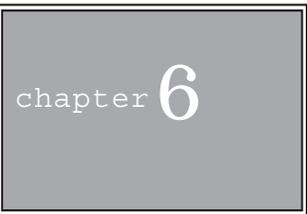


The ATC on Ascension

During the second half of 1942, you could have stood on Palm beach, Florida, and looked at a sight such as the world had never seen, as every thirty seconds planes roared on by—from ambulance transports and Navy planes to mediums to vicious-looking huge bombers headed in one direction—southeast, toward Puerto Rico, Brazil and across the ocean to Africa. With volcanic hills behind a U.S. tiny airfield on Ascension, a small secretive island in the middle of the South Atlantic, 1448 miles from Brazil, 1362 miles from Africa, troubled by birds, at no time in history was this airfield more vital than during 1942. Its story portrays no flashy scene of action, of bombs bursting, yet it was vital for the Air Transport Command whose mission was supplying the Allies for battle-victory in North Africa. Only after Accra became dispensable in December with a new more direct route to Dakar would flight scheduling subside.

Ascension's runway at Wideawake Field was blasted out of a volcanic mountain side by engineers in Spring of 1942, and by July 10, the first Liberator had landed. Supplies and aircraft reached British forces by two basic ways through the South, by sea or air. Air was the quickest, and was why the run was so vital. Accra became the chief airport of call for U.S. ferry pilots on Africa eastward from Ascension. Accra consisted of giant rolling open country, red brown in the dry season, and



AN OUTPOST

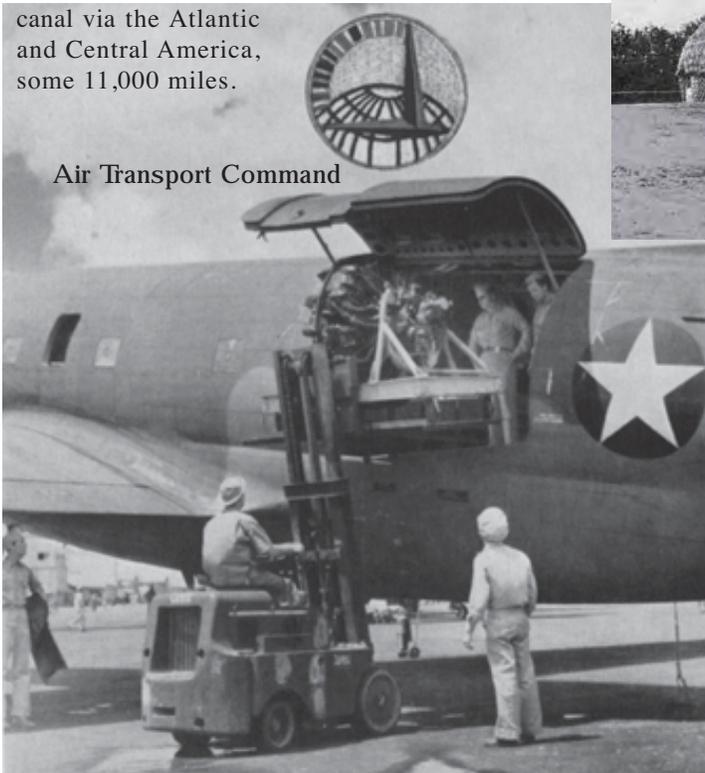


Take-off from Accra to Marrakech, 3000 miles away. It is about 12,000 miles from Accra, Ghana, to Guadalcanal. From Marrakech to Guadalcanal via the Atlantic and Central America, some 11,000 miles.

engulfed by rats, mosquitoes, giant ant hills and fleas. Malaria was rampant. From the outer limits of Accra, the trans-African ATC route reached Egypt or turned to Marrakesh, Morocco, in a 3,000 mile stretch across two extremes of weather in non-air-conditioned airplanes—blistering desert heat and violent dust storms and torrential jungle rainfall of almost continuous overcast. The inhabitants on the African outposts liked Americans and trusted them. Had the Nazis been suspicious of how great operations were in the South, they would have been stirred to interfere, but it was one of the war's best kept secrets. Over three million ton miles were flown by the ATC over the South Atlantic, a major accomplishment.



Air Transport Command



Native style huts for Americans at Marrakech air base. The saga of liberty arched across many lands.





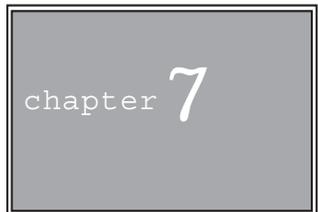
Guadalcanal & Santa Cruz

Early in the soft summer of nineteen-forty two, Marines from the Second Division left sunny California to rendezvous with the Marines of the first Division at Fiji, 2,950 miles away from Hawaii, and approximately 670 miles south of the Equator. Southward, the gentle tropic rains fell on the voyagers, while the weather turned humid. Arriving at Fiji, both amphibious divisions participated in practice maneuvers, but it didn't last very long for the First Division. They moved out hastily and voyaged on to a new destination. They had no idea where in the world they were going.

To the military chiefs of World War Two, the key of carrying the war to Japan was to reach through the Solomons—very outermost of the Japanese Empire in the Pacific Ocean.

The Solomons are a cluster of over 18,000 islands.

Most islands, because they once pertained to Spain, have Spanish names. Characteristically, one was named after a navigator of one of the ancient Conquistadores who sailed these parts in the 16th Century. It was christened Guadalcanal for the sailor Pedro de Ortega's birthplace in Spain; so christened by his naval captain, Alvaro de Mendana. This Solomon island, Guadalcanal, stirs up the crystal essence of the Marines. As for the others, one could say most are unknowns, probably never heard of before, Buka, Ontong, Florida, Espiritus



Santo, Bouganville (pronounced Boo-gan-vil), Gizo and San Cristobal, just to name a few. Comparatively large is Guadalcanal: ninety-two miles long and some thirty miles wide. This piece of parcel-post island was to become the hot-bed of war and inflamed suicide.

The island is one of thick jungles, and rivers, plus plains. A considerable part of Guadalcanal's northern rim bordering the Matanikau River possessed wide coastal plains, reflective of runways for an airfield. Securing them was paramount.

On word from our ally, the Australians, we learned that the Japanese were building an airbase, from which to strike allied supply lines, and possibly cut-off the last friendly nations in the Pacific: Australia and New Zealand. The whole key to the Solomon campaign, which promulgated the beginning of the long allied chain of reaching Tokyo, was the taking and the holding of Guadalcanal Island. This effective duty called for the tough and elite United States Marine Corps; and under the codeword of Operation Shoestring, the task fell on the shoulders of the 15,000 plus troops from the U.S. First Marine Division.

On August 7, 1942, the humid voyage by convoy was over for the Marines. With the advent of light they hit the beaches. Thus resulted the very first American beach-head full-landing of World War Two, occurring at Beach Red and Beach Blue under simultaneous naval air cover.

The landing was unexpected for the Japanese, who were not prepared to meet them at the beaches.

Unusual as it may seem, the important naval forces had been spotted before reaching the islands, but it was not believed possible that the Americans could launch a counteroffensive in the Pacific so soon in 1942.

At Beach Red (Guadalcanal) the vanguard of 10,900

American forces landed on the Solomon islands in 1942. War is barbaric and vicious. The Solomons, about 6,100 miles from Los Angeles, marked the first land that was taken from the Japanese by any allied nation, and its battles were horrific. Hanging on to Guadalcanal had critical importance.

Opposite page, the hot, steamy swamps of a 2500 square-mile island: Guadalcanal. Mission of the Marines: to take the island. There were no newsreel color cameras when they landed on Aug. 7.

