

Newsweek

SEPTEMBER 7, 1942

Guadalcanal

In contrast to the bloody fighting on Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo, the assault on Guadalcanal, 15 miles south of Tulagi, was almost uneventful. The Marines, with their tanks and guns and masses of supplies, landed on the north shore of the big 80-mile-long mountainous island about 10 a.m. Cautiously they advanced westward toward Lunga and Kukum, site of the Japanese installations.

They found that except for a few snipers the Japanese had scampered to the hills. The enemy had left in so great a hurry that unfinished bowls of breakfast rice, with chopsticks still in them, were found in the camp messes. And the Marines took over intact vast quantities of stores and equipment, including food, fuel, ammunition, and scores of trucks.

But the biggest prize of all was an excellent airport in the Lunga region which the Japanese had been building for months. About 85 per cent complete, and including a 1,400-yard-long runway, the airport was ready for use by land aircraft. Within a few hours, American bombers and fighters were operating from it.

All these operations, plus the capture of Mbangai and Makambo Islands, near Tulagi, and a landing on Florida Island at Halavo, west of Gavutu, about cleaned up the first job of wresting control of the strategic Tulagi Harbor area from the enemy. Meanwhile, the American forces took care of counterattacks.

How American warships repelled a Japanese attempt on Aug. 8 to attack the landing armada with surface ships had already been told by the Navy. Last week, it announced a whole new series of sea and air fights. In one engagement north of Guadalcanal, American planes set afire six enemy ships, including a cruiser and destroyer, and shattered a transport. In another engagement, torpedo bombers sank a large enemy destroyer and severely damaged a second destroyer. And in three air fights between Aug. 23 and Aug. 28, Navy fighters shot down 40 enemy bombers and fighters, against a loss of only four American planes.

But what appeared to be the biggest naval-air scrap in the area was reported on Aug. 25. The Navy said that American naval and air forces were engaged in a "large-scale battle at sea" with a strong enemy naval force that had approached the American-held Solomons from the northeast. It added that Flying Fortresses and carrier-based planes had scored four bomb hits on a large Japanese carrier, severely damaged a smaller one, and also hit several enemy cruisers and a battleship. The Japanese ships had withdrawn.

That prompted some press reports that the United States Navy had scored another decisive victory comparable with those of the Coral Sea and Midway. But on Aug. 28, a high government authority warned against accepting any such interpretation. And, despite the Navy's earlier reference to a "large-scale battle," he stressed that the skirmish off the Solomons was essentially a minor victory.