



THE JAPS.' DEFENCES ON BETIO

This drawing from an official United States Marine Corps photograph shows one of the forts the Japs. had built on Betio. In some of the blockhouses, a concrete emplacement 5 ft. thick was covered with palm logs 18 in. in diameter. Outside the logs were angle irons of railway-rails, and over all was 10 ft. to 12 ft. of sand and coral.

by a naval barrage that pumped 1,500 tons of shells on to Betio's square mile. Yet the Marines found that this tremendous concentration of explosions had done little to weaken the efficacy of the Jap. defences.

The Jap. shore batteries opened up first as the huge task force approached the island about 5 a.m. Their shooting was not good. The first few salvos from the battleship struck a fuel dump on the island, making a grand target. The transports stopped some 12,000 yards out, and in went the two destroyers through the reef and into the lagoon to provide a covering barrage for the following Higgins boats. Meantime the heavy ships poured in a rain of shells from farther out, and carrier-based planes screamed down to dive-bomb the

defences. Standing out about 2,000 yards, the destroyers began their barrage and in two hours one ship fired 700 rounds of 5 in. shells at this almost point-blank range. The Jap. shore batteries replied, but scored only five hits on one of the destroyers. Enough certainly to do plenty of damage—had any of the shells exploded.

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Meanwhile the Marines were disembarking into Higgins boats and making for the shore. At first things were quiet, but as the small craft approached, the land batteries gave them everything they had. Then when they were still 600 yards out the boats began to strand on a shelf of coral. There was nothing for it but to wade in or transfer to the few landing-boats with shallower draft.