



Retired Marine Col. Charles Waterhouse--a World War II veteran--depicts the stark ferocity of the Tarawa landing in this acrylic painting aptly named "Battle of Tarawa."

BLOODY TARAWA: "76 HOURS OF HELL"

The Central Pacific's Gilbert Islands were strategically important to the Allies in World War II. Tarawa, an atoll in those islands, was the scene of a major amphibious assault and one of the proudest testaments to valor in U.S. Marine Corps history.

Japan's Rear Adm. Shibasaki Meichi was quoted as saying before the assault that it would take the American forces "a million men and a hundred years" to capture the atoll. The Japanese had backed up this boast with an elite force of almost 5,000 men and had heavily fortified the island of Betio in the southwestern corner of the atoll. Since capturing the islands from the British three days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese had spent two years positioning coastal defense guns, anti-aircraft guns, anti-boat guns, light and heavy machine guns and an airstrip they could use to strike at Allied troops stationed in the area. The atoll was strategically vital to both sides, and the stage was set for one of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific.

The Allies were faced with serious problems in capturing Tarawa. The big coastal guns would keep the Navy ships either under constant fire or at bay, and the Japanese had used sunken ships and other large pieces of metal to create obstacles

which blocked the avenues of approach from the sea.

The approaching craft would have to slow down to maneuver, putting them in prearranged ambush sites where they would be subject to deadly, concentrated fire from fortified positions. The next line of obstacles included a double apron of barbed wire, and log and concrete barriers, which surrounded the island. After breaching these defenses, the Marines would still be faced with the beach itself, where the Japanese had fortified heavy machine guns, in addition to antipersonnel mines strategically placed in the fringing reef where the boats would have to land. With the added benefit of anti-aircraft guns and planes of their own, the defenders were well prepared for any assault.

The Allies had to take Tarawa, and on Nov. 19, 1943, the assault began. Faced with near-impossible odds, the Marines made it to the beach. By the last day of the battle, the Japanese had been forced into the east end of the three-mile island. Organized resistance on Tarawa ceased by 1:30 p.m. the third day.

The Battle of Tarawa took 76 hours and cost the lives of 1,020 Marines. The list of American wounded reached nearly 2,300.



WELCOME ABOARD

USS TARAWA LHA-1

EAGLE OF THE SEA



Oil painting of USS Tarawa (CV-40) by LTJG T.R. Clemons, (MC), USNR, Asst. Medical Officer, painted during a shakedown cruise and presented to the officers wardroom.

THE FIRST TARAWA: CV-40

USS Tarawa (CV 40) was one of the Navy's potent new 27,000 ton aircraft carriers and sister of the *Essex*, *Yorktown*, *Shangri-La* and *Princeton*. She served from 1945 until her decommissioning in 1960. The first Navy ship so named, *Tarawa* was built at the Norfolk Navy Yard in Portsmouth, Va., and launched in the Elizabeth River May 12, 1945.

In a speech delivered at *Tarawa's* launching, Marine Corps General Holland Smith, who commanded the Marines during the furious 76 hour fighting on the atoll, said, "It is eminently fitting that this great ship should be named for an operation which marked the turning point of the war in the Pacific and began a new era of amphibious warfare."

The Marines who went ashore on Nov. 20, 1943, carried a battle flag which was later presented to the new carrier. The flag, under which 1,020 Marines and Sailors died, was hauled down in a special ceremony on Feb. 13, 1944, by a handpicked color guard consisting of men who had taken part in the assault.

Tarawa boasted improvements in design and equipment that set her apart from the other ships in her class. The vessel was 856 ft. in length, 110 ft. in beam and had a 24 ft. draft. Fully loaded, she displaced more than 34,000 tons and was able to achieve a top speed of more than 30 knots.

With a crew compliment of approximately 2,500 men, *Tarawa* carried 80 planes and was equipped to launch and land the first Naval-developed jet-propelled aircraft.

LENGTH: 820FT / 250M (NEARLY 3 FOOTBALL FIELDS)

BEAM: 106FT / 32.2M (WIDER THAN A HOCKEY RINK)

DISPLACEMENT: 40,000 TONS

SPEED: EXCESS OF 20 KNOTS (23 MPH)

PROPULSION: TWIN-SCREWS (70,000 TOTAL SHAFT HORSEPOWER)

COMPLEMENT: 984 ENLISTED / 63 OFFICERS / 2,000 MARINES)

ARMAMENT: 2 - MK31 ROLLING AIRFRAME MISSILE (RAM) LAUNCHERS

2 - MK51 CLOSE - IN WEAPONS SYSTEM (CIWS)

4 - 25MM AND 4 - .50 CAL MACHINE GUNS

RADAR AN/SPS - 64 NAVIGATION

AN/SPS - 67 SURFACE SEARCH

AN/SPS - 48 AIR SEARCH

AN/SPN - 35C FINAL APPROACH

AN/SPS - 40 SECONDARY AIR SEARCH,

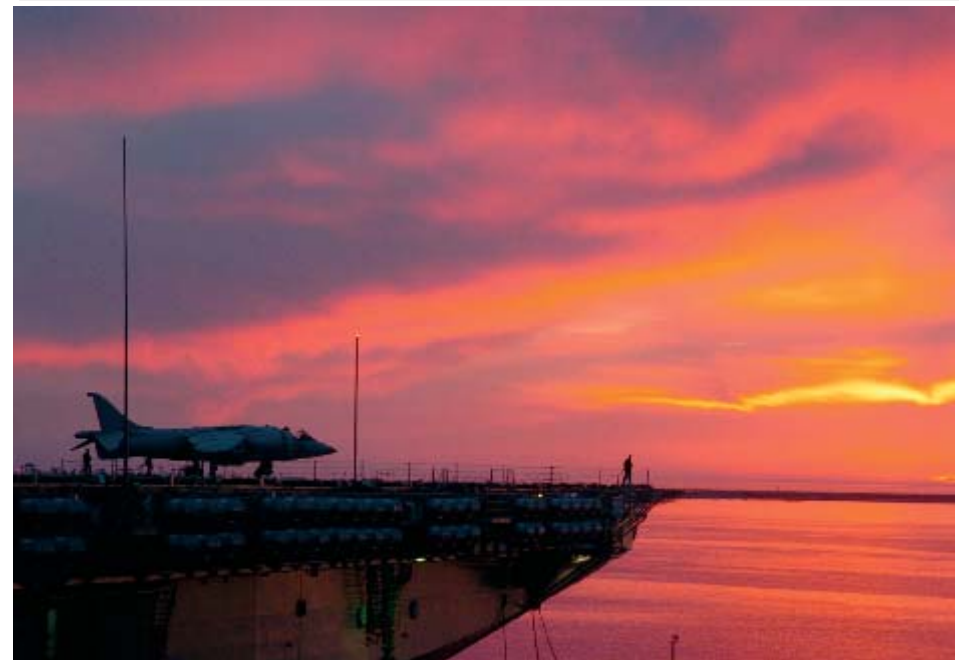
AN/SPN - 43C AIR SEARCH

MK 23 TARGET ACQUISITION SYSTEM, TAS FIRE CONTROL

AIRCRAFT 6 - AV-8B V/STOL HARRIER JETS 35 HELICOPTERS

4 - LANDING CRAFT AIR CUSHION (LCAC)

5 - LANDING CRAFT UTILITY (LCU)



TARAWA CLASS LHA



Tarawa's primary war-fighting mission is to embark, land, and sustain United States Marines on any shore during hostilities. The ship can perform this basic mission by helicopter, landing craft, amphibious vehicle, or any combination of these methods.

Tarawa (LHA-1) is the lead ship of the LHA-class of general purpose amphibious assault ships. *Tarawa* also serves as the centerpiece of a multi-ship Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) during deployments.

Tarawa can simultaneously fulfill six war-fighting requirements:

- ✓ Flagship for embarked Amphibious Squadron, Flag or General Officer staffs

- ✓ Amphibious assault craft launching platform. The ship employs a variety of surface assault craft: the Air-Cushion Landing Craft (LCAC), two 135-foot Utility Landing Craft (LCUs), and Amphibious Assault Vehicles (AAVs).

- ✓ Aircraft carrier, with a 35 aircraft compliment that includes the AV-8B fighter/attack Harrier jets. The primary helicopters are: the AH-1 Cobra helicopter gunships, the utility UH-1N Hueys, the CH-53E "heavy lift" Super Sea Stallion, and the CH-46D/E "medium lift" Sea Knight helicopters.

- ✓ Hospital ship, equivalent to the nation's finest local hospital with 17 intensive care unit beds, 4 operating rooms, 300 beds, a 1,000 unit blood bank, full dental facilities, orthopedics, trauma, general surgery and X-ray capabilities.

- ✓ Command and control ship, with the Navy's most sophisticated satellite communications capability.

- ✓ Assault provisions carrier, able to sustain embarked forces with fuel, ammunition and other supplies.



TARAWA TODAY:

LHA-1

USS *Tarawa* (LHA 1) was built by Ingalls Shipbuilding Division of Litton Industries at Pascagoula, Miss., and commissioned May 29, 1976. Her homeport is Naval Station, San Diego, Calif.

Tarawa's first deployment to the Western Pacific began in March 1979, when *Tarawa* rescued 400 Vietnamese refugees who were adrift in the South China Sea.

The "Eagle of the Sea" began her second deployment in Oct. 1980 with the first Marine Corps squadron to conduct integrated helicopter-fighter operations aboard an LHA-class ship for an extended deployment.

Tarawa completed her third deployment in Nov. 1983. During this deployment, *Tarawa* was diverted to the troubled waters of the Eastern Mediterranean to support the UN

peacekeeping forces in Beirut, Lebanon.

Tarawa steamed out of San Diego in October 1984 for her fourth Western Pacific deployment which encompassed participating in multiple joint military exercises with allied nations throughout the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

In June 1986, *Tarawa* departed for her fifth Western Pacific deployment, followed in May 1987 by a one-year overhaul. By July 1989, she rejoined the Pacific Fleet for her sixth operational deployment--subsequently participating in joint military exercises with Thailand

In Dec. 1990, *Tarawa* deployed to the Arabian Gulf as the flagship of a thirteen-ship amphibious task force in support of *Operation Desert Shield* and *Operation Desert*



Storm. It was the largest such deployment since the Vietnam conflict.

Tarawa participated in the amphibious assault *Exercise Sea Soldier IV* in Jan. 1991 as a prelude to amphibious assault landings in Kuwait. On Feb. 24th, *Tarawa* landed elements of the Fifth Marine Expeditionary Brigade into Saudi Arabia just south of the Kuwaiti border; these forces later joined the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force to enter and liberate Kuwait.

After the conclusion of *Operation Desert Storm*, *Tarawa* departed the Arabian Gulf in May 1991 and was diverted to Bangladesh to render humanitarian assistance to typhoon victims in *Operation Sea Angel*.

In May 1992, *Tarawa* commenced her eighth deployment to the Western Pacific, participating in the joint United States-Kuwait *Exercise Eager Mace '92-'93* and later supported the insertion of Pakistani troops into Somalia in support of UN humanitarian

relief operations.

Following overhaul in Long Beach, Calif., *Tarawa* departed in April 1996 for her ninth deployment to the Western Pacific Ocean and Arabian Gulf during which she participated in *Exercise Indigo Serpent* with the Royal Jordanian Navy--the first-such exercise with the nation of Jordan.

In Jan. 1997, *Tarawa* entered an extensive overhaul, after which she was the centerpiece for *Exercise Kernel Blitz*, the largest amphibious exercise in the Pacific Fleet in nearly 25 years--involving over 25 ships and 20,000 Sailors and Marines.

Tarawa departed on her tenth deployment in Feb. 1998, where she was diverted to the African nation of Eritrea in the Red Sea to evacuate American citizens from the United States Embassy. More than 200 Americans were safely rescued.

In August 2000, following an extensive drydock overhaul period in Bremerton,



The Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC) surface assault ship can carry Marines ashore at speeds in excess of 40 knots.



The AH-1W Super Cobra, shown here flying over Kuwait City, is a day/night, marginal weather Marine Corps attack helicopter that provides en route escort for assault helicopters and their embarked forces.

Wash., *Tarawa* deployed for the eleventh time to the Western Pacific, Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. This deployment included wreath-laying ceremonies at the World War II battle sites of Tarawa Atoll, Guadalcanal, and Iwo Jima. While deployed, *Tarawa* provided humanitarian relief supplies to the war-ravaged country of East Timor, and in October 2000, participated in *Operation Determined Response*, steaming to the Gulf of Aden in Yemen to provide *USS Cole* and United States Government Agencies on-site logistics, force protection, and evacuation support following the horrific terrorist attack on the *Cole*.

Tarawa departed San Diego for her 12th Western Pacific deployment on Jan. 6, 2003, during which the crew participated in *Operations Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom*.

Tarawa arrived in the North Arabian Gulf in mid Feb. 2003 to join a larger amphibious force that brought 33,000 Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen to the region. This amphibious force, named Task Force 51, eventually included 32 U.S. and coalition ships. *Tarawa* served as the flagship for Task Force 51, under

the command of Rear Adm. W. Clyde Marsh. Stationed in the Arabian Gulf during *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, *Tarawa* provided critical support to the ground troops of the U.S. and coalition forces that pressed into southern Iraq and then north towards Baghdad.

After the deployment, *Tarawa* returned to San Diego in July 2003, and then underwent an extensive drydock overhaul period at the National Steel and Shipbuilding Company (NASSCO) in San Diego beginning in October 2003. After leaving the shipyards in mid-Feb. 2004, *Tarawa* conducted work-up operations before leaving for Hawaii in mid-June for the 2004 Rim of the Pacific exercise.

Following a year of preparations and training with Expeditionary Strike Group One, *Tarawa* departed for her 13th Western Pacific deployment in 2005.