

LIFE ON GUADALCANAL

A Week With The U.S. Marines

THIS vivid account of a week with the U.S. Marines in the Solomon Islands was written recently by the New York "Times" Correspondent, F. Tillman Durdin.

LIFE has never a dull moment for the Marines on Guadalcanal, site of the important Solomons air base that was wrested from the Japanese a month ago. If the enemy is not attacking, the Marines are.

Existence is an incessant struggle for survival and a continuous series of alarms and surprises and battles and excursions. Marines here say it isn't so bad now as it was, but there is still plenty of excitement—enough to make "never a dull moment" almost the universal phrase for passing the time of day out here.

On the night of my arrival on Guadalcanal (Sept. 1), the Marine positions were bombed twice by large flights of Japanese aircraft. Shortly after midnight, three enemy warships, either cruisers or destroyers, slipped into shore some 15 miles to the east of our bivouac and were landing troops and supplies.

The night vibrated with the whirl of wings as our 'planes took to the skies to attack the Japanese air and sea raiders. Enemy bombs bracketed our encampment and a few were killed and several injured. The Marines, cursing "Tojo," tumbled from their bedrolls to their foxholes and then back to bed again. The moon broke hazily through the scudding clouds and made splotches of pale light beneath the palm and ironwood trees. It was a typical night on Guadalcanal.

The Japanese bombed us again about noon the next day, and our fighters got four Zeros and two bombers in an air battle.

"Oscar" the Submarine

The following night, "Oscar"—the Japanese submarine that seems to lurk continuously offshore—surfaced at midnight and indulged in some 10 minutes of scattered shelling of Marines. There were no casualties.

"Never a dull moment," said the Marines the following morning as they broke out their shaving kits and washbasins. "Did you ever read *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*?" asked one officer, reflectively, as he sorted out his mess gear at breakfast table. Life is like that on Guadalcanal.

Two nights later, two Japanese destroyers and a light cruiser crept into the bay off Guadalcanal and shelled the shore positions. U.S. destroyers the day before had taken a Marine raiding party to little Savo Island off Guadalcanal to clean up the remnant of Japanese forces there. Life is like that on Guadalcanal.

Another raider group swept through the extensive area westward of the Marines' perimeter, hunting down a Japanese force that has a foothold there. A half-dozen Japanese were flushed and shot. The rest fled beyond range and down the coast.

Meanwhile, the routine camp life goes on. The Marines bivouacked in encampments over an area of jungles and palm trees. The palm trees here are part of the world's largest coconut plantation, owned by Lever Brothers, and are the source of copra for soaps that are sold all over the globe. Most of the Marines live on the ground under tiny pup tents. The others, who are without tents, have rigged up makeshift caves in the sides of the hills.

Rain, Mud, Filth

Men sleep with their jobs—gunners with their guns, drivers with their trucks and jeeps. Mosquito nets are a necessity against anopheles. It rains almost every night—weepy tropical rain that soaks into the bedrolls and seeps through tarpaulin. The nights are passed in wet chill and discomfort, and the days in mud and filth that the Marines, who have been too busy fighting, have not had time to clean up.

The Marines deal with filth on their clothes and bodies in the Unga River, which runs miraculously swift and clear through the occupied area. The swim in the Unga is one of the daily necessities on Guadalcanal. Many of the men drive mud-covered jeeps and trucks into the shallow, pebbly stream and wash themselves, vehicles and clothes all at one session.

There are still only two meals daily. They are generous meals, however, and a typical menu includes steak, beans, bread and butter with jam, canned peaches and coffee. The men supplement regular meals with coconuts and occasional local tangerines. There are no natives around to climb trees and get them coconuts, but high winds have solved this problem by breaking off tops of trees and bringing down a bonanza of nuts.

Black Market in Souvenirs

Many of the men still are smoking captured Japanese cigarettes and eating captured Japanese peppermint candy, which is not so bad as wearing Japanese underwear. There is a thriving black market in Japanese souvenirs, which range all the way from fencing shields to occupation bank notes.

Life is reduced to essentials, and Guadalcanal's greatest pleasure is just in still being alive, in mail from home, in night-time camaraderie around radio programmes from home, in group singing of all songs that have become American folk music.

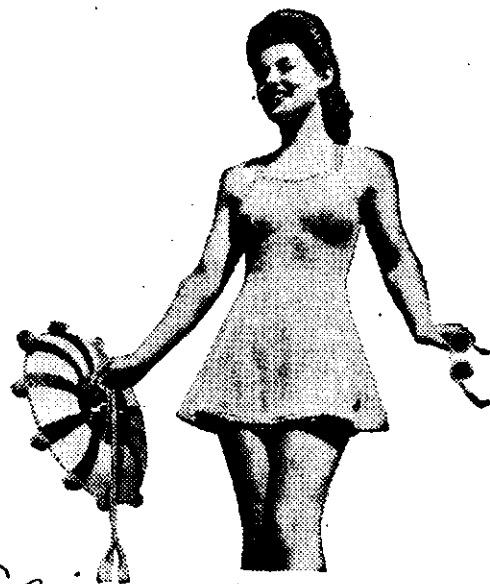
Marines take it all with sardonic cheerfulness, with a smile or wisecrack. When the Japanese fail to provide excitement, Mother Nature steps in. Last night there was an earthquake shock to spice the routine.

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