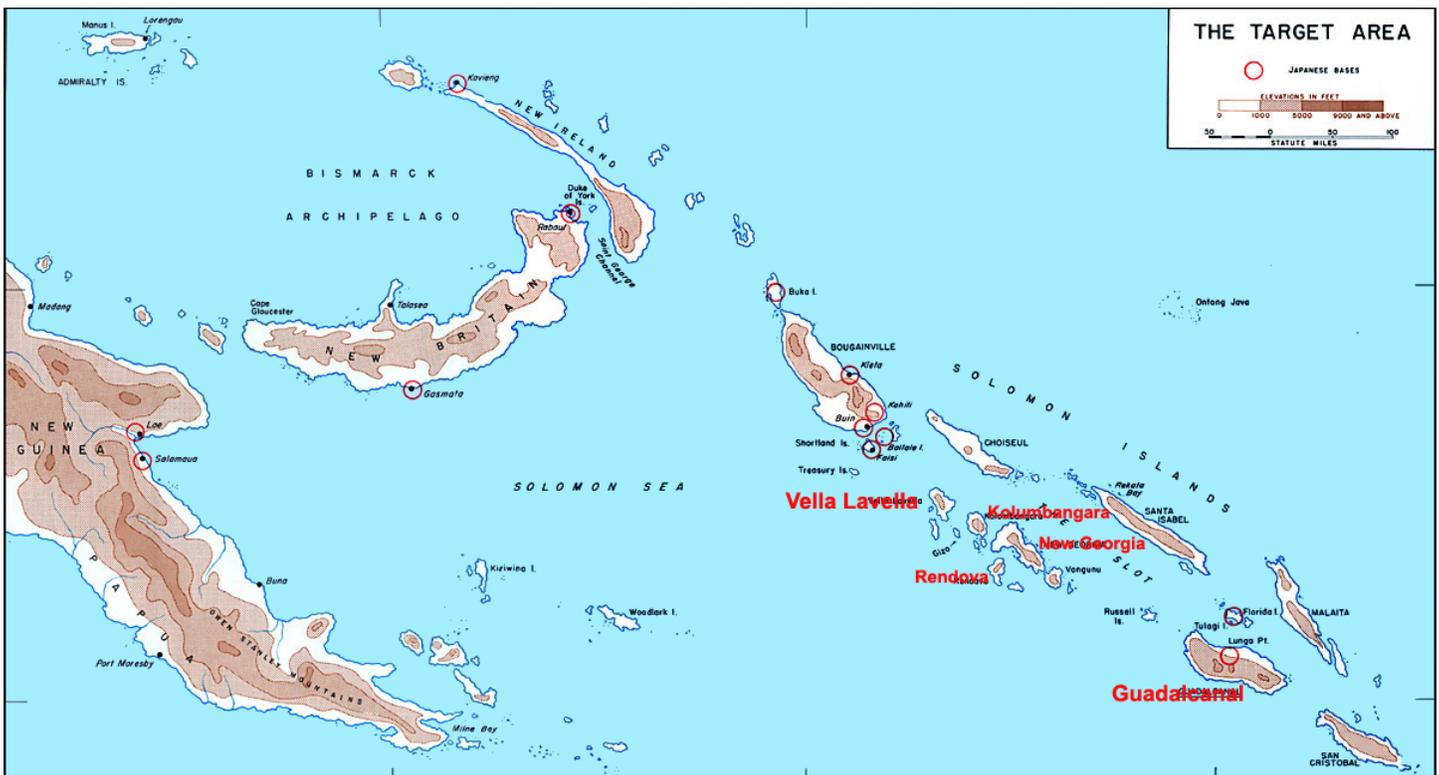


# The 35th on Vella Lavella

From 9 February to mid-July, 1943, after the fall of Guadalcanal, the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment worked with the rest of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division maintaining the security of Guadalcanal. Preparations were made for any potential counterattacks by the Japanese and improvements to the new base of operations were made so that it might be used in further operations against the Japanese, who were still in strong positions in the Solomon Islands. The 25<sup>th</sup> Division or "Tropic Lightning", as it had become known, spent the spring and summer training and recuperating from the battle it had just fought.

The planning for the drive to push the Japanese from the Solomon Islands did not originally include the units of the 25<sup>th</sup>, however, as the fighting on New Georgia began, it became apparent that more support was necessary. In July of 1943, both the 27<sup>th</sup> and 161<sup>st</sup> RCT's were brought in to New Georgia to aid in driving the enemy from the island and in capturing the airfield that had been built at Munda. The 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, as division reserve, was scheduled to join the division in August, to aid in the reduction of Rendova Island. By that time, however, the 27<sup>th</sup> and 161<sup>st</sup> had proven themselves masters of the situation and plans were changed.



## Vella Lavella

During the weeks following the fall of Munda, the Japanese fled New Georgia, occupying Kolombangara, the island to the northwest. They also established positions on Arundel, a smaller island off the western tip of New Georgia. Admiral William F. Halsey, commander of the South Pacific Area, decided not to attempt an assault on Kolombangara. The New Georgia campaign had already taken more time and men than originally planned and the capture of Kolombangara would not be fast or easy. Forces, instead, were committed on Vella Lavella, the island northwest of Kolombangara, which was reported to be held only by a small group of

Japanese, and on Arundel. Halsey hoped that U.S. possession of these islands would make the enemy positions on Kolombangara untenable.



Brig. Gen. Robert McClure, the 25th Division's assistant commander, led the Northern Landing Force that assaulted the beaches of Vella Lavella. The force, formed around the division's 35th Infantry, made its landings on 15 August, 1943, along the beaches near Barakoma, on the southeast coast. The 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry, landed without opposition and proceeded towards the Bilo Mission near the southern tip of the island.

The 1st Battalion came ashore on the 2d Battalion's right and moved north, crossing the Barakoma River. The 3d Battalion faced greater difficulty in getting to the beach. As their landing craft approached the shore, the Japanese attacked from the air, strafing the beaches. The Japanese dispatched a large number of Zero fighters and Val dive-bombers in response to the landing. They attacked the LSTs around noon but were driven off by massed anti-aircraft fire. A further attempt late in the day was also spoiled. Casualties during the initial landing amounted to 12 killed and 50 wounded for the Americans. After the initial fighting, the Americans established a beachhead and began resupply operations.



The landing force established a defensive perimeter across the southern tip of the island, extending from the western coast, opposite Bilo Mission, to just north of the Barakoma River. It was from these positions that the U.S. troops searched for pockets of enemy soldiers. These patrols met scattered resistance, but for the most part were unopposed.

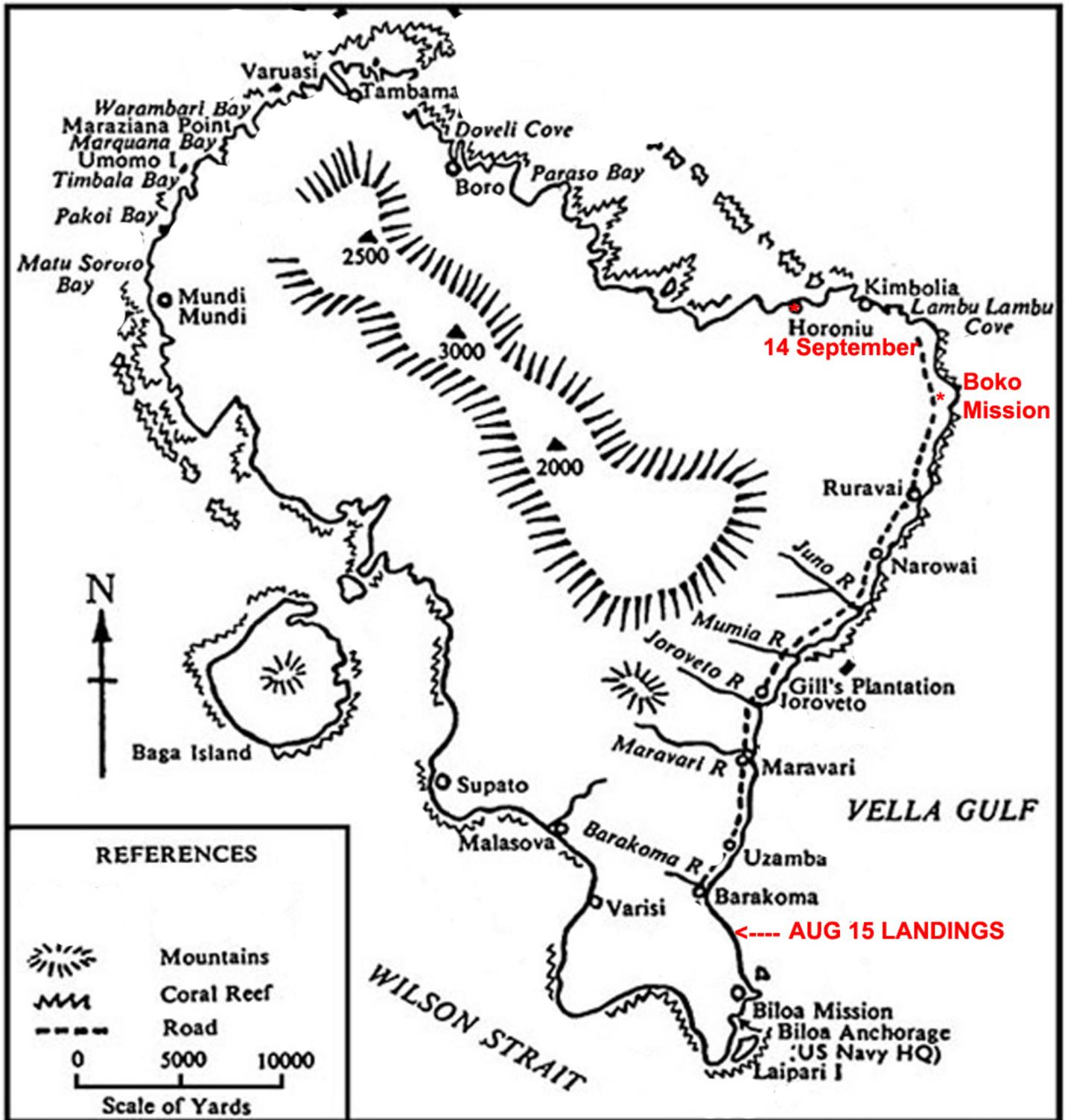
In late August, a US reconnaissance patrol searching for a suitable location for a radar site discovered a strong concentration of Japanese troops around Kokolope Bay.

The US commander, McClure, subsequently began an advance along the east coast of the island supported by native guides and a small group of Fijian scouts, aimed at capturing Kokolope Bay in order to establish the radar site.

As the troops from the 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry pushed beyond their beachhead, a battalion of the 145th Infantry Regiment arrived from New Georgia to hold the perimeter.



US Troops on Vella Lavella



The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion started off on 30 August, with Company A in the lead. Five days later Companies A and C reached the Boko Mission, east of Kokolope Bay. The Japanese attacked the next morning, but were driven off by Company A.

Companies B and C, on 11 September, again came under fire and could not break through the enemy position. The companies withdrew to the battalion line and waited for further orders.

McClure pulled the 3d Battalion, 35th Infantry, including the 64<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, from the defensive perimeter and directed it to move north as part of an assault in conjunction with

the 1st Battalion. The 1st Battalion was to move on Valapata, southwest of Kokolope Bay. At the same time the 3d Battalion was to drive north and prevent the enemy from escaping to the west.



Both battalions started off on 14 September, but rugged terrain slowed the 3d Battalion. This delay allowed the enemy to slip away, and the 1st Battalion reached Valapata to find the enemy emplacements abandoned. The 3d Battalion then relieved the 1st at Valapata, Boko Mission, and Baka Baka. The 1st Battalion searched the area from the bay to Lambu Lambu, further east, for any enemy stragglers. On 14 September, Horaniu was captured after the Japanese garrison withdrew to the northeast of the island.

While the 1st and 3d Battalions conducted operations in the north, the 2d Battalion manned the defensive perimeter in the

south. The battalion had successfully extended its lines north along the west coast to Nyanga Plantation and on to Paramata.



NZ 3d in relief of the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry received the bronze assault landing arrowhead device on its Northern Solomons campaign streamer.

This was the situation when, on 18 September, Admiral Halsey turned the command of the forces on Vella Lavella over to Maj. Gen. H.E. Barrowclough, commander of the 3d New Zealand Division, which relieved the 35th Infantry.



For its assault landing on Vella Lavella, the 35<sup>th</sup> infantry

received the bronze assault landing arrowhead device on its Northern Solomons campaign streamer. Following the capture of the island, the Allies developed it into an important airbase which was used in the reduction of main Japanese base at Rabaul.

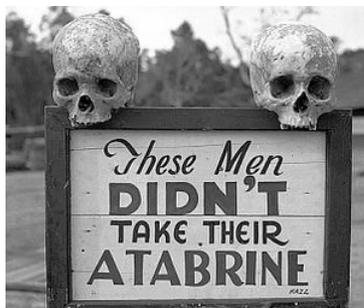
Subsequently, Barakoma Airfield on Vella Lavella was the home base for VMF-214 (the "Black Sheep," led by Gregory Boyington).

Upon relief by the New Zealand forces, the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry rejoined the division on Guadalcanal on October 20. On 10 November, the division embarked for a far too short, but glorious rest period in New Zealand. This visit was

undoubtedly the high point in the regiment's career in the South Pacific. The cordiality, generosity and consideration displayed by the New Zealanders for battle-weary soldiers of another nation cannot be too highly praised. But all too soon, the 35<sup>th</sup> had to return to the business at hand; the extermination of the Japanese. On 9 February, 1944, the regiment left New Zealand, and on 13 February, debarked upon New Caledonia, where almost immediately, a new training program was begun.

## 35<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY REGIMENT - TRAINING ON NEW CALEDONIA

Feb 13, 1944 to Jan 11, 1945



The problem of readying the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry for further combat was of a threefold character. Perhaps the most important necessity was to physically recondition the original personnel of the unit who were largely infected with malaria, and who were all, to some degree, enervated by long exposure to tropical climates. Through the training program, extraordinary attention was paid to all factors affecting the physical welfare of the men. A strict atabrine discipline was enforced. This situation was complicated by the fact that in New Zealand and during the first half of the training period in New

Caledonia, the 25<sup>th</sup> Division was used as a test group for experiments in the administration of atabrine. This malaria prophylaxis proved extremely effective; at the end of the training period, the incidence of malaria in the regiment was reduced to one or two cases per month. And as a result of the experiments made with the 25<sup>th</sup> Division, an entirely new and effective technique of malaria prophylaxis was evolved for the entire Pacific Area.

In the field of training, we began with the elementals. Recent officer replacements required further training under practical field conditions, (and) the older officers needed to learn the latest the schools had to say. Officers and non-commissioned officers who had been promoted in combat and assumed more complicated duties had to polish and perfect the knowledge hard-won on the battlefield. The men on the line had to become more perfect in the jobs they know so well. And there were many new weapons – the M-1, the Bazooka, the pack 37mm gun, the anti-tank grenade launchers, the white phosphorus grenade, the sniper rifle, the assault mortar, and the assault machine gun.



In addition, the replacements we had received and the many replacements we would receive during the training period had not only to be trained, but absorbed into the regiment – into the squads, platoons and companies. Above all, the naturally sharp distinction between the new men and the old must be broken down, so that all would be smoothly interacting parts of an efficient machine.

If this were not enough, the regiment must be trained to wage a type of warfare new to them. Our previous campaigns had been conducted in almost impenetrable jungle, where only the

most elementary camouflage was necessary, and where any great degree of mobility was impossible. We were accustomed to fighting under the most difficult conditions, but the tactics in warfare over open, relatively flat terrain, were outside our practical experience. We had to learn the arts of camouflage, to adjust ourselves quickly to constant change, to swift marches and motor movements. We had to learn to fight for roads instead of trails, and how to fight in villages and towns.

It was an ambitious program, but a start was made in February.

The Division had been notified that it must be ready for combat in June, and with this in mind, the entire course of training was mapped out: a progression beginning with the use of individual and crew served weapons and culminating in the employment of the weapon known as a regiment.

Deadlines for each phase of the training were set by Division. The 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry was constantly ahead of the schedule, and ahead of the other regiments of the Division. In the frequent problems and maneuvers involving the entire Division, the regiment acquitted itself with honor in both offense and defense. Tribute must be paid to Colonel Claude E. Journey, then Commanding Officer of the Regiment. His thorough knowledge of his profession, his administrative ability, his superior qualities of leadership, his abounding energy and zeal, were essential to the success of the Regiment's training program. Due to ill health, he was forced to leave the Regiment in May, and thus was unable to see the Regiment's successes in combat, which he had so confidently expected and done so much to insure.

The expected commitment of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division in June did not materialize, and the period from June to November was largely spent in refining and perfecting our proficiency in what we learned previously. The employment of the larger units, such as the battalion and the entire regiment was emphasized.



LST and LCT of WWII

In October, a trend toward amphibious training began, and during the month of November, training was almost entirely centered on amphibious operations. During the early part of the month, dry-training was conducted in the Regimental Training Area. This training culminated in a Regimental Combat Team landing on a simulated beachhead, which greatly benefited the combat team, in that personnel became familiar not only with their own tasks, but with the many administrative details, such as rosters, loading plans, landing schedules, etc., needed to make a landing successful. In this dry landing, a simulated beach was lined with all types of landing craft outlined on the ground. All combat team equipment was placed in the proper landing craft as it would have been in actuality. A shore party battalion from another regiment

was used, and complete shore party installations were set up on the beachhead. Casualties were evacuated through the proper channels.

During this time, our 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion trained as a shore party battalion by acting as shore party for the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry, then going through their amphibious training at Uitoe Beach.



Then on 10 November, the 35<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team moved to the Uitoe Beach Area, Cape St. Vincent, New Caledonia, for a two-week period of amphibious training conducted by the 7<sup>th</sup> Amphibious Training Unit. The men received raining on APA's, LST's, LCT's, and LCVP's. They were also trained in the unloading of cargo and waterproofing of equipment. Several actual landings were made and the tactical situation simulated was such as to use all elements of the combat team.

Though this training was of a repeat nature to some of the older men, it greatly benefited the new men and refreshed the plan. It was of great value as a morale factor, for it provided welcome change from the many months of training the men had gone through. Coming at a time just before the movement of the Division into combat, it was an excellent tapering off period.

Training during December was curtailed by preparations for the Regiment's overseas move and by the move itself. During the early part of December, training consisted mainly of conditioning marches and gun drill.

On shipboard, training was restricted to conditioning exercises on deck, care and cleaning of equipment, and, once the nature of the coming operation was disclosed, to lectures concerning the terrain over which the regiment was likely to fight, and difficulties we were likely to meet.

On 21 December 1944, the convoy arrived at Guadalcanal, and the combat team debarked in the vicinity of the Balesuma River in a practice amphibious landing of the entire Division. In this operation, involving the landing of the entire combat team, the unloading of many supplies, and the setting up of a beachhead perimeter, all lessons learned in the previous months of training were brought into practice.

## MOVEMENT

The ten-day period of amphibious training at Uitoe Beach marked the Regiment's preparations for overseas movement. During the long months of what amounted to garrison conditions, organizations and individuals alike had accumulated a large excess of equipment and luxury items. The necessity for strict selection of equipment to be carried to the beach effectively eliminated the non-essential, and the ten-day "shakedown" period proved the wisdom of the choice. As a result, there was little confusion or indecision as to what equipment to carry in what echelon when the real move came.

On 7 November, the 25<sup>th</sup> infantry Division had issues the first set of Warning Orders, designed to systematize preparations for the move.

Police of the camp area was begun immediately. Old latrines and sumps were given a final inspection. All unsalvageable equipment and other materials were burned. Permanent camp improvements, such as buildings, tent floors and frames, showers, and motor pool and RSO installations, were policed and left in place for the incoming unit. Serviceable tents were left standing.

The Regiment was to move in four echelons as follows: The First Echelon, consisting of tactical units, their necessary equipment, first priority vehicles, a 15 day gas supply, and 30 days' supply of food, ammunition and oil, was to arrive on the far shore two days after the initial landing. The Second Echelon, consisting mainly of the balance of the Regiment's vehicles and its maintenance equipment, was to arrive on the far shore four days after the initial landing. The Third Echelon, carrying Regimental administrative personnel and equipment, was to arrive on the far shore twelve days after the initial landing. The Fourth Echelon, consisting of footlockers, "B" bags, cots, tents, Special Services equipment, and Post Exchange supplies, and the balance of the regimental impediments, was to arrive on the far shore thirty days after the initial landing.

Immediately upon the regiment's return to Camp Hill from Uitoe Beach on 20 November, the job of segregating supplies and equipment into the proper echelons was begun in earnest. As quickly as transportation difficulties would permit, the equipment was then transported to Noumea Harbor (New Caledonia) and stored to await loading. The Anti-Tank Company moved to the loading area to provide guards for regimental equipment.

The Second Echelon was the first to depart. On 28 November it was completely loaded on the AK Grierson and on the same date, the Grierson departed from Noumea Harbor.

All First Echelon equipment was loaded and the assault troops were ready to move to Noumea for embarkation on 1 December 1944 when orders were received to halt all plans for troop movement. The most necessary housekeeping equipment was removed from the APA's and returned to camp, and the regiment awaited further orders.

Six days later, the division resumed boarding preparations and at last, on 14 December 1944, the regimental combat team had cleared their bivouac area on the previous day, and bivouacked for the night at Camp Hill, in order to take their place in the Motor March on the 14<sup>th</sup>. On 13 December, advance parties from all organizations had preceded the combat team to the loading area, to serve as guides at the docks and on board the APA's

On the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, all personnel assembled in their respective areas by 0800. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Landing Team headed the march, departing from Camp Hill in 80 2 ½ ton trucks at 1300. They were followed by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Landing Team, in 82 trucks at 1400. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Landing team departed last, in 90 trucks, at 1500.

By 1900, all Battalion Landing Teams had de-trucked at their respective loading points and begun embarkation. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Landing Team embarked on the APA Audrain (#59) from Sandy Beach; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on the Laurane (#153) from the Marine Landing; and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion on the Ocento (#157) from the grand Docks.

By 2300, all Battalion Landing Teams had completed the embarkation and on 17 December 1944, after two days aboard transports in Noumea Harbor, the 35<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team departed for its unknown destination.

After an uneventful trip, the convoy reached Guadalcanal on 21 December, and the division disembarked in a practice amphibious landing. The maneuver was over at 1530, and the regiment bivouacked in a half completed camp 4 miles inland. We remained for 3 days, re-embarking on the transports on the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. After spending Christmas Eve anchored off Tulagi, we continued on our northern voyage reaching Manus, in the Admiralty Islands, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December. The convoy lay there over the New Year with the aid of 3 bottles of beer apiece. Despite a drizzling rain throughout most of the day, the affair was a success.

Early on the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the convoy left Manus Harbor, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, it was officially announced that our destination was Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, Philippine Islands.

The last leg of the voyage was almost as uneventful as the first had been. Air raids were expected hourly. Had anyone known how peaceful our journey would be, and supplied himself with betting money, he could have made his fortune for life, for as each day we drew nearer to our destination, the heavy gamblers on the regiment, who would bet on anything, from the drawing of a card to which way a Jap would fall when shot, offered fantastically greater odds. But there were no raids. At 2200, on the 7<sup>th</sup>, as the convoy passed thru the Surigao Straits, two torpedoes were fired at us. The Japs must have fired them from a prudently long distance, for they passed harmlessly through the convoy, not even disturbing the sleep of the Army personnel aboard. This was the only enemy attack during the entire voyage.