

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 25TH MARINES



HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION  
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.



*First Lieutenant John E. Spadafora of Company I, 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, checks enemy movement during Exercise Alkali Canyon in 1973 at Twentynine Palms, California.*

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by

Colonel Joseph B. Ruth, Jr.,  
U.S. Marine Corps Reserve



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# FOREWORD

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This historical monograph is the first in a series of reserve regimental histories. When completed, this series will cover in similar fashion each reserve regiment in the Fleet Marine Force. The present narrative not only highlights the significant actions and activities of the 25th Marines, but also furnishes a general history of Marine Corps activities in which it took part.

Colonel Joseph B. Ruth, Jr., USMCR, took his reserve duty as a member of the Division of History and Museums from 1974 to 1977, during which time he prepared this monograph. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from the University of South Carolina, and a Master of Arts degree in business administration from Boston College. Currently, Colonel Ruth is Chairman and Professor, Business Division, Mount Wachusett Community College in Gardner, Massachusetts.

In the pursuit of accuracy and objectivity, the Division of History and Museums welcomes comments on this booklet from key participants, Marine Corps activities, and interested individuals.



E.H. SIMMONS  
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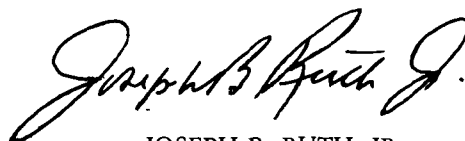


# PREFACE

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*A Brief History of the 25th Marines* is a concise narrative of the regiment from its initial activation in 1943 through its participation in the battles for Roi-Namur, Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima during World War II, to its reactivation in the 1960s as a regiment in the Marine Corps Reserve, and subsequent training and civic activities. Official records of the Marine Corps and appropriate historical works were utilized in compiling this short history. This booklet is published for the information of those interested in the 25th Marines and in the events in which it took part.

The monograph was produced under the editorial direction of Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., Chief Historian of the History and Museums Division. Final review and preparation of the manuscript for printing was done by Mr. Charles R. Smith. Miss Catherine A. Stoll of the Publications Production Section set the manuscript in type. The maps were prepared by Mr. Richard A. Hillman, who also designed the book. All illustrations are official Department of Defense (Marine Corps) photographs from the files of the Still Photograph Depository, History and Museums Division, now a part of the Defense Audio Visual Agency.



JOSEPH B. RUTH, JR.  
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve





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# A Brief History of the 25th Marines

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## *Introduction*

In striking contrast to the evolutionary development of Marine Corps units during peacetime, the demands of war brought the 25th Marines into instantaneous existence and propelled the new regiment into hard-hitting combat readiness. On 1 May 1943 at Camp Lejeune, located at New River, North Carolina, the Corps split its 23d Marines in two, with one-half of the force becoming the cadre of the 25th Marines.

Over the next 30 months, the 25th went from the uncertainty of this abrupt birth to the cockiness of a well-trained boxer, and thence to the poise of a seasoned fighter. Training in the sweltering heat of the North Carolina summer and in the freezing temperatures of the California hills gave the regiment the traditional hardness and strength of all Marine Corps regiments.

The mission which faced both Lieutenant Colonel Richard H. Schubert, the unit's first commanding officer, and Colonel Samuel C. Cumming, who later led the regiment into its first action, was to mold these Marines into a winning team. The prize was both victory and life itself.

## *The Regiment In Training*

The first home for the Marines of the 25th was the quonset huts of Tent City in Camp Lejeune. The 25th Marines, together with the 23d, formed the east coast echelon of what later became the 4th Marine Division. Having been activated on 1 May 1943, the 25th began training immediately and continued at a feverish pace during the hot North Carolina summer months. New personnel arrived daily, and the ranks of the regiment began to swell. The days at Camp Lejeune were numbered, however, for the 25th was destined for the war in the Pacific.

On 20 August 1943 the regiment boarded transports at Norfolk, Virginia and sailed for San Diego via the Panama Canal. The regiment's march into history had begun. During a relatively uneventful trip, the men relaxed from the rigors of Camp Lejeune as best as possible on board the crowded transports. Disembarking at San Diego on 10 September, they moved approximately 60 miles up the coast to Camp Pendleton, the Marine Corps' newest training base. The 25th was the last of the units destined for the 4th Marine Division to arrive. On 11 September the regiment officially joined the 4th Division, then commanded by Major General Harry Schmidt.<sup>1</sup>

Newly arrived from Headquarters Marine Corps where he had been Assistant to the Commandant, General Schmidt brought to the division 34 years' experience as a Marine Corps officer, including service in World War I and in Nicaragua. His progressive command and staff billet assignments together with the usual formal professional schooling, including the Army Command and General Staff School, had groomed General Schmidt for just such a responsible command.

Colonel Samuel C. Cumming, the second commanding officer of the 25th Marines, assumed his post on 28 July. The son of missionary parents, he was born in Kobe, Japan. In World War I, during which he saw extensive combat with the Marine forces in Europe, Colonel Cumming was awarded a purple heart with oak clasp for wounds received in battle and a Silver Star with two gold stars in lieu of second and third awards, the French Fourragere, the Croix de Guerre with two stars, the Silver Medal of Bravery (Montenegro), and the Star of Bravery (Roumania).<sup>2</sup>

Surrounded by hills familiar to many western movie fans, Camp Pendleton, the former Santa Margarita Ranch, was a welcome relief from the hot discomfort of Camp Lejeune. Training went on dur-



USMC Photo 5160

*Aerial view of tent camp area, New River, North Carolina in October 1942. As temporary home of the*

*25th Marines, the tents, really pre-fabricated huts, were hurriedly built as the nation geared for war.*

ing the pleasant days and evenings of the late summer and early fall of 1943. As winter approached the nights became increasingly cold and by December almost unbearable to the tent dwellers of the 25th Marines.<sup>3</sup> In late November, the grim reports of 2d Marine Division losses at Tarawa added a sobering dimension to the preparations for combat. Greater emphasis then was placed on the training of assault demolition teams for employment against fortified positions.<sup>4</sup> One observer of the 2d Marine Division landings was Lieutenant Colonel Walter I. Jordan, who would later be assigned as the 25th Marines Executive Officer.

The long, difficult days of training and the still longer nights were quickly forgotten during the

weekend liberties at San Diego, Los Angeles, and Hollywood. But the clock was running and these weekend adventures would soon be over. These happy and sometimes wild memories would have to last for 21 months — or for a lifetime. Beginning in the early part of November, division planners worked on Operation Flintlock, code name for the invasion of the Marshall Islands, which was to be the division's baptism of fire.

The Marine Corps has always prided itself on the thorough training its combat units undergo before commitment to battle, and that which the units of the 4th Division experienced was no exception. The December days were filled with command post exercises, field problems, pillbox assaults, hikes,

maneuvers, and landings. The culmination of the division's training period was a full-scale rehearsal for Flintlock capped by a landing at San Clemente island on 2-3 January. Of the exercise, Brigadier General James L. Underhill, assistant division commander, said "About everything that could go wrong went wrong." General Underhill felt that with a critique and another rehearsal the difficulties could be ironed out. Unfortunately, that luxury was out of the question. Time had run out; Operation Flintlock was about to begin.

### *A Host Of Islands*

The regimental command post (CP) of the 25th Marines (reinforced) was already functioning on board the attack transport USS *Callaway* (APA 38) as the convoy sailed from San Diego on 13 January 1944. Other ships in the convoy carrying regimental units were the USS *Warren* (APA 53), USS *Sumter* (APA 52), USS *Biddle* (APA 8), and the attack cargo ship USS *Almaack* (AKA 10). The 4th Marine Division was now a part of the V Amphibious Corps (VAC), commanded by Major General Holland M. Smith. The other principal units in VAC were the 7th Infantry Division, 22d Marines, and the 106th Infantry.

The Marines, from private to general, watched as the shoreline receded, each alone with his own thoughts. This was wartime, they were trained, and now they soon would meet the enemy in battle. Life on board a crowded military transport was never easy and one never really became used to it. The troops conducted physical drill and schooling every day despite limited space, chow line interference, and ship drills. Maintaining the training schedule under these circumstances was a constant challenge to the various operations officers.<sup>6</sup> Periodic inspections found the weapons to be in excellent condition. Impending battle was a great motivator. The Marines were in good spirits. Singing and bull sessions occupied the long nights on the blacked-out ships. The Marines in the convoy will long remember the harshness of reveille, the abandon-ship drills, the confusion of making their way to breakfast in the darkness, and the never-ending quest for a niche safe from the watery attack of the ship's crew following the order "clean sweepdown, fore and aft." With all the problems, however, they still found time for games of chance, writing letters home, reading pocket books, and standing in lines, and more lines. Yes, they would remember.

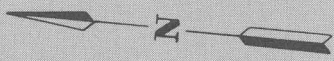
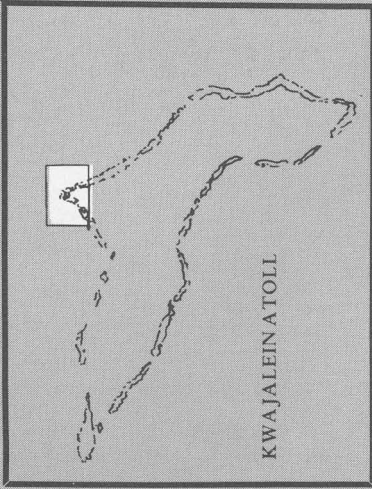
The men of the 25th Marines had their first look at Pacific islands when they reached Hawaii on 21 January. The convoy anchored off of Maui while amphibious group planners went on to Pearl Harbor for conferences and briefings.<sup>7</sup> The island of Maui was an enticing sight to the Marines of the convoy, and it became tantalizing after the word was passed—look but do not touch. There would be no liberty on Maui. The planners returned from Pearl Harbor late in the day and on the following day, 22 January, the convoy sailed for the war zone.

After departing from Maui, the word was soon passed that the objective of the V Amphibious Corps was to be Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. This atoll was the largest in the world, and was one of 32 such atolls forming the Marshall Islands chain. An atoll is an enclosed or semi-closed reef on which islands have developed. The word "atoll" was not new to the Marines' vocabulary; they had heard about Tarawa.

The decision to take the Marshall Islands had been made by the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) at the Trident conference in Washington, D.C. in May 1943. With the ultimate destination the Japanese mainland, the Marshall Islands, located some 2,400 miles west of Hawaii and approximately midway between Hawaii and the Philippines, was a logical target. The Marshall Islands represented a part of the outer defense line protecting the Japanese mainland and a rupture anywhere in this line would have ominous portent for the enemy.

The original plan for this operation had the amphibious forces taking two well-defended atolls (Wotje and Maloelap) in the first phase, then concentrating on Kwajalein Atoll as a third target. Navy and Marine experience on Tarawa, however, convinced Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Area (CinCPOA), that the plan was overly ambitious, and accordingly, the plan was revised with Kwajalein Atoll being the sole invasion target. By selecting Kwajalein, Admiral Nimitz was by-passing two strongly defended atolls and striking right into the heart of the Marshall Islands.

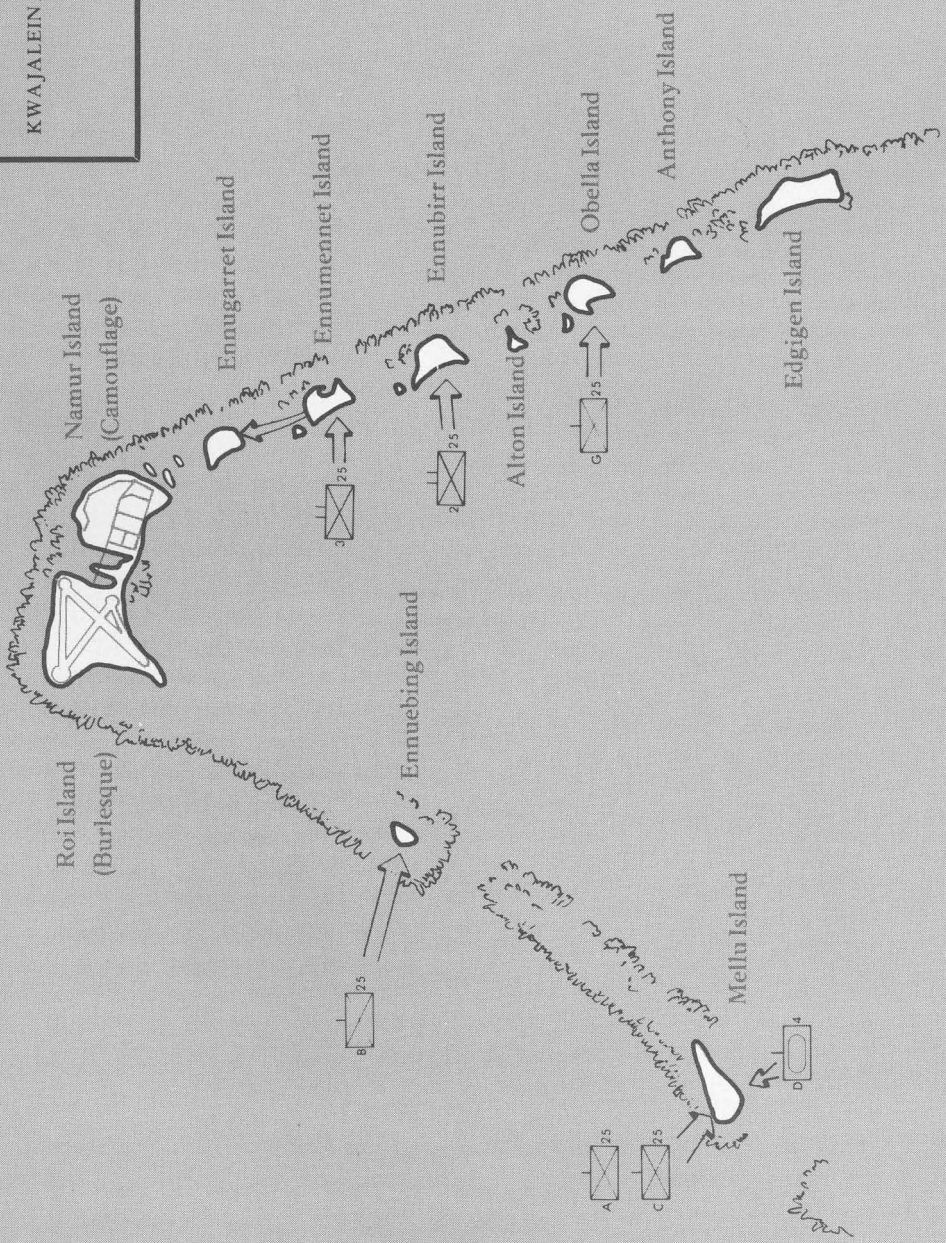
The Japanese had expected an attack in the Marshall Islands but were surprised by the selection of Kwajalein Atoll, as evidenced by the poor defenses of this atoll. The capture of Kwajalein Atoll would not only disrupt the enemy's vital lines of communication to the outer islands, but at the same time it would protect the United States' line of communication to South Pacific bases. Furthermore, its



**ROI-NAMUR**

Statute Miles: 0, 1, 2

Kilometers: 0, 1, 2, 3





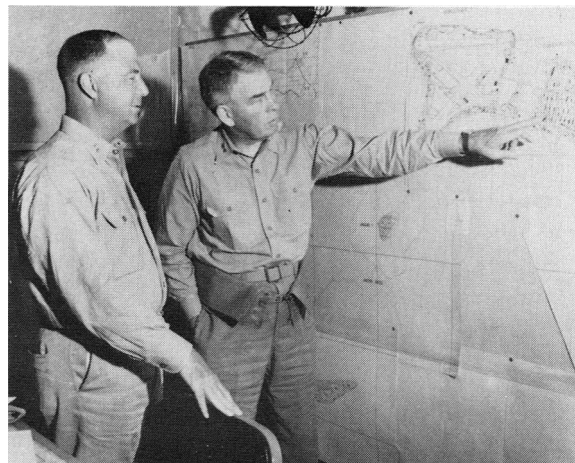
capture would give the United States Navy a fleet anchorage of more than 800 square miles and a new base from which to launch future offensives.

To accomplish the mission, VAC was divided into a Northern Landing Force (NLF) and a Southern Landing Force (SLF). The NLF, commanded by Major General Schmidt, had as its principal component the 4th Marine Division, and its main objective would be Roi and Namur, the center of air activity in the Marshall Islands. Kwajalein Island, the main naval base in the atoll, was assigned to the SLF. The SLF, commanded by Major General Charles H. Corlett, USA, had as its principal component the 7th Infantry Division.

There was great activity throughout the chain of command as all levels reviewed their assignments. The too few maps, photographs, and intelligence reports were carefully studied and restudied. The operation plan for the NLF called for the 25th Marines to land on D-day to secure certain of the offshore islands so that they could be utilized as artillery sites. The artillery then would be in position to provide fire support for the main thrust against Roi-Namur. This tactic was devised from the bitter experiences in the Tarawa battle where it was found that attempting to set up artillery on an assault beach was hazardous and did not permit the artillery to realize its full potential.<sup>8</sup> This same tactic would also be used by the SLF prior to the main landing on Kwajalein.

The Marines of the 25th were chagrined that their assignment was not to be a part of the main attack; but this was partially offset by the knowledge that they would be the first to land. The 23d Marines would strike Roi on D plus 1 while simultaneously the 24th Marines would land on Namur. During this second day of the battle, the 25th Marines would be in reserve.

Reveille for Lieutenant Colonel Clarence J. O'Donnell's 1st Battalion, 25th Marines on the morning of 31 January was at 0330. This was D-day. In the darkness the troops found their way to a breakfast of fruit juice, cold meat, and hot coffee.<sup>9</sup> There were final preparations and checking of equipment. Finally at 0530 they went over the landing nets of the USS *Warren* into waiting LCVs (landing craft, vehicle, personnel). The LCVs carried them to the LST (landing ship, tank) area where, with great difficulty, they transferred into amphibian tractors (LVTs). The Marines watched, trance-like, as battleships, cruisers, and destroyers shelled Roi-Namur and the battalion objectives of Ennuebing



USMC Photo 70547

*Rear Admiral Richard L. Conolly, Northern Task Force Commander (left), and Major General Harry Schmidt, commanding the 4th Marine Division, discuss plans for the Roi-Namur operation.*

and Mellu, two small islands south of Roi. Carrier aircraft dove in to bomb and strafe the same objectives.<sup>10</sup> The sea that morning was unusually rough, and the wind was gusty, producing fringes of whitecaps on the water.<sup>11</sup> The ground swells and the strong wind tossed the LVTs up and down like seesaws. On board, the tractors, the Marines, their supplies, and their equipment were being drenched. The communications equipment was no longer operable because of the salt water. The LVTs continued to circle while the Marines, in wet discomfort, awaited the order to land.

The Marines of Captain Edward L. Asbill's Company B were still wet, when at 0952, they landed on Ennuebing to become the first assault troops to land on prewar Japanese soil. The original H-hour had been delayed because of the difficulties of transferring to the LVTs in the heavy seas. Enemy resistance to the landing was light and the Marines quickly occupied the island. There were 13 enemy dead on the island and another 3 Japanese were taken prisoner. In the early afternoon, 75mm batteries of the 14th Marines landed and took up positions to support the assault on Roi-Namur.

Original plans for the Mellu assault had called for a simultaneous landing on the seaward side of the island by Company C and the Scout Company of the Division Tank Battalion. Scout Company, unable to surmount the reef, was ordered to round the southern coast and land on the lagoon side directly across the island from where the original landing had been planned. Scout Company landed at 0955, but

Company C did not land at the time planned because of difficulty in locating its LVTs. This was a problem that would plague the entire operation. Company C finally landed at 1015 and with Scout Company, swept up the island, capturing two Japanese soldiers and killing the remainder. Company A also had problems in locating its LVTs, finally landing after the island was secured. Shortly thereafter the 14th Marines landed its 105mm batteries and positioned them facing Roi.

Enemy losses on Ennuebing and Mellu were 30 dead, including 8 apparent suicides, plus 5 prisoners of war. Capture of these islands opened Jacob Pass and enabled the minesweepers and supporting ships to enter the lagoon and carry out the rest of the D-day plan. The first D-day mission had been accomplished with dispatch.

Ennubirr, the site of the main Japanese radio transmitter in the atoll was the objective assigned the 2d Battalion. Ennubirr was located directly across the lagoon from Ennuebing. It was still dark when the men of the 2d Battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel Lewis C. Hudson, Jr., went over the landing nets on D-day. By 0645 the battalion was transferring from LCVs into LVTs. Once loaded the LVTs began to circle. In the strong sea, water was coming up over the bows and gunwales of the tractors onto the Marine passengers. One tractor broke down and was swept onto a reef and overturned. This unfortunate accident cost the lives of four Marines.

Lieutenant Colonel Justice M. Chambers' 3d Battalion began debarking at 0830 destined for Ennubirr. *Brigadier General James L. Underhill, Assistant Division Commander, 4th Marine Division, from September 1943 to April 1944.*

USMC Photo 13229



numennet Island. The process was interrupted while the USS *Biddle* got underway to correct its position in the transport area. The remainder of the battalion debarked at 1130.

An unforeseen complication came about when the destroyer USS *Phelps* (DD 360), control vessel for the landings, was ordered into the lagoon to support a minesweeping operation. The USS *Phelps* turned over control to Brigadier General James L. Underhill, Assistant Division Commander of the 4th Division, who was on board a subchaser, the SC 997. This created serious problems since the SC 997 did not have communications facilities for such control. An officer of vast experience, General Underhill set about his task, much like a cowboy in a roundup, gathering together the craft carrying the two battalions and leading them through the Ennuebing Pass and onto the line of departure. The USS *Phelps* did return prior to the afternoon assaults.

LCI(G)s (gunboats) pounded both Ennumennet and Ennubirr. Planes from the Essex Class carrier USS *Intrepid* (CV 11) bombed and strafed both islands. At noon, Ennubirr was attacked by six Martin torpedo bombers (TBMs) and by seven Douglas Dauntless dive bombers (SBDs). The destroyers USS *Porterfield* (DD 62) and USS *Haraden* (DD 585) opened fire with their 5-inch batteries. The attack waves began their move to the beach. LCI(G)s, in the lead, released rocket salvos and swept the islands with 20mm and 40mm fire.<sup>12</sup> The two battalions landed on their objectives shortly after 1500.

The assault on Ennubirr was by Companies E and F. Company E moved in without resistance to occupy the communications building. Company F received sniper fire as it advanced through a wooded area. With the assistance of a platoon from the division tank battalion, Company F was able to clear the entire section. After the action, 7 Marines lay dead, but 24 of the enemy had also been killed. A platoon from Company G was dispatched to overrun nearby Obella, and both islands were declared secured by 1648.<sup>13</sup>

Assault companies of the 3d Battalion landed on Ennumennet, securing the island within 30 minutes at a cost of one Marine killed and seven wounded. Its next task was Ennugarret. Originally scheduled for 1600 on D-day, the assault was not made until after 1800, again because of difficulties in obtaining landing vehicles. Lieutenant Colonel Chambers commandeered four LVTs and made the landing with 120 men. The LVTs then shuttled back and forth carrying the rest of the battalion. By 1915 the island



was under control, but mopping up activities continued into the night.

The 2d Battalion, 14th Marines began landing on Ennumennet by 1900. Battery B, 4th Special Weapons Battalion and the 75mm platoon of the Regimental Weapons Company both landed on Ennugarret during the night and took up positions to support the D plus 1 assault on Namur. There was firing from Namur during the night and the Marines could hear the shells whistling overhead. They spent a restless night.

Its critical job done, the 25th Marines reverted to division reserve. Its work on D-day would be extolled by the voices of the newly emplaced artillery on the following morning, 1 February.

According to intelligence reports, up to 6,000 Japanese troops were waiting to greet the 23d and 24th Marines as they landed on Roi-Namur. The enemy defenders for the most part were members of naval guard units attached to the *6th Base Force* enemy unit. Not a great deal more was known about them, but the Marines had great respect for the Japanese capacity to die hard. That was enough to know. It was D plus 1 and all the confidence in the world was packed into those many LVTs in the shape of Marines. The Marines were impatient to land and get on with it.

The landings were scheduled for 1000 on 1 February. Beginning at dawn the artillery emplaced on Mellu, Ennuebing, Ennugarret, Ennubirr, and Ennumennet began pounding their appropriate targets. At 0700 the USS *Tennessee* (BB 43) fired 14-inch salvos into Roi-Namur. These fires were joined by those of the USS *Maryland* (BB 46) firing its 16-inch guns.

In order to avoid some of the problems experienced on D-day, the LSTs moved inside the lagoon from the open sea. The LSTs would then be able to launch their LVTs reasonably near the line of departure and protected from the heavier seas. It was a wise move. Unfortunately, however, there was a recurrence of problems with the LVTs, now compounded by the D-day losses. The time of the landing was delayed. Impatient, Colonel Louis R. Jones requested and received orders to land the 23d Marines on Roi. The landing was made at 1150 with two battalions abreast and met only disorganized resistance. The terrain on Roi did not present the problems that the 24th had on Namur. Roi was flat with the biggest part of the island being utilized for the landing strips. Namur's jungle growth and building ruins provided deadly firing positions, which were not

duplicated on Roi. The defensive installations on Roi were relatively poor, and the problems they presented were surmounted by the Marines without too much trouble. By 1800, the Marines reached the northern shore. During the evening and the early morning of D plus 2 there were some mopping up chores to do, but by 0800 the island was declared secured. Marine casualties at Roi were 18 killed and 68 wounded. The results were impressive.

Namur would never be mistaken for the identical twin of Roi. The bareness of Roi had prompted its code name, *Burlesque*. Namur, on the other hand, had a dense jungle and numerous concrete fortifications and buildings. Namur's code name was appropriately *Camouflage*. The air and naval bombardment had turned Namur into a labyrinth of jungle debris and shattered masonry which would impede the Marines at every turn.

As the echoes of the artillery rounds from the newly won islands rolled over the lagoon, the men of the 3d Battalion, 25th Marines massed the fires of every available weapon onto Namur from their positions on Ennugarret. These fires would be shifted inland only when the assault troops approached the shore.

Some of the transportation problems of the previous day were again present and even magnified because of the D-day losses of LVTs. Many of the LVTs needed service and gas and there was still the confusion of locating the parent ships for resupply. The assault battalions as a result were short about 50 LVTs. Faced with this dilemma, Colonel Franklin A. Hart, Commanding Officer, 24th Marines made the decision to send the balance of his assault troops ashore by LCVPs. At 1155 the assault battalions landed on Namur. Immediate problems arose when the LVTs stopped at the water line rather than move inland as they had been instructed. Fortunately, however, resistance on the beach was minor and Companies E and F of the 2d Battalion, which were the first to land, were able to move inland fairly rapidly.<sup>14</sup> What resistance there was on the beach was limited to small groups of enemy soldiers armed only with light weapons. Companies I and K landed within 5 minutes of the 2d Battalion and faced similar light opposition. Both battalions drove hard and fast toward the first objective.

As the battle progressed all over the island, a tremendous explosion occurred at approximately 1300 which seemed to tear the island apart. A huge mushroom of smoke and fire careened into the air. Major Charles F. Duchain, an assistant operations officer for the 4th Marine Division, was observing in a



USMC Photo 70694-A

*Tracked landing vehicles with rocket launchers and loaded with men of the 25th Marines head for shore.*

*Their objective was the occupation of the small islands flanking Roi-Namur.*

carrier plane directly over Namur at the time. Major Duchein radioed "Great God Almighty! The whole damn island has blown up."<sup>15</sup> It was learned later that something had set off a blockhouse containing torpedoes and other ammunition. About one-half of the casualties suffered by the 2d Battalion in the entire action were the result of this and two other blasts that occurred a short time later that day. These explosions killed 20 Marines and wounded 100.

Firefights continued along the entire line of advance. At 1630, the 3d Battalion, in an attack to the north, ran into noticeably stiffer resistance. Some of the shock effects of the naval bombardment had begun to wear off, and the enemy's effectiveness increased. The Japanese fighting man on Roi-Namur, as was true for the enemy troops throughout the Pacific, was brave and dedicated. He became even more daring and tenacious in the face of certain death, as was the case of Roi-Namur. These final actions would be his ticket to *Yasukuni*, the Shinto shrine to the war dead in Tokyo.

At 1930 the Marines dug in for the night, setting up a defense perimeter. Harassing fires from both front and rear went on through the night. The fires from the rear came from enemy positions that had been bypassed in the attack. Enemy soldiers had hidden in what the Marines called "spider holes." The enemy, masters in the art of camouflage, would dig a hole, covering both the hole and themselves by moving a palm leaf over the top. In the midst of all the other debris covering the ground, the palm leaf was not noticeable. Later, at a propitious time, the enemy soldier would come out of hiding and do his damage. Some enemy troops tried to escape at low tide under cover of breaking dawn by wading along the reef, skirting the 3d Battalion positions; all were killed.

On D plus 2, the 24th Marines completed the conquest of Namur, the island being declared secured at 1418. The battle of Roi-Namur was now history. This fast and complete victory had cost the 4th Marine Division 190 dead and 547 wounded.<sup>16</sup>

Also on D plus 2, while the 24th Marines was still battling on Namur, Colonel Cumming received orders to start Phase III of the operation, namely, clearing the remainder of the islands in the northern zone. The 2d Battalion moved out at once and soon had secured eight islands, all without resistance. The natives rounded up in this island-sweep were placed in a camp established on Ennubirr. The 1st Battalion, on its own expedition, secured Boggerlapp, Boggerik, and one other island. Finally on D plus 4, the 3d Battalion took over the remainder of the island-hopping tasks, and within 3 days, cleared 39 islands.

On 13 February, exactly a month to the day after it left San Diego, the 4th Marine Division, less the 25th Marines, sailed for Maui. Behind, the silence of 3,742 enemy dead acknowledged that the division had been tested and found to be a capable fighting force.

After the completion of its assignment, the 25th Marines was temporarily detached from the 4th Marine Division to become the atoll garrison force. The regiment set up camp on Roi and Namur until relieved on 28 February. Boarding transports on 28 February, the regiment sailed for Maui.

### *Hula Hands and Purple Hearts —*

#### *A Short Stay On Maui*

Arriving at Maui on 8 March, the men of the 25th Marines were delighted to be on friendly soil again and finally to be off the crowded transports. Their first look at Camp Maui, however, was not too reassuring. There was much work to do and they set to it.

Training began almost immediately and it was back to basics. Pillbox assault techniques were practiced and perfected. Lumbering tanks joined with the infantry on the field exercises; each learned to operate with and to appreciate the other. At formations, decorations, including 211 Purple Hearts, were awarded.<sup>17</sup> Colonel Cumming received the Distinguished Service Medal for valorous service.

New faces began to appear. Replacements arrived from posts and stations throughout the United States. The troops were given liberty on a battalion rotation basis, but somehow, the liberties at Wailuku, Kahului, and Lahaina, exotic as the names might be, just did not have the flavor of those in Los Angeles and Hollywood. There were other forms of



USMC Photo 310135

*Colonel Merton J. Batchelder, Commanding Officer, 25th Marines from January to October 1944.*

entertainment, such as the outdoor movies and occasional USO shows. Local groups of hula dancers were also enjoyed to the fullest.

As the weeks rolled on, the tempo of the training increased. In mid-April the 23d and 25th Marines went on amphibious maneuvers. Then toward the end of April, an increase in crating and packing made it clear to the Marines that their days on Maui were numbered. Other things were also happening; Colonel Cumming was promoted to brigadier general and named assistant division commander, with Colonel Merton J. Batchelder relieving him as commanding officer of the 25th Marines. Newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel Hollis U. Mustain took over the 1st Battalion and Lieutenant Colonel O'Donnell moved up to be regimental executive officer.

On 2 May the combat-loading of ships began and 10 days later the 25th Marines embarked at Kahului for final maneuvers and an unknown destination. The 2d and 4th Marine Divisions made two joint landings, one at Maalaea Bay, Maui, and the other on 45-square-mile Kahoolawe, Hawaiian Island.

In the Kahoolawe landing, actual naval gunfire and aircraft strafing with live ammunition added

realism to the exercise. The maneuvers over, the convoy moved to Pearl Harbor, arriving there on 20 May. On 25 May, the slower ships of the convoy left for the war zone, while the faster ships sailed 4 days later. The troops learned soon after leaving Pearl Harbor that their next assault would be on an island that was located on the inner perimeter of the Japanese defense line, just 1,270 miles from Tokyo. The island was Saipan in the Marianas.

### *Seven Lives To Repay Our Country — The Battle of Saipan*

The danger to the U.S. flanks presented by the island fortress of Truk no longer existed. Naval carrier air strikes against Truk in the Caroline Islands had destroyed the Japanese air fleet there and had sunk numerous combat and cargo ships in its harbor. In addition, there was now a long-range bombing access to that island via the Admiralties and Emirau. The specter was checkmated.<sup>18</sup> The Truk landing, so often contemplated in the most awesome terms by all Marines, would never come to pass. There would be no disappointed Marines. The timetable could now be adjusted ahead by 6 months with the invasion of the Marianas. Saipan, Tinian, and the enemy occupied U.S. possession, Guam, were the three operations that were scheduled. This move to the west would cut the lines of sea and air communications between Japan's home islands and its outlying island empire. The conquest of the Marianas would, in addition, extend U.S. sea control and provide air bases from which to send long-range bombers against Japan proper. The Japanese, solemnly aware of this, could be expected to react accordingly.

Saipan, located in the southern Marianas, is oddly shaped, reminding one of a giant seal. This island is of coral-volcanic origin, 14¼ miles long and 6½ miles wide. Missing were the thick jungles of the Solomons and the bleak coral construction of the Marshalls and Gilberts. Saipan with its mountains, plateaus, plains, and swamps would offer new lessons to be learned. The sharp ridges and fissure-like valleys with natural faults and caves would be a new experience for the Marines and, as the saying goes, experience is a hard teacher.

The Japanese were alarmed by American victories in the Marshalls and Gilberts; consequently, they poured troops, equipment, and supplies into the Marianas. The troops sent to reinforce this new bastion came from the homeland, from China, and from Manchuria, including veterans of the Kwan-

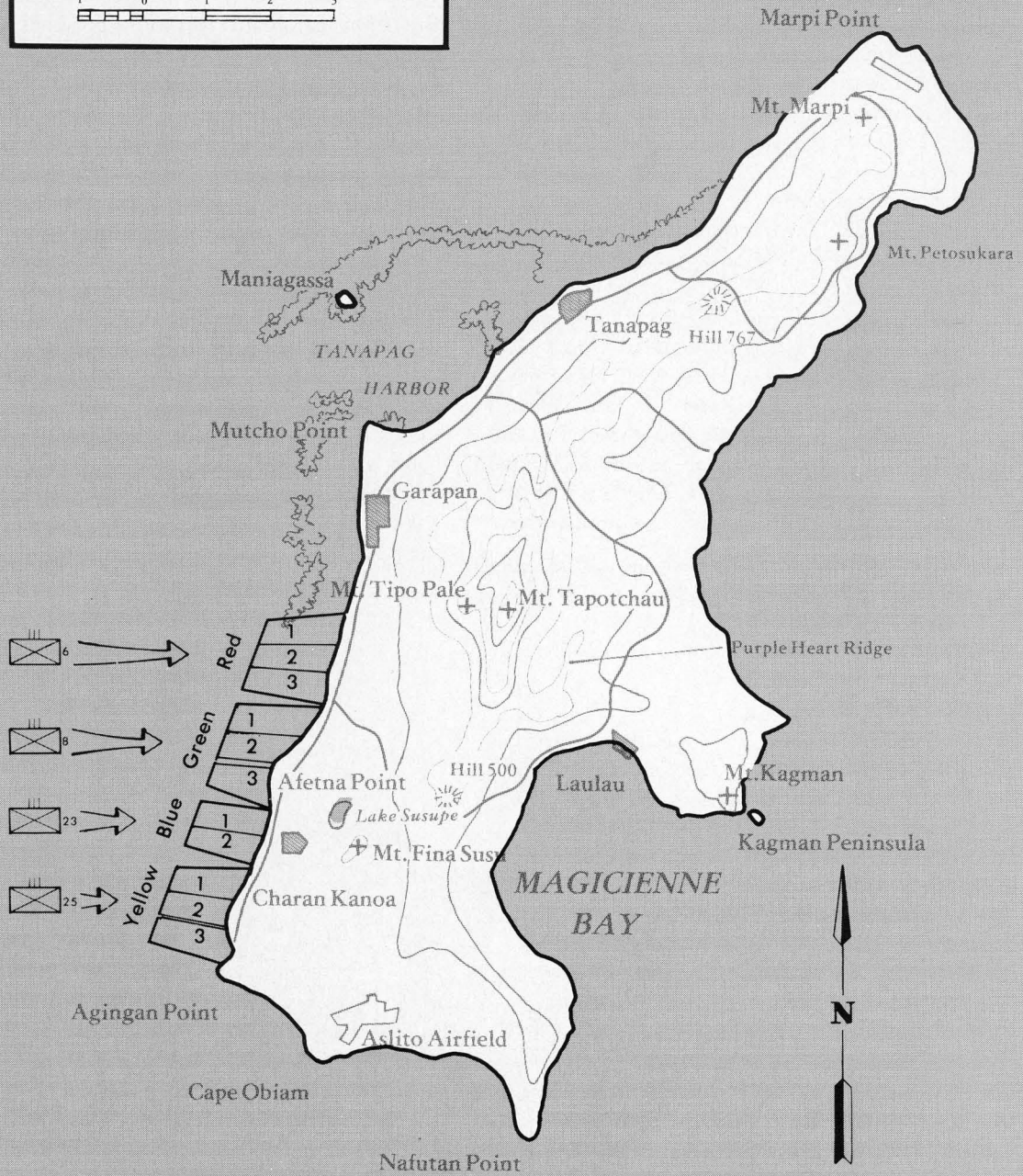
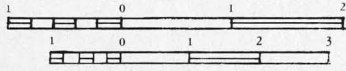
tung Army. So on Saipan approximately 30,000 Japanese were poised to repel their enemy, an enemy referred to as American devils by Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saito, commanding the *Northern Marianas Army Group* and the island's commander. General Saito's forces on Saipan included the *43d Infantry Division*, the *47th Independent Mixed Brigade*, the *55th Naval Guard Force*, and the *1st Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force*. Tank and artillery units supported these forces.

The first stop of the attack convoy was at Eniwetok on 8 June. The slower ships that had left Maui before the main part of the convoy were already there. The slower ships sailed the next day with the balance of the convoy following on 11 June. The days on board the transports continued to be spent pouring over maps, plans, photographs, relief models of the island, and the latest intelligence reports. On the evening of 14 June the convoy was off Saipan; the landing would take place in the morning.<sup>19</sup>

On the day that the main part of the convoy left Eniwetok, Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's Task Force 58 began an intense 3½-day air and naval bombardment of Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Rota, and Pagan. On the very first plane sweep of the Marianas, 150 Japanese aircraft were destroyed on the ground or in the air. It was truly a clean sweep; this crippling strike would go on paying dividends throughout the entire campaign. On 14 June, fire support ships of the Northern and Southern Attack Force (Task Force 52 and 53) arrived at Saipan under the command of Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf, joining Task Force 58 in the bombardment of beaches and installations. The Navy's new and daring underwater demolition teams (UDT) moved inshore to investigate the presence of mines and other obstacles. None were found needing destruction, but the intelligence the teams gathered concerning the landing beaches was invaluable. Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith was wearing two hats, that of commander of the Northern Troops and Landing Force (NTLF), which would strike Saipan, and also of the Expeditionary Troops, the latter consisting of both the NTLF and the Southern Troops and Landing Force (STLF). The STLF, scheduled to assault Guam on 18 June, was commanded by Major General Roy S. Geiger. The NTLF had as its principal assault components the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions and the 27th Infantry Division.

The plan for the Saipan landing called for the 2d Marine Division to land on the left and abreast of the 4th Marine Division, with the town of Charan

# SAIPAN



HILLMAN



Kanoa, located on the lower western side of the island, being the center of the landing zone. The 27th Infantry Division would be in NTLF reserve. The reserve regiment of the assault divisions would conduct a demonstration off Tanapag Harbor north of the actual landing beaches. The broad plan would then be for the 4th Marine Division to secure the southern end of the island including Aslito airfield, then to turn north and sweep up the island with its right flank being on the eastern coast. After landing, the 2d Marine Division would strike north also, sweeping toward Mt. Tapotchau, the point of highest elevation on the island, and to Garapan, the principal town on the island. Then abreast, the divisions would continue up the long axis of the island to the northernmost tip.

At 0520, D-day, the transports carrying the assault divisions eased into position approximately 18,000 yards off Charan Kanoa. The traditional order "land the landing force" came at 0542 from Vice Admiral Richmond K. Turner, Commander, Joint Amphibious Forces. The 0830 designated H-hour was later moved ahead to 0840. After a last check of their gear, the Marines went over the side of the APAs and down the landing nets into the waiting LCMs and LCVPs. The sea was relatively calm so that the transfer into LVTs was without the problems ex-

*Marines of the first wave landing on Saipan crawl forward for protective cover. They fought down*

perienced at Roi-Namur. At 0812 the LVTs carrying the assault battalions churned across the line of departure, and with LVT(A)s armed with 75mm guns and LCI(G)s in the lead, headed for the shore under the protective cover of the carrier planes which were diving and strafing along the length of the beaches.<sup>20</sup>

As the leading wave reached the reef, some 800 and 1200 yards from the beach, it began receiving fire from automatic weapons, antiaircraft guns, artillery, and mortars. As each succeeding wave reached the reef, the fire increased in intensity. The whistling of the high angle shells being fired from the shore added an eerie dimension to the final beach approach. The comforting fires of the main batteries of the U.S. ships lifted when the leading wave was 1,000 yards from the beach. As the wave reached a point 300 yards offshore, the fires of the 5-inch batteries lifted. The first wave, carrying members of the assault battalions, hit the beaches at 0842 amidst the fires of mortars and artillery. Within 20 minutes 700 LVTs landed 8,000 Marines on Saipan's beaches. The 25th Marines landed on the extreme right, with the 2d Battalion on the left flank landing on Yellow Beach 1, and the 1st Battalion landing on Yellow Beach 2. The 3d Battalion was in reserve.

*heavy Japanese opposition for following waves.*

USMC Photo 83222

