists without a mission.

In addition to adapting to its changing missions, the Corps was also short of experienced personnel. One of Commandant Vandegrift's most pressing needs was to secure enough Marines to fill out the divisions of the burgeoning Corps, a task which fell to Gerald Thomas, Director of Plans and Policies. With the addition of so many young, green Marines, the Corps was also faced with a serious lack of seasoned leaders, a fact Vandegrift well recognized. The Raiders provided not only a source of personnel, consisting of some of the best personnel in the Corps, but a ready-made unit from which a new infantry regiment could quickly be fielded. Both Vandegrift and Thomas, long-time veterans of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, certainly recalled Edson's aggressive recruiting of the best and brightest from the ranks of the fledgling division at the war's outset. Later, during Thomas' tenure as Vandegrift's Chief of Staff at I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC) in 1943, Thomas came to the conclusion that IMAC simply lacked enough

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<sup>454</sup> Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 236; Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*, 39-40.

<sup>455</sup> "If we were to be employed in the assault [on Bougainville], then we should be armed accordingly and not expected to use manpower to compensate for our lack of firepower." Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 237.

suitable missions for specialists, resulting in a misapplication of the considerable talent in those battalions.<sup>456</sup> Vandegrift quickly came to share Thomas' position, finding that the Marine rosters in the Southwest Pacific were "a little over stock [*sic*] with specialists and would be glad if our replacements . . . could be only plain, ordinary Marines – no specialists included."<sup>457</sup>

After assuming the office of Commandant in January 1944, Vandegrift "had to find the people to bring our veteran units up to strength and to provide replacements for the anticipated casualties. We also had to activate new units if we were to fulfill our tasks—and this was very difficult in view of our personnel ceiling."<sup>458</sup> The Marine Corps of 1944 was rapidly approaching peak strength; four divisions were operating in early 1944, with a fifth and even sixth in the offing. The unprecedented growth of the Corps had been met with ever-increasing suspicion by the U.S Army. Though the Joint Chiefs of Staff did approve some increases to the manpower ceiling of the Corps, the new Commandant would mostly have to make do with the parameters he had. Vandegrift faced the reality that "to fulfill such obligations luxuries had to go."<sup>459</sup> With personnel at

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<sup>456</sup> I Marine Amphibious Corps, a direct result of Holcomb's visit to Guadalcanal, was created specifically to remedy the problems in Navy and Marine Corps command relations in the South Pacific by incorporating all Marine ground units, logistics, and administration under a single command. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 371.

<sup>457</sup> Vandegrift to Holcomb, 14 April 1943, Holcomb Collection, MCUA. Vandegrift lamented that "we do have to spread the few experienced officers that we have rather thinly. It appalls me when I think that we have expanded from 1360 officers in 1939 to the 28,000 odd officers we now have. That is very little leaven to lift the whole mass." Vandegrift to H.M. Smith, 28 February 1944, Vandegrift Collection, MCUA. Vandegrift wrote in his memoir that "Edson's levy against our division, coming at such a critical time, annoyed the devil out of me, but there wasn't one earthly thing I could do about it." Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*, 100. Thomas believed that the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders were "a sharp outfit, there wasn't any doubt about it. But they robbed the division." Thomas transcript, MCUA, 235. Millett, *In Many a Strife*, 219.

<sup>458</sup> Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*, 240.

<sup>459</sup> Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*, 240-241.

a premium, the Marine Corps began to have less room for specialized units in general.<sup>460</sup>

Thus, the rationale put forth by the higher echelons of Marine Corps leadership was firmly couched in a pragmatic view of the reality of Marine Corps' needs in the Pacific War in late 1943. It is difficult to argue with their logic. Though nothing in war is inevitable, the dissolution of the Raiders is not extraordinarily surprising in light of the changing nature of the Pacific War. The cold, hard logic behind the end of the Raiders is perhaps the most commonly cited reason for their short existence. Though some accounts of the Raiders do discuss various aspects of what can be loosely termed cultural reasons contributing to the end of the Raiders, few do so in the context of the conflict of interests inherent in overlapping elite cultures. Those observers who do delve into the cultural conflict that is intertwined throughout Raider history tend to focus heavily on the lightning rod figure of Evans Carlson and the reactionary impulses he generated.<sup>461</sup> While this is admittedly vital to the story, it is not the full story for it does not take into consideration the implicit and fundamental challenge that the Raiders had inadvertently created for the culture of the U.S. Marine Corps. The lack of exploration and discussion is unfortunate, as the Raider experience offers a case study in both the nature of elites within military organizations generally and in the nature of cultural boundaries in the Marine Corps.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> The limit imposed on the Corps by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1942 was 307,661; in 1944 it was raised to 478,000. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 371-372, 390, 404.

<sup>461</sup> Smith, *Carlson's Raid*, 210, 215; and Wukovits, *American Commando*, 266-269.

<sup>462</sup> The official *History of Marine Corps Operations* relies heavily on the pragmatic line of analysis, as does the definitive institutional history of the Corps, Allan Millett's *Semper Fidelis*. "By the summer of 1943, the siphoning off of trained men both individually and in battalion-sized organizations, as raider and paramarine battalions were activated, proved to be a severe drain on the Marine Corps as a whole and a luxury which it could not afford . . . additional manpower was needed for regular Marine Corps ground formations. The center of the argument here is that the weapons and tactics with which they fought were no different from those employed by regular Marine ground troops." Frank and Shaw, *History of Marine Corps Operations*, vol. 5, *Victory and Occupation*, 711. See also Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 406. Jon

## The Raiders and Cultural Conflict

The Raiders were admittedly in “the vortex of controversy” throughout their relatively brief service life.<sup>463</sup> The enduring controversy is attributable to the cultural tensions introduced by the Raiders as a special operations unit with a distinctly elitist subculture within the larger culture of the elite Marine Corps. By crafting an identity as the elite fighters of the Corps, an identity which they superimposed over their erstwhile most important identity as U.S. Marines, the Raiders – explicitly and implicitly – created a group identity that was not only enduring and powerful, but was also perceived as a potential threat by the leadership of the Marine Corps. The Raiders upset the cohesive narrative of Marine identity in two general ways. First, the Raider program was tainted in the eyes of many Marines by excessive external interference in the workings of the Corps. The Raider battalions threatened to give traction to efforts from outside the Corps to reduce the size and scale of the post-war Marine Corps to little more than small-scale detachments for garrison and raiding duties, thereby undoing all the gains towards becoming a full-fledged service branch that the Corps had made at such high cost in the Pacific. Secondly, by injecting a new, sub-identity as elites of the elites, the Raiders provoked fears of dividing loyalties, threatening to disturb the cohesion of the Corps. These cultural threats and divisions arguably played just as much a role in the end of the Raider project as the operational reasons, if not more so.

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Hoffman briefly mentions the Raiders’ elitism in his discussion of their disbandment, but focuses more on operation reasons. *Makin to Bougainville*, 40. Possibly the best explanation of the end of the Raiders is found in Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 301-310; however, he puts most of his emphasis on the operational rationales and does not fully explore some of the cultural issues he raises.

<sup>463</sup> Moskin, *Marine Corps Story*, 276.

## **External Interference: A Threat to the Marine Corps**

The Raiders faced an uphill battle for acceptance within Marine Corps culture from their origins. They were born amidst a swirl of outside influences. So many and so diverse were the sources of inspiration and motivation for the foundation of the Raider experiment that most Marine officers were not exactly sure from what quarters the concept originated. Of course, Edson and H.M. Smith laid much of the foundation of what the Raiders eventually became with their APD battalion experiments. But any number of individuals can be cited, with some justification, as the primary source of the Raider concept: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Frank Knox, William Donovan, Evans Carlson, James Roosevelt – not to mention the example set by the British Commandos and Carlson’s desire to mimic the Chinese 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army. The high-level interest by powerful individuals created the distinct impression in Marine ranks that the Raiders were forced upon the Marine Corps from the outside. Judging by the staunch resistance put up by Holcomb, backed by his ranking generals, this impression was not too far from the truth.<sup>464</sup>

The Raiders continued to attract unwanted interference from outside the Corps during the Solomons campaign, as seen in Turner’s attempt to unilaterally form “provisional raider battalions” from Marine units. Though Turner denied it, many

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<sup>464</sup> For example, Benis Frank mentioned to Gerald Thomas that many other senior Marine officers “felt that the Marine Corps had been pushed into this Raider business, in spite of itself, and that Carlson had been the influencing factor.” Benis Frank (interviewer), in Thomas transcript, MCUA, 233. Thomas himself thought that “it may be that [James] Roosevelt influenced it a little bit.” Thomas transcript, MCUA, 232. Victor Krulak, who was serving in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division when the Raiders were originally formed, said, “I know that Carlson was keen on the matter of lightly armed troops of this sort...But, just where the Raider idea had its first origin in the Marine Corps, I can’t say.” Krulak transcript, MCUA, 70. Omar Pfeiffer, on the other hand, said, “It is my understanding that Prime Minister Churchill was probably the real instigator of the formation of Raider Battalions in the Marine Corps...at one of the meetings with President Roosevelt, he sold him the idea and the Marine Corps had to suffer for it.” Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 195. Alan Shapley laid the blame on William Donovan. Shapely, transcript, MCUA, 82. Clearly, there was much confusion regarding the origins of the Raiders, even among those who served with them.



Marines felt that this was part and parcel of the on-going efforts to curtail the growth of fully independent Marine divisions by limiting the Corps to regimental or smaller units. The desire to prevent outside forces from pigeonholing the Marine Corps as a force of small, commando-style units, completely dependent on other services for support, was the primary motive for Holcomb's resistance to the Raider program from the outset. Vandegrift likewise recognized the need to fight for the preservation of the Corps' status as an independent service in the face of threats of postwar reduction back to their 1920s status as a small force of colonial infantry. Such fears were not unfounded; numerous efforts were made during the postwar reorganization of the defense establishment to reduce the size and strength of the Marine Corps.<sup>465</sup>

In the eyes of Marine leadership, the threat of external entanglements went beyond mere injury to the pride of the Corps, though that would be impermissible on by its own right. Rather, it was perceived that the Raiders were an existential threat to the evolution of the Marine Corps itself. This is ironic, for the men and officers who served in the Raider battalions most likely were completely unaware of the quandary their small, special operations battalions created in high places. In his trenchant analysis of the Raider experiment, John Gordon stresses the hidden existential threat to the growth of the Marine Corps as perhaps the most important motive for opposition from HQMC. The "most potent criticism of all," Gordon writes, "involved the very essence of amphibious

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<sup>465</sup> Such limitation of the Corps was indeed considered after the war's end, including proposals by the Army that the Marine Corps be limited to regiment-sized units only. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 404, 452, 456-457. In Marine Corps historiography, the years immediately following WWII are usually termed the "unification crisis," and are seen as a political battle as intense and life-threatening as any fought during the war. For the Marine Corps' perspective, see Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 445-474; for the Army's perspective, see Russell Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 485-495. Aaron O'Connell covers the unification crisis in terms of how it affected the Marine Corps narrative and how Marines successfully used their cultural appeal to secure victory in the halls of Congress, in *Underdogs*, 98-147.

doctrine.”<sup>466</sup>

Signified by the creation of the Fleet Marine Force in 1933, the Marine Corps had transformed itself into a task-organized, seaborne land army able to assault a hostile shore. Having at last acquired its own mission and role, relegated to the past was the old light infantry, police-force-for-the-Navy arrangement . . . . Rather than an adjunct to their carefully-evolved doctrine, it [the Raider concept] was seen as its very antithesis . . . in their eyes, the raiders represented a very dangerous departure indeed.<sup>467</sup>

In the minds of many Marines, always wary of attempts by outsiders to marginalize their Corps, the Raiders were fruit of a poisoned tree from the very beginning.<sup>468</sup>

### **Division of Loyalties**

**Opposition to Evans Carlson.** One commonly recognized example of the Raiders going against the Marine Corps grain is the suspicion aroused by Evans Carlson’s outspoken views and radical methods. Carlson is certainly one of the most enigmatic Marines in the annals of the Corps. He was seen as an eccentric by all, borderline traitorous by some. This “idealistic, romantic military adventurer,” with his overt questioning and restructuring of authority and tradition, and his advocacy of his own radical, unique brand of egalitarianism raised the ire of many fellow Marines.<sup>469</sup> Later Raider officers respected Carlson for his achievements, but found that “unfortunately a lot of the ideas he had were not in consonance with Marine Corps philosophy.”<sup>470</sup> Shapely, Carlson’s successor in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, certainly found his

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<sup>466</sup> Gordon, “An Experiment with Military Elitism,” 368-369.

<sup>467</sup> Gordon, “An Experiment with Military Elitism,” 369.

<sup>468</sup> This belief is illustrated in an exchange between Alan Shapely and the interviewer (Thomas Donnelly), in which the interviewer states that the Raider concept as advanced by Donovan and Franklin Roosevelt was “Another threat to the survival of the Marine Corps.” Shapely is quick to affirm, “Yes, it was.” Shapely transcript, MCUA, 82.

<sup>469</sup> Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 234.

<sup>470</sup> Banks transcript, MCUA, 20.

methods disagreeable and abandoned most of them immediately.<sup>471</sup>

Of course, Carlson was not without friends among Marine officers. Early in his career, famed Marine Smedley D. Butler had developed a high opinion of Carlson, and the equally legendary Lewis “Chesty” Puller allegedly counted Carlson as an old friend. Merrill Twining (Vandegrift’s Assistant Operations Officer at Guadalcanal) thought Carlson a “most remarkable man” and found “little reason to believe that Carlson carried out his radical leadership philosophy to any extreme degree.”<sup>472</sup> Vandegrift had known Carlson for many years and appears to have had a cordial relationship with him. James Roosevelt remained dedicated to him, frequently arguing in later years that, “The man had been a patriot, regardless of his politics.”<sup>473</sup> Then-Colonel (later Commandant) David Shoup based his assessment on Carlson’s proven courage rather than any alleged political views, bluntly stating, “He [Carlson] may have been ‘Red,’ but he wasn’t yellow.”<sup>474</sup>

By war’s end, however, Carlson’s detractors outnumbered his friends. Most damning in the eyes of the majority of Marines was his outspoken support of Mao’s

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<sup>471</sup> F.D. Beans said that “there is no doubt he had different ideas, a different concept than any Marine I know.” F.D. Beans, Oral History Interview Transcript (hereinafter Beans transcript), MCUA, 70; while Charles Banks characterized him as “a nonconformist.” Banks transcript, MCUA, 21.

<sup>472</sup> Twining, *No Bended Knee*, 140-141. Like Thomas, Twining continued to hold influential staff positions under Vandegrift, including at IMAC and HQMC. See Karl Schuon, *U.S. Marine Corps Biographical Dictionary: The Corps’ Fighting Men, What They Did, Where They Served* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1963), 223-224.

<sup>473</sup> Roosevelt and Libby, *My Parents*, 277; Roosevelt also gives a passionate defense against charges of Carlson’s supposed Communist sympathies in “Evans Carlson: A Personal Memoir,” 386-392.

<sup>474</sup> Quoted in Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 424. Smedley Butler wrote to Carlson in 1926, “You always do the right thing . . . I want to congratulate you again and thank you for your fine work. You are a ‘hell’ of a fine officer.” Excerpt quoted in Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 134. Author Hans Schmidt credits Butler with being the direct predecessor to Carlson’s Gung Ho style. *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 132. According to Peatross, Chesty Puller made a visit to the Raider camp at one point during their Long Patrol on Guadalcanal specifically to catch up with Carlson. *Bless ‘Em All*, 157. It seems that Carlson had been generally well-thought of throughout the Corps prior to his sojourn with the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army. Frank, “Comment,” 395. Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 134. George Smith cites Vandegrift as writing to Carlson after the war, in regard to his planned run for Senate, “I imagine you will have rather stiff competition in California, but personally I wish you all the luck in the world.” *Carlson’s Raid*, 217.

Chinese Communists, which placed him publically at odds with the stated policy of the U.S. government. Carlson gladly acknowledged receiving inspiration for his Gung Ho method from Mao's Communists during his trek with the 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army. As Benis Frank, former chief historian of the Marine Corps History & Museums Division, put it once, many Marines "believed that, if Carlson was not a card-carrying Communist, he had many Communist or leftish leanings."<sup>475</sup> Before he ever joined the Raiders as a young lieutenant, Oscar Peatross recalls being advised "'Don't touch him [Carlson] with a 10-foot pole.'"<sup>476</sup> Even those otherwise sympathetic to Carlson admitted that "He was pretty much a communist."<sup>477</sup> Herbert Merillat, a combat correspondent on Guadalcanal, wrote that "Within the Corps he was widely regarded as an able officer but also a romantic or a 'pinko,' or both. At the very least he was seen as a friend of President Roosevelt (as indeed he was) in an officer corps not noted for New Deal tendencies."<sup>478</sup> Ultimately, Carlson's unorthodox methods, political dalliances with the far left, and almost quixotic fixation with ethical indoctrination, set him at odds with many in the Corps.

Others found as much fault with his conduct as CO of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion as they did with his political advocacy. Merritt Edson, for one, had little use for Carlson and did not care to hide it. He viewed Carlson's resignation and subsequent re-joining of the Corps in the pre-war years as no less than traitorous to the Corps and apparently never forgave Carlson for his rude treatment of the men of Able Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion, in February 1942. His few interactions with Carlson during the war ranged from cool

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<sup>475</sup> Frank, "Comment," 395. With tongue-in-cheek, Frank adds, "Besides, he thought a lot, and that's bad; and he wrote books that were actually published, and that's even worse!"

<sup>476</sup> Peatross transcript, MCUA, 76.

<sup>477</sup> Beans transcript, MCUA, 70.

<sup>478</sup> Herbert Christian Merillat, *Guadalcanal Remembered* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1982), 247.

receptions to outright anger at Carlson's tendency to steal the media spotlight. The Makin Raid, for all its heralding in the popular press, was a black mark on Carlson for the remainder of his career. Nimitz' opinion of Carlson was certainly diminished after Makin, and his report on the raid, complete with deliberate censure of Carlson, was copied directly to the Commandant. R.D. Heinl of the Marine Corps' History Division asserted that "among the few who learned the full story, the operation served to place a chill on the raider program . . . the raider concept, perhaps unfairly, never quite lived down Makin."<sup>479</sup> Benis Frank, founder of the oral history program of the History Division, found over the course of his numerous interviews that Makin "raised some real questions and doubts about Carlson's leadership abilities."<sup>480</sup>

More importantly, those in positions of great influence in the Marine Corps did not care much for Carlson or his Gung Ho Raider schemes. Commandant Holcomb was among those who distrusted the Gung Ho method. According to historian David Ulbrich, "The raider concept rankled Holcomb even after the units were formed, and the maverick Carlson particularly irritated him."<sup>481</sup> Another influential officer who distrusted Carlson

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<sup>479</sup> Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, 357-358.

<sup>480</sup> Frank, "Comments," 395. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders returned from the Long Patrol, Edson "gave Carlson a cool reception but provided a hearty welcome to those men who had served in his original Company A before their transfer." Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 230. Twining relates a "bizarre occurrence" in which he was to orchestrate a meeting between Edson and Carlson on Guadalcanal to get their opinions on the fire-team concept. Though both Raider leaders were present, they apparently did not even acknowledge each other's presence at the three-man meeting, leaving Twining "in the middle in more ways than one." *No Bended Knee*, 145. Edson later wrote an angry letter to the editor of the *Marine Corps Gazette* after it had run a photo of Edson, Carlson, and Shoup with the heading "leaders of the assault," objecting in strong terms that Carlson was only an observer and should not have been credited with more than that. Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 267. See discussion of Nimitz' reaction to the Makin raid, and the effects of Nimitz' report, in Chapter 4.

<sup>481</sup> Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory*, 125. Holcomb apparently had distrusted Carlson for some years, dating back to their service in China. Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory*, 51-52. Ulbrich notes that this observation is based on notes Heinl took during a post-war interview with Holcomb, and that "both interviewer and interviewee shared biases against Evans Carlson." *Preparing for Victory*, 125. This raises an interesting point, for Heinl was very influential in writing Marine Corps history, and thus his sentiments had potential to warp post-war impressions of Carlson. Consider, for example, Benis Frank's oral history interview with Oscar Peatross in 1973, in which Frank states that during the writing of *History of Marine Corps*

immensely was Col. Omar Pfeiffer. Though not one of the better-known Marines of World War II, he served in positions of great influence: from April 1941 to June 1943, he was the Assistant War Plans officer on Nimitz' (CINCPAC) staff, and served the remainder of the war on King's (COMINCH – CNO) staff in the planning section. As the Marine representative on the staffs of Nimitz and later King, Pfeiffer was certainly in position to know what was going on, and he had little hesitation about lending his input on matters related to the Raiders. Pfeiffer made no pretense about his feelings on Carlson and his methods: "his organization [the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders] was imbued with purely and simply communist doctrine and procedure . . . . Whenever I hear those words [Gung Ho], I am almost nauseated. It is a Chinese communist slogan."<sup>482</sup> Pfeiffer was adamant in his opposition to Carlson and his Raiders, and recommended to Commandant Holcomb directly that the Raider concept be abandoned.<sup>483</sup>

**Carlson's Post-War Career.** Carlson most enduring legacy is for his time in command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion – Carlson's Raiders. When he was passed up for command of the new 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Regiment in spring 1943, he "suffered deep disappointment."<sup>484</sup> Promotion to executive officer of the regiment was in truth a "double blow" to Carlson, as he lost his own battalion but was denied command of the

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*Operations*, "Bob Heintz as historical officer was the one who sequestered the story [Makin Raid] and said it shouldn't be put in and now he's taken the other view that the Marine Corps had nothing to hide and should tell it." Peatross transcript, MCUA, 77.

<sup>482</sup> Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 198-199.

<sup>483</sup> Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 199. Pfeiffer often served as "more-or-less a go-between" for Vandegrift and Holcomb and Navy Admirals, especially R.K. Turner. George B. Clark, *United States Marine Corps Generals of World War II: A Biographical Dictionary* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2008), 110. Pfeiffer also played a key role in diffusing Admiral Turner's scheme to form provision raider battalions, personally preparing Nimitz' forwarding of the message with disapproval. Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 193; Updegraff, *Special Marine Corps Units*, 14-17. Vandegrift, for one, held him in high regard, saying with approval that Pfeiffer "knew his subjects and practically lived and ate the job." Vandegrift to Holcomb, 26 June 1943, Holcomb Collection, MCUA.

<sup>484</sup> Roosevelt, *My Parents*, 276.

regiment.<sup>485</sup> Not long after his promotion, Carlson had to be evacuated to the states because of acute malaria. He never again served in independent command. He spent the summer of 1943 attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division in California as a staff officer while he recovered; during which time he also, with Commandant Holcomb's approval, served as military advisor on the production set of the movie *Gung Ho*. True to form, Carlson chafed at being stateside while the war continued unabated, and wrote Holcomb volunteering for combat duty again; he was assigned to the new 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division. Still feeling "like a duck out of water" to be in the U.S. while the Raiders fought on New Georgia, Carlson volunteered to go along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division to Tarawa in November 1943 as an observer.<sup>486</sup> He served admirably there, occasionally acting as a messenger for Col. Shoup. He served as an assistant planning officer with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division during their assault on Saipan. Carlson suffered severe injuries from enemy machine gun fire there while attempting to rescue a wounded Marine. His wounds and the forthcoming end of the war led Carlson to retire officially on July 1, 1946, with promotion to Brigadier General. Even before formally retiring he began actively participating in groups, notably the American Veterans Committee, dedicated to "create a postwar America that lived up to the ideals men had fought and died for."<sup>487</sup> His intention of a run for U.S. Senator in California was halted prematurely by a heart attack in December 1945. Limited to a more restful routine while recovering, Carlson still granted numerous interviews to Michael Blankfort for what eventually became his "authorized" biography, *The Big Yankee*. Sadly, this proved to be the final battle for the rugged China Marine. Carlson never regained his health, and died in June 1947 of

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<sup>485</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 174.

<sup>486</sup> Carlson to H. Merillat, 5 August 1943, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>487</sup> Zimmerman, "Military Missionary," 261.

complications from cerebral thrombosis.<sup>488</sup>

As in life, so in his death Carlson remained controversial. The government apparently denied his widow, Peggy, the funds necessary to transport his body to Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. James Roosevelt intervened to prevent this indignity by personally raising the funds to pay for transportation. Carlson received a funeral with full military honors at Arlington. Notably absent from the ceremony was Merritt Edson, who declined a request to chair a memorial service in Carlson's honor. However, Commandant Vandegrift attended the service and was "greatly moved at the funeral," according to Carlson's son and fellow Marine Raider, Evans Jr.<sup>489</sup> But even before his death, Carlson's prior association with the Chinese Communists, combined with his postwar advocacy of ending U.S. support for Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist government in favor of Mao's Communist movement, had aroused opposition even for such a favored war hero as Carlson of the Raiders. As early as September 1946, *Time* magazine leveled the accusation that Carlson had "long been an apostle of Communistic causes and Communist-fringe groups."<sup>490</sup> This drew Carlson's protest: "I am not a member of the Communist Party, nor am I an apostle for Communist causes . . . I am a free American citizen who has spent over 30 years in the armed services fighting in defense of the right of American citizens to enjoy life, liberty, and the

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<sup>488</sup> Smith, *Carlson's Raid*, 210-215; Holcomb to Carlson, 3 July 1943, Carlson Collection, MCUA; Carlson to Holcomb, 7 July 1943, and Holcomb's reply of 14 July 1943, Carlson Collection, MCUA; Alexander, *Utmost Savagery*, 137-138, 201-205; Wukovits, *American Commando*, 268; "Brig. Gen. Evans Fordyce Carlson," Carlson File, HDRB; Zimmerman, "Military Missionary," 262.

<sup>489</sup> Smith, *Carlson's Raid*, 219. On Evans Carlson, Jr., joining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion over his father's repeated objections, see Wukovits, *American Commando*, 54-55. It was rumored later that Vandegrift had to order the officers at HQMC to go in order to ensure their attendance – a rumor which Benis Frank found rather ridiculous. Frank, "Comment," 397.

<sup>490</sup> "Win the Peace for Whom?" *Time*, September 16, 1946.



pursuit of happiness and the four freedoms [as set forth by Franklin D. Roosevelt].”<sup>491</sup>

During the anti-Communist craze of the postwar years, Carlson’s name appeared on publicized lists of Communist sympathizers and Senator Joseph McCarthy even accused him posthumously of being a disciple of Mao. Sadly, had he survived to continue his political activism, it is quite possible that his reputation as Carlson the Raider Marine may very well have been tarnished by the outcry against Carlson the Chinese Communist sympathizer.<sup>492</sup>

On the matter of Carlson’s political beliefs, Kenneth Shewmaker argues quite persuasively that “to accuse a man like Evans Carlson of being a Communist is presumptuous. He was anything but a Marxist.”<sup>493</sup> Carlson possessed no commitment to the political ideology or philosophy of Marx, Lenin, or even Mao for that matter. Instead, he projected his own beliefs, shaped by his upbringing as the son of a Congregationalist minister in New England, onto the Chinese, seeing in them only what he wanted to and naively ignoring the rest – “a misjudgment that was especially

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<sup>491</sup> Carlson, letter to the editor, *Time*, October 7, 1946.

<sup>492</sup> Roosevelt and Libby, *My Parents*, 277. Advocates for Carlson claimed that the “though he was buried with military honors at Arlington Cemetery, it was managed almost as if by stealth . . . A glorious hero was laid to rest as though to oblivion.” R.W. Swing, “The Man Who Will Become a Legend,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, October 11, 1947, 26-27. Swing’s article prompted an angry letter from R.D. Heinl to the editor, retorting that “If the Arlington burial of a Marine general officer, attended by a provisional regiment of Marines and sailors, the United States Marine Band, and the firing of minute-guns, can be considered ‘stealthy,’ I wish I could ascertain Mr. Swing’s definition of ostentation.” Heinl, letter to the editor, *Saturday Review of Literature*, held in Carlson File, HDRB. Edson’s stance was that, “I have never been nor am I now an ardent admirer of General Carlson’s. Although I respected his bravery as an individual, I have never agreed with the doctrines and policies which he espoused.” Quoted in Hoffman, *Once a Legend*, 400. Drew Pearson, “Budenz’ Red List Said to Include Famed U.S. Marine Hero Carlson,” *Atlanta Journal*, May 4, 1950; and “Carlson of ‘Raiders’ Named Commie in Budenz Testimony,” *Washington D.C. Times Herald*, July 18, 1950; both held in Carlson File, HDRB. Joseph R. McCarthy attempted to cast suspicion on Carlson by posthumously painting him as a Communist: “I would remind the reader that [Joseph] Stilwell and Carlson are the Communist heroes of our war in the Far East, that both were and are honored in the *Daily Worker* and throughout the Communist movement in this country.” *America’s Retreat from Victory: The Story of George Catlett Marshall* (1952; repr. Belmont, Massachusetts: Robert Welch, 1961), 38.

<sup>493</sup> Shewmaker, “American Liberal Dream,” 214.

commonplace in the era of the New Deal.”<sup>494</sup> Carlson lacked a formal education and had never been much interested in abstract political philosophies at all. He merely believed that he had found, at long last, a physical manifestation of the ideals that he had long nurtured. Carlson’s ideals represented a strange collusion of New England puritanism, egalitarianism, and the hopeful optimism represented by his hero, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the New Deal – generously seasoned with transcendental poets like Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson. An odd mixture, to be sure, but hardly the makings of a Marxist or Maoist. Even his rival Omar Pfeiffer conceded that Carlson was unique: after observing Carlson’s powerful eulogy to the Raiders who fell on Makin, Pfeiffer could only remark that, “the memorial service presided over by Colonel Carlson, was a most solemn and impressive affair. My opinion, which may be called for or uncalled for, is that he missed his calling; he should have been a chaplain.”<sup>495</sup>

**Carlson and the Cult of Personality.** Part of the distrust of Carlson stemmed from fear of a growing cult of personality within the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders. Carlson’s magnetism and charisma endeared him to his Raiders in a highly personal manner. His egalitarian emphasis on the enlisted man, even to the point of allowing open discussion of the merits of an officer’s orders or plan of battle, caused many young Raider Marines to personally “buy in” to the battalion. Marine combat correspondent Jim Lucas, who himself fell rapidly under Carlson’s charm to become “a rabid Carlson fan,” closely observed the

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<sup>494</sup> “Americans tend to view other societies in terms of their own self-image . . . Carlson projected onto an Asian society Western conceptions of what is good and right.” Shewmaker, “American Liberal Dream,” 215.

<sup>495</sup> Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 198. Said James Roosevelt, “Carlson had acquired an idealistic view of Mao which may have been and was considered by many to be naïve.” Roosevelt points out that his reading selections did not include any political works at all, but volumes such as *The Education of Henry Adams* and *One Hundred and One Famous Poems*: “I simply mention this because it is an indication of the breadth and difference that made up this rather amazing man.” Roosevelt, “Evans Carlson,” 391.

“esteem in which Carlson was held by his men.”<sup>496</sup> During training after Guadalcanal, Carlson was swept off his feet on a slippery submarine deck by a large wave. Grabbing him, a Raider yelled out “God-damn it, colonel, stand clear. What would become of us if anything happened to you?”<sup>497</sup> Many of his Raiders took Carlson’s promotion to regimental executive officer as a personal loss: “On shore, we learned that Colonel Carlson had been promoted . . . I stumbled with them [the Raiders] up the beach, tears in their eyes, and heard them curse the fate that had robbed them of their old man. I sat in their tents and heard them cry like babies.”<sup>498</sup> Lucas put it even more bluntly in a press release he prepared about his time with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders: “The men literally worship ‘the old man.’”<sup>499</sup> Oscar Peatross, an officer in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, wrote that Carlson “was a charismatic leader with a strong following, especially among the younger enlisted men, many of whom adored him. This broad base of enthusiastic, even zealous supporters enable him to achieve his objectives . . . in spite of the rejection of his egalitarian philosophy by many of his officers and noncommissioned officers.”<sup>500</sup> In this manner Carlson garnered a great deal of personal loyalty and affection from his Raiders – and they truly were *his* Raiders.

While his practices endeared him to younger Marines, more experienced NCOs and officers often did not share that consensus. From their perspective, Carlson’s Gung Ho meetings had the net result of undermining authority and corroding discipline.

Opponents of Carlson claimed that Carlson undermined the authority of his leaders so

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<sup>496</sup> Lucas, *Combat Correspondent*, 99, 103.

<sup>497</sup> Lucas, *Combat Correspondent*, 103.

<sup>498</sup> Lucas, *Combat Correspondent*, 105.

<sup>499</sup> Lucas, unpub. article, n.d. [ca. 1943], Carlson Collection, MCUA. It is worth noting that attached to Lucas’ draft is a note from a Division of Public Relations staff officer, with the instruction, “better keep this on ice.”

<sup>500</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 174.

badly that “There could be no discipline and no moral[e], in such an organization.”<sup>501</sup>

Even Peatross, one of Carlson’s supporters, admitted later that the Gung Ho method was frequently exploited by enlisted men: “Once it became common knowledge in the battalion that he deemed it a mortal sin for an officer to give an order that was misunderstood, the men naturally sought to turn this to their advantage. It became not at all uncommon for a malefactor, brought on the carpet for some sin of omission or commission, to offer in extenuation ‘Sir, I didn’t understand the order,’ and thereby divert the colonel’s wrath onto the officer accuser.”<sup>502</sup> Charles Lamb, a career Marine and Sergeant Major (later Lieutenant) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders, attended only the first Gung Ho meeting and left in disgust. He later wrote that,

I was at that time, and will always be, proud of being a Marine and could not understand or digest Carlson’s double talk and ridicule of the Marine Corps and its methods. To the majority of the men, this was the start of the hero worship they developed for him. He told them that they were pioneers, that they were heroes, and that they were the best fighters in the world. They believed him.<sup>503</sup>

Other Marine officers outside the Raiders fostered the suspicion that Carlson was building a personality cult as well, a suspicion that grew stronger with each additional media glorification of Carlson and his Raiders. Omar Pfeiffer, for example, in postwar discussion of his opposition to the Raider idea put strong emphasis on his belief that a personality cult was building up around Carlson. Carlson was, in Pfeiffer’s vocal opinion, “building a personal organization that only he could command and, and my first

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<sup>501</sup> “When a man was put on report by an officer, and there was no other witnesses, as Colonel Carlson heard the case he would end by saying, ‘One man’s word is as good as another with me; case dismissed.’ There could be no discipline and no moral[e], in such an organization.” Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 199.

<sup>502</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 66.

<sup>503</sup> Lamb further accused Carlson of exploiting the Raider battalion for the opportunity to gain public acclaim for his ideas. Lamb “Comments on the Raid on Makin Island,” 29 August 1956, Carlson Collection, MCUA, p.4, 10.

opportunity, I so informed the Commandant.”<sup>504</sup> Even friends of Carlson had to admit that “Carlson’s system would never be effective on a service-wide scale for the simple reason that there are not enough Carlsons.”<sup>505</sup>

The anti-Carlson sentiments are commonly reflected in writings on the Raiders, especially given the fact that the entire Raider concept, fairly or not, is so closely associated with Carlson. This illustrates the reactions of men dedicated to continuing the Marine Corps culture to an individual who introduced ideas and practices that were out of step with that culture. In this sense, Carlson can justly be considered a “military missionary” – or perhaps more aptly, a military heretic. One recent study suggests that the Marine Corps culture can be best understood as a civil religion. If the Marine Corps culture is viewed in terms of civil religion, Carlson was indeed akin to a heretic: he introduced non-canonical “doctrines” into the religion of the Corps, only to find that the orthodoxy effectively resisted his endeavors. Yet merely identifying Carlson’s ill-favor with some in powerful circles does not fully explain the predicament that the Raiders inadvertently created for the Marine Corps. If Carlson himself were the only problem, why did the anti-Raider sentiment continue to gather momentum throughout 1943, well after Carlson’s evacuation? Other factors were at work as well, causing the Raiders to be seen as a liability to attempts to foster the Marine Corps image.<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 199, 233.

<sup>505</sup> Twining, *No Bended Knee*, 141. It is interesting to note that while Thomas did not discuss Carlson directly in his oral history interview, he did state his disapproval collecting of “the ablest officers in the Marine Corps” in the Defense Battalions – they “Built an empire...that was a give deal at one time, but later it turned out to be a dead game.” Thomas transcript, MCUA, 330-331. While not directly related to Carlson, this does indicate Thomas’ generally negative opinion towards personal “empire building,” so to speak.

<sup>506</sup> The phrase is from the title of Zimmerman, “Military Missionary.” Aaron O’Connell argues for understanding Marine Corps culture in terms of a religious order in *Underdogs*, 39-42.

## Favoritism

The favored treatment accorded to the Raiders in matters of personnel and equipment did not endear them to the rest of the Corps. This had been true from the initial organization of Raider battalions. By forming a special operations force based on double-volunteers, the Raiders ensured they would be going into battle with the cream of the crop. This opened them up to the legitimate charge that they were concentrating the best talent in small organizations at the expense of the Corps. One of the foremost complaints leveled against the Raiders was their coopting of prime personnel at a time when they were desperately needed. This criticism was not unique to the Raiders. The view that special units drain the best and brightest personnel away from the general service branches of a military organization was common throughout both the American and British militaries of the day. Overconcentration of the ablest men in select units prompted British Field Marshal Sir William Slim's warning that can "lower the quality of the rest of the army, especially of the infantry, not only by skimming the cream off it, but by encouraging the idea that certain of the normal operations of war were so difficult that only specially equipped *corps d'elite* could be expected to undertake them."<sup>507</sup> The accusation that special operations and military elite units are "skimming the cream of the crop," thereby lowering the quality of the remainder of the military establishment, was commonly leveled at the special operations units, from World War II to the present day.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> William Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (New York: David McKay, 1961), 455.

<sup>508</sup> Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 53-58; Horn, "Love 'Em or Hate 'Em," 36; Horn and Balasevicius, *Casting Light on the Shadows*, 120-121. Victor Krulak, who commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Battalion, had some insightful comments on the issue of "cream of the crop." The Parachute battalions had a parallel experience with the Raiders (and served alongside them on several occasions, including at Edson's Ridge and Bougainville), and thus Krulak's comments are noteworthy: "The men [paramarines] were of the very highest quality. They exemplified that very dissatisfaction which many of the senior officers held . . . that

The perception of the Raiders as favored sons did not get better over time. Charles Banks found that “there was a lot of criticism of the Raiders because a lot of people were jealous,” especially after he got first pick of replacement officers for his 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders after New Georgia.<sup>509</sup> The Raiders fueled their perception as favored sons with their continued first priority on the newest equipment. Joseph Alexander relates that when the Corps adopted camouflaged uniforms and helmet covers (the famous “duck hunter” pattern), “The Raiders and parachutists received the first shipments of these distinctive field uniforms and wore them with an arrogance that grated on the regular units.”<sup>510</sup> Raider Oscar Peatross corroborates this sentiment; he noticed that there was a “rising level of resentment” among the officers of IMAC staff before the Bougainville landings.<sup>511</sup> Resentment over special treatment became particularly acute through 1943 as the Raiders were employed almost exclusively as light infantry rather than special operations troops. With the Raiders frequently performing the same missions and fighting alongside Marine infantry battalions, notably at Bougainville, there seemed to be scant justification for their continued favored status.

Another area where the Raiders certainly seemed to receive preferential treatment was in publicity. The Raiders, similar to the British Commandos early in the war, served to bolster morale on the home front. Stories of their combat exploits were eagerly consumed by Americans desperate for any break from the dismal news of 1941-1942, and

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we were skimming the cream off the Marine Corps by double volunteers. I’ve never seen such wonderful Marines. They were brave; they were certainly dedicated. They had certain deficiencies in the area of discipline and obedience. They’d been given the idea that they were something in the way of superior beings and this caused some trouble. We gradually got them under control.” Krulak transcript, MCUA, 76.  
<sup>509</sup> “Naturally this made other people jealous. And we got some damn fine guys as a result.” Banks transcript, MCUA, 21.

<sup>510</sup> Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 243.

<sup>511</sup> Try though he may, he could not convince any of the staff officers that the Raiders were legitimately different than any regular Marine infantry battalion, for “each of them had already made up his mind: the Raiders were superfluous and should be disbanded.” Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 236-237.

they continued to hold the public's attention. The desperate actions of Edson's 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders made for their share of good copy as well, particularly their seizure of Tulagi and defense of Edson's Ridge. The service of the President's son in "the most lethal, self-sufficient, swift-striking force in military history" garnered plenty of attention.<sup>512</sup>

Even more pronounced was the emphasis on Carlson himself, whose gregariousness and colorful personality made him a much more interesting subject than the more reserved Edson. Carlson boasted that "The news of Makin spread our doctrines around the world, inspiring others to follow our example."<sup>513</sup> This was facilitated by the media's fascination with him, and his reciprocal amenability towards the media's attention. Carlson made the pitch for the Gung Ho method every time he had a chance.<sup>514</sup> The magazine *PM* featured Carlson on its cover, as did the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*.<sup>515</sup> He was featured prominently in articles for such widely-read magazines as *Reader's Digest* and *Life*.<sup>516</sup> Wartime books by correspondents Robert Sherrod and Jim Lucas covered Carlson and his Gung Ho philosophy in glowing terms.<sup>517</sup> And of course, he was portrayed by popular leading man Randolph Scott in the movie *Gung Ho*. Carlson became, in the words of Jim Lucas, "almost a legend . . . stories about him were told in

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<sup>512</sup> "Jim Roosevelt's Raider School Training Masters of Mayhem," February 23, 1943, held in James Roosevelt File, HDRB. Charles Hurd, "Marines on Tulagi," *New York Times*, August 11, 1942; Robert C. Miller, "Tulagi Won in 48 Hours; T.N.T. Buried Foes in Caves," *New York Times*, August 29, 1942; Hanson W. Baldwin, "Solomons Action Develops Into Battle for South Pacific," *New York Times*, September 27, 1942; and William McKennan and Sidney Whipple, "The Battle of Bloody Hill," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 20, 1943.

<sup>513</sup> Carlson, "Address of Commanding Officer . . ." Carlson Collection, MCUA, p. 4.

<sup>514</sup> For one example among many, see Isabel McDonald, "He Took Caste System Out of Marines," *NY Evening Post*, December 26, 1945, held in Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>515</sup> Wesley Price, "Meet Raider Carlson," *PM's Sunday Picture News*, January 2, 1944, held in Raiders: Articles File, HDRB; Frank Hughes, "Carlson of the Marines," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, February 18, 1945, held in Carlson File, HDRB.

<sup>516</sup> Lucien Hubbard, "Colonel Carlson and His Gung Ho Raiders," *Readers Digest* 43, no. 260 (December 1943): 63-68; Don Burke, "Carlson of the Raiders," *Life*, September 20, 1943, held in Raiders: Articles File, HDRB.

<sup>517</sup> Sherrod, *Tarawa*, 35-38; Lucas, *Combat Correspondent*, 98-106.



every port and printed in every newspaper.”<sup>518</sup> Media attention – and the resultant controversy – continued even after his death with the publication of Michael Blankfort’s *The Big Yankee*. R.W. Swing used his review of that book as an opportunity to lionize Carlson. Both Blankfort’s book and Swing’s article drew irate responses from Marines, but the fact remains that Carlson continued to receive the hero’s treatment throughout the war and for the first few years following.<sup>519</sup>

The common theme of elitism is readily apparent throughout the media coverage of the Raiders. Overly exaggerated, colorful language is employed in an attempt to make the Raiders out to be almost super-human fighters, the best of the best. The tone struck in a press release during the fighting on Guadalcanal is typical:

[T]he roots of the answer [as to why the Marines were prevailing on Guadalcanal] are to be found in a heritage handed down through generations of fighting men serving in the oldest and proudest branch of America’s armed forces . . . This heritage is a flaming esprit de corps no foe ever has extinguished . . . Armed with this heritage . . . the United States Marine today proudly feels that his service is the fist of the Nation’s striking arm. But if this is true, then the Marine Raiders are the brass knuckles on that might fist. For the Raiders stand apart as fighting men.<sup>520</sup>

The author of this press release inadvertently highlights the underlying tension between the elitism of being a Marine and the extra helping of elitism that came with belonging to

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<sup>518</sup> Lucas, *Combat Correspondent*, 99.

<sup>519</sup> Blankfort’s accusations against the Marine Corps “brass” did not go unnoticed. The Director of the Division of Public Information, W.E. Riley, wrote a scathing letter to the publishers of *Big Yankee*, angrily pointing out that “Mr. Blankfort has seemingly distorted fact to support an allegation obviously designed to lead the reader through inference to the author’s own conclusion,” and demanding a correction be included in later editions. W.E. Riley to Little, Brown, and Company, June 12, 1947, in Carlson File, HDRB. R.W. Swing’s article, “The Man Who Will Become a Legend” in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, prompted R.D. Heinl to write an angry letter to the editor accusing Swing of using “weasel words” to create “an inaccurate and unfriendly atmosphere when he touches on the Marine Corps.” Heinl, letter to the editor, *Saturday Review of Literature*, n.d. [ca. October 1947], held in Carlson File, HDRB. David Shoup took it a step further and wrote to Swing personally, protesting that Swing had deliberately mischaracterized Carlson to make him seem more of a nonconformist than he was – “I fear that by the very words you intended to praise him you have done Carlson a grave injustice.” D.M. Shoup to R.W. Swing, 6 November 1947, Carlson Collection, MCUA.

<sup>520</sup> Jo Morang, Press Release, n.d. [ca. 1943], Press Releases – Edson’s Raiders File, HDRB.

the Raiders. The tension between competing claims to elite status was exacerbated as the war continued.

The volume of attention focused on four small battalions only added to the emerging cultural conflict between the Raiders and other Marine battalions in the South Pacific. As Joseph Alexander aptly notes, the exaltation of the Raiders to human legends may have had a morale-boosting effect early in the war when fears of Japanese invincibility in jungle warfare were rampant, but as the Marines continued to successfully engage and defeat the Japanese, it began to grate on them. “Those Marines who had fought for Bougainville’s Hellzapoppin’ Ridge, or Cape Gloucester’s Aogiri Ridge (with Lew Walt), or crossed the reef under fire at Betio [Tarawa] were no longer inclined to suffer the condescending cockiness of the Raiders, nor anyone else.”<sup>521</sup> Legendary Marine officer Lewis “Chesty” Puller, who certainly had seen his share of the hard fighting in the Pacific, raised this point with the Commandant. When asked by Holcomb to weigh in on the Raider battalions, Puller replied: “Nothing special about them, sir. They’re just ordinary Marines, when they’re good. No better than our good men in the ranks. There’s too much guff about them, I mean too much Hollywood stuff. It isn’t good for the Raiders, and it’s mighty bad for the regular Marines . . . . The Raider idea should be abandoned.”<sup>522</sup>

Overwhelming publicity for special operations units brings attendant pitfalls, as several special operations units discovered during World War II. It tends to come at the expense of the morale of line units, a fact which seems particularly unjust when placed in perspective relative to the totality of the war effort. A war as massive as World War II is

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<sup>521</sup> Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 307.

<sup>522</sup> Quoted in Burke Davis, *Marine! The Life of Chesty Puller* (1962; repr. New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 162.

certainly not decided by only a few small bands of commandos, paratroopers, or raiders, but by the consistently high quality of the total military effort. Field Marshal Slim recognized as much, claiming that, “Armies do not win wars by means of a few bodies of super-soldiers but by the average quality of their standard units. Anything, whatever short cuts to victory it may promise, which thus weakens the army spirit, is dangerous.”<sup>523</sup> The overly-hyped publicity heaped upon Allied special operations units in the early war ultimately backfired. Other military units, the men doing the difficult, day-to-day work and fighting necessary to permanently defeat the Axis powers, quickly came to resent the glamourized image of their special operations brethren; even public opinion, originally so amenable to romanticized heroes and their feats, eventually became cynical about special operations raids.<sup>524</sup>

The Marine Corps recognized the potentially detrimental effects of undue publicity for the Raiders. This can be seen by tracking the progression of the press releases about the Raiders. The Navy Department press release after the Makin Raid portrayed the Raiders as America’s supermen, specially selected, trained for the most impossible missions, and armed to the teeth with lethal weapons.<sup>525</sup> Marine Corps press releases after the battle for Guadalcanal furthered this image, claiming that “Raiders and Parachutists are regarded nothing short of ‘Supermen’ in the Marine Corps. To be either is, therefore, an accomplishment.”<sup>526</sup> By 1944, however, the official tone had changed

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<sup>523</sup> Slim, *Defeat Into Victory*, 456.

<sup>524</sup> By the summer of 1942, the British Commandos’ publicity operation was striving to make them appear as “routine troops engaged in routine operations,” as the public had grown weary of constant hype about raids when little real progress was evident in the war against Germany. Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 61.

<sup>525</sup> Navy Department Press Release, “Marines’ Special Raider Battalions,” August 25, 1942, Carlson Collection, MCUA. This press release is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>526</sup> A.R. McKeever, “Superman Sergeant,” Press Release, n.d. [c.a. February 1943], Press Releases – Edson’s Raiders File, HDRB.

drastically, with talk of the Raiders' superior status being deliberately downplayed. The press release announcing the recreation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines claimed that "the Raiders were never beaten . . . but they are not supermen. They merely have learned self-sufficiency."<sup>527</sup> A press release issued after Guadalcanal was secure made this point even more explicitly: "The Raiders are neither supermen, nor arch-killers, nor glamour boys. They are Marines . . . the men who comprise the Raiders are drawn from the men who comprise the regular Marine ranks, and are in no sense super-Marines. The Raiders differ only by virtue of their specialized training."<sup>528</sup> Even some Raiders themselves realized that so much publicity was potentially unhealthy for the cohesion of the Marine Corps. Raider Lee Minier reasoned that "There was too much publicity and false and exaggerated stories and movies being published about the Raiders . . . the Marine Corps doesn't like that sort of thing."<sup>529</sup> Though Minier had no way of knowing it, his analysis mirrored the Commandant's own thoughts on the Raiders.

During World War II, the Marine Corps cultivated their image as America's amphibious gladiators wresting control of the Pacific from Japan. However, the coverage of the Marine Raiders tended to elevate their status as Raiders at the expense of the Corps. The idea of the press exalting select groups of Marines over the rest of the Corps did not sit well with Corps leadership. Even before the Raiders had proven themselves in combat they had been publically equated with the British Commandos.<sup>530</sup> Such elevation of the Raiders as the proverbial cream of the crop in the public eye persisted in spite of

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<sup>527</sup> Division of Public Relations, "Fourth Marines Reactivated from Famed Raider Battalions," April 1944, Raiders: Press Releases – General File, HDRB.

<sup>528</sup> Samuel E. Stavisky, "Raiders in Pacific Not Supermen but Highly Specialized Marines, Correspondent Writes," Press Release, n.d. [ca. 1943], Raiders: General Information File, HDRB.

<sup>529</sup> Minier to Jolette Minier, 20 February 1944, Minier Collection, MCUA.

<sup>530</sup> Drexel Biddle to Edson, 2 March 1942, Edson Papers, LOC.

Commandant Holcomb's repeated insistence that "The United States already has a large and growing Commando force—the United States Marine Corps."<sup>531</sup> Holcomb was sincerely concerned that the glamour of the Raiders, with their special equipment and methods and abundance of flamboyant personalities would come at the cost of the good image of the Marine Corps as an entirety.

His fears were not unfounded. In December 1943, *Fortune* magazine featured a thirteen-page article, "The Psychiatric Toll of Warfare," exploring the mental breakdown of troops in prolonged combat. The author asserts that "Psychiatrically, the American Dunkerque [*sic*] was Guadalcanal."<sup>532</sup> The tone and language employed in the article leaves a distinct impression of the Marines of Vandegrift's 1<sup>st</sup> Division as generally hapless, tired, and beyond hope of victory. They were prone to such psychological symptoms as "headaches, lower thresholds to sharp noises, periods of amnesia, of panic, psychosomatic complaints, generalized or limited tremors, functional palsies."<sup>533</sup> The weary, neurosis-prone Marine infantry contrasted rather unfavorably with Carlson's Raiders, who "were sent into battle psychologically prepared," and only suffered "one case of traumatic war neurosis" during their month-long trek behind enemy lines on Guadalcanal.<sup>534</sup> After praising Carlson and his methodology in glowing terms, the author upbraids the Marine Corps' leadership: "Despite the successes of Carlson's methods, no steps have since been taken to use them elsewhere in the Marine Corps, or in any other unit of the armed forces for that matter."<sup>535</sup> Taken as a whole, the article reflected badly

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<sup>531</sup> "Gen. Holcomb Likens Marines to Commandos" *NY Herald Tribune*, 24 February 1942, held in Edson Papers, LOC (attached to letter, G.A. Percy to Edson, 25 February 1942).

<sup>532</sup> "The Psychiatric Toll of Warfare," *Fortune* 28, no. 6 (December 1943): 278.

<sup>533</sup> "Psychiatric Toll of Warfare," 278

<sup>534</sup> "Psychiatric Toll of Warfare," 280.

<sup>535</sup> "Psychiatric Toll of Warfare," 280.

on Marine Corps, as it diminished the capability of the battle-tested veterans of Guadalcanal in order to extol the merits of the Raiders' psychological training. This of course did not sit well at all with the Commandant, who questioned the validity of the sources listed in an initial draft of the article. Holcomb's complaints did elicit a response from the Executive Editor of *Fortune*, Albert L. Furth, but the final copy of the article appeared in the December issue without substantially incorporating Holcomb's objections. It is impossible to escape the article's generally negative impression of Vandegrift's Marines when such phrases as "group neurosis," "lost hope," "expendable—doomed...tired—bone tired," were employed to describe them.<sup>536</sup> Meanwhile, Carlson comes across as a modern George Washington, benevolent and wise, able to inspire his Raiders against overwhelming odds with his "proven qualities of leadership and with his respect for the dignity of man."<sup>537</sup>

### **"An Elite of the Elite"**

The *Fortune* magazine incident serves as an example of the potential for discord that came along with the establishment of small, elite bands within a *corps d'elite*. In the Raider battalions, shaped as they were by their special operations designation, the ideal of elitism flourished as they rapidly moved along the path from Guardsmen to Technicians and finally to Warrior elites. However, the evolution of the Raiders into a *de facto* elite of the elite threatened the unity of spirit that was essential to the Marine Corps' culture. The emergence of a small but powerful subculture within the Marine Corps that asserted its own exceptionalism threatened to divide loyalties within an organization that

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<sup>536</sup> "Psychiatric Toll of Warfare," 278.

<sup>537</sup> "Psychiatric Toll of Warfare," 282. Mia M. Fritsch to Holcomb, 25 October 1943; and Albert L. Furth to Holcomb, 9 November 1943, both in Carlson Collection, MCUA.

depended on the power of its own culture far more than did the larger military branches.

As Marine historian Aaron O'Connell pertinently notes, Marine Corps culture was defined largely by a combination of potent narratives of Marine exceptionalism and rigorous policing of the boundaries between those who were and were not Marines.

Marines, says O'Connell, "imagined themselves as a small and loyal tribe of warriors who were outnumbered, disrespected, and persecuted . . . [and they] drew regularly on the language of religion, practices of extreme discipline, and intricately scripted rituals to mark themselves as different, separate, and superior to every other organization around them."<sup>538</sup> The Raiders, however, may have posed a tacit threat to the unity of Marine Corps culture by injecting the possibility of divided loyalties. To have a small group hand-picked and groomed to be the best Warriors within the organization of proud Warriors was perceived as implicit questioning of Marine exceptionalism.

The Marine Corps has long been known to have a distinctive subculture, one marked by what historian Aaron O'Connell terms "narratives of Marine exceptionalism."<sup>539</sup> As he explains, "Being a Marine meant elitism, an intimate community, and access to a set of stories granted only to a few. But those benefits were not free . . . . More so than in the other services, membership in the Marine Corps required an ideological commitment, the abandonment of previous civilian identities, and

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<sup>538</sup> O'Connell offers the best cultural history of the Marine Corps, capturing the nature and effects of the narratives of Marine exceptionalism. As he puts it, "Running through nearly every artifact of Marine Corps culture in this era were regular, almost compulsive affirmations of the Marines' inherent superiority over everyone else, coupled with a wariness of outsiders that bordered on paranoia." *Underdogs*, 6.

<sup>539</sup> "As long as there have been Marines, they have insisted that they are superior to the other services and have located that superiority in transcendent nouns such as 'esprit,' 'spirit,' 'mystique,' and 'feeling' . . . . The most important stories Marines carried into war with them were a set of claims asserting unconditionally that Marines were, and always have been, unique and superior to all other military services." O'Connell, *Underdogs*, 27. See also O'Connell, "'A Harsh and Spiritual Unity,'" 3.

the adoption of a new set of stories and priorities.”<sup>540</sup> This culture was powerful, and left an indelible imprint on the thousands of Americans who wore the eagle, globe, and anchor during World War II. The Marine Corps’ relatively small size, and the uniformity and effectiveness of its recruit training, resulted in a very high cohesion and seamless transmission of the pre-war culture of the Corps to a new generation of recruits on a larger scale than ever before. Crucial to maintaining the sense of Marine exceptionalism was the dedication of each Marine to the Corps; it became one’s identity.<sup>541</sup>

The wholehearted devotion to the Corps felt by the majority of Marines contrasts with the other service branches. With their much larger size, combined with the influx of draftees later in the war, group identity in the Army and Navy was tied more strongly to individual units or ships – it was much easier to identify with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division or the *USS Yorktown* than with the Army or Navy as a whole. “The division, the basic American fighting unit, fulfills the soldier’s need for identity,” wrote Army Major Thomas Farnsworth.<sup>542</sup> For the soldier, “The division is the most vital unit. It transcends all claims or prerogatives of branch, arm, service. It is the basic fighting unit—the center of accomplishment, esprit, and morale.”<sup>543</sup> While extolling the merits of the division as a source of group identity and cohesion, Farnsworth unwittingly strikes a difference between the smaller Marine Corps and the Army: “What ships are to sailors, divisions are to soldiers. The Marine Corps, smaller, more compact, and less burdened with necessary housekeeping duties, is more fortunate: it can maintain its pride in the whole

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<sup>540</sup> O’Connell, *Underdogs*, 28.

<sup>541</sup> “For all its expansion, however, the Corps [in 1945] remained a numerical elite.” Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 439.

<sup>542</sup> Farnsworth, “The Division,” 19.

<sup>543</sup> Farnsworth, “The Division,” 18.



Corps.”<sup>544</sup>

In this, Farnsworth may have unwittingly identified the crux of the tension between the Raiders and the Marine Corps at large. By virtue of their special operations missions, their self-selection as the Guardsmen taken from the ranks of the Guards, their Technician elite mastery of a particularly hazardous kind of amphibious warfare, and their Warrior status earned in blood, the Raiders had crafted a distinctly separate identity as elites of the elite. The strong *esprit* and unit cohesion that infused the Raider battalions was both their greatest asset and their Achilles heel. Elite, special operations units frequently develop extremely high unit cohesion, so much so that their loyalty to their individual units may become a threat to the cohesion of the service at large. Perhaps the best exposition of this potential pitfall of special operations elites is given by Horn and Balasevicius in their analysis of special operations forces:

This element of self-selection, combined with the feeling of accomplishment, as one of the few who has successfully passed selection; and the self-confidence born from challenging, difficult, and hazardous training, creates an aura of invincibility and an intense loyalty to what is perceived as a very exclusive group. An intimate bond is deepened further through shared hardship and danger. Members of these “special” groups frequently develop an outlook that treats those outside the “club” as inferior and unworthy of respect.<sup>545</sup>

This description dovetails almost perfectly with O’Connell’s description of the ideals of Marine Corps culture. The Marine Corps prided itself on its high standards and encouraged feelings of elitism, with all of its connotations of exceptionalism. The same can be said, however, of the Raiders – and such was the major point of contention. Elitism by definition is based on perceptions of superiority and inferiority. By fostering a

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<sup>544</sup> Farnsworth, “The Division,” 19.

<sup>545</sup> Horn and Balasevicius, *Casting Light on the Shadows*, 125; their comments on 123 are also relevant.

subculture of the elites among the elites, the Raiders inferred that all Marines who were not Raiders were inherently inferior. Furthermore, the potential that any Marine would find more meaning and purpose as a member of a particular subset, rather than as a Marine, ran contrary to the entire thrust of the Corps' efforts to foster a uniquely Marine identity as America's amphibious assault elites.<sup>546</sup>

The division of loyalties concomitant with the Raiders' special operations designation became a refrain of the critics of the Raider experiment, as evidenced by the opinions of many senior Marine officers. Omar Pfeiffer gave voice to the concerns felt by many in Corps leadership: "My thoughts were that we wanted to train every Marine to believe that he was *an elite*; and to have *an elite of the elite* was carrying things too far. To have [created more Raider battalions] would have emasculated orthodox fighting units."<sup>547</sup> Gerald Thomas further emphasized the effect that the Raiders had on the Marine Corps spirit: "I don't believe that an outfit as good as the Marine Corps needs to build special organizations [i.e. Raiders]. Shock troops and special organizations are the device of declining power. When they can't build real formations, they start in and grab all the good men and put them in one outfit so they got somebody they know can fight. It's a losing game."<sup>548</sup> The criticism most commonly leveled against the Raiders was that "a well-trained [Marine] infantry battalion could do anything that these other specialists [i.e. Raiders] could do."<sup>549</sup> Alan Shapely likewise felt that "a [Marine infantry] battalion or a regiment could do anything that a Raider battalion or Raider regiment could do," but

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<sup>546</sup> Elites are often defined in terms of negative comparison, i.e. elites are those who are better than whatever other group, hence making the comparison group out to be distinctly inferior. "Furthermore, the nature of these highly-selective units created an impression that everyone else was second-best." Horn and Balasevicious, *Casting Light on the Shadows*, 121. See discussion of elitism in Chapter 1.

<sup>547</sup> Pfeiffer transcript, MCUA, 194 (emphasis in original).

<sup>548</sup> Thomas transcript, MCUA, 235.

<sup>549</sup> Vandegrift transcript, OVHS, 968.

he expounded on the thought, basing this objection in the potential diversion of loyalty away from the Corps: “And further, you don’t have a Marine Corps within the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps is too small for this.”<sup>550</sup> Singling out a group of Warriors that was more elite and exalted than the remainder of the group undermined the efforts of the Marine Corps to instill the pride and *esprit de corps* throughout the Corps.

Ultimately, it is impossible to single out any one reason driving the decision-making process that ended the Marine Corps’ first Raider experiment. The situation of the Marine Corps and the evolving nature of the Pacific War in late 1943 presented significant operational reasons for discontinuing battalion-sized raiding, especially considering that few such raids had even been undertaken. The end of the Raiders may therefore be seen as merely the result of hard-nosed pragmatism. But as has been demonstrated, the Raiders introduced a measure of dissonance within Marine Corps culture, in some ways deliberately, but in many ways unwittingly. This cultural tension between the emerging and solidifying culture of the Marine Corps as Warrior elites and the subculture of the Raiders as “elites of the elite” manifested itself in diverse ways. It can be sensed in the jealousy over the preferential treatment of the Raider battalions, and it animated the resentment over excessive exaltation of the Raiders in the public eye. The desire to preserve the stability of the Corps’ culture is also what lay behind the widespread suspicion that Carlson and his methods were tainted with Bolshevism. No single one of these complaints, or others like them, can be clearly held forth as the single most important rationale for transforming the Raiders into the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. Rather, it appears that legitimate, operational necessities converged with the on-going cultural unrest within the elitist culture of the Corps to spell the end of the Raiders.

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<sup>550</sup> Shapley transcript, MCUA, 82.

## **The Raider Legacy**

It would be a gross misstatement to claim that the Raiders were irrelevant to the Marine Corps' effort in the Second World War. The Marine Raider battalions were an experiment, a part of on-going efforts by the Marine Corps to prepare for the on-coming war. Events unfolded differently than anticipated, but the attempt remains laudable as an effort to gain mastery of the amphibious assault in all phases situations. Though their operational lifespan was short and tumultuous, the Raiders did make several valuable contributions to the Corps at large. They played a part in raising morale on the home front in 1942, an intangible asset that was desperately needed in the early-war gloom. The flexible and unorthodox nature of the Raiders gave them room to experiment. They were the first to test the fire-team concept in combat, an innovation that has benefited the Corps ever since. After the end of the Raider battalions, the experience and expertise of the former Raiders leavened numerous green Marine units for the terrible ordeals of 1944-1945. Wherever they served, with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines or with other units, the Raider Marines continued to exemplify the courage, resourcefulness, and leadership that made them Raiders.<sup>551</sup> Former Raiders were frequently sought out as instructors for young Marines, giving them the chance to pass on their expertise; their influence was felt in many battalions in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions. One battalion, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 25<sup>th</sup> Marines, soon adopted the unsanctioned title of "Chambers Raiders," after their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Justice Chambers, one of Edson's original

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<sup>551</sup> Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 310-311.

company commanders.<sup>552</sup> In the larger picture, the Raiders played a role, small but significant, in the Corps' metamorphosis into the nation's recognized Warrior elites. At faraway places like Tulagi, Makin, and Edson's Ridge, the Raiders' victories helped establish the Marines as Warriors. General Alexander A. Vandegrift paid the Raiders a fitting tribute in a division bulletin commending the Raiders to all hands. Though he was speaking specifically of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders and their assault on Tulagi, his comments are a fitting summary of the Marines who served in all four Raider battalions in the South Pacific:

The Commanding General desires to transmit to all hands here on Guadalcanal the good news that has reached us from Tulagi. Our comrades there have added the name of a splendid victory to the long roll of battle honor of the Corps. Striking from the sea they assaulted and conquered a series of organized positions defended in great strength by a wily and determined opponent. The fight was carried to the enemy at all times and in all places and he was driven from every place he held by the resolute attack of men who were not afraid to die. God favors the bold and the strong of heart . . . . We salute the officers and men of our Division who carried through the Tulagi operations to so brilliant a conclusion.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 297. When a reporter heard of 3/25's self-proclaimed title, Chambers was called to account as there were not supposed to be any Raider battalions in the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division. Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 313.

<sup>553</sup> Vandegrift, "Division Bulletin Number 31a-42: Commendation for Results of Battle of Tulagi," 13 August 1942, Vandegrift Collection, MCUA.

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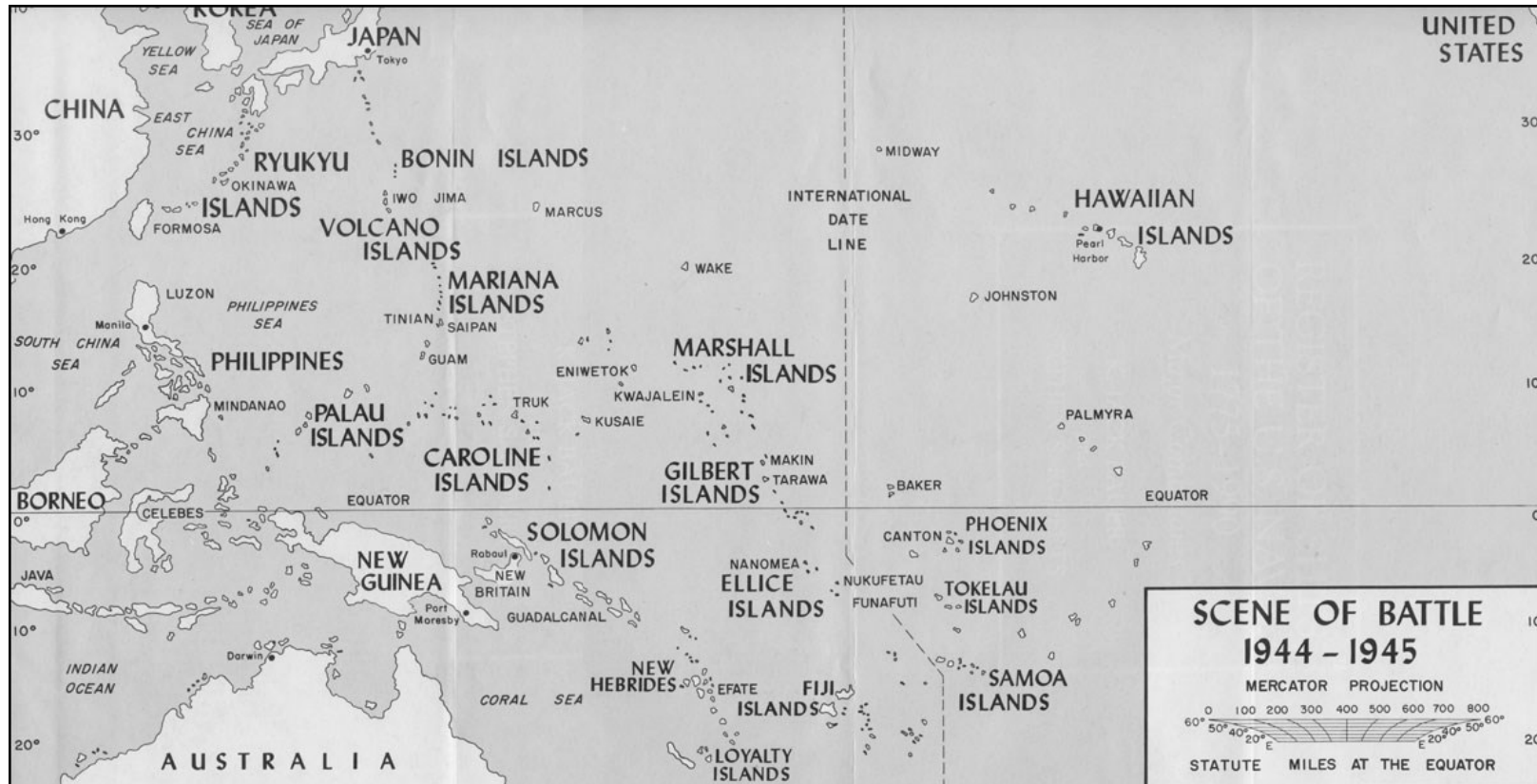


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## APPENDICES

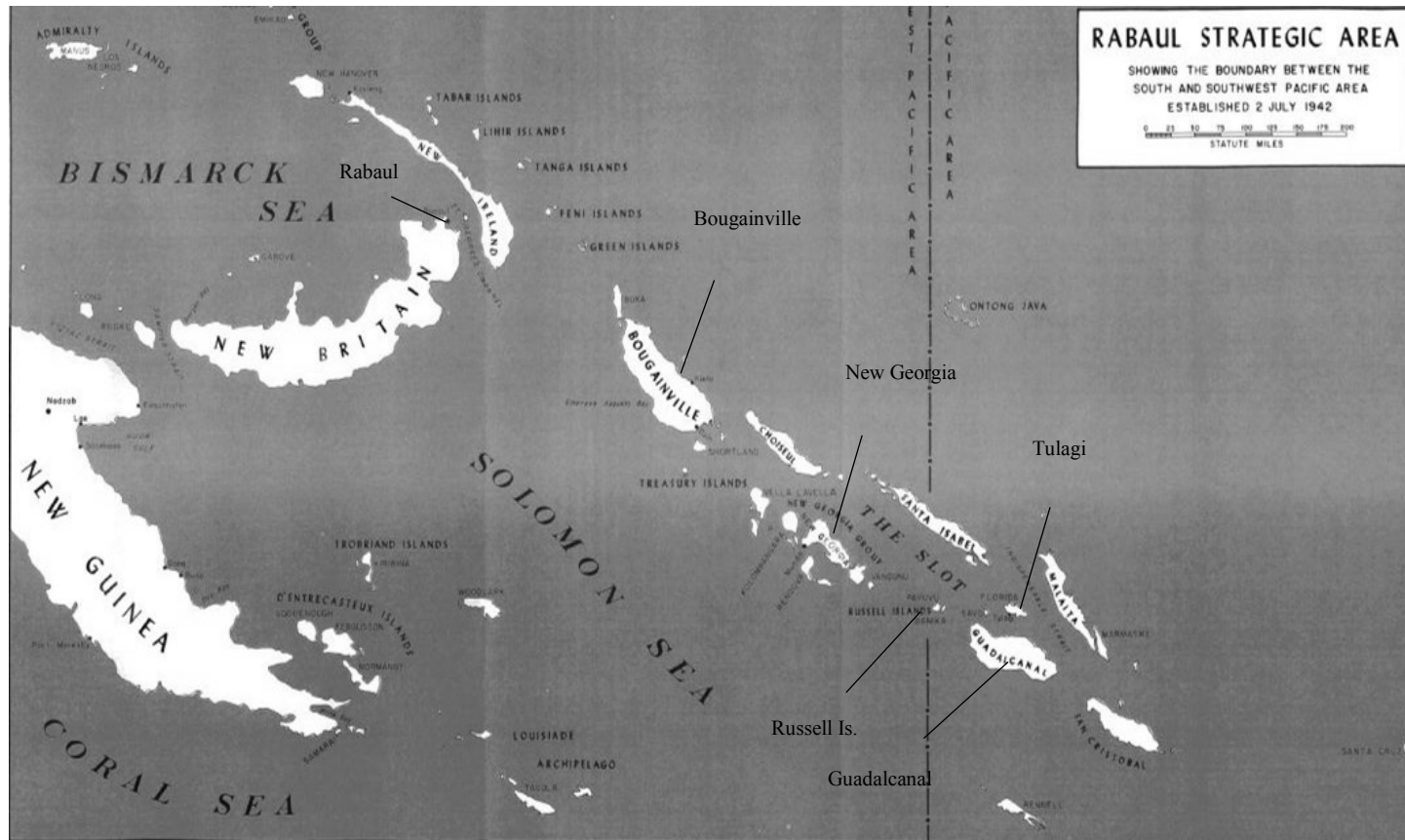
### Appendix A. The Pacific Theater of Operations.<sup>554</sup>



The Raiders served with distinction in the Solomon Islands campaigns of 1942-1943, and in the raid on Makin Atoll in the Gilbert Islands.

<sup>554</sup> George W. Garand and Truman R. Strobridge. *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, vol. 4, *Western Pacific Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1971).

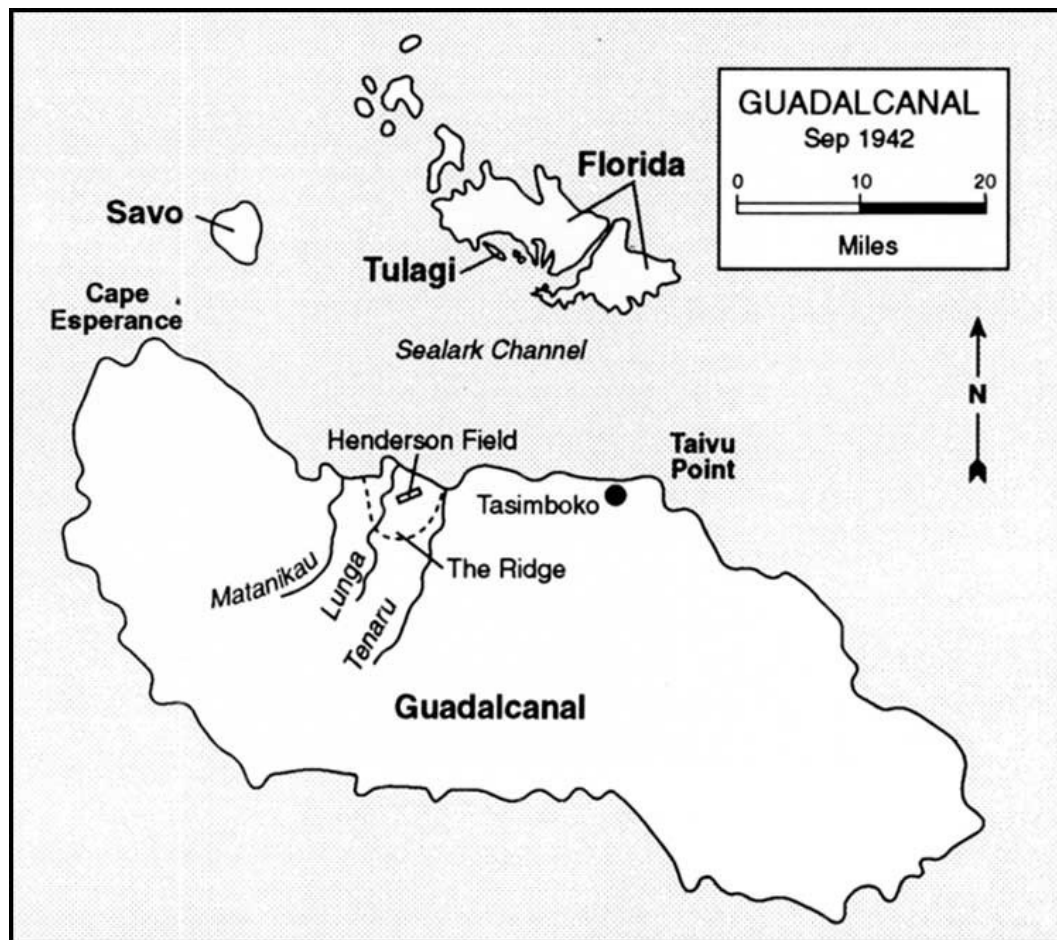
## Appendix B. “Up the Ladder.”<sup>555</sup>



Starting with Guadalcanal, the Allies advanced up the Solomon Islands chain with the intention of seizing the key Japanese base at Rabaul on the east coast of New Britain. The Raiders served in operations on Tulagi, Guadalcanal, the Russell Islands, New Georgia, and Bougainville.

<sup>555</sup> Henry I. Shaw, Jr., and Douglas T. Kane, *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, vol. 2, *The Isolation of Rabaul* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1963).

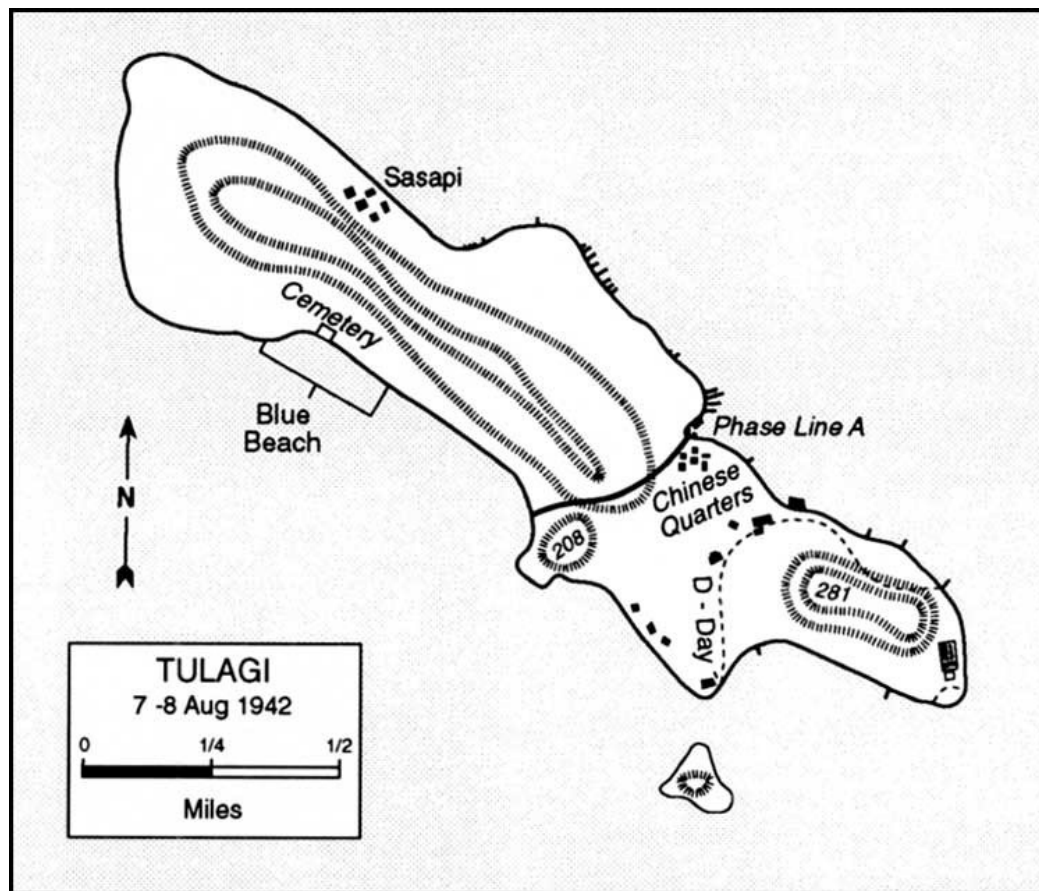
Appendix C. Guadalcanal and Tulagi.<sup>556</sup>



An overview of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion's area of operations.

<sup>556</sup> Jon T. Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War* (Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1995).

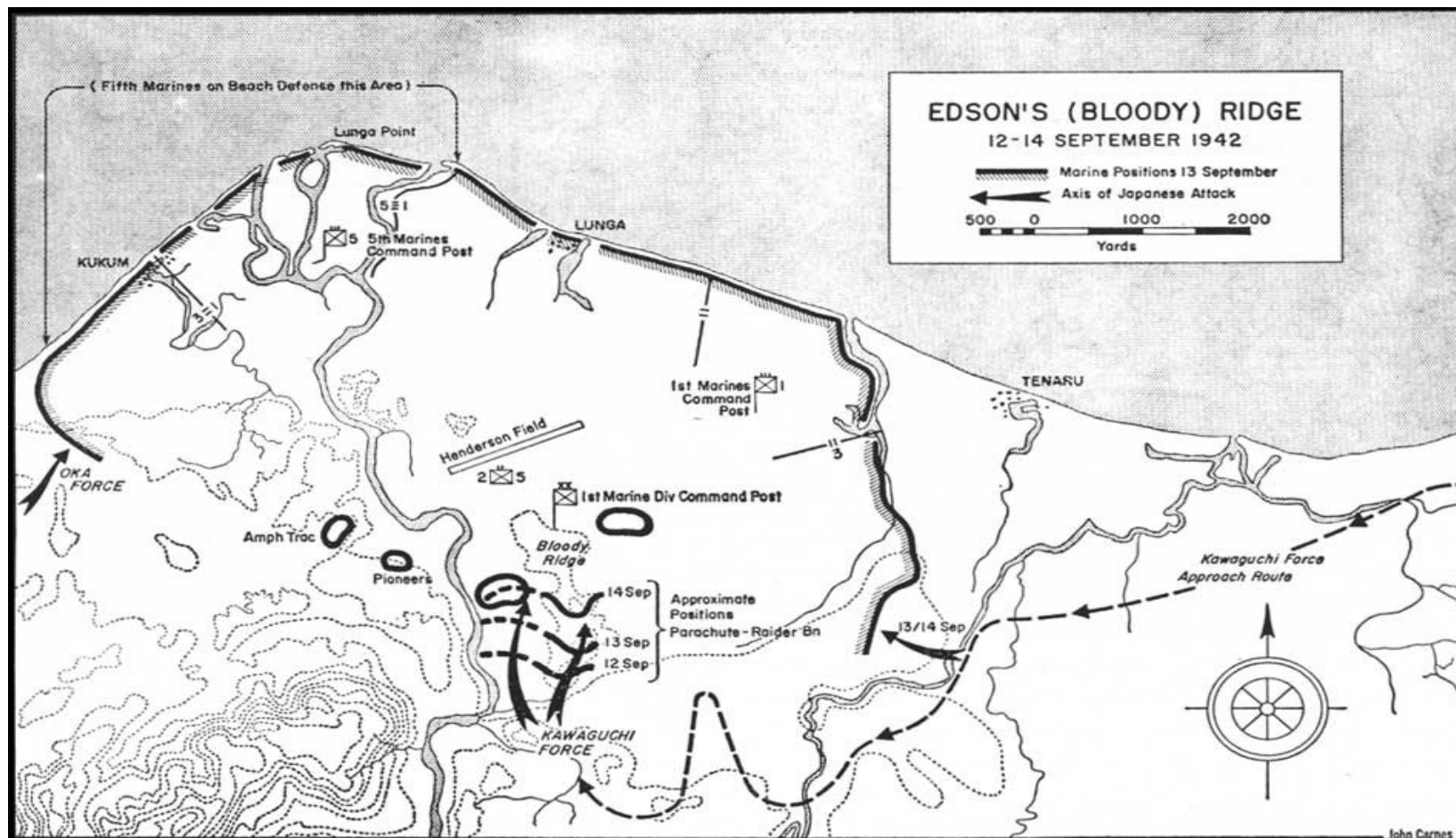
Appendix D. Tulagi.<sup>557</sup>



The 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders landed on Blue Beach on August 7 and advanced southwest towards Hill 281. They began to meet significant resistance in the vicinity of Phase Line A; Tulagi was declared secure on August 8.

<sup>557</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*.

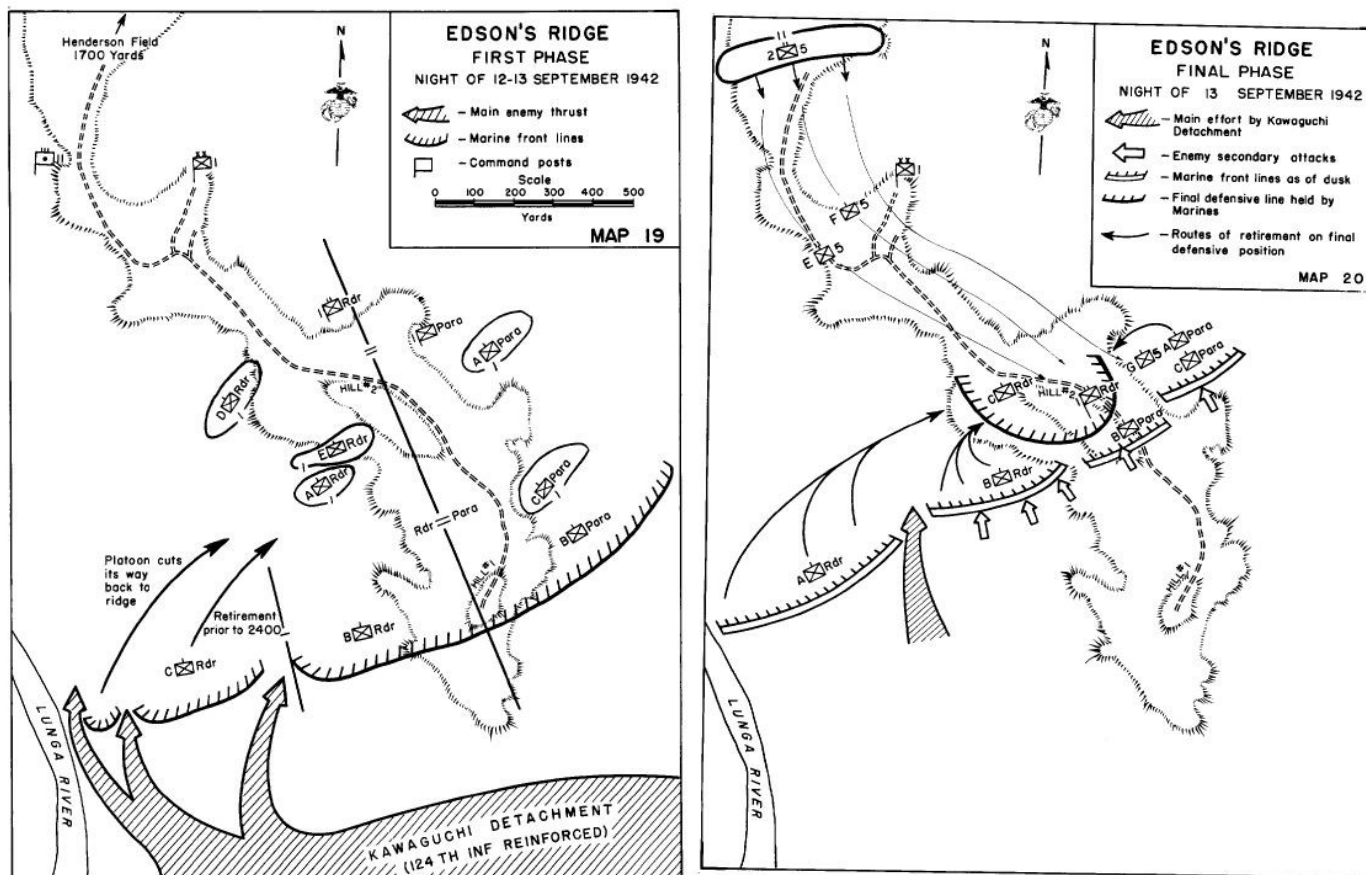
## Appendix E. Henderson Field and Edson's Ridge.<sup>558</sup>



Also known as "Bloody Ridge" or simply "The Ridge," Edson's Ridge was a strategic location for the defense of Henderson Field.

<sup>558</sup> Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *First Offensive: The Marine Campaign for Guadalcanal* (Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1992).

## Appendix F. The Battle of Edson's Ridge.<sup>559</sup>

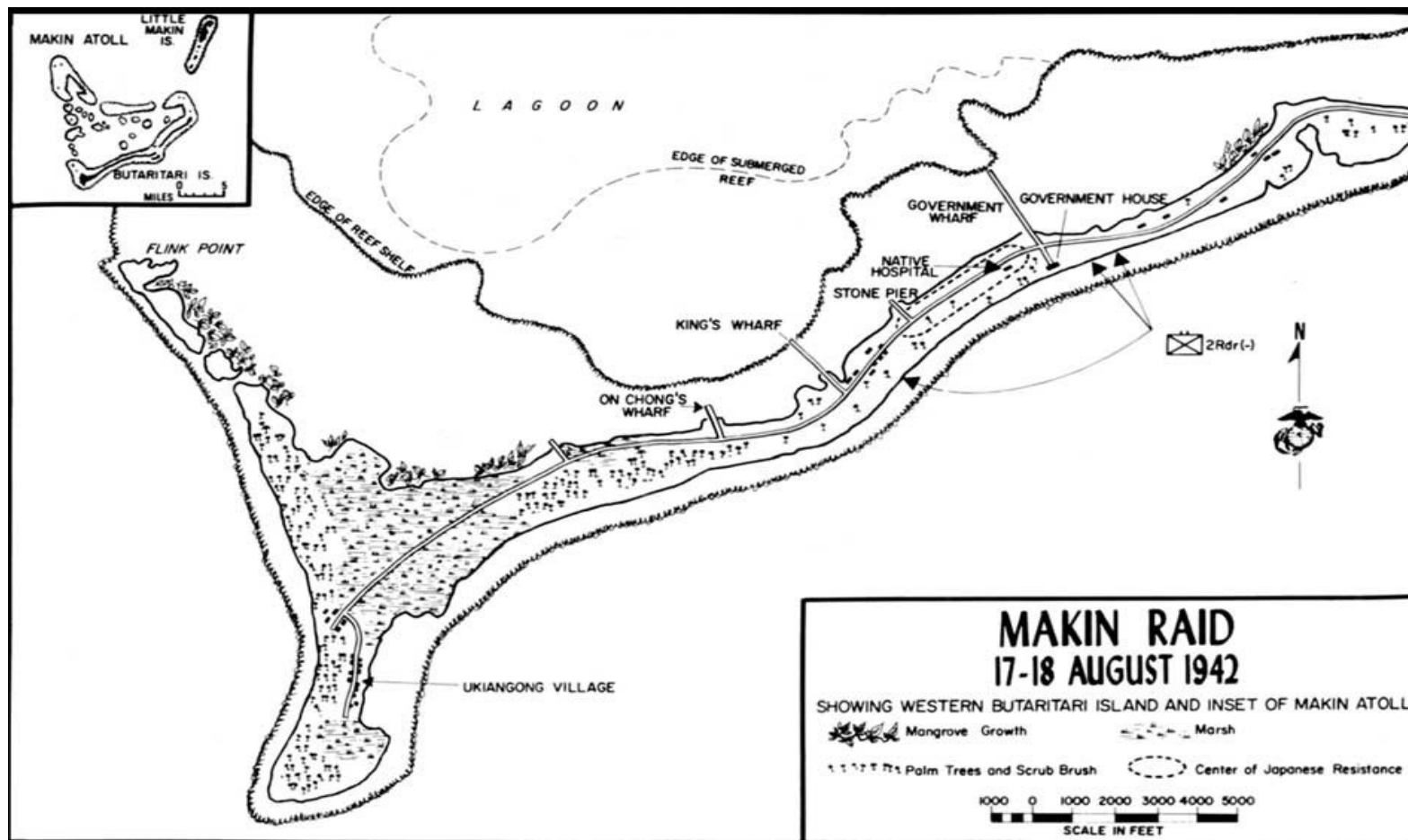


The Raiders defended the Ridge against attacks by General Kawaguchi's brigade on the night of September 12-13, and made a desperate last stand on the night of September 13-14; the Raiders held the ridge both times.

<sup>559</sup> Both figures are from Frank O. Hough, Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, vol. 1, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1958).



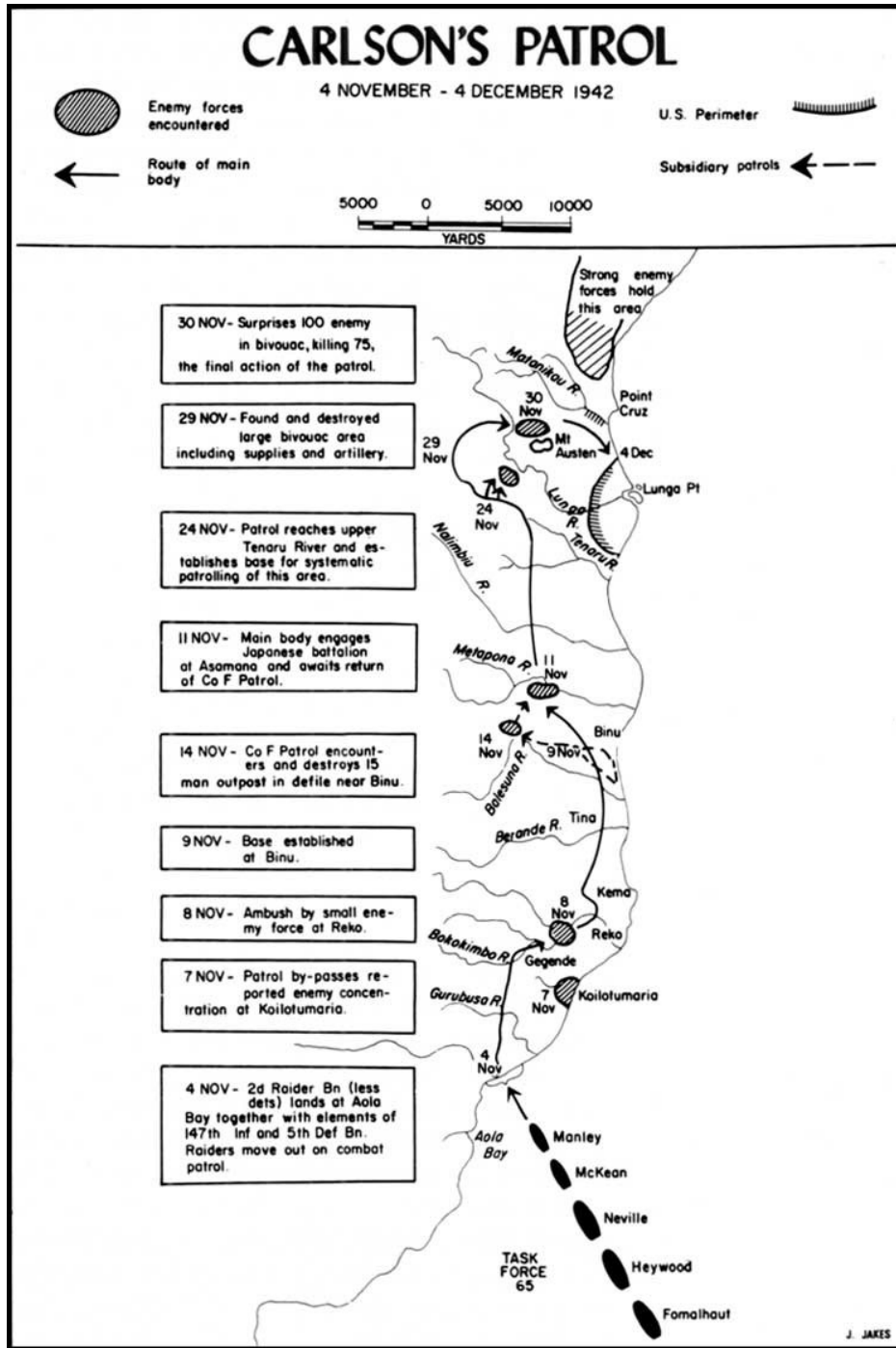
## Appendix G. The Makin Atoll Raid.<sup>560</sup>



Carlson's 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion made one of the most daring special operations raids of the war on Butaritari Island of Makin Atoll on August 17-18. Note that Lt. Oscar Peatross' platoon became separated and landed to the west of the main body.

<sup>560</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*.

## Appendix H. Carlson's Long Patrol.<sup>561</sup>



The route of Carlson's Raiders on their famed Long Patrol behind enemy lines on Guadalcanal.

<sup>561</sup> Hoffman, *Makin to Bougainville*.

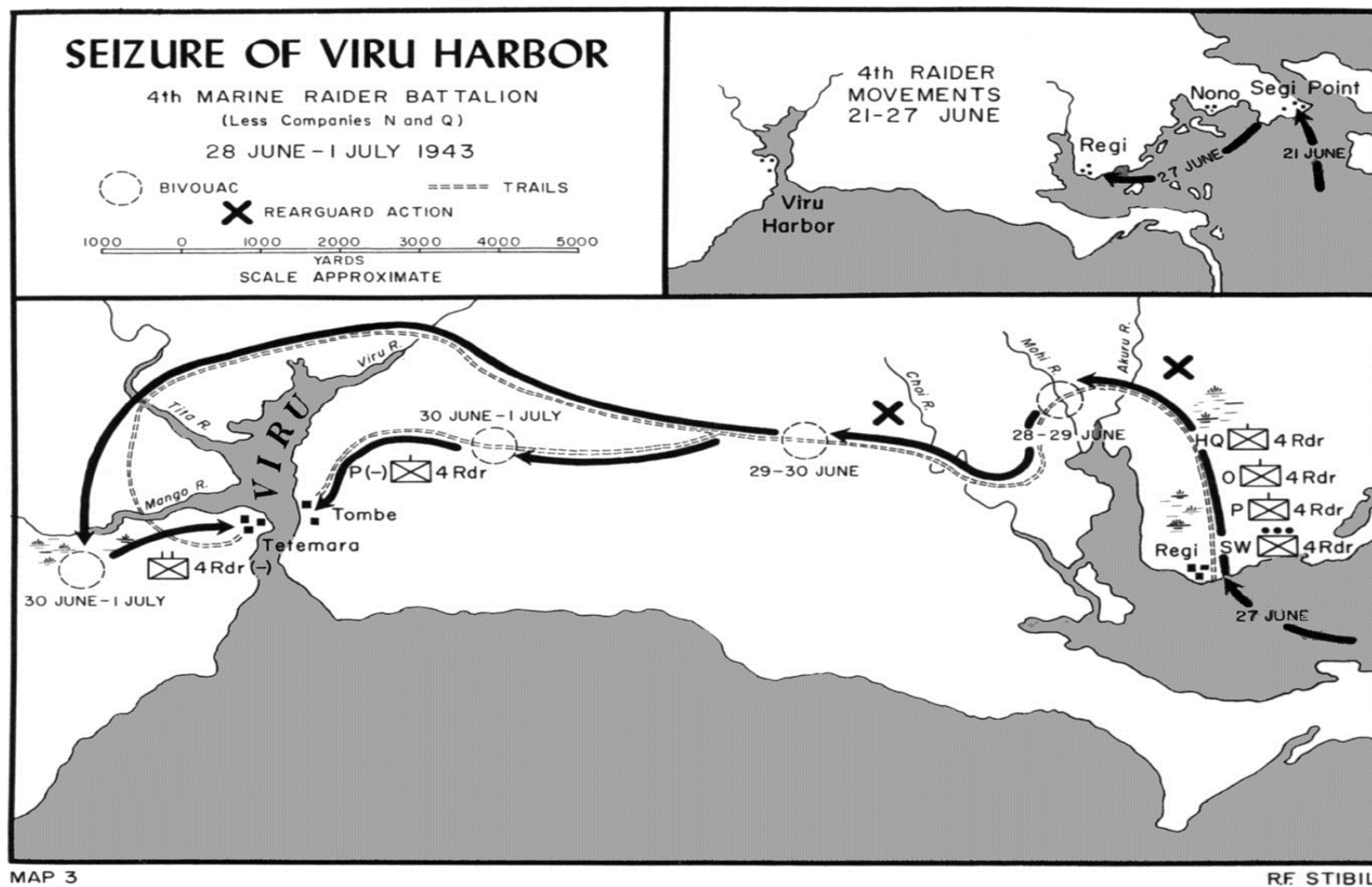
## Appendix I. The New Georgia Islands.<sup>562</sup>



The scene of Operation TOENAILS. The 4<sup>th</sup> Raiders landed at Wickham Anchorage on Vangunu Island and at Segi Point on New Georgia's southeast point in late June; the 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders landed at Rice Anchorage on New Georgia's west coast in July.

<sup>562</sup> Shaw and Kane, *History of Marine Corps Operations*, vol. 2, *Isolation of Rabaul*.

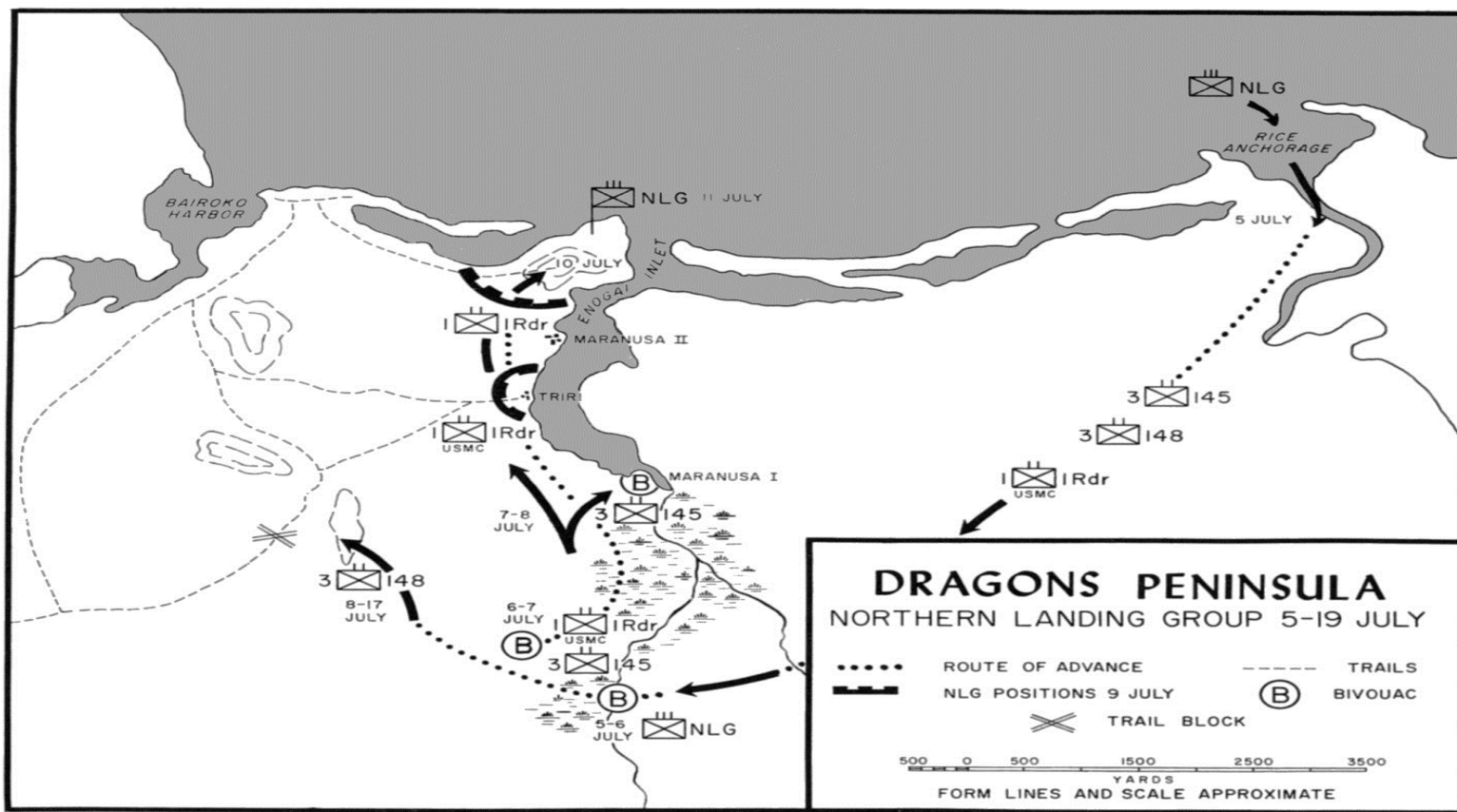
## Appendix J. Viru Harbor Operations.<sup>563</sup>



The route of the 4<sup>th</sup> Raiders grueling march to seize Viru Harbor.

<sup>563</sup> Shaw and Kane, *History of Marine Corps Operations*, vol. 2, *Isolation of Rabaul*.

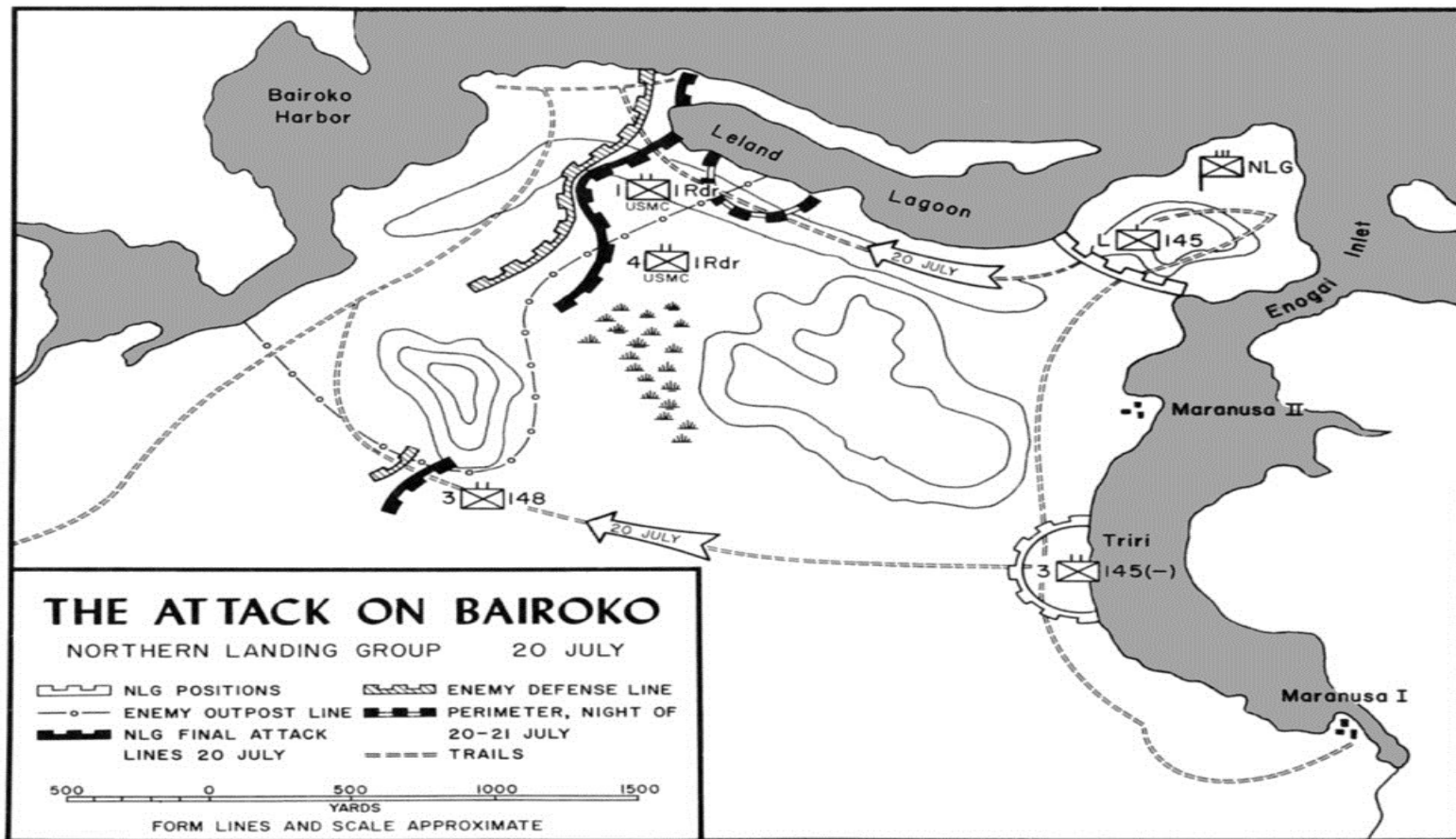
## Appendix K. Enogai Inlet Operations.<sup>564</sup>



The 1<sup>st</sup> Raiders and the Northern Landing Group advanced from Rice Anchorage to seize Enogai Inlet and destroy the Japanese garrison at Triri village.

<sup>564</sup> Shaw and Kane, *History of Marine Corps Operations*, vol. 2, *Isolation of Rabaul*.

## Appendix L. The Attack on Bairoko.<sup>565</sup>

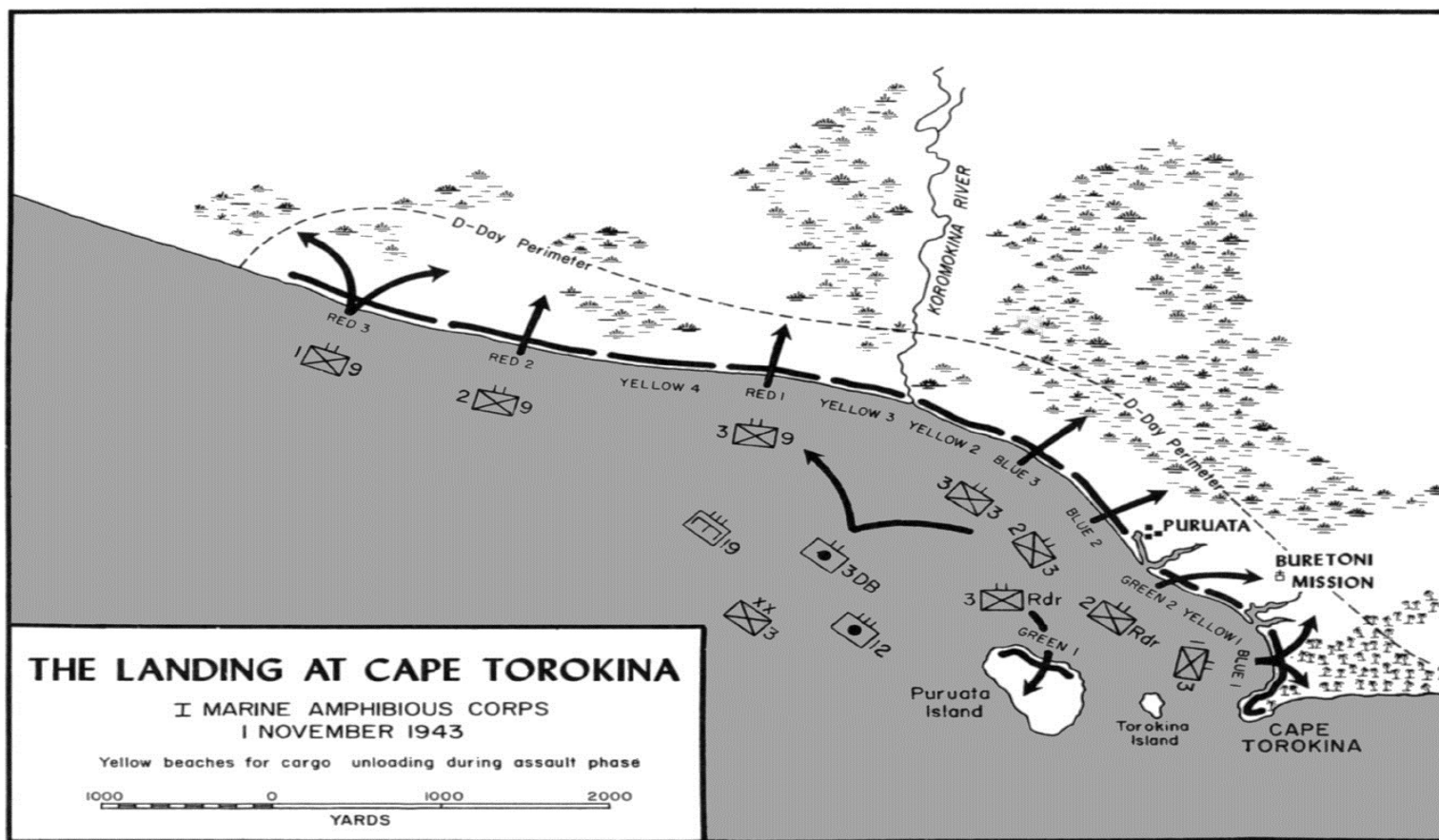


MAP 9

In the face of prepared defenses and without the element of surprise, the Raiders suffered heavy casualties in their attempt to capture Bairoko. It was the Raiders' only repulse.

<sup>565</sup> Shaw and Kane, *History of Marine Corps Operations*, vol. 2, *Isolation of Rabaul*.

Appendix M. Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville.<sup>566</sup>



MAP 14

The Raiders' landing at Cape Torokina on Bougainville was their last combat operation. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders landed west of Cape Torokina, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Raiders secured Puruata Island in the bay.

<sup>566</sup> Shaw and Kane, *History of Marine Corps Operations*, vol. 2, *Isolation of Rabaul*.