

Stanley Graves Benner

Stanley Benner was born on July 5, 1916 in Arlington, Massachusetts. He lived in Boston, Mass., until 1940. Enlisting in the United States Marine Corps Reserve on August 21, 1940, he reported for active duty at Quantico, Va., on November 8, that same year. After training at the Marine Corps' recruit depot at Parris Island, S.C., he arrived at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on January 21, 1941. While there, he participated in maneuvers on the Puerto Rican Island of Culebra. Transferred to the Marine Corps Base at Parris Island, S.C., on April 12, he served there—receiving a promotion to private first class on May 26,—until shifting duty station to what would later become Camp Lejeune at New River, N.C., on September 28,. Benner was promoted to corporal on October 11, 1941 and to Sergeant on April 1, 1942.

Ordered to the field on May 8, 1942, Sgt. Benner joined Company "A", 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, and, after traveling by rail to San Diego, Calif., sailed for the South Pacific in late May. After arriving at Tutuila, the battalion reinforced other elements of the 7th Marines already on garrison duty in the Samoan Islands. It remained there, serving as a reserve amphibious force, during the initial landings on Guadalcanal in early August. While on Samoa, Sgt. Benner accepted appointment as second lieutenant on August 4.

Heavy Japanese pressure against American forces on and around Guadalcanal—particularly the naval action that sank four Allied cruisers on the night of 8–August 9,—prompted a call for more reinforcements. Following a Japanese infantry attack along the Tenaru River on August 21, a sign that the enemy was trying to retake Henderson Field, the 7th Marines sailed from Samoa on September 4, for Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. Upon arrival on the 12th, the regiment received orders to move to Guadalcanal as soon as possible. Departing the New Hebrides on the 14th, the transports spent four days at sea dodging enemy naval forces before anchoring off Kukum, Guadalcanal, on September 18,. Later that same day, the 7th Marines took up a position astride "Bloody Ridge", guarding the perimeter's southern flank from there down to the Lunga River.

Over the next few weeks, Lt. Benner's unit took part in the fierce fighting along the Matanikau River, including the desperate amphibious evacuation west of Point Cruz on September 27, and the far more successful spoiling attack west of the river between 7 and October 9,. The 1st Battalion then returned to their original positions on "Bloody Ridge."

Meanwhile, in a series of hard fought air and sea battles around Guadalcanal, the Japanese managed to reinforce their position on the island. After several night convoy runs, nicknamed the "Tokyo Express", the Japanese had assembled enough troops to attempt another assault on the defending marines. After swinging inland through the jungle, the Japanese 4th Infantry Regiment closed the perimeter's southern flank on the night of October 24,. When the Japanese arrived, only Benner's 1st Battalion remained to face them because the 2d Battalion had been pulled out to reinforce the perimeter's western flank the day before.

The assault, coming under cover of heavy rain and darkness, surged out of the jungle just after

midnight on the 25th. The Japanese, throwing grenades and firing rifles and machine guns, repeatedly charged the marine positions but were beaten back by American small arms, mortar, and artillery fire. The enemy kept the pressure on the ridge throughout the night, at one point forcing a salient into the leathernecks' line, but were eventually driven back with heavy losses. The Japanese resumed the attack the following evening, throwing fresh troops into the fray. Artillery, mortars, small arms, and canister-firing 37-millimeter guns cut down the repeated Japanese assaults, forcing the decimated units to withdraw. Lt. Benner led his platoon in the fierce two days of combat on "Bloody Ridge," and directed its fire against repeated assaults of enemy forces greatly superior in number. In so doing, contributing to the "rout and virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment" he was killed in action in the early morning hours of October 26.

Awards

For his "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity" in command of his platoon, Benner was awarded the Silver Star, posthumously.

Namesakes

The destroyer escort USS Benner (DE-551) was named for Second Lieutenant Benner, but her construction was cancelled in 1944 before it could begin.

In 1944, the destroyer USS Benner (DD-807), in commission from 1945 to 1970, was named in his honor.