

MAJOR GENERAL MERRITT A. EDSON, U. S. MARINE CORPS (RETIRED)

Major General Edson, born on April 25, 1897, in Rutland, Vermont, attended the University of Vermont, and saw his first military service in the First Vermont Infantry during the trouble with Mexico in 1914. Following his enlistment in the Marine Corps on June 26, 1917, he was appointed Second Lieutenant in October of that year. In July, 1918, he was temporarily promoted to the rank of First Lieutenant, and in September was sent to France. From this service he returned to the Marine Barracks in Quantico Virginia, in November 1919, to serve until 1921. Duty in Louisiana with a Mail Guard detachment followed, after which he was transferred to Pensacola, Florida, for flight training. He was designated Naval Aviator in July 1922, and transferred to the Air Detachment at Quantico.

From 1923 to 1925, he served with an aviation unit in Guam, after which he took an extensive course in advanced aviation tactics at Kelly Field, Texas, and in 1927 he was transferred to the Navy Yard at Philadelphia as Ordnance Officer. Subsequently he was sent to sea in the Caribbean area in command of the Marine Detachment aboard the U.S.S. DENVER, and in 1928 commanding the Marine Detachment in the U.S.S. ROCHESTER. For his service in Nicaragua he was awarded the Navy Cross and the Nicaraguan Medal of Merit with Silver Star.

In August, 1929, Major General Edson returned to the Marine Barracks in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he served until 1935. Here he made a name for himself as an expert in small arms fire, serving as Captain of Marine Corps Rifle and Pistol Team. (He is rated as an ordnance expert, and wears the medal of a Distinguished Rifle Shot.) Late in 1935, he was transferred to Parris Island, South Carolina, where he served as range officer, and while there, was promoted to the rank of Major. A short tour of duty at Headquarters, Marine Corps, in Washington, followed by a course at the Marine Corps School in Quantico in the fall of 1936, preceded his transfer to Shanghai, China, where he remained until May, 1939.

From May 1939 until June 1941, he served as Inspector of Target Practice and Officer in Charge of the Target Practice Section in Headquarters, Marine Corps, Washington, D.C. In June 1941, he assumed command of the First Marine Raider Battalion which saw action in the Solomons, and for his leadership of this battalion (to which the First Parachute Battalion was attached, making a force of approximately 800 men) on the night of September 13-14, 1942, was awarded the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) of Great Britain.

Major General Edson later received a Gold Star in lieu of a Second Navy Cross, for service as Commanding Officer of the Tulagi combat group during the landing assault on Japanese-held Tulagi Island, British Solomon Islands August 7 to 9, 1942, and was credited, in the citation which accompanied the Medal, with direct responsibility for the capture of Tulagi Island. Major General Edson (then a Colonel) Participated in the action against Japanese forces on Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, November 20-28, 1943, and received the Legion of Merit as Chief of Staff to the Commanding General of the Second Marine Division. He attained the rank of Brigadier General in December 1943. He was awarded the Silver Star Medal for service in Saipan

and Tinian while Division Commander in June 1944, and a Gold Star in lieu of a Second Legion of Merit while Chief of Staff of Fleet Marine Force in June 1945. Following duty as Commanding General, Service Command, Fleet Marine Force, he was transferred in January 1946, to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D.C. In February 1947, he was detached to Headquarters Marine Corps, and soon afterwards requested retirement, which became effective August 1, 1947. At that time he was advanced to the rank of Major General.

In addition to the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross and a Gold Star in lieu of a Second Navy Cross, Major General Edson holds the Legion of Merit with Gold Star in lieu of a Second, the Silver Star Medal, and a ribbon for and facsimile of the Presidential Unit Citation (with three stars). He also holds the Mexican Service Medal (Army), the Victory Medal (Overseas Clasp), the Second Nicaraguan Campaign Medal, The China Service Medal, the American Defense Service Medal (Fleet Clasp), American Area Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Area Campaign Medal (with six stars), the World War II Victory Medal, Marine Corps Distinguished Pistol Shot's Medal, the Nicaraguan Medal of Merit, with Silver Star, and the Distinguished Service Order of Great Britain. Citations for awards of Medal of Honor, First and Second Navy Cross, Legion of Merit and Presidential Unit Citations for the First Marine Division, Reinforced and the Second Marine Division, Reinforced follow:

MEDAL OF HONOR:

"For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty as Commanding Officer of a Marine Raider Battalion, with a Parachute Battalion attached, during action against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands on the night of September 13-14, 1942. After the airfield on Guadalcanal had been seized from the enemy on August 8, Colonel Edson with a force of 800 men, was assigned to the occupation and defense of a ridge dominating the jungle on either side of the airport. Facing a formidable Japanese attack which, augmented by infiltration, had crashed through our front lines, he, by skillful handling of his troops, successfully withdrew his forward units to a reserve line with minimum casualties. When the enemy, in a subsequent series of violent assaults, engaged our forces in desperate hand-to-hand combat with bayonets, rifles, pistols, grenades, and knives, Colonel Edson, although continuously exposed to hostile fire throughout the night, personally directed defense of the reserve position against a fanatical foe of greatly superior numbers. By his astute leadership and gallant devotion to duty, he enabled his men, despite severe losses, to cling tenaciously to their position on the vital ridge, thereby retaining command, not only of the Guadalcanal airfield, but also of the Division's entire offensive installations in the surrounding area."

NAVY CROSS:

"For distinguishing himself by display of extraordinary heroism on 7 August 1928, while in command of a marine patrol on the Coco River, enroute to Poteca, Captain Edson upon encountering a force of bandits entrenched upon both sides of the river, personally led his advance guard against the enemy, engaging in hand to hand conflict with them, and by his exhibition of coolness, intrepidity, and dash, so

inspired his men that the superior force of bandits were driven from their prepared position, and severe losses inflicted upon them."

GOLD STAR in Lieu of SECOND NAVY CROSS:

"For extraordinary heroism as Commanding Officer of the Tulagi Combat Group during the landing assault on enemy Japanese-held Tulagi Island, British Solomon Islands, August 7 to 9, 1942. In personal command of the First Marine Raider Battalion during the initial operation, Colonel Edson advanced the attack of his battalion and its supporting units with such skill, courage and aggressiveness that he was an inspiration to the entire Combat Group and was directly responsible for the capture of Tulagi Island. His gallant conduct throughout this hazardous action was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

LEGION OF MERIT:

"For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service as chief of staff of the Second Marine Division prior to and during action against the Japanese forces on Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, November 20 to 28, 1943. The division staff under his direction made a complete intelligence study of the atoll of Tarawa and an estimate of the situation upon which the commanding general's decision to attack was made. During the operation, because of his experience and fine judgment, he succeeded in presenting sound solutions to many difficult problems. On D plus one day, he went ashore on Betio to establish an advance command post, which functioned until the arrival of the division commander the next day. He remained ashore during the remainder of the battle and prepared plans for carrying out the final attack and mopping up of the Japanese positions on Betio and the atoll of Tarawa. His outstanding performance of duty was in keeping with the highest traditions of the naval service."

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION TO THE FIRST MARINE DIVISION, REINFORCED:

"The officers and enlisted men of the First Marine Division, Reinforced, on August 7 to 9, 1942, demonstrated outstanding gallantry and determination in successfully executing forced landing assaults against a number of strongly defended Japanese positions on Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, Florida and Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands, completely routing all the enemy forces and seizing a most valuable base and airfield within the enemy zone of operations in the South Pacific Ocean. From the above period until 9 December, 1942, this Reinforced Division not only held their important strategic positions despite determined and repeated Japanese naval, air and land attacks, but by a series of offensive operations against strong enemy resistance drove the Japanese from the proximity of the airfield and in-

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION-FIRST MARINE DIVISION, REINFORCED (Cont.)  
flicted great losses on them by land and air attacks. The courage and determination displayed in these operations were of an inspiring order."

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION-SECOND MARINE DIVISION, REINFORCED  
"For outstanding performance in combat during the seizure and occupation of the Japanese-held Atoll of Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, November 20 to 24, 1943. Forced by treacherous coral reefs to disembark from their landing craft hundreds of yards off the beach, the Second Marine Division (Reinforced) became a highly vulnerable target for a devastating Japanese fire. Dauntlessly advancing in spite of rapidly mounting losses, the Marines fought a gallant battle against crushing odds, clearing the limited beachheads of snipers and machine guns, reducing powerfully fortified enemy positions and completely annihilating the fanatically determined and strongly entrenched Japanese forces. By the successful occupation of Tarawa, the Second Marine Division (Reinforced) has provided our forces with highly strategic and important air and land bases from which to continue future operations against the enemy; by the valiant fighting spirit of these men, their heroic fortitude under punishing fire and their relentless perseverance in waging this epic battle in the Central Pacific, they have upheld the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

1 October 1947.