



Although the Allied victory at Guadalcanal was a step forward in protecting shipping lanes, Australia was still threatened by the Japanese Empire in 1943. The linked map (Plate 8 - "Disintegration of the Malay Barrier and the Threat to Australia" - from *Reports of General MacArthur*, Volume I, at page 24) depicts the reasons for concern.

Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger (of the Sixth Army) directed the 1st Marines (veterans of the fight to take the Japanese airfield at Guadalcanal) to capture another strategically located Japanese airfield and garrison. This time the 1st Marines (including Robert Leckie and Sid Phillips) would land at Cape Gloucester, on the island of New Britain (part of the Bismarck Archipelago).

The National Archives describes this photo of the landing Marines - taken by Sgt. Robert M. Howard on December 26, 1943 - as follows:

Marines hit three feet of rough water as they leave their LST to take the beach at Cape Gloucester, New Britain.

Following naval and air bombardment, provided by U.S. and Australian forces, the Marines initially encountered little resistance when they reached the beaches at Cape Gloucester on the 26th of December, 1943:

While the operations on Arawe were under way, Krueger had developed plans to seize the Japanese airfield and garrison at Cape Gloucester on the western tip of New Britain. He assigned this mission to the 1st Marine Division, combat veterans of Guadalcanal. Because enemy defenses were concentrated near the airfield, the marines landed on an undefended beach about six miles to the east on 26 December 1943.

Once ashore, they advanced to the airfield along a narrow strip of dry ground. Japanese resistance was surprisingly light, and the marines controlled the airfield by 29 December. Japanese aircraft did manage to inflict some damage on the amphibious assault force supporting the operation, sinking one destroyer and damaging other support ships.

Everything changed, however, after the Marines captured the airfield. Hampered by ongoing, torrential rain - and terrible personal conditions - the men fought a vicious, deadly battle:

The heaviest combat came after the marines had secured the airfield. While clearing the Japanese from the jungles to the east, they encountered fierce opposition.

The worst fighting came on New Year's Day, along a stream later dubbed Suicide Creek. The Japanese had constructed a well-camouflaged bunker complex along the stream bank and succeeded in repelling Marine attacks for two days.

Finally, engineers constructed a corduroy road by laying logs over the mud so that tanks could be brought in to destroy the Japanese defenders. Although this initiative was successful, the price of victory was high.

Marine casualties totaled 310 killed and 1,083 wounded.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

See, also:

Cape Gloucester - Wounded Marines - Video

Cape Gloucester - Ill and Exhausted Marines - Video

Battle of Cape Gloucester - Purpose of the Fighting

Cape Gloucester - Japanese Positions, 1943 Battle

Cape Gloucester - Marine Machine Gunners

Image and Brief Bio: Robert Leckie

Credits:

Image 127-G-68998 from the U.S. National Archives. Online, courtesy NARA. PD

Quotations from "Bismarck Archipelago - The U.S. Army Campaign of World War II," online courtesy the U.S. Army Center of Military History.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Battle-of-Cape-Gloucester-Marines-Land-and-Fight1>

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Media Stream



Battle of Cape Gloucester - Marines Land and Fight

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