

# Army Expansion Firefight 2 - Raid on Makin Atoll

August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1942 - Pacific Ocean between Guadalcanal and Hawaii

**General Situation:** Makin Atoll is a Japanese sea plane base in the Gilbert Islands and is garrisoned by 71 men of the Japanese 62<sup>nd</sup> Garrison Force led by Warrant Officer Kyuzaburo Kanemitsu. The 200 strong Marine 2nd Raiders have traveled secretly to the island aboard two submarines, the USS Argonaut and the USS Nautilus. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider's first combat engagement and they are eager to prove themselves as elite. Early in the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, they attempt to sneak onto the island aboard rubber dinghies, to raid it for information and to destroy supplies. However, their off-board motors failed in the rough seas and the Raiders were forced to row their boats ashore. Exhausted, the Raiders have landed at two locations a mile apart and plan to attack the Japanese base from two directions. They have lost the element of surprise though, because one of the Raiders accidentally discharges his weapon. With the element of surprise lost, the Raiders must attack immediately.

Fearing a large invasion, the Japanese have radioed for support, though most know they will die. If they fight to the death with dignity, they may prevail.

**Historical Discussion:** The Makin Atoll raid is a perfect example of how difficult it is to accurately record history and to know what actually happened. Very few sources corroborated each other's stories and most offered different versions of how events of this battle progressed. This is not uncommon for any historical study, but it is especially true for military history. Too often, a single primary source (usually a military report or memoir) is taken at face value and is not compared to other accounts. Patriotism and pride also often encourage sources to exaggerate and alter accounts in their nation's favor. Carlson's 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders were commissioned by President Roosevelt himself and the President's son was Lt. Col. Evans Carlson's second in command. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders were designated to be the best of the best from the start. Their daring raid was hailed as an extraordinary success by U.S. media and the movie about their exploits, titled "Gung Ho!", was released less than a year after the engagement. In truth though, the raid on Makin Atoll was most probably a failure.

The Marine 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders were tasked with raiding the Japanese sea plane base with the goal to destroy supplies, gain intelligence, and capture enemy prisoners for interrogation. From the very start of their raid, things did not go as intended. The dinghies they had trained with did not work in the open ocean and the Marine's struggled to get them to shore. Carlson decided to have everyone land at one landing zone instead of two, but one boat did not

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**Commanders:** 4 **Initiative:** 1st U.S. Force on Round 1 **VP:** Japanese 1  
**CAP Allocation per Round:** Each Japanese Force 3 CAPs +/- Bushido **Each U.S. Force** 7 CAPs minus Casualties and Hits. **Ref:** Overconfident  
**Action Cards:** Shuffle all action and bonus cards 2-13. Each commander receives 1 card in Round 1 and 1 card each Round thereafter.  
**Hit Counter Piles:** Mix 2 'No Hit' Counters into the Japanese Hit Counter pile.  
**Map Setup:** Maps 13 and 14  
**Overlays:** Place Jungle 4 so that hex J4-01 is on hex 13-B11 and hex J4-02 is on hex 13-B12.  
 Place Hill 4 so that hex H4-01 is on hex 13-F05 and hex H4-02 is on hex 13-F06.  
 Place Village 1 so that hex V1-01 is on hex 14-P03 and hex V1-02 is on hex 14-O02.

## 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Force: 2nd Marine Raiders, Main Attack

**Setup:** Place anywhere on or south of row 11 after all Japanese units have set up.

**Natives:** At the beginning of Round 3, place anywhere on the map at least 2 hexes from any enemy Units.



**3x 2nd Raiders**  
(Card 61, Card 69)



**1x Melanesian Police**

**Orders:** Raid the sea plane base and capture enemy intelligence.  
**Special Rules:** 2nd Raider units may spend APs instead of CAPs to use their Capability Card.

### Victory Points:

**1 VP - Immediately,** score 1 VP for each enemy Unit that any U.S. Unit eliminates.

**1 VP - At the end of the game,** score 1 VP for each 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Force 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Unit that is south of row 07 on map 14.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Force: 2nd Marine Raiders, Flank Attack

**Setup:** May enter on Round 1 along the west edge on hexes B03 to J4-2.

**Natives:** At the beginning of Round 3, place anywhere on the map at least 2 hexes from any enemy Units.



**3x 2nd Raiders**  
(Card 64, Card 69)



**1x Melanesian Police**

**Orders:** Raid the sea plane base and destroy enemy supplies.  
**Special Rules:** 2nd Raider units may spend APs instead of CAPs to use their Capability Card.

### Victory Points:

**3 VP - At the end of a Round,** score 3 VP for each Control Marker taken control of this round and remove these Control Markers.

**1 VP - At the end of the game,** score 1 VP for each 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Force 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Unit that is south of row 07 on map 14.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Japanese Force: Army Garrison

**Setup:** Place the Infantry and control markers on the hexes indicated below. Place the Sniper hidden anywhere on the map.

**Reinforcements:** At the beginning of Round 2 place on one of the highlighted hexes along the shore.



**2x Infantry 3x Control Marker 1x Sniper**  
V1-18, V1-21 13-Q04, H4-04, V1-11 (Card 62)

**1x Infantry**

**Orders:** Protect the sea plane base and its engineers at all costs.

### Victory Points:

**2 VP - Immediately,** score 2 VP for each 2nd Raider Unit that any Japanese Unit eliminates.

### Bushido Points:

**+2 BP - Immediately,** receive 2 BP when any Japanese Unit is eliminated by a U.S. close combat or short range attack.

**-1 BP - Immediately,** lose 1 BP each time a Conscripts Unit is eliminated.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Japanese Force: Army Engineers

**Army Garrison:** Place the Conscripts on the hexes indicated below. Place the Grenade Discharger next to any Hut.

**Reinforcements:** May enter at the beginning of Round 2 along the east map edge on hexes R03 to R12.



**2x Conscripts**  
H4-03, V1-03

**1x Grenade Discharger**

**1x Conscripts**

**Orders:** Survive the raid and protect the sea plane base.

### Victory Points:


**1 VP - At the end of each Round,** score 1 VP for each Control Marker that is under Japanese control.

### Bushido Points:


**+1 BP - Immediately,** receive 1 BP when any Japanese Unit eliminates a 2nd Raider Unit.

**-1 BP - Immediately,** lose 1 BP each time a Control Marker is lost.


## Round 1


Initiative: 

## Round 2

Reinforce: 

## Round 3

Reinforce: 

Air Support: 

## Round 4

VP: 

**Firefight Ends**

### Overconfident

Both U.S. Forces each immediately lose 1 CAP when any U.S. unit receives a Hit Marker.

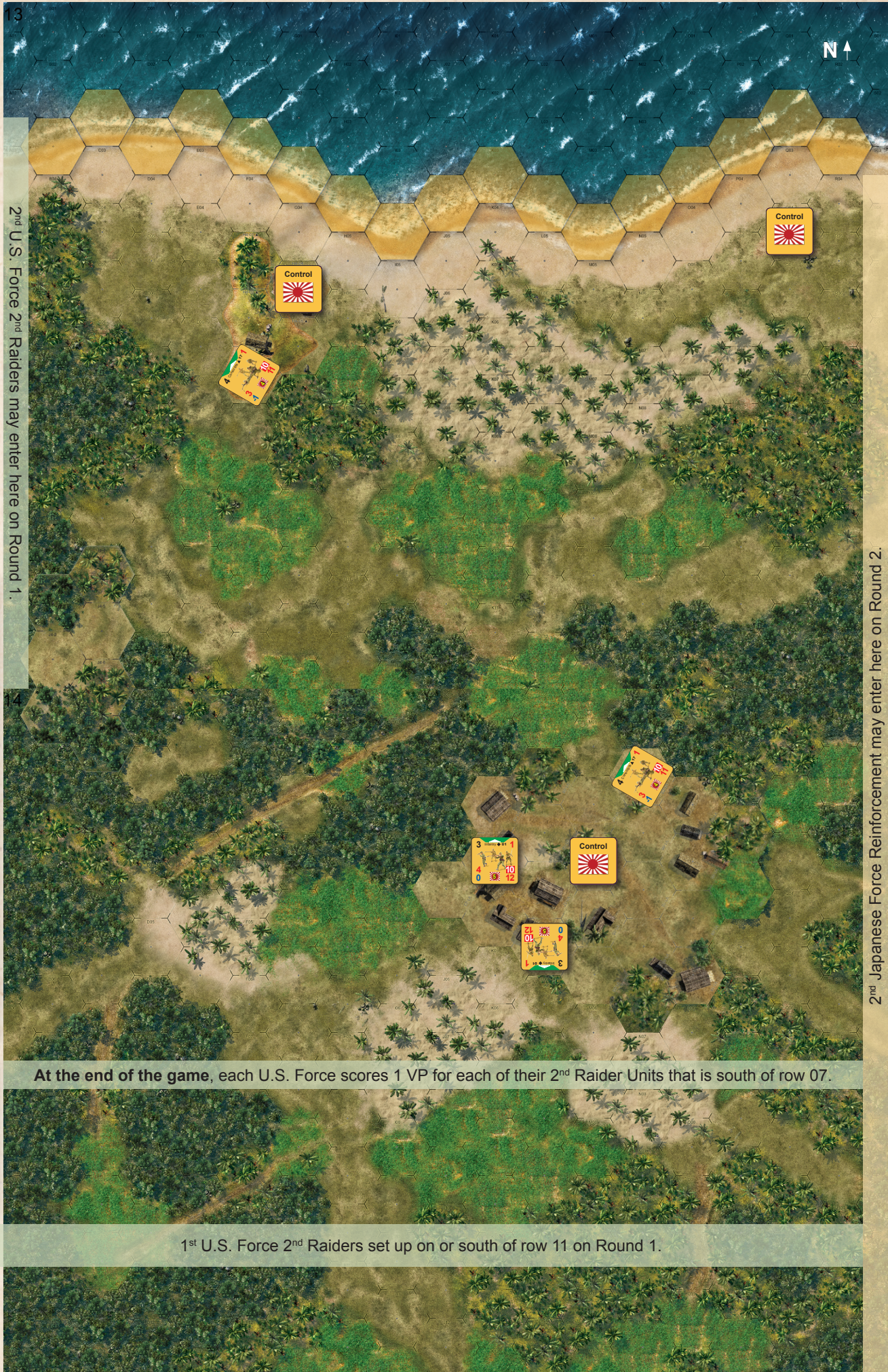
At the beginning of each Round, **both** U.S. Forces reduce their total CAPs by 1 for each Hit Marker on either Forces' units. This is in addition to each forces' own eliminated units.

**Ex:** A 2nd US Force unit takes a hit. Both US players immediately lose 1 CAP.

**Ex:** Beginning of a new Round, 1st US Force lost 1 unit, plus there are two hit US units from both players on the map. 1st Force loses a total of 3CAPs for the round.

### Air Support

At the beginning of Round 3, the Japanese receive Weapon Card 41 - Aerial Attack which may be used once by either Japanese player.



At the end of the game, each U.S. Force scores 1 VP for each of their 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Units that is south of row 07.

1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Force 2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders set up on or south of row 11 on Round 1.

2<sup>nd</sup> Japanese Force Reinforcement may enter here on Round 2.

receive the order and landed alone at the second landing zone.

The accidental discharge of a weapon was the third thing to go wrong. With the advantage of surprise and numbers, the Raiders could have easily overrun the unprepared Japanese, but with their garrison deployed, the Japanese were able to hold off the Raider's advance. Not knowing the true nature of the attack though, most of the Japanese Infantry banzai charged the Marines and were shot down by the state of the art automatic weapons the Raiders carried. Carlson's inflated record of the number of Japanese killed is one of the items that does not match other sources or modern excavation of the battle.

In addition to Japanese air attacks, two Japanese sea planes were sent with reinforcements. Sources differ drastically about what happened to the sea planes. They were either shot down on approach by the Raiders with anti-tank rifles or machine guns, or they survived and unloaded troops, or they were shot down as they took off. American sources also mention that two Japanese ships entered the Atoll's bay and were sunk by cannon fire from the submarines that were positioned on the very opposite side of the island. The sub cannon fire was supposedly directed by the Raiders, who, another source claims, did not have a working radio with which to contact the subs. This act of artillery precision is either very impressive or an exaggeration.

Despite the Raider's success at fending off the Japanese banzai charges, the Raiders pulled back to the shore and eventually left the island. In most sources, an attempted surrender by the Raiders to the Japanese is described, but accounts differ drastically between sources. In one account, a Raider suggests surrender but is mocked by the rest. He is told that he can surrender if he can find a Japanese to surrender to, but he cannot find one when he looks. In another account, Carlson decides to surrender to the Japanese, but his messenger is accidentally shot by a Raider sentry. One source describes how the Japanese had already evacuated the island, so the Raiders could not find anyone to surrender to. All that we can be sure of is that the Raiders did not surrender for one reason or another.

The Raiders had a tough time leaving the island. The rough sea and tide made it nearly impossible to row out to the submarines. Many dinghies sank and most weapons were lost. This was the reason given for why the Raiders tried to surrender. It is described that the Raiders eventually evacuated the island by building a raft and meeting the subs at the end of the island.

The boat that landed at the second landing zone was not able to make contact with the main force. They proceeded inland towards the sea plane base where they found a church and destroyed a radio. A battle ensued in which several Raiders were killed. The remaining Raiders then retreated to their landing zone and rowed back to the submarines.

In the end, the Raiders succeeded in destroying some supplies and equipment at the base and killed most of the Japanese garrison. They did not gain any information though, and it should be noted that none of the Japanese who charged were captured; an indication that the Japanese soldiers truly fought to the death with Bushido. Twelve Raiders were also left alive on the island by their compatriots, where they were eventually captured. Most of the captured Raiders were sent to a prison camp, where they were executed. The Japanese commander who ordered them killed was found guilty of war crimes for these killings after the war. The Japanese fortified the atoll after the American raid, which resulted in larger casualties when the Americans had to take control of the atoll during the Battle of Makin.

After weeks of research, we cannot be certain what really happened. We are confident that actual events could be deciphered, but that proved to be beyond the scope of this firefight. We decided to present the firefight as if the Raiders did land at two landing zones and attacked from two directions as planned. The scenario begins shortly after the Japanese were alerted to the attack after the Raider's accidental weapon discharge. Though the Raider's total force out-numbered the Japanese 3 to 1, the Raiders were trained for hit and run attacks and skirmishes. For this reason, we represent the forces more equally numbered to simulate the Raiders not concentrating and committing all of their forces at once.

- Gunter Eickert, Feb 2017

