

1ST MARINE DIVISION
"THE OLD BREED"
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS (USMC)



Following the 7 December 1941 outbreak of war between the United States and Japan, the division deployed to the southwest Pacific to participate in the initial American invasion of Japanese occupied territory. On 7 August 1942, the 1st Marine Division (reinforced), supported by two naval task forces and other escorting naval units, made amphibious landings on Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands. After a hard-fought, six-months campaign, the struggle for Guadalcanal ended with a resounding American victory. The Guadalcanal campaign marked the first ground defeat of the heretofore invincible Japanese legions. In late December 1942, the division was withdrawn to Australia for rest and rehabilitation, having suffered almost 3,000 battle casualties. After rebuilding for nine months in Australia, the division participated with the Sixth Army in the New Guinea-Bismarcks theater of action. On 26 December 1943, the division landed on western New Britain for the purpose of isolating Rabaul, and protecting the American advance towards New Guinea. After more than four months of sharp conflict in rugged terrain, the Japanese were forced from the western half of the island, and the 1st Marine Division was relieved by Army units. The division then moved to Pavuvu Island in the Russells to prepare for its next operation, the seizure of Peleliu. On 15 September 1944, the 1st Marine Division landed on Peleliu in a bloody assault against a well-organized, well-led, thoroughly fortified enemy. By aggressive assault and bold maneuver, the division seized the campaign's prize, the Peleliu airfield, then cut the defender's position into localized pockets of resistance. A slow and costly battle of attrition was waged, in which the division suffered some 7,000 casualties before the island was declared secure in October. The bloody battle for Okinawa was the last campaign for the 1st Marine Division in World War II. The valiant fighting spirit of the division was an important contribution to the successful conquest of Okinawa. As part of the Tenth Army's III Amphibious Corps, the division was one of the assault forces to land on the enemy bastion on 1 April 1945. The invasion of Okinawa marked the end of the "ocean"

drive against Japan, a drive that began at Guadalcanal in 1942. Continuous and bloody fighting for the division would persist on Okinawa, however, until the island was secured in late June 1945. The division suffered more than 8,600 casualties in the three-month campaign. The end of the war on 14 August 1945, found the 1st Marine Division still on Okinawa, making preparations for the conquest of Japan. The news of the Japanese surrender was welcomed by all the officers and enlisted Marines. The 1st Marine Division was awarded three Presidential Unit Citations for its heroic participation in the Guadalcanal, Peleliu, and Okinawa campaigns. As always, the price of victory was high, as the division suffered approximately 20,000 casualties during the course of World War II, including more than 5,000 deaths. Three weeks after the Japanese surrender, the division was dispatched to China for occupation duty, where it supervised the disarmament and repatriation of Japanese troops in the northern part of the country. While in China, elements of the division had a number of encounters with Chinese Communist forces. In the spring of 1947, the division returned to the United States, where it was stationed at Camp Pendleton, California. Along with the rest of the Marine Corps, the 1st Marine Division was reduced to peacetime strength during the late 1940s.