

Edson's Ridge Guadalcanal

In early September 1942, Marines had taken control of Guadalcanal and its strategic airfield, but their hold on the island was tenuous. Because of a strong Japanese Naval presence, the Marines on the island were under-supplied and could not rely on naval support. The Japanese, recognizing that loss of the island base could shift the momentum in the war, rushed to retake the airfield from the US Marines. Though US air and sea power kept the Japanese Navy away from the island during the day, under the cover of darkness the Japan secretly transported troops and supplies to the island through an undefended corridor (referred to by US forces as the Tokyo Express). The early inability of the allies to cut off this supply corridor strengthened Japanese opposition and could have resulted in the Marines on the island being overpowered.

Marines were alerted to the presence of significant Japanese troops when scouts, with the aid of Island locals discovered and destroyed an enemy supply cache. From the documents they recovered they were able to anticipate the attack of an enemy force of formidable size. Marine Corps leaders evaluated the terrain and anticipated that the attack would likely come along Lunga Ridge. The ridge offered a natural approach to the airfield and had previously been largely undefended. In response to the threat, 840 marines were all that could be spared to defend the ridge. The defenders included the First Marine Raider Battalion, led by Colonel Merritt (Red Mike) Edson, and the First Parachute Battalion. With limited time and resources, the Marines dug into the ridge and prepared for the attack.



On the night of September 12th, following a naval bombardment from their ships, more than 3000 Japanese soldiers attacked Edson's Marines at Lunga Ridge. After hours of bloody close range fighting,

the Japanese broke through American lines. Though the Japanese eventually withdrew for the evening, the Marines had lost a third of their men and were forced to fall back to consolidate defenses. Marine Corps leadership knew another fight would ensue the next evening. As the outnumbered Marines worried about their position, Colonel Edson simply said, "It is useless to ask ourselves why it is we are here. We are here. There is only us between the airfield and the Japs. If we don't hold, we will lose Guadalcanal."

Throughout that day, Marines, under Edson's direction, prepared for the coming battle by strengthening defenses, digging fortifications, zeroing in mortars, securing the support of artillery, and getting needed rest. That night wave after wave of attack came, with each one reducing marine numbers and weakening defenses. But the Marines held. In the end the Japanese retreated, too diminished to effectively assault the air field.

The Message

Every day our goals and values are under assault. We have our objectives. We know what kind of person we want to be and what kind of life we want to live. However, there are constantly forces that try to overrun those objectives. Every day we must fight the battle between what is easy and what is right. In order to succeed we must take a good look at our own vulnerabilities. We must ask ourselves where the biggest threat to our future will most likely come from, and then we must strengthen those defenses. We must identify where our destructive habits, desires and attitudes are being supported and then choke off their supply lines.

There may be times when we feel like it isn't fair, or that everything is working against us becoming the person we want. In fact, that may be true. Maybe you do have the odds stacked against you. Maybe life has been unfair. But that doesn't change anything. Remember, "It is useless to ask ourselves why it is we are here. We are here. There is only us between the [the future we want] and [a life of just getting by]. If we don't hold, we will lose [ourselves]." So, rather than wallow in pity because the odds are stacked against you, get to work. Like Edson's Raiders did on "Bloody Ridge," fortify your position. Pour over maps of your personal battlefield to be able to see the big picture of your life. Strengthen your resolve. Enlist artillery support from those you respect. Replenish your spiritual supplies and make sure the lines stay open. Then fight to the last man.