CHAPTER 5

Tarawa

Background—Off to The Gilberts—Helen—D-Day, 20 November 1943—D Plus 1, 21 November 1943
The 6th Marines Attack—D Plus 2, 22 November 1943—D Plus 3, 23 November 1943
Mopping Up—Apamama—The 6th Marines Leave Tarawa—Lessons Learned

Background

Time magazine, in its 6 December 1943 issue, said: "Last week some 2,000 or 3,000 United States Marines, most of them now dead or wounded, gave the nation a name to stand beside those of Concord Bridge, the *Bon Homme Richard*, the Alamo, Little Big Horn and Belleau Wood. The name was Tarawa."[1] Actually the breakdown was:

	USMC		USN	
	OFF	ENL	OFF	ENL
KIA	56	701	2	24
WIA	87	1954	2	48
MIA	1	202	0	3
Total	144	2857	4	75

(Total dead, 783; Total WIA, 2,091; Total MIA, 206; Total casualties of Tarawa, 3,080)[2]

Of the above, the 6th Marines had:[3]

	USMC		USN	
	OFF	ENL	OFF	ENL
KIA	3	91	0	5
WIA	10	237	0	9
MIA	0	0	0	0
Total	17	328	0	14

As a battleground, the islands of the Central Pacific posed much different and much more complicated problems than did the islands in the mountainous, jungle-clad Solomons such as Guadalcanal. Their strategic value was obvious since they provided an avenue westward. Also important, the flat terrain of atolls makes them tempting for building airfields, and their lagoons provide protected ship anchorages.[4]

Tarawa is such an atoll, some 2,500 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor. It was the most strategically important atoll in the Gilbert Islands.[5] In August 1943, at the Quebec Conference, "the line of advance for the central Pacific offensive was marked out as from the Gilberts, to the Marshalls, to the Marianas, and thence to the Carolines."[6] Of the 25 small islands making up the atoll of Tarawa, the most important and heavily fortified was Betio.[7] It also had an airstrip.

Betio is two miles long and one-half mile wide, almost at sea level and at no point higher than ten feet. Betio had to be seized. It was tough!

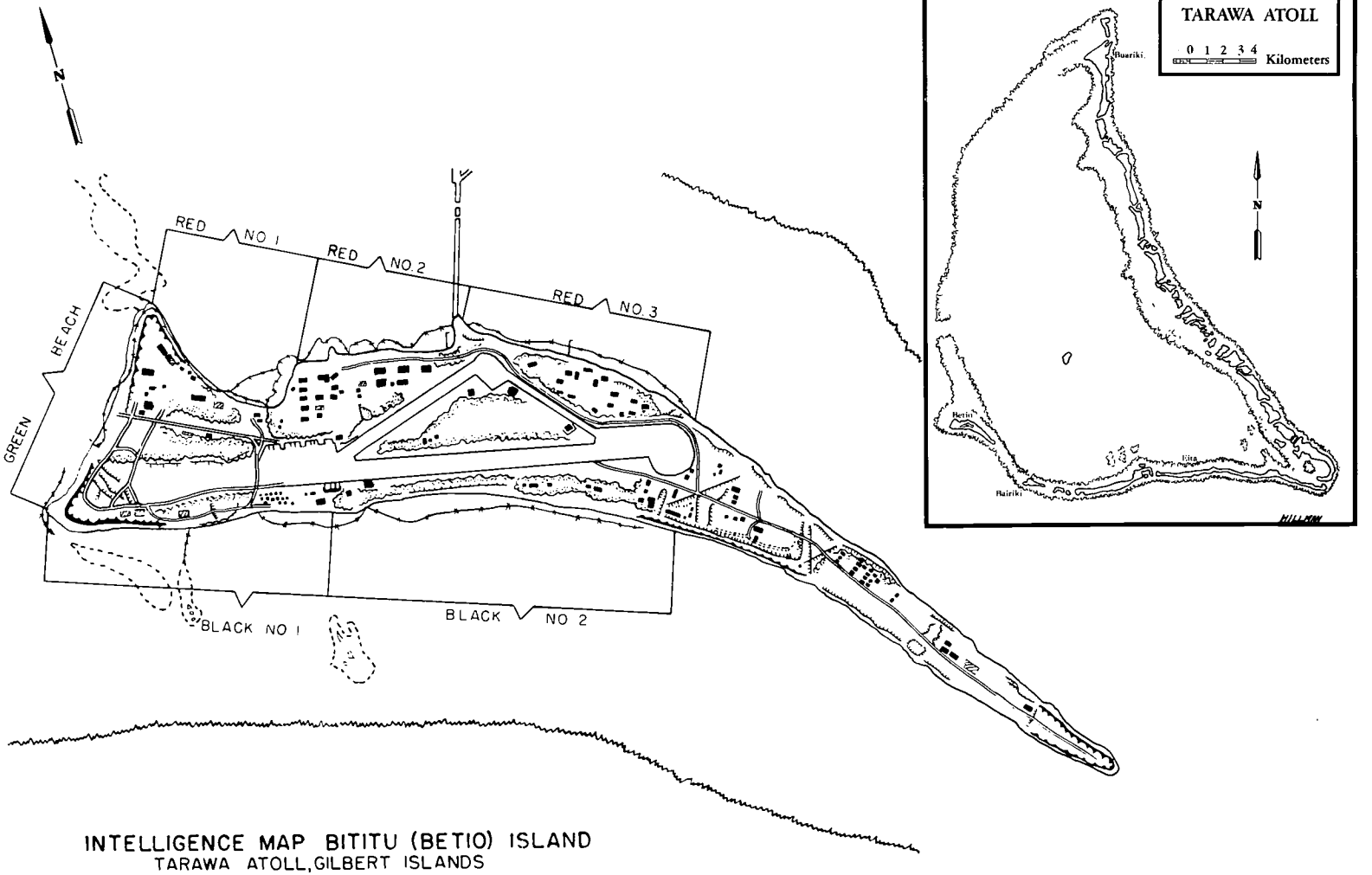
The job was assigned to the V Amphibious Corps commanded by Marine Major General Holland M. Smith. It consisted of two divisions. One, the Army's 27th Infantry Division, under Major General Ralph C. Smith, was to land at Makin, approximately 100 miles to the north of Tarawa. The other, the 2d Marine Division, commanded by Major General Julian C. Smith, drew the tougher job of seizing Betio.

Holland Smith, as corps commander, did not accompany the Betio expedition. He had been ordered by Vice Admiral Richmond K. Turner, USN, to embark on his flagship, the battleship USS *Pennsylvania*. Turner, in overall charge of the Gilbert Islands operation, had designated the Makin expedition the Northern Attack Force and the Betio (Tarawa) invaders the Southern Attack Force, under Rear Admiral Harry Hill. Both operations had been given the code name "Operation Galvanic." The Central Pacific war was about to begin.

Turner reasoned that Makin, being closer to the Marshalls, would be the scene of the most action.[8] He turned over full tactical control of operations at Tarawa to Hill and Julian Smith. The worst news, from the Marine division's point of view, was that the 6th Marines (Reinforced) would be taken from Julian Smith's control and held as corps reserve. Fortunately, as it turned out, the regiment's ships were ordered to the transport area off Tarawa, rather than to Makin.

Off to the Gilberts

For security reasons the 2d Marine Division made no secret of an amphibious exercise planned for Hawke's Bay, located a short distance up the coast from Wellington. Only a few trusted officers and men knew the division would not return to Wellington, even though the approximately 500 Marines with New Zealand brides suspected that this would happen. The division actually made arrangements for rail transportation from Hawke's Bay back to Wellington as a means of increasing the plausibility of the cover story. Japanese spies if any, may have been convinced,



INTELLIGENCE MAP BITITU (BETIO) ISLAND
TARAWA ATOLL, GILBERT ISLANDS

500 400 300 200 100 0 1000 YDS

TAKEN FROM 2D MAR DIV
SPECIAL ACTION REPORT

as were most of the single Marines expecting to rejoin their girl friends once again.

Hawke's Bay, for a transport convoy traveling at 14 knots, is only 24 hours' sailing time from Wellington. By 2 November, even the most optimistic Marine was persuaded that "this was no drill."[9] Cruisers and destroyers started joining the convoy. Very few officers and none of the enlisted men knew the destination. Soon the island of Efate in the New Hebrides loomed into view. More warships had already assembled there. The Marines were now certain that their next stop would be "the target." Scuttlebutt had it that it would be Wake Island.[10] Spirits soared! The Marines had a score to settle there, so the gossip was eagerly believed.

Only the Marines of the 2d Regiment (Reinforced) had a chance for a rehearsal at Efate. The new amphibian tractors (amtracs or LVTs) were waiting there for them. The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines did get to inflate its rubber boats and paddle around in the lagoon. Although already apparent, it was at Efate that it was agreed upon that the outboard motors were useless and unreliable once they had been used in sea water. A technique using ropes and Navy small boats (LCVPs) to haul the rubber crafts was developed. Each LCVP towed six rubber boats.

Rear Admiral Hill and Major General Julian Smith moved their flags aboard the old battleship, the USS *Maryland*. More than the big men-of-war assembled, Marine conversation centered on a strange-looking new vessel. It was named the USS *Ashland*, and it was a landing ship, dock (LSD). Inside were 14 General Sherman medium tanks and their crews. During the afternoon of 12 November the word was passed, "Make ready to sail at 0600." They were on their way to a destination few people knew about, and to whatever fate the future held for them.

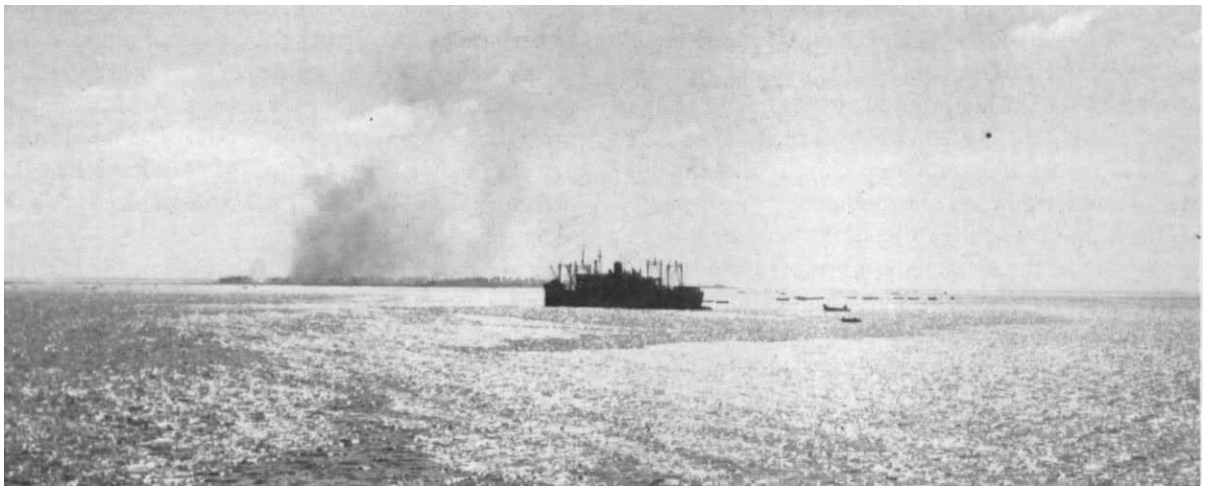
On 14 November, Admiral Hill flashed a message to the transports: "Give all hands the general picture of the projected operation and further details to all who should have this in execution of duties. This is the first American assault of a strongly defended atoll and with northern attack and covering forces, the largest Pacific operation to date."[11] Maps, aerial photographs, and rubber relief maps appeared from where they had been stored under heavy around-the-clock guard. There was Betio, code name "Helen," and on its northern shore three landing beaches were marked "Red 1," "Red 2," and "Red 3." The 2d Marines (Reinforced) under Colonel David M. Shoup would lead the assault. The Marines showed little interest in briefings on the Army's planned assault of Makin. The most unhappy regiment was the 6th Marines when it discovered it was to be the corps reserve. The men were certain there would be nothing left for them to do on Tarawa—or during the rest of "Operation Galvanic" for that matter.

Helen

Real occupation of Tarawa by the Japanese did not occur until September 1942. On 15 September 1942, the *Yokosuka 6th Special Naval Landing Force* (SNLF) landed on Betio. (The SNLF were the closest Japanese equivalents of the U.S. Marines. Most of the men came from the northern Japanese home islands. They were tall, around six feet, tough and proud.) In December the *111th Pioneers* arrived and immediately commenced construction of the island's defenses. In February 1943, the *6th SNLF* was redesignated the *3d Special Base Force*. It was joined on 17 March 1943, by the *Sasebo 7th SNLF* and in May of the same year by the *4th Construction Unit*. All were under the command of Rear Admiral Keichi Shibasaki. By this time, his command had 2,619 first-class fighting men.[12] In addition to these combatants there were airfield specialists and labor troops bringing the total to 5,236. Shibasaki did not overlook the possibility that an attacker might gain a foothold on the island. Anti-tank ditches and other obstacles were arranged to confine the assault force so it could be destroyed.[13] His orders, nevertheless, were those given earlier to the *Yokosuka 6th SNLF*: "to wait until the enemy is within effective range (when assembling for loading) and direct your fire on the enemy transport group and destroy it. If the enemy starts a landing, knock out the landing boats with mountain gunfire, tank guns, and infantry guns, then concentrate all fires on the enemy landing point and destroy him at the water's edge."[14]

Admittedly, the Marines' landing on Betio might be rough, considering the number of Japanese troops, the uncertain tides, the long fringing reef, big dual-purpose guns, and some coast artillery, yet the general plan of the Southern Attack Force was to take the island by storm, get as much land as possible in the shortest time, and obtain immediate use of the airfield.[15]

The intelligence was confusing—the Army bombers had received *no* antiaircraft fire when they dropped their 1,000-pound "Daisy Cutters." Then, they *had* received heavy fire. A battleship commander at Efate had boasted, "We are going to bombard at 6,000 yards. We've so much armor we're not afraid of anything the Japs can throw back at us." A cruiser commander had said, "We're going in to 4,000 yards. We figure our armor can take anything they've got." Nobody bothered to check with the Japanese!



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 63610

Smoke rising over the heavily defended island of Betio provides the 6th Marines, then in corps reserve, with its first view of combat in the Central Pacific in World War II.

Before the battle Rear Admiral Shibasaki boasted, "a million men cannot take Tarawa in a hundred years." Rear Admiral Howard F. Kingman, commanding the ships ordered to deliver the preinvasion bombardment, promised, "Gentlemen, we will not neutralize Betio. We will destroy it. We will obliterate it!"[16] Both were wrong!

On the day before the battle, a mimeographed message appeared on all bulletin boards on the transports.[17] It read:

> To the officers and men of the Second Division: a great offensive to destroy the enemy in the Central Pacific has begun. American air, sea, and land forces, of which this division is a part, initiate this offensive by seizing Japanese-held atolls in the Gilbert Islands which will be used as bases for future operations. The task assigned to us is to capture the atolls of Tarawa and Apamama. Army units of our own Fifth Amphibious Corps are simultaneously attacking Makin, 105 miles north of Tarawa . . . .
>
> Our Navy screens our operation and will support our attack tomorrow with the greatest concentration of aerial bombardment and naval gunfire in the history of warfare. It will remain with us until our objective is secured and our defenses are established. Garrison troops are already enroute to relieve us as soon as we have completed our job of cleaning our objective of Japanese forces.
>
> This division was especially chosen by the high command for the assault on Tarawa becasue of battle experience and combat efficiency. Their confidence in us will not be betrayed. We are the first American troops to attack a defended atoll . . . . Our people back home are eagerly awaiting news of our victories.
>
> I know you are well trained and fit for the tasks assigned to you. You will quickly overrun the Japanese forces; you will decisively defeat and destroy the treacherous enemies of our country. Your success will add new laurels to the glorious traditions of our Corps.
>
> Good luck and God bless you all.
>
> Julian C. Smith,
> Major General, USMC
> Commanding

D-Day, 20 November, 1943

On D-day, the 6th Marines were on the horizon watching from a distance history being made. The Marines cleaned their rifles again for lack of better things to do. Final letters had already been written, but the regiment's Marines were really only spectators. Even the news of how the battle was progressing was sparse. They were disgruntled!

H-hour was set for 0830, yet when the hour came the Japanese shore batteries were not yet quiet, so H-hour had to be postponed, even though the battleships USS *Colorado* and USS *Maryland* had swung their main batteries into action and lesser fire-support ships were blazing away furiously.

The three assault battalions were: 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, under Major Henry P. "Jim" Crowe, which would land east of the pier (Red Beach 3); 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Herbert R. Amey, Jr. (a former member of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines in Iceland), which would land in the center, just west of the pier (Red Beach 2); and, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, under Major John F. Shoettel, which would land next to Amey (Red Beach 1). The 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, was to strike straight across the airfield to the southern shore, thereby getting the Marines the greatest amount of land in the shortest

possible time. The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, under Major Wood B. Kyle, would land, if needed, as regimental reserve. Colonel David M. Shoup, the commander of the 2d Marines, was in command of the assault battalions. The 2d Division's reserve consisted of the two remaining reinforced battalions of the 8th Marines and regimental headquarters.

Fifteen minutes before the assault battalions were to reach shore, the division's scout-sniper platoon, under Lieutenant William D. Hawkins, reinforced with engineers equipped with flamethrowers, would go to work. Their job was to clear the pier jutting out about 500 yards from the north side of the island and which divided Crowe's and Amey's battalions. In doing this, they were only partially successful.

Then the bad news began to arrive on the 6th Marines' transports. They had observed some of the heavy naval gunfire. When it lifted, all they could see was the dust and flames on the island. Then naval dive bombers began to arrive and started strafing and bombing the beaches. But the Japanese were firing back! More than one Marine muttered, "There's always some bastard who doesn't get the word!"

The transports carrying the three assault battalions first stopped at an area to the north of their assigned position, which delayed those battalions' debarkation. After the ships were finally in position, the first waves away from the transports had to transfer from their boats to amphibian tractors for their journey to the beach. After much confusion, the Marines loaded the tractors, formed up at the line of departure, and, at 0824, headed for the beaches. It was impossible for the assault units to reach the beaches by 0830, the time now set for H-hour by Admiral Hill and General Julian Smith. They changed it to 0845, which was still too early. Again H-hour was delayed, until 0900.[18]

Most of the defenders' dual-purpose antiaircraft guns were out of action, as were many of the antiboat guns due to the excellent firing of support ships prior to H-hour. At 0854 Hill gave orders to cease all naval gunfire except for that by the destroyers inside the lagoon. Further, the strafing of the planes had stopped. Unfortunately, Hill didn't know that the pre-H-hour supporting fires had not destroyed the many smaller beach defense guns and pillboxes. Due to the heavy blanket of smoke which acted like a curtain between the *Maryland* and the beach, as well as the imminent landing of the first assault waves, it was the only course of action possible for Hill and Julian Smith.[19] The assault waves began to come under heavy fire while still 3,000 yards from the beach.[20]

The first battalion to hit the beach was the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, at 0910. About 500 yards from the beach, the boats carrying the battalion ran aground on the reef and the troops began wading ashore. The two companies in amphibian tractors, "I" and "K," lost more than 50 percent of their men. The third company in landing craft, Company L, lost more than 35 percent.[21] The battalion was disorganized. Major Shoettel lost control.

Crowe's 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, on Red Beach 3, fared better. It's leading LVTs made the beach at 0917. Crowe was able to get his first waves ashore with light casualties.[22]

The 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, caught intense enemy fire before finally beginning to land at 0922 on Red Beach 2. Its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Amey, was killed while wading ashore.[23] All three rifle companies were unable to advance because of enemy fire from the flanks and the front. Their beachhead was only about 300 yards wide and 75 yards deep; the executive officer, Major Howard Rice, and one wave were deflected to Red Beach 1. Radios on Red Beach 2 were inoperative either from salt water or enemy machine gun bullets.[24]

Some of the later waves transferred to amphibian tractors, while sometimes an entire landing team (consisting of a reinforced infantry battalion) waded the 400 to 500 yards of water from the reef to the shore through intense enemy fire. The confusion at the reef and beyond to the shore was unbelievable: units became separated, units were mixed, officers lost control.

This bad news slowly reached the 6th Marines' transports hovering on the horizon. Colonel Shoup ordered his reserve, the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, to land on Red Beach 2, work its way to the west and assist the 3d Battalion. There were not enough amphibian tractors left for more than two companies. These encountered heavy enemy fire from the left of Red Beach 2. About an hour later, around 1030, Julian Smith put part of his reserve, the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, under Shoup's command. The reserve battalion was ordered to land on Red Beach 3 to support Crowe's 2d Battalion, 8th Marines. As soon as the boats grounded on the reef, the men began to wade. Many drowned after stepping into deep holes. Enemy 40mm guns, machine guns, and small arms, plus mortar fire, caused heavy casualties and scattering of the men. The battalion was badly shaken and disorganized.[25]

Only two of the six medium tanks that had headed for the beach finally made it, but not without great effort. They fell in with the disorganized elements on the small part of Red Beach 1 held by the Marines. Major Michael P. Ryan quickly reorganized these ele-

ments and started clearing out a foothold on the western part of Red Beach 1.[26] Ryan, the Weapons Company officer with the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, worked throughout the afternoon of D-day expanding his perimeter. He had no flame throwers or demolitions, but by skillfully employing the firepower of the two medium tanks, he made steady progress.[27]

At Julian Smith's request during the afternoon of D-day, Holland Smith released the 6th Marines from corps reserve back to the 2d Marine Division. This allowed Julian Smith to commit his division reserve, the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, together with the rest of the 8th Marines. Smith asked Shoup whether night landing of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines was feasible on Green Beach, or if he would rather have the battalion as reinforcements on Red Beaches 2 and 3. The message never reached Shoup. This and other messages from the division failed to reach their intended recipients. Consequently, the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, and regimental headquarters, lay idle at the line of departure awaiting orders until past midnight. When the division received no response from Shoup, Julian Smith directed Colonel Elmer E. Hall, commanding the 8th Marines to land his remaining elements on the north shore of the extreme eastern end of Betio, where the tail of the island was only about 200 to 500 feet across. Here again the message was not received.

The evening of D-day, the Japanese commander, Rear Admiral Shibasaki, apparently made a big mistake. He failed to counterattack the slim Marine beachhead during the night. By morning of D+1 it was too late. Shibasaki was killed on that day.[28]

D Plus 1, 21 November 1943

The 8th Marines' headquarters and the regiment's 1st Battalion spent D-day night at the line of departure. The regimental commander finally received a message from the division at 0200 on D+1, inquiring about the location of his still uncommitted 1st Battalion. Based on his answer, the regiment received another message from division around 0430 ordering a landing on the eastern end of the island at 0900 on D+1.[29] In the meantime, Shoup had informed the division that he desired the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, to land on Red Beach 2. The division cancelled the landing on the eastern tip of the island and ordered the 1st Battalion to immediately land and then attack to the west. At 0615, the 1st Battalion started wading

A section of palm trees devastated by naval gunfire, bombs, and artillery provides a rifleman's eye view of the Tarawa battlefield in November 1943, and illustrates why it could be so difficult to locate the tenacious Japanese defenders until they opened fire.
Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 63591

ashore at Red Beach 2. Heavy enemy fire from the front and both flanks disorganized the battalion. The battalion commander, with more than half of his troops ashore, reported to Shoup for orders. He was told to attack to the west and establish contact with the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. However, the 1st Battalion had lost all flame throwers, demolitions, and heavy equipment while wading ashore. Worse, it had suffered heavy casualties.[30]

On the morning of D+1, Shoup ordered the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines, to attack south and seize the southern coast of the island. At 1600, Lieutenant Colonel Walter J. Jordan, an observer from the 4th Marine Division who had taken command of the 2d Battalion when Amey was killed, arrived at the southern coast. He had only about 200 men, little ammunition, no water, and no rations. Soon after this force's arrival, the Japanese attacked from the east, causing heavy casualties. Fortunately, the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, joined Jordan and his men. The 1st Battalion also had many stragglers from both the 8th Marines and the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines. Since most of the troops belonged to the 1st Battalion, Jordan turned over command to Major Kyle and reported to Shoup's command post.[31]

The 6th Marines Attack

Julian Smith had not seen fit to commit any elements of the 6th Marines to the battle until he could obtain more definite information concerning the situation ashore.[32] Many possible missions were discussed at a conference on the *Maryland* the morning of D+1. Colonel Maurice G. Holmes, Commanding Officer, 6th Marines, attended, and left with the understanding that he was to be prepared to accomplish any of them. He then called a conference on his ship of all his battalion commanders. After the conference, the commander of the 1st Battalion, Major William K. Jones, was halfway down the cargo net when he was recalled. He had left the conference understanding he was to be prepared to land in rubber boats on the narrow tail of the eastern end of the island. Holmes had received a message from the division informing him that Ryan had seized all of Green Beach. It also ordered Holmes to land one of his battalion landing teams in rubber boats immediately on Green Beach and to boat another battalion landing team, which was to be prepared to land in support of the first team. The 2d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Murray, was designated the support battalion to land behind Jones.[33]

Murray had hardly started to boat his battalion when he received a message from the division ". . . to boat and land Landing Team 2/6 on Beach Blue 1 or 2 immediately."[34] Realizing that Beach Blue was on Bairiki, the island adjacent to Betio, he issued the necessary orders to his company commanders and directed his executive officer, Major LeRoy P. Hunt, Jr., to query the division as to whether he was to land his entire landing team, i.e., tanks, artillery, etc. It turned out the division only wanted his battalion to go ashore. Around 1330 the division had received a message from Shoup that the enemy was attempting to leave Betio and wade across to Bairiki, hence Murray's change of orders.[35]

The 3d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth F. McLeod, took over Murray's initial mission and started loading in boats to support either Jones or Murray.[36]

Because of an ordered shift in his transport's anchorage, which was later cancelled, Jones was unable to reach the beach in his rubber boats until 1835, when it was starting to get dark. He tried using rubber boats to guide two amphibian tractors through the mine field protecting Green Beach. The rubber boats simply paddled over the mines, which could be seen easily, although the barbed wire did give the boats some trouble. One of the LVTs made it unharmed. The other hit a mine and was destroyed.[37] Both tractors were loaded with badly needed water, rations, ammunition, medical supplies, and spare radio equipment. Upon reaching the beach, Jones checked in with Ryan, who notified Shoup. Jones then had his Marines dig in and form a line behind Ryan's defense. Fortunately, the 1st Battalion immediately unloaded the contents of the amphibian tractor that had successfully made the beach, as it was destroyed later that night by an enemy air raid.

The air raid which hit Green Beach on D+1 night rained bombs from high altitude. The Marines had scooped out shallow foxholes in the sand and the raid didn't cause much damage. The sound of the bombs whistling down through the darkness was eerie, and succeeded in keeping the battalion awake a good part of the night.

Meanwhile the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, landed on Bairiki at 1655, encountering some machine gun fire from one pillbox. Murray called in an airstrike, which ignited a can of gasoline in the pillbox, burning all of the Japanese. Landing, therefore, against no resistance, the battalion secured the island without finding any more enemy.

The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, had completed boating by 1600. The order to land didn't arrive that day

and the battalion spent the night of 21-22 November in its boats at the line of departure.

The chief of staff of the 2d Marine Division, Colonel Merritt A. Edson, arrived at Shoup's command post at approximately 2030 on D+1. He assumed command from Shoup of all the troops on the island. This not only took much of the responsibility off Shoup, it also allowed him to give full attention to his disorganized troops, which had not only suffered many casualties but also were scattered and mixed with other units.[38] Communications ashore were still mainly by runner, but Shoup was now in contact with the division headquarters. Shoup and Edson immediately worked out the plan of attack for the next day.

D Plus 2, 22 November 1943

The orders for the morning of D+2 were as follows:

1. At daylight the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, would pass through Ryan's line, attack to the east along the southern shore, pass through the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, and report progress to Edson and Shoup's command post.

2. Also at daybreak, Major Lawrence Hayes' 1st Battalion, 8th Marines (Reinforced), would attack to the west along the north beach into Ryan's line and eliminate the pockets of resistance separating Hayes and Ryan on the border between Red Beach 1 and Red Beach 2.

3. The 8th Marines (less the 1st Battalion still attached to Shoup's 2d Marines) would continue the attack to the east along the northern shore.

The 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, had landed on Betio on D+1. This 75mm pack howitzer battalion proved to be invaluable in supporting the infantry battalions. To increase the amount of artillery, the attack order for D+2 directed the 2d Battalion, 10th Marines, to land on Bairiki at Beach Blue 2. Upon landing, this battalion was to operate under the fire direction center of the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, on Betio.

Early in the morning of D+2 the planned attack began on Betio. The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, moving in a column of companies, passed through the southern part of Ryan's line, but not before Jones had borrowed the two medium tanks from his old friend by making him a promise that he would return them—a promise Shoup later overruled. The battalion attacked viciously and rapidly, bypassing troublesome strong points to be finished off by following companies. The airstrip on its left and the beach on its right prohibited using more than one company at a time in the assault. By mid-morning it had made contact with Kyle's battalion. By noon it had passed through Kyle's battalion and continued its attack to the east. Just before 1300 enemy resistance stiffened. Captain George D. Krueger, the commanding officer of Company B, had passed through the assault Company C, and was now in the lead. Although Company C had killed about 250 of the enemy, its own casualties had been light.[39] Now with the enemy's increasing resistance, casualties in the battalion began to mount. Captain Krueger was shot through the neck by an enemy sniper hiding in a coconut tree [It paralyzed him from the waist down for the rest of his life.] The sniper was killed. First Lieutenant Norman K. Thomas, the executive officer, took over and pressed the attack.

Jones had been called to a conference at Shoup's headquarters. Colonel Edson promised Jones all available tanks and direct support from the artillery battalion. Edson was to arrange for air and naval bombardments on the objective before the assault jumped off. The time for the assault was set for 1330.

During Jones' absence, Major Francis X. Beamer, the acting executive officer, took charge and continued the attack.* He moved Company A through Company C.[40] Company C's men were hot, exhausted, and running into stiffer enemy opposition.

Jones had commandeered one of the medium tanks to take him to the meeting since the airfield was swept by enemy small-arms fire. He used the same medium tank to return to his command post in order to use its radio to control the other tanks.[41]

Shortly after jumping off at 1330, Jones' battalion ran into continually increasing enemy resistance. Only about 300 to 400 yards were cleared of the enemy that afternoon. At 1530 Jones was ordered to relieve Crowe's 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, on the north side of the airstrip. Company C was assigned that mission.[42] From 1545 on Jones had no communication with Company C because its TBY radio went out of commission.[43]

Company B, with its right flank on the beach, had so many casualties it was impossible for Company A

*Beamer did a great job of backing up Jones throughout the campaign, an important example of trust and confidence in the functioning of the Marine Corps. Here were two old friends who had been together on Iceland and Guadalcanal, and even vacationed together. One ends up being commanding officer. The other, who commanded the weapons company, was the battalion commander's choice for his acting executive officer rather than a more senior major replacement he was furnished, who was probably just as competent and just as smart. The known versus the unknown won out. In a tight situation, that is what the Corps is all about. We have to rely on one another. We have to have trust in one another. With it all obstacles can be overcome—as was done at Tarawa.

to relieve them for a rest. Company A could only go around it while keeping contact on the right with Company B and anchoring its left flank on the airstrip. Now all three rifle companies were committed, leaving the battalion without a reserve. Jones ordered Lieutenant Lyle E. Specht of the 81mm mortar platoon to use his platoon as a nucleus and form a battalion reserve by using all available cooks, clerks, and runners.

Initially, some Company A personnel had advanced beyond several wrecked enemy trucks. Both the trucks and other equipment were aflame. Realizing that it was getting dark and that the fire would silhouette any movement in front of the trucks, Captain Charles R. Durfee decided to pull these Marines back in order to be better prepared for the expected Japanese attacks after nightfall. This extremely hazardous operation was successfully executed except that one mortally wounded BAR man, Private First Class Glenn White, could not and would not be removed from the shellhole where he had taken cover. The next morning his body was found, still clutching his BAR, in the midst of a number of dead Japanese.

It was growing dark and the 1st Battalion was ordered to dig in for the night. Everyone expected a "Banzai" attack. At 1830 all of the tanks were recalled. At about the same time, Company A reported that it had visual contact across the airstrip with Company C. The two companies used heavy machine gun sections on their closest flanks to interdict the airstrip in case the enemy tried to use it to turn their flanks. This evidently never occurred to the Japanese.

Around 1930 the Japanese started their first attack. Only about 50 men were involved.[44] The Marines figured the enemy was trying to locate the machine guns and main line of resistance of the 1st Battalion. They withheld their small-arms fire and called down artillery. The enemy did succeed in locating where Companies A and B met and managed to open a gap between the two companies. Jones committed Specht's reserve to close the gap and consolidate the line. At the same time, he had the destroyer assigned to direct support of the battalion fire naval gunfire into the area not covered by Marine artillery. Artillery fired smoke shells as reference for the destroyer. Most of the enemy pressure was on Company B. Under the cover of darkness, Jones was able to start evacuating his wounded, using amphibian tractors to carry them across the airstrip. More than 200 enemy were killed during the afternoon attack but still they counterattacked.[45]

During the first attack, Jones asked Kyle to place a company of his battalion about 100 yards to the rear of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, and establish a secondary line. This was accomplished about 2030. This company was subsequently relieved by McLeod's 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, which had been ordered to move up, pass through Kyle, and support Jones.

Colonel Holmes established the 6th Marines' command post ashore during the afternoon of D+2. He then reported to Shoup's command post, where a conference was in progress. General Julian Smith, who had assumed command ashore, informed Holmes that all elements of his regiment would revert to his control about 2100, 22 November. Holmes also received orders to continue the attack to the east the following morning by passing the 3d Battalion through the 1st Battalion. All available tanks were to support the 3d Battalion. Before leaving Shoup's command post, Holmes made all the necessary arrangements for the next morning's attack. The 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, was to be relieved of its mission on Bairiki, move to Betio via Green Beach, and be available if required.[46]

For the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, the night of D+2 was one few would ever forget. The Marines evidently were correct in believing the small show of force around 1930 was only a preliminary to the main attack, in spite of the damage it inflicted. During that attack, Jones had called for the 75mm pack howitzers to fire as close as 75 yards in front of the battalion's lines. The naval gunfire ship was ordered to move its fires in as close as 200 yards to the line. These two maneuvers, while probably initially not causing many enemy casualties, did, at least, serve as a screen to prevent the Japanese from exploiting the gains made by the initial penetration between Companies A and B. Most of the close-in fighting was done with bayonets and hand grenades.[47]

At 2300 the enemy attempted to create another diversion in front of Company A and, at the same time, in front of Company B. Each Japanese group contained only about 50 men. It seemed that the Japanese were still attempting to get the information their earlier show of force had failed to obtain. During these skirmishes, Jones used a medium tank to replenish water, small-arms ammunition, and grenades. He was able to build a small supply dump about 50 yards to the rear of Company A.

Between the first and second small attacks on the 1st Battalion, Company I of the 3d Battalion relieved the company that the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, had placed to Jones' rear as a second line of defense.

The attacks at 2300 on Companies A and B evidently served their purpose, as it was against the right sector of the front line that the enemy launched the

heaviest and final attack of the battle for Betio.[48] Around 0300, 23 November, the Japanese began firing machine guns into the Marines' line. These guns were set up in some wrecked trucks only about 50 yards in front of the Marines' line. Three of these were destroyed by NCOs who voluntarily crawled out to silence them with hand grenades.[49] A few others were probably destroyed by Marine small-arms fire—both rifle and machine gun.

At 0400, approximately 300 Japanese attacked Company B and the right front of Company A. Thomas stated that Company B couldn't hold, and asked Jones to either let him pull back or to send reinforcements. "We are killing them as fast as they come at us, but we can't hold much longer," Thomas said. Jones answered "You have to hold."[50] Thomas replied, "Yes sir!" He held.

Artillery fire again was called in to within 75 yards of the front line. The direct support destroyer placed itself on line with the Marines' front line and brought its fire to within 100 yards of the Marines. It alternately fired high explosive and illuminating shells. There was a great deal of noise: explosions, screams, Japanese yelling "Banzai," as well as curses by the Americans. By 0500 the counterattack was over. Within 75 yards of the front line there were more than 200 dead Japanese. At 75 yards—the point where the artillery coverage began—out to where the naval gunfire coverage began there were at least 125 more Japanese bodies missing heads or limbs.[51] The enemy had come down the beach in a column of threes as part of their attack. They were mowed down by the Marines' heavy machine gun fire.

When it grew light, Jones set the tanks to work on the enemy pillboxes and emplacements to his front, which allowed the battalion to evacuate its wounded and then its dead. The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, had 3 officers killed and 6 wounded, and 52 enlisted men killed and 138 wounded during the campaign—most of them during the night attacks.[52]

With the casualties evacuated, Jones walked his front line, patting his men on the shoulder, and fighting back tears as he saw the carnage. The breaking dawn revealed red-eyed, grime-coated Marines, some with a haunted expression. Several came up to Jones and muttered, "They told us we had to hold . . . and, by God, we held."[53] Jones could only nod in return, while marveling that everything seemed so quiet!

D Plus 3, 23 November 1943

A first sergeant named Lewis J. Michelony, Jr., permanently lost his sense of smell and almost his life on D+3. His experience graphically tells what the Marines experienced in clearing the enemy from their concrete and log emplacements. "Mickey," as he was affectionately called, had been the lightweight boxing champion of the Atlantic Fleet and was certainly an outstanding Marine. Before the war ended, he earned two Silver Star Medals. In his own words he describes the events as they took place:

> This was the third day of the Tarawa Campaign [and our] second day on the beach when this incident occurred. Three of us were in the process of crossing an area eastward from Green Beach. . . . We were establishing what we thought was a position for the mortar platoon to set up. The mortar platoon was like another rifle platoon, reinforced. The temperature was way above 100°, at least 105°F. There seemed to be no circulation of air which made breathing difficult. The sun's rays were directly overhead, scorching, and seemed to be saying "I have more heat in reserve" as a token of punishment for our being there. Our dress was that of green/brown camouflaged dungarees, the helmets having a similar type of camouflage covering. Despite the climate, our movement (the three of us) was relatively easy, as we had not yet encountered any opposition. At this moment I wasn't sure what the hell we were doing as the rifle companies were out of earshot from our position. The only communication the three of us had was word of mouth. We found ourselves in a position within an opening that was covered by four bunkers. In this opening we encountered our baptism of fire. The movement into the area was too easy, until this time we hadn't been drawing enemy fire from any sector or any of the bunkers. Feeling cocky and quite secure in what we were doing would have been approved by John Wayne but not "Willie K." [Major William K. Jones]. At this time we were walking straight up, as though we were on parade. For all intents and purposes we didn't have a thing to fear and would have made a wonderful movie scene: Three Marines walking blindly through the Japanese lines. To our immediate front was a bunker about two and a half feet above the ground, made out of logs, with a slit opening for a machine gun about two feet high and maybe three or more wide. To our right, left, and rear were similar bunkers made the same way. They were all made out of coconut logs with sand all over them from the shellings. They looked like little places on the ground that had been lifted up by nature for a play ground. We had thrown grenades in the bunker to our rear and received no reactions. By now we were located in the immediate center of this clearing covered by bunkers. There were dead Japanese soldiers, Japanese rifles, and helmets in the area. . . . Suddenly, out of nowhere, all hell broke loose. The front bunker opened fire with a machine gun, grenades hailed in from nowhere. The area was like a western movie. The lieutenant never managed to hit the dirt. Instead, what had been his head smiling was no longer there. It happened so fast it's difficult to say exactly what happened. A helmet rolling similar to a bowling ball going down an alley for a strike. The difference was the helmet had what remained of a once smiling head bleeding in it. There was no question to whom the helmet belonged. I had hit the sand face down trying to bury my head into the sand hoping I could escape the same fate. This resulted in nothing more than getting a mouth full of sand. The other Marine fell. [At first] I didn't

know if he was hit also. Seeing him crawl out of the area like a reptile . . . I knew he was going for help. Should I crawl, run, play dead, or what? . . . Now I was both mad and scared. Mad at myself for not having been more observant and scared because of a possibility of there being no way out. . . . I dove into the nearest bunker. What I didn't realize before making the leap was what might be inside the bunker. . . . It was a room about 15x12 feet and five feet high. The light inside was semi-dark. . . . I entered an opening they had constructed to the rear for entry. I landed in a mess of water was my first impression. Only upon getting a mouthful I discovered it wasn't. It was a combination of water, urine, blood and other material. . . . Some of it was from the bodies of the dead Japanese and other from the live ones. I could hear strange mumblings as I was spitting the vile liquid from my mouth. . . . In a few seconds I had a clear idea of the predicament I was in. . . . The taste of blood and smell of this place distressed me into a state of nausea. . . . How long did I stay? Five to ten minutes. The live ones were too punchy from the shelling to realize I wasn't one of them. . . . Somehow I managed to get out. To this day, I know not how. I crawled out of this cesspool, dripping wet . . . into the hot, welcome sunlight. It didn't take long for the equatorial sunlight and heat to dry the mess covering me. The drying of my clothes left me feeling as though my dungarees had been starched. For months after I could taste and smell, as well as visualize, the scene. I never did manage to remove the stains from my dungarees. . . . After this incident, I never have been able to smell again.

The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, had three casualties from bypassed snipers on their way from Green Beach to relieve Kyle in back of Jones. At 0300, McLeod received orders to relieve Jones, and, when ordered, continue the attack to the east and secure the remainder of the island. Picking up all available tanks and flame throwers from Jones, McLeod jumped off at 0800, 23 November.

McLeod had two medium and seven light tanks in support of his battalion. It experienced very little resistance for the first 200 yards. Although there were still a lot of well-dug-in Japanese, they seemed to be dazed with the events of the night before. They would fire a round or so at the advancing Marines and then kill themselves, either by their own weapons or by grenades. The battalion met resistance in Company I's sector on the north shore of the island. In a series of supporting bombproof shelters, a group of Japanese were determined to make one last stand. McLeod simply left Company I to take care of the opposition and moved on with the rest of his battalion.[54]

McLeod, in reporting on his move to the end of the island stated, "The only opposition was a few snipers. At no time was there any determined defense. I did not use my artillery at all, and called for naval gunfire for only about 5 minutes. . . . We used flame throwers, and could have used more. Medium tanks were excellent. My light tanks didn't fire a shot. I did not fire a machine gun out of my Weapons Company."[55] However, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, suffered 11 killed and 31 wounded before reaching the tail of the island around 1330. At that hour Major General Julian Smith declared the island of Betio secured on D+3, 23 November 1943.[56]

The Navy destroyers moved closer, blasting the shallow sand spit between Betio and the neighboring island of Bairiki in order to shut off the only escape route for the few Japanese trying to run from the fury of the Marine assault. "The best guess" of their number, made by war correspondent Richard W. Johnston, who was there at the time, is contained in his history of the 2d Marine Division entitled *Follow Me!* On page 150 Johnston says that about 500 Japanese held out in dugouts, blockhouses, log and dirt emplacements, and rifle pits on the eastern part of Betio. The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, during its morning attack is credited with taking 14 prisoners, most of whom were Korean laborers, and killing 475 Japanese, while having 9 Marines killed and 25 wounded.[57] It is interesting to note that the foregoing nine killed and 25 wounded, which is from *The Battle for Tarawa*, differs from Lieutenant Colonel McLeod's after-action report in which he states that he had 11 killed and 31 wounded. Even the three casualties he reported before starting his morning attack don't make up the difference.

During his conference on 22 November, Julian Smith, besides informing Holmes he would regain control of the 6th Marines, also ordered the 8th Marines, less the 1st Battalion, to move to Bairiki and take over Murray's mission.

Only about half of that plan worked out. The first elements of the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, did not reach Betio until the 3d Battalion had secured the latter island. This occurred because of a misunderstanding with the Navy about boats. Most of the boats were still unloading supplies from the transports. The available Marine shore party personnel on Betio were unable to unload the boats fast enough. Shoup and his reinforced 2d Marines did clean out the pocket of resistance on the Red Beaches, taking very few prisoners. During the afternoon of 24 November, instead of the previous day, the 8th Marines, less its 1st Battalion, was able to move to Bairiki by 1615, and Lieutenant Colonel Murray moved the rest of his battalion to Green Beach, where he bivouacked for the night.[58] When he reached there, however, he learned

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 70172

Two of these four Marines wear gas masks despite the tropical heat as they recover the bodies of Marines killed in the fierce three-day battle for Tarawa in November 1943.

his landing team would operate under division control and would move back to Bairiki the next day and start the long job of cleaning up the remaining islands of the atoll. The 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, was the freshest in the division, and had seen the least combat.[59] It was a good choice and the reinforced battalion was ready to go.

Throughout the afternoon of D + 3, all of the battalions moved to their assigned defensive areas, dug their foxholes, and prepared for the Japanese stragglers they knew would crawl from their holes after dark. The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, defended the south beach from the airstrip to the eastern tip of the island; the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, defended the northern coast opposite Jones; and the 2d Marines with the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, and 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, took care of the rest of the island. Back of the beaches, each battalion kept a mobile reserve, which proved unnecessary. Throughout the afternoon Marines carried their dead to the designated burial area, moved in supplies, and started burying dead Japanese. The island seemed quiet and peaceful, but it was a devastated, filthy, hell-hole. The unburied had begun to smell foully.

During the evening someone on the eastern end of the island threw a thermite grenade into what he thought was an enemy dugout. Actually it was a Japanese magazine containing 5-inch ammunition. The grenade started the ammunition exploding, which continued throughout the night. The explosions not only kept the Marines in their holes, but also allowed the few remaining enemy to emerge from their holes and strike one last blow for their emperor.[60]

The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, had set up its command post in an abandoned enemy tank trap. It comfortably held Jones, Major Beamer, the battalion intelligence officer, some runners, and the necessary radio personnel with their equipment. A few more officers were in the tank trap, but the remaining command post personnel dug foxholes around the perimeter. First, the intelligence officer was killed when he peered over the lip of the tank trap. He could not be evacuated because anyone moving above

ground was thought to be an enemy. Jones finally fell asleep. When he awakened at daybreak, he was met by an angry Beamer holding a large brushhook he had found abandoned in the tank trap. "All night long," Beamer glared, "while you snored, the damn Japs kept lobbing grenades at us. Luckily, they went long but you'd better not visit the men in the foxholes up there. They didn't get any sleep either!" Then Beamer took him to the rim. Peering over they could see a dead Japanese soldier who had crawled within six feet of the tank trap and another a few feet further. Approximately 14 Japanese were killed that night in the center of the area occupied by the 6th Marines.[61]

Mopping Up

Tarawa atoll is shaped like an "L" running mainly north and south, with Betio being the most western island on the short leg of the "L." Preliminary reconnaissance of the small islands east of Betio—Eita, Buota and some smaller, unnamed islands—had determined that whatever Japanese combatants remained had moved north of the island of Buota near the bottom of the north-south portion of the atoll. Instead of starting at Bairiki, therefore, Lieutenant Colonel Murray and his 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, landed at the island of Buota to begin their trek to the north.

This preliminary reconnaissance included a patrol on some of the small islands led by previously mentioned First Sergeant Lewis J. Michelony, Jr. He reported that at one point they came upon a native in a lava-lava. Michelony asked him (in pidgin English) if he had seen any Japanese. He replied in excellent English, "No, they have all taken to the bush."

The landing occurred on 24 November. By nightfall the battalion had started moving north. On the 25th, the march resumed. By the end of that day the battalion had progressed well up the atoll without making any contact with the enemy. By late afternoon of the 26th, they had reached the south end of the last large island of the Tarawa atoll—Bauriki.[62] Along the way they had met only friendly natives. Now, the remaining Japanese, if there were any, had to be on this island. They were!

Before bivouacking for the night, Murray sent Company E to the north as a covering force. At sunset, a Company E patrol encountered a Japanese patrol. In the sudden exchange of shots two enemy were killed and two Marines were wounded.[63] After dark, all of Company E's patrols returned to the company perimeter. The entire battalion dug in for the night in case of an expected enemy night attack. It never came.

The next day the battalion continued its advance. Companies E and G were in the assault with Company F in reserve. The enemy was in small groups and not well organized. They were everywhere—in pits, behind coconut logs, in the trees. They were difficult to see and they held their fire until the Marines could almost touch them. The vegetation was dense. Fighting was at close range and fierce.[64] Company E was hardest hit, so Murray passed Company F through them. Company E, when reorganized, became the reserve. Not until near nightfall did the island become quiet. It had been typical jungle fighting so familiar to those who were veterans of Guadalcanal. The day had cost Murray three officers killed and one wounded. Enlisted losses totaled 29 killed and 58 wounded. The Marines killed 175 Japanese and took two prisoners, both of whom were Korean.[65] By 0800 on 28 November, the last little island was checked out and the capture of Tarawa atoll was complete.

Apamama

Apamama, another atoll in the Gilbert chain of islands, lies 76 miles south of Tarawa. The whole atoll is about 12 miles long and 5 miles wide.[66]

On 19 November, a large troop-carrying submarine, the USS *Nautilus*, with Captain James L. Jones and his V Corps Reconnaissance Company (less one platoon) was aboard. They left the Betio area to scout out the neighboring atoll of Apamama. Jones was to land the night of 19-20 November, reconnoiter the atoll for any sizable number of enemy, select and mark suitable beaches and channels to be used later by other Marine forces, but to withdraw, if necessary, and avoid an engagement.

The submarine was unavoidably late in reaching Apamama, so it was long before dawn on the night of 20-21 November that Jones' company left the submarine in their rubber boats and headed for shore. Once ashore they began patrolling and ran into a three-man Japanese patrol. One enemy was killed, the rest escaped. The Marines moved on to the next small island. Here they learned from the natives that there were 25 Japanese on a large island in the center of the chain making up the atoll. The enemy were heavily entrenched, so Jones was unable to cross the sand spit connecting the islands because of the enemy's heavy machine gun fire. Since night was falling, the Marines

broke off the attack. On the morning of 24 November he called in 70 rounds from the *Nautilus*'s 5-inch, 35mm deck gun. All day the *Nautilus* fired and the enemy held the lightly-armed Marines at bay.

Also on 24 November, Major General Julian Smith ordered his assistant division commander (ADC), Brigadier General Leo D. Hermle, to seize and occupy Apamama. His landing force was built around the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines. At 1500 on 25 November, General Hermle, aboard the USS *Maryland* with Admiral Hill and the 3d Battalion on the USS *Harris* (an assault transport ship) left for Apamama.[67]

The morning of the 25th of November, a native reported that all of the Japanese were dead. When another native brought the same glad tidings, Jones took his company to investigate. The stories were true! A few enemy had been killed by the previous day's shelling and the rest, about 18, had committed suicide.[68]

Early on the morning of 25 November, Hermle and Hill arrived with their forces off the atoll. They spotted a rubber boat coming out from shore and heading their way. In it was Captain Jones bearing the happy news that all 23 of the Japanese were now dead and the Marines would be welcomed ashore by the natives. Jones' losses had been one Marine dead, one wounded, and one injured.[69]

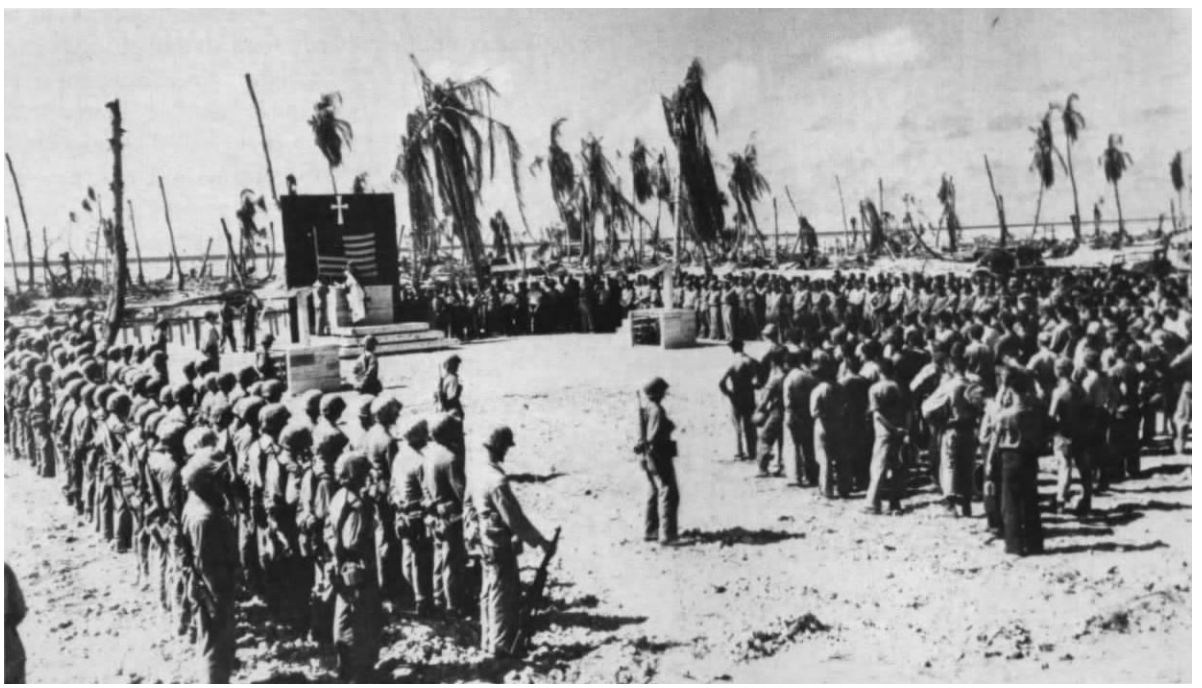
Early that afternoon, Hermle and the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, indeed welcomed by the friendly natives. The reception couldn't have been better. Small boys tossed down green coconuts for other small boys to open. The fresh cool milk was offered to the hot Marines. The island was clean, the air sweet, and the people friendly. It was totally different from Betio. Further, missionary influence had worn off under the Japanese occupation of Apamama, so the many brown-skinned Polynesian maidens were dressed in nothing but grass skirts. Unfortunately, the 3d Battalion had to leave Apamama only a few days later.[70]

The 6th Marines Leave Tarawa

With the 2d and 8th Marines already on transports heading for the new camp awaiting them on the island of Hawaii, the 6th Marines, minus its 2d Battalion, comprised the only infantry left on Betio. The smell of death and scenes of destruction still lingered. Burial parties worked daily. The smell of dead flesh was nauseating. Marine working parties from the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, improvised mouth masks from parachutes. Some of the graves of deceased Marines had been marked with mess gear bottoms and the

Marines hold a memorial service for their fallen comrades following the capture of Tarawa and prior to the 2d Marine Division's departure for Hawaii in November 1943.

Author's collection



name, serial number, and date of death of the Marine. Something like this:

2dLt John Doe
KIA-Betio
21 Nov 43
GSW-Head

The above had been carved into the metal mess gear with either a bayonet point or the mess gear knife. This was a painful duty for the Marines to perform, and one could see tears in the eyes of many hardbitten NCOs. The division's temporary cemetery grew in the area of the battle cemetery started during the fighting. White crosses replaced the simple stakes marking the bodies of Marines. The cemetery was 200 yards west of Shoup's original command post (which was later taken over by the division). Bulldozers dug deep mass graves in which the bodies of the Japanese were placed.

During the last week in November all of the remaining members of the 6th Marines (less the 2d Battalion, which stayed for two more months) loaded on one transport. There was even enough room for Captain James L. Jones and his V Corps Reconnaissance Company[71]. He and his brother, Major William K. Jones, had their first reunion since leaving the United States. Major John E. "Monk" Rentsch, executive officer of the 3d Battalion, had "borrowed" a case of the new instant coffee from the stores of the division commander, and brought it aboard. One had only to mix it with hot water from the tap to have coffee. The men cleaned their weapons, wrote letters, exercised, or just loafed in what little deck space was available. Because of the shortage of fresh water, the ship provided only salt-water showers, but even these seemed a luxury after Betio. Soon the ship's laundry had washed the stench of death from the Marines' uniforms. It was good to be alive.

But the voyage wasn't all fun. Particularly for the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, who had the most casualties in the regiment during the Tawara campaign. Major Jones had a problem finding out how many of his battalion were actually on the transport. Casualty lists had to be made out. Many of his wounded were on other ships. Some of the casualties from the other two battalions were aboard the transport. It was a terrific job locating men aboard a transport, a lot of whom belonged to other units. He kept pushing his sergeant major, an old China Marine who had been with him since Iceland, for an accurate list. The sergeant major in turn kept pushing the first sergeants for their lists. Every day there were changes in the battalion's strength. Adding to the confusion was the fact that no one wanted his friends to leave the unit even though said friends had already been evacuated as wounded. It really wasn't until the battalion had finally settled in camp on Hawaii that a worthwhile muster roll could be created.

On 4 December 1943, Major General Julian Smith turned over the command of the Tarawa area to Commander, Advanced Base, Tarawa, Captain Jackson R. Tate, USN.[72]

Lessons Learned

There were many lessons learned during the Battle of Tarawa—most on Betio, but some also on the adjoining islands of the atoll and on Apamama. True, the cost of taking Tarawa raised some heated criticism in the United States when the casualty figures were published. The press, as usual, raised a "hue and cry." The American people were both shocked and surprised.[73]

In retrospect, the Battle of Tarawa saved untold lives in subsequent campaigns—both in the Pacific and also during the Normandy landings. The example of perserverance over adversity, which proved that individual courage and collective know-how could defeat a strong enemy, put steel in the backbones of all of America's fighting men.[74] How to demolish an enemy strong point with flamethrowers and demolitions was a specific, but a most valuable lesson used throughout the remainder of the war. The imperative need for better, more trustworthy, and waterproofed communication equipment was underscored. The absolute necessity of having a well organized shore party ashore early was apparent in order to provide the supplies and replacement equipment needed to press the attack. Additional naval gunfire, better and more closely coordinated air support, together with more precise intelligence, would also save many lives in future operations. Even though the overall commander of ground operations, then-Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, was quoted after the war as saying, "Tarawa was a mistake," many others who lived through it disagree.

CHAPTER 6

Saipan-Tinian

Background—The Island of Hawaii—Training for 'The Next One'—The Marianas—Shipping Out
D-Day, 15 June 1944—D Plus 1, 16 June 1944—D Plus 2, 17 June 1944—D Plus 3, 18 June 1944
D Plus 4 to D Plus 6, 17-20 June 1944—D Plus 7, 22 June 1944—Mopping Up
On to Tinian—Lessons Learned

Background

While the 2d Marine Division was licking its wounds from Tarawa and getting ready for training in its new camp area on Hawaii, a great deal was happening elsewhere in the Pacific. As mentioned in the previous chapter, "the line of advance" set out at the Quebec conference in August 1943 was the Gilberts, then the Marshalls, next the Marianas, and finally the Carolines. The Gilberts were now secured. The advance continued.

In February 1944, Marines seized Kwajalein, Majuro, and Eniwetok in the Marshalls. These atolls provided forward area anchorages, together with sufficient land area for airstrips and staging areas. Additionally, far-ranging carrier strikes had attacked first the major Japanese bases at Truk atoll (16-17 February) and the Marianas (22 February). All of these actions revealed the relative weakness of Truk, while keeping the enemy off balance. Another carrier raid against the western Carolines (30 March-1 April 1944) also exerted an impact on the Japanese even though the Carolines were being bypassed and saved until after the Marianas.[1]

Early in December 1943, bombers started flying off the previously built Japanese airstrip on Betio, hitting into the Marshall Islands—Mili, Nauru, Wotje, and Maloelap. Hawkins Field, as it now was called in honor of a Marine lieutenant Medal of Honor recipient, became a busy place.

At the same time, many people were still asking questions about the Tarawa operation. What about the tides? Why wasn't the prelanding bombardment more effective? Why was Betio attacked by storm? Was it even necessary to attack across the Central Pacific?[2] Some of these questions were never answered fully. And yet, the war ground on. Further, as it did so, it became more and more apparent that the Marines who had died at Tarawa had made a great and lasting contribution to history.

"If the Marines could stand the dying, you'd think the civilians could stand to read about it," one sergeant remarked bitterly.[3]

The Island of Hawaii

29 December 1943

Dear Mother and Dad,

We're sitting around eating my Christmas nuts and candy and trying to answer the last batch of mail, by the light of a Coleman lantern. Lots of your November letters arrived today. . . .[4]

Early December had been busy. The 2,000-mile journey from Tarawa was not easy. The transports stank most of the way with the smells of blood and death. There were no fresh uniforms for unwounded Marines. Every day saw funerals aboard ships and flag-covered bodies slipping into the sea.

The campsite was 65 long, dusty miles out of Hawaii's port of Hilo. The battle-weary Marines expected to find large, comfortable camps waiting for them just as they experienced upon their return from Guadalcanal. They didn't.[5]

Platforms for tents were stacked in long rows and the pyramidal tents had not been unfurled. Most of December the Marines worked at building Camp Tarawa. They worked all day in chill mist or rain because the camp was located in a saddle between the two Mauna volcanoes—Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa. Snow was on the peaks of both; at night it became bitterly cold.[6]

At first local Army commanders refused to loan blankets from their supply in Hilo until overruled by their superior in Honolulu.[7] Some Seabees were sent over from Pearl Harbor to assist the division engineers. Soon mess halls, heads, and showers were operating. Nevertheless, Christmas 1943 was not one that many in the 2d Marine Division like to remember.

The camp was on part of the Parker Ranch. The site was chosen both because the cold climate would help those Guadalcanal veterans still suffering from malaria and because the ranch provided excellent terrain for training.

Hilo and Kona, a city on the opposite side of Hawaii from Hilo, were the only liberty spots for the Marines. At first there was trouble. Many of the men had found and brought with them Japanese money from Tarawa. To them the Japanese-Americans living in Hawaii were the same as those Marines had just defeated on

Tarawa. When tavern and restaurant owners refused to accept payment in anything but American money, arguments ensued. It didn't take the Marines long to adjust. Despite such problems the local populace soon accepted the Marines as the brave young Americans they really were. For the most part, however, the division had to depend on itself for entertainment. The regiment quickly organized an extensive athletic program. Colonel James P. Riseley, who had relieved Colonel Holmes as the commanding officer of the 6th Marines, was a sports enthusiast. Insisting that his executive officer and three battalion commanders live in individual tents next to his and join his mess, he also required that they support the regimental sports program. He expected their religious attendance at any boxing match involving a member of the regimental team. As a result, the 6th Marines boasted a first-class boxing team.

"Uncle Jim," as he was later fondly called, was a unique character. An ardent horseman, he was a graduate of the Army's cavalry school at Fort Reilly, Kansas, before World War II. Although a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, he was more at home on the ground than on the sea. Of medium height, he sported a neatly trimmed "cavalryman's mustache." He believed in creature comforts, when practical, and always seemed to have a plentiful supply of Cuban cigars and excellent Scotch whiskey. Only one project flared back on him, literally.

In the area containing his tent and those of his four lieutenant colonels a two-seater "head" had been built for their use. It was similar to the outhouses found on farms in the old days. It had been built on top of a deep pit into which a small shovelful of lime was deposited daily. Each week a working party used diesel fuel to burn the accumulated refuse. The seats were simply two round holes cut into rough timber. They weren't very comfortable, so "Uncle Jim" sent to Pearl Harbor for regular toilet seats to be placed over the holes. Although he was able to secure only one seat, he was very proud of having the only one in all of Camp Tarawa. Then disaster struck! The working party, either unwittingly or on purpose, went through their weekly ritual of burning out heads. In doing the colonel's, they completely scorched the sole toilet seat, thereby making it unusable. He was furious!

The 6th Marines had a new command setup by this time, with Colonel Riseley as commanding officer, plus a new executive officer, since Lieutenant Colonel Russell Lloyd had been made commander of the shore party groups after Tarawa. The new executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth A. McLeod had been the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines on Tarawa. He had been replaced by Lieutenant Colonel John W. Easley, the former commander of the 1st Battalion. Major William K. Jones retained command of the 1st Battalion, and Lieutenant Colonel Murray still led the 2d Battalion.

There had been several shifts in the battalion executive officer billets. Both Semmes and Beamer had been transferred from the 1st Battalion. The weapons companies were disbanded and the machine gun sections made integral parts of the rifle companies. Consequently, each battalion required only one major instead of two. Major James A. Donovan had been transferred from the 3d Battalion to the 1st Battalion to be its executive officer. Major LeRoy P. Hunt in the 3d Battalion had been replaced by Major John E. Rentsch, who also had been in Iceland, Guadalcanal, and Tarawa with that battalion. Major Hunt moved over to be the executive officer of the 2d Battalion, replacing Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Nutting, who had been given command of another battalion in the division. All in all, it was a very strong top command echelon in the regiment, and this was equally true throughout the entire division. Every effort had been made to fill the gaps caused by casualties and promotions by at least keeping the officers in the same regiment.

The same was true regarding the company grade officers; however, their higher number of casualties did not make it entirely possible. As a result, there were many new faces in all of the lower officer ranks, not only in the 6th Marines but also throughout the entire 2d Marine Division.

While Julian Smith still commanded the division and kept most of his division staff intact, Brigadier General "Red Mike" Edson had replaced Brigadier General Hermle as assistant division commander. His position as chief of staff was filled by Colonel David M. Shoup. Colonel Walter J. Stuart had command of the 2d Marines. The 8th Marines also got a new commanding officer, Colonel Clarence R. Wallace. So did the 10th Marines, Colonel Raphael Griffin, because Colonel Thomas E. Bourke had been promoted. Consequently, all of the regiments had new commanding officers while the battalion commands remained fairly stable.

As spring warmed the atmosphere, General Smith arranged with the Parker Ranch to have a rodeo. The Hawaiian ponies were there and presented a real challenege along with their skillful regular riders, the Hawaiian cowboys. There were plenty of Marines from the West and Southwest with rodeo experience. There were even some from South Boston who were determined to prove they could do anything that the

Photo courtesy of SgtMaj L. J. Michelony, Jr.

1stSgt Lewis J. Michelony, Jr., former Atlantic Fleet lightweight boxing champion, receives the Silver Star Medal (his second) for heroism on Saipan from MajGen Thomas E. Watson, the commander of the 2d Marine Division in 1945 near the end of World War II.

Southern and Western Marines could do. But, they didn't know the trickiness or meanness of a bucking bull or pony. Although there were many failures, there were no major casualties.

Early in 1944 decorations for the Tarawa campaign started to arrive in camp. Formations were held where the citation was read and the medal pinned on, usually by General Smith. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander of the Pacific Theater, appeared at one formation and pinned on the medals himself. Additionally, Major Crowe of the 8th Marines and Major Jones of the 6th Marines were given "spot" promotions to lieutenant colonel. ("Spot" really meant it was only good so long as the recipient stayed in the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.) The other major battalion commanders were not given spot promotions because they had either already been selected for promotion, or were on the verge of being selected by a regularly constituted board at Headquarters, Marine Corps. Still it was quite a pleasure for the more junior Crowe and Jones since they got to wear the silver leaves and received the increased pay and privileges.

Before and during this period, but not until the camp was almost finished, leave to both officers and enlisted men was granted freely. A large number headed for the island of Oahu, but some just went to Hilo or Kona. Replacements and promotions also caused personnel turbulence. Finally, the 6th Marines and the rest of the 2d Division seemed to settle down and look towards the future. Their confidence and spirits once again soared. The horrors of Tarawa were pushed aside in their minds. The war was still a reality and there was a lot of work to be done. Few could even guess what the next challenge would be. But, everyone agreed, it was bound to be tough. We were getting closer to the home islands of Japan!

Training for 'The Next One'

Training in all fields intensified. The ranges provided by the cattle ranch were ideal for live firing exercises, artillery and mortar firing, and tank manuever and target practice.

One reorganization of the infantry battalion brought institution of the fire-team concept. The fire team consisted of four men organized around a Browning Automatic Rifle. This concept is still very much

alive after all these years, although the size and mission has changed fairly recently. This, together with the disbanding of the Weapons Company in the infantry battalions, were the direct result of lessons learned by the Marine Corps not only on Guadalcanal and Tarawa but also on Eniwetok and other Central Pacific atolls.

An article written by the Twenty-third Commandant, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., USMC (Ret), in the December 1984 issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette*, explains in detail the evolution of the fire team. General Greene, while a second lieutenant stationed at Marine Barracks, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, "with day-on, day-off duty" became fascinated in studying the role of the four-man "fighting team" in history. Over time, he learned that the origin of the fire team goes back 3,000 years to the four-man fighting team of Greek Marines employed by Ulysses in the Aegean Sea. During the American Civil War, General Hardy of the Union Army introduced a four-man team into the organization of the Army. It was later recognized and adopted by the Confederate Army. The concept was best described by General Hardy who noted that "Comrades in battle forming groups of four men will be careful to know and to sustain each other."

The basic idea has had an evolutionary growth under various conditions of warfare. General Greene notes, "Small tactical groups were used in the Spanish-American War, in the Philippines, Dominican Republic, Haiti and Nicaragua. But, the earliest practical concept of what was to become the fire team occurred early in the Nicaragua campaign (1927-1933) which called for a lot of patrol duty on narrow trails through rugged, bush covered terrain."

Later General Greene, who in Shanghai, China, was a captain in the battalion of Lieutenant Colonel Clifton B. Cates (later the Nineteenth Commandant), was able to refine the idea in reorganizing his company in defense of the American sector in Shanghai.

Early in 1942, Greene was one of the observers sent to the British Commandos, some of whom had two-man teams. Later, based on these reports, Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson, commander of the 2d Raider Battalion, advocated the use of three-man teams, but did not initially use the automatic rifle as the base of fire.

After much experimentation and study by talented officers, the Marine Corps published the "F" series of tables of organization on March 1944. It was preceded by a Commandant's letter of 17 January 1944 which stated that the forthcoming T/Os had been approved. About this time, February to May 1944, General Greene, then a senior colonel, was G-3 of the 2d Division. He wasted no time in seeing that the formation of four-man fire teams was implemented in the reorganization then taking place. Thus, the battle for Saipan was to provide the test of combat. The fire-team concept surpassed all expectations. With few changes it has functioned smoothly and efficiently. As General Greene says, "Its validity has been battle-tested."

In addition to the development of the four-man fire team, one of the major problems at Tarawa had been the breakdown of communication and early logistical support during the initial stages of the landing before either regimental or division command posts and shore parties and supplies had come ashore. Accordingly, during this training period, procedures were developed to have logistical control officers (LCOs) stationed in patrol craft at or near the line of departure. The LCO had available at this location a floating supply dump in LCVPs of belted ammunition, extra communication gear, blood plasma, and other items likely to be required at an early stage. Additionally the LCO had direct communication by radio with division headquarters, each assault battalion, and each transport and hospital ship supporting the division. A transport quartermaster with the loading plan of each transport and cargo ship was also on board. It was his duty to immediately dispatch needed supplies ashore from the floating dump or from the appropriate ship, as well as direct the evacuation of casualties to the appropriate hospital LST, hospital ship, or transport. This arrangement was successfully employed at both Saipan and Tinian.

Tarawa had had a great impact on the 2d Division's organization, morale, self-respect, and group confidence. Few of the wounded had been returned to the division. (Almost all of those sent to hospitals went to other units upon their release.) Furthermore, the Corps had been proud that its ranks were filled only with those who had "chosen to be Marines." Although there were still plenty of 17-year-old replacements arriving who fit that category, there were also many older Marines in the group who had joined through the Selective Service System. The fact that they had preferred the Marine Corps to the other services did not make them volunteers in the old sense.[8]

Nevertheless, the "old timers" lost no time in seeing that the "new comers" were thoroughly indoctrinated in the achievements of the past. Cold as it was, Camp Tarawa rapidly became a good camp—better than either Guadalcanal or Tarawa, even though no-

where near the dream that had been New Zealand. The camp newspaper, the *Tarawa-Boom-De-Ay*, reminded the Marines of their heritage, and they were surrounded by souvenirs brought from all of the places the division had been. Soon the old esprit-de-corps grew. The past was prologue. They were expected to help write the epilogue.

The training at first was largely conditioning, getting the sick and weakened back into shape to meet the physical demands awaiting them. Then came the reorganization of units and fitting in the replacements. By mid-spring, dugouts and other fortifications had been built on the training ranges. The Navy had its carrier pilots engage in drills with the Marines using live ammunition. Real training took off in earnest. As one Marine wryly remarked, "We'll always get the tough beaches, and we'll never dare retreat. Not after Betio."[9]

General Smith could see and sense the way his division was recovering from it's Tarawa wounds. He had one burning ambition: to again lead his Marines in battle. That desire was fervently shared by his veterans who had grown to both love and respect "their general." But to no avail. In April 1944, the Commandant of the Marine Corps relieved Julian Smith "for more urgent duties elsewhere" and replaced him with Brigadier General Thomas E. Watson. Watson had commanded a brigade composed of the 22d Marines and the 106th Infantry Regiment of the Army during the successful assault on the Eniwetok atoll in the Marshall Islands. Starting as an enlisted man, as he progressed through the ranks he had gained the reputation of a stern disciplinarian. The replacement and loss of "General Julian" was not a popular one.

Preparations began for the change-of-command ceremony. Although General Watson still had one star, a second one was on the way. In addition to the formal military ceremony involving the passing of the division's colors, and a huge troop formation, a social ceremony sponsored by the officers of the division was planned. A large vacant Quonset storage hut was picked as the site. Each regiment set up its own bars and stocked them for its officers. A small stage with microphones was erected. A combo band to play popular music was located. Following the morning formal ceremony, which was held in sunny but cold weather, the division officers gathered in the Quonset hut to say "farewell" to their old commander and to greet the new one.

Colonel Shoup, now chief of staff, was the master of ceremonies. In due course, he assembled everyone around the stage after having dispensed with the music. At his request, Generals Smith and Watson joined him. First he said the Division's farewell to General Smith. He was lavish and lengthy in his praise. Tears came to his eyes, as they did to those of many of the assembled officers. When eventually finished and General Smith had made his appropriate remarks of thanks and farewell, Colonel Shoup's introduction of General Watson was both brief and formal. General Watson's answering remarks were equally brief. The social event, which had progressed throughout the afternoon on a happy note, became subdued, and shortly dispersed.

During February and April, schools for transport quartermasters and unit loading officers were held. In March, amphibious exercises were conducted at Maalea Bay on the nearby island of Maui where the 4th Marine Division was camped. Intelligence training intensified. Suddenly Marines were ordered to train in the many sugar cane fields made available by the plantations on the island of Hawaii. Not all of the islands that were possible "next targets" had sugar cane. Saipan and Tinian did.[10]

At this time several key Japanese phrases were becoming a part of everyone's vocabulary: "Tay-oh-geh-tay koi" (put up your hands) and the equivalent of such things as "hurry up" and "come out and we'll give you food and water." These lessons were administered to the Marines at their most receptive time, before the evening movies.[11]

The Marianas

The Mariana Islands are a series of volcanic mountain peaks and uplifted coral reefs in the far Pacific forming a chain from Guam to Japan. Discovered by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521, they were visited often but were not occupied by the Spanish until 1668. Originally called Ladrone Islands (Islands of Thieves) because the natives stole everything they could from visiting ships, the name was changed to honour Queen Marie Anne (Mariana), who was then Regent of Spain. Guam was ceded to the United States as a result of the Spanish-American War. Germany bought the Northern Marianas from Spain in 1899. After World War I the League of Nations mandated Germany's islands to Japan, which kept control until the islands were conquered by the United States in the summer of 1944. Except for Guam (a territory of the United States), the islands mandated to Japan later became part of the United States Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands. They have been administered as a trusteeship from the United Nations since 1947.[12]

After long negotiations with the various islands that make up the Trust Territories, the United States finally reached an agreement with the Northern Marianas involving the islands of Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and seven smaller islands to their north. This agreement was signed on 17 June 1975 after 78 percent of the inhabitants had voted in favor of it. On 24 March 1976 the United States Congress approved the creation of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas in Public Law 94241.[13] Since that time the 14,500-plus inhabitants of the islands making up the Commonwealth are proud of the linkage to the United States which freed them from Japanese rule in 1944. They now have the prerogative of governing themselves. They have their own elected governor, lieutenant governor, Senate, and House of Representatives which function identically to our democratic system of government.

Interestingly, although recognized and treated as a United States Commonwealth through the Public Law mentioned above, technically the Northern Marianas are still part of the Trust Territories mandated to the United States by the United Nations in 1947. The United Nations has insisted on not treating the breakup of the Territories on a "piecemeal" basis, and therefore will not recognize the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas at this writing. Consequently, negotiations between the United States and the United Nations are ongoing.

Ironically, because of their proximity to Japan, their beautiful beaches, and warm climates, the Commonwealth islands depend heavily on Japanese tourist trade. Hotels have sprung up and related businesses flourish.

As part of the agreement setting up the Commonwealth, a large piece of real estate was set aside as a memorial park to commemorate the American war heroes who fought for their liberation. Also, approximately $2.5 million was appropriated to construct the memorial park just north of the main city of Garapan on Saipan. The Interior Department has erected a small monument in honor of the Americans who fought in the battles of Saipan-Tinian.[14] Although there are numerous Japanese monuments dedicated to their dead scattered throughout the Commonwealth, this is the only American one. Efforts to do more fell on deaf ears when a monument was erected

Col James P. Riseley (center, front row), commanding the 6th Marines, poses with his battalion commanders and principal staff officers shortly before the invasion of Saipan.

Author's collection

Author's collection

LtCol William K. Jones and the staff officers of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, pose for a group photograph prior to their departure from Hawaii for the assault on Saipan.

on Guam honoring all of the American battles fought in the Pacific War.

The Saipan monument reads:

> In Memoriam
>
> On June 15, 1944 United States Armed Forces invaded Saipan. That day on this spot the 6th Marines encountered stiff resistance and suffered heavy losses in personnel and equipment. The island was declared secured on July 9th. Total Army, Navy and Marine Corps personnel killed in the battle for Saipan was 195 officers and 2,349 men.
>
> This memorial is in honor of those who with unselfish devotion gave their lives in the service of their country.

It is interesting that the 6th Marines is the only unit mentioned specifically on the monument.

The original inhabitants were small in stature, brown-skinned with oblique eyes, as found ethnologically in the Micronesian group along with the Carolines, Marshalls, and Palau. German, Spanish, and Japanese genes intermingled with that of the natives increased their stature and changed some of their features.[15]

Shipping Out

On 10 April 1944 the plan for the invasion of the Marianas came down to the 2d Marine Division. It called for the invasion of Saipan on 15 June, to be followed by subsequent assaults on Guam and Tinian. Saipan and Tinian were about 100 miles to the north of Guam. Since the Marines (other than a handful in the top commands) could not be briefed until actually at sea, even the codename was kept secret.

In late April a full-scale mock-up of beaches and a dummy city were laid out on a range for the 2d Division. As explained by Major General Watson:

> In preparation for the exercise, the successive phase lines which had been designed to control the advance of the Division from the landing beaches to the Force Beachhead Line were laid out on the ground exactly to scale. In front of the staked-out beaches were marked the adjacent water areas over which the ship-to-shore movement was to take place off Saipan. Over this terrain game board the entire division was moved in accordance with the time schedule calculated for the actual assault and employing the scheme of manuever designed for attack. In this manuever, every officer and man learned the part he was to play in the landing and came to appreciate the time and space factors involved. Yet only a few commanders and staff officers of the thousands of men who participated in this rehearsal actually knew the name of the target.[16]

It was an ambitious and worthwhile effort, but it was too optimistic. In the first place, no one knew what the Japanese reaction to the landing would be, so no allowance was made for their actions. In the second place, of "the thousands of men who participated" only a few fully understood what the exercise was about. As far as the many veterans in the division were concerned, they were skeptical that the entire drill had any real meaning, primarily because of the first reason given above.

By the first week in May all major training had been accomplished. The troops were embarked and headed for the east coast of Maui where the rehearsal was to take place. Because of the habitation on that island, the D-day bombardment plan was scheduled for the uninhabited island of Kahoolawe. Consequently, the main object of the rehearsal was to practice the ship-to-shore control of the eight "amtrac" battalions—four Marine Corps and four Army (some 700 LVTs). In addition, it was hoped that communication and the manuever of the landing force in the limited manuever area on the beaches would be tested.

In spite of what some histories of this period report, the rehearsal was a disaster in the view of this writer, who had command of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines at the time. So, disillusioned by the inability of the LVT drivers to stay on course with their front bullet proof shields down and blocking their vision, he demanded and got agreement on a practical innovation. Taking lengths of cord, he had one end tied around one of his shoulders and the other end around the corresponding shoulder of the driver. This "bridle" was steered by an officer in the open bay of each LVT who could take quick looks over the top with a clear view rather than a limited view through the slit in the front armor plate. A simple code—a tug on the left shoulder meant go to the left, two tugs on both shoulders meant stop, etc.—this "system" turned out to be invaluable in getting his LVTs through the surf and over the reef at Saipan without broaching, and thereby drowning Marines.

Aboard LST 485, which carried elements of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, men were sleeping in Landing Craft, Tank (LCT) 988. It was thought to be secured on the deck of the LST, but it came loose from its cables in the rough weather. Nineteen men were either missing or killed and five injured as the craft was rammed and sunk by the next LST in column. Similar accidents occurred aboard LSTs 71 and 390 when LCTs 999 and 984 slipped overboard. Fortunately, after an all-night search for survivors of these two accidents, many were rescued, although 11 were injured.[17] None of these accidents involved members of the 6th Marines.

When the rehearsal was completed on 19 May, the troop transports and about one-half of the LSTs put into Pearl Harbor for rehabilitation. These were insufficient facilities and space for exercising the troops, but liberty was granted freely. At the same time, the remainder of the loading was accomplished.

On 21 May with the ships clustered tightly, LST 353, tied up at West Loch unloading 4.2-inch mortars and ammunition, suddenly burst into flames and exploded. Other nearby ships hastily got under way, but not until six other LSTs caught fire and sank. The resultant heavy losses in personnel and equipment was a blow to both the Navy and the 2d Marine Division, as sailors and Marines aboard the burning ships dived into the water. Fortunately, most of the LVTs and DUKWs had debarked for routine checkups before the fires occurred. Nevertheless, the 2d Marine Division's casualties numbered 112 in this disaster.[18] No troops from the 6th Marines were involved.

The Northern Attack Force, consisting of the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions, plus supporting arms, was to assault Saipan, while the Southern Attack Force would attack Guam later. The Army's 27th Infantry Division was the Expeditionary Troops reserve, to be prepared to land at either Saipan or Guam. The 77th Infantry Division was held in the Hawaiian Islands as strategic reserve, prepared to be called to the Marianas, but not until D-day plus 20 since it would take that long for the ships carrying the assault echelons to return from Saipan to Oahu.

The Northern Attack Force departed Pearl Harbor in echelon in accordance with their speed capabilities. The LSTs left on 25 May followed by the transports of the 4th Division on 29 May. On 30 May the 2d Division and Headquarters, Northern Attack Force, left Pearl Harbor on their transports and battleships. The force arrived at Eniwetok atoll on the 6th and 11th of June for final staging. Enroute, officers held school for all hands so everyone became familiar with the plans for the attack on Saipan. All units were furnished photographs, relief maps, charts, and other intelligence material. During the six days it took for the assault elements to reach Saipan, intense naval bombardment and air strikes were directed against the island.

One hundred ships were required to transport the Northern Attack Force, plus four to five times that number of supporting vessels.[19] It was truly an awesome armada.

The night of 14 June 1944 was cloudy, and the blacked-out ships moved silently towards their destination awaiting the arrival of the assault forces. As the night began to wane, the bulk of the island took shape like a brooding hunch-backed dinosaur balefully awaiting its victims' assault. Meanwhile, the "victims," blissfully ignorant of what lay in store, tried to sleep, wrote final letters home, and contemplated the steak and eggs breakfast they knew they would be served early the next morning. Services by the different denominations had been held earlier in the evening. All the months of preparations were rapidly drawing to a close. Veterans and newcomers alike in the 2d Division were confident that the costly lessons learned at Tarawa would be heeded. The bombardment group, using a higher trajectory, rather than skipping the shells across the island as they had at Tarawa, had blasted Saipan on 13 June (D minus 2). The fast battleships fired their main and secondary batteries for almost seven hours, tearing up the impact area. At night, they harassed the Japanese, denying them any rest. The air strikes of 11, 12, and 13 June had already caused heavy damage to Garapan City and the Aslito airfield. The enemy's cave life began. Nothing above ground was safe from the air and sea bombardments. However, a well camouflaged pillbox did not represent the same type of target as an enemy airfield. Consequently, the overemphasis on covering all assigned targets (area shooting) and the neglect of specific point targets within those areas was to prove costly.

Underwater Demolition Teams (UDTs) performed their hazardous tasks during daylight on 14 June, removing or destroying mines, obstacles, and the like from the beaches selected for the landings.

These beaches, on the west side of Saipan, ranged southward from the main city of Garapan, past the sugar mill at Charan-Kanoa down almost to Agingan Point near the tip of that part of the island. Starting with Red Beach 1 in the north, the 2d Division was also assigned Red 2 and 3, followed by Green Beaches 1, 2, and 3. The 4th Division continued southward with Blue Beaches 1 and 2 (opposite Charan-Kanoa), followed by Yellow Beaches 1, 2, and 3. The plan envisioned a swinging gate movement hinging on Red Beach 1, attacking across the island and gradually turning northward. As the gap between the two Marine divisions opened, the 27th Infantry Division in reserve was to be fed in. Therefore, while the 2d Division was capturing the mountains Tapotchau and nearby Tipo Pale, the 4th Division would push eastward to the coast, seizing Aslito airfield on the way. Both divisions were ordered to seize objective O-1 after landing since it embraced the first commanding high ground. Unfortunately O-1 was 1,200 to 1,500 yards from the middle beaches, tapering at both ends to the beaches on the flanks, and the enemy had different ideas.

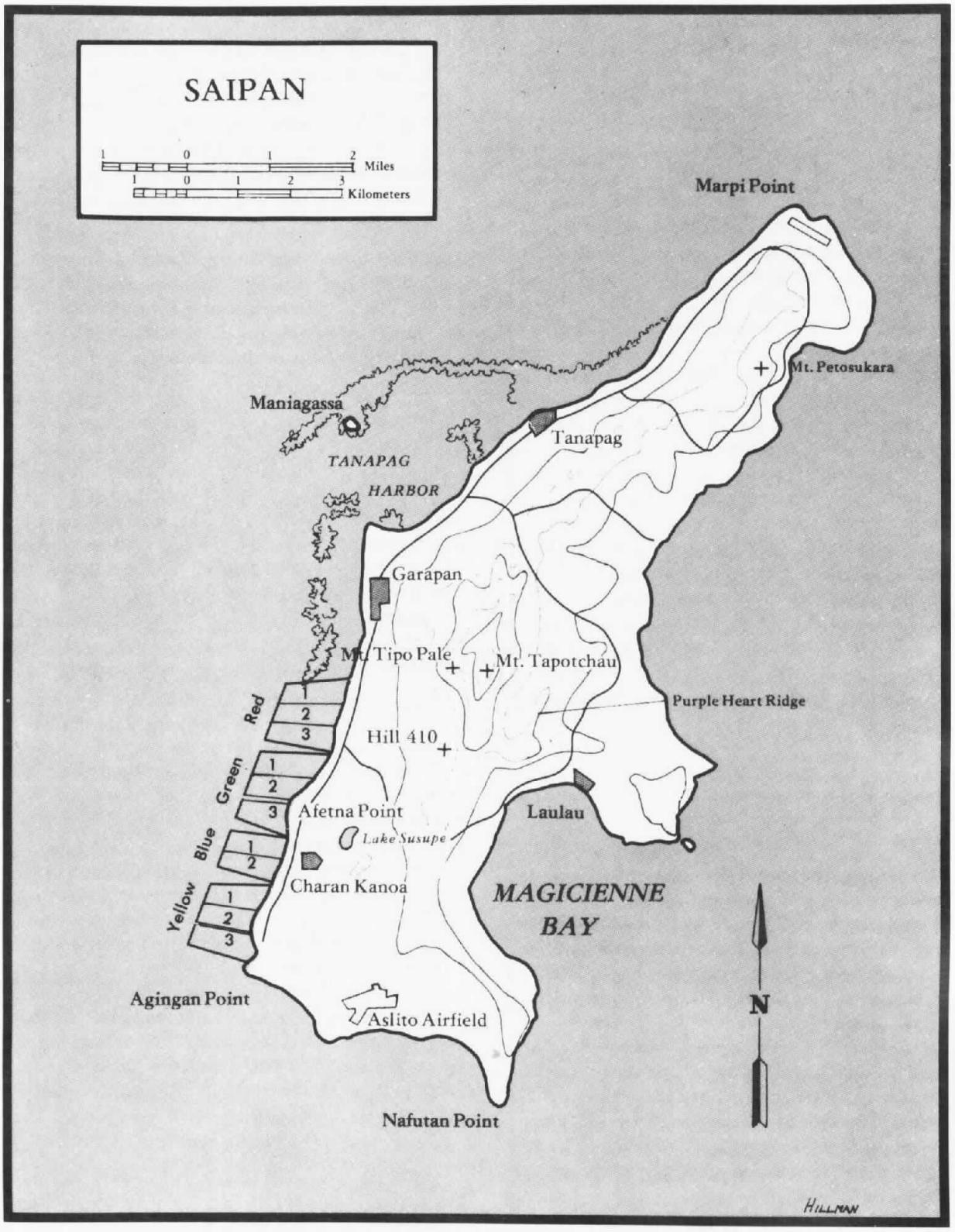
Prior to landing, Lieutenant Colonel Murray had cautioned his 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, that they must dig in on D-day night and to expect a "Banzai" attack. "They'll throw everything they've got at you," he warned, "including the kitchen sink." Later on his words were to be proven prophetic.

The 6th Marines was assigned the Red Beaches on the left (northern) flank of the division. The 2d Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Murray was assigned Red Beach 2 and the 3rd Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Easley was to land on Red Beach 3. The 1st Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Jones was the regimental reserve. The adjoining regiment, the 8th Marines, was scheduled to land on Green Beaches 2 and 3. A northerly current unreported by the UDTs the previous day, together with an error by the Navy boat guide officer responsible for guiding the LVTs to the proper beaches, caused unforeseen confusion on D-day.

D-Day, 15 June 1944

The report from the UDTs on their dangerous mission of the day before arrived at 0400 on 15 June. It was generally encouraging—the reef itself offered no great obstacle, natural or artificial, and the swimmers had found no mines. The report said the Japanese had organized the area behind the beaches with occasional pillboxes and many trenches. What the report failed to mention were numerous mortar and artillery registration flags on the reef and in the water between the reef and the beaches. These flags enabled the enemy to place accurate fire on the assault waves. Perhaps the Japanese installed the flags after the UDTs' reconnaissance. Although the report didn't mention them, they could be seen plainly from ships thousands of yards offshore.

As it grew light, fire support ships climaxed their previous efforts. At 0542 Admiral Turner ordered "Land the landing force." H-hour was set for 0830. Shortly after 0700 the LST flotilla moved into position about 1,250 yards behind the line of departure. Troops and LVTs began to debark from the LSTs. Control vessels, with both Navy and Marine representa-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Laulau
Charan Kanoa
MAGICIENNE
BAY
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Agingan Point
Aslito Airfield
Nafutan Point
HILLMAN

tives embarked, took their assigned positions. They all flew flags to designate the beach approaches which they controlled.

At H-hour minus 90 minutes, all naval gunfire lifted and the air bombardment began—first a bombing strike, followed by a strafing attack. After 30 minutes the planes departed and the warships resumed their bombardment.

Armored amphibian tractors (LVT(A)s or amphibian tanks) constituted the first assault wave, with 24 light gunboats, firing 4.5-inch rockets as well as 20mm and 40mm guns, backing them up as far as the reef.

At 0753, Admiral Turner ordered a delay of H-hour from 0830 to 0840 to allow the boat waves more time to get into position.[20] At 0812 the first wave headed full speed towards the beaches. The unreported enemy registration flags on the reef and in the water fluttered in a slight breeze.

"We'll always get the tough beaches and we'll never dare retreat. Not after Betio."

As the assault waves started over the reef, it seemed to explode. Well registered artillery and mortar shells from hidden and camouflaged enemy guns turned the barrier into an inferno of fire, thunder, and water cascades. The LVTs moved relentlessly on, leaving many of their numbers either broached or destroyed.

As the leading assault wave neared the shore the friendly main battery fires lifted when the LVTs were 1,000 yards from landing and the 5-inch fire lifted at 500 yards. Until the first LVTs landed, the beach area was strafed almost constantly by friendly aircraft. As the assault waves closed to within 100 yards of the beaches, the aircraft moved their attack inland, trying to keep a minimum safety interval.

Now the effect of the northerly current flow entered into and compounded the mounting confusion. The two assault battalions of the 6th Marines scheduled to land on Red Beaches 2 and 3 landed about 400 yards too far north, almost on Red Beach 1. Likewise, the two assault battalions of the 8th Marines landed to the north on Green Beach 1 instead of Green Beaches 2 and 3.[21] This caused a dangerous massing of troops. After running the gauntlet of heavy enemy fire which caused serious losses, the confusion was intensified as all four assault battalion commanders were wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Murray, of the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines; Lieutenant Colonel Henry P. Crowe, of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines; and Lieutenant Colonel John C. Miller, of the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, were seriously wounded and had to be evacuated. Lieutenant Colonel Easley, less seriously wounded, still commanded his 3d Battalion, 6th Marines; however, command of the 2d Battalion passed to the executive officer, Major LeRoy P. Hunt, Jr. Despite the confusion, loss of leaders, and mixing of units, the Marines moved forward to carry out their assigned missions. They encountered stiff resistance and took heavy losses. The 6th Marines could force only a shallow beachhead, 75 to 100 yards deep, just across the coastal road.

At 1000 Colonel Riseley landed and established his regimental command post near the center of Red Beach 2. The command post, the wounded on the beach, and elements of the 2d Battalion were immediately attacked by a group of approximately 20 Japanese. Once the Marines eliminated this threat, Riseley ordered his reserve, the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, to land.

Already loaded in LVTs at the line of departure Lieutenant Colonel Jones and his men headed for the beach. The 1st Battalion experienced the same warm enemy reception as the assault battalions. Jones lost key personnel to an enemy tank hidden in a bush on the northern flank of Red Beach 1 which had been unnoticed by the Marines already ashore. All of the LVTs were tightly packed with Marines. The men had only enough room to stand hunched over beneath the armored gunwales of the LVTs, a position necessary because of the steady drum of small arms fire on the sides. Once in a while a mortar or artillery shell would score a direct hit on an LVT. Survivors waded ashore without their equipment.

Enroute to the beach, Jones noticed an ammunition box on the deck beside him, and decided he might as well sit down rather than stand hunched over. As he sat, he was thankful for the makeshift bridle arrangements he had insisted upon for guiding the LVT drivers. Because of this, he reflected, none of his LVTs had broached on the reef, and his battalion definitely was heading for Red Beach 2, where he had been ordered to land and report to the regimental command post.

Suddenly, there was a flash over his head. He looked at his hand which was covered with blood. After wiggling his fingers he decided he wasn't wounded. Looking up to his left he saw a round hole in the armor plate where his head had been seconds before. Looking to his right he discovered where the blood was coming from. Two bodies, unable to fall because of the press of other bodies, were standing with their heads blown off by the shell which passed through the other side. Blood gushed from their necks as other men tried to make room to gently lower the bodies to the deck.

The LVT ground to a halt just short of the beach. Jones ordered the occupants to disembark over the starboard gunnel by rolling over it, since enemy small-arms fire was peppering the port gunnel where the tank shell had made the hole. When his turn came, Jones ordered the LVT to take the bodies and other wounded back to the ship, then rolled over the gunnel into fairly shallow sea water, where he washed himself and his uniform as best he could.

Proceeding to the beach he rapidly located the regimental CP just inland of the berm. Before reporting to Colonel Riseley for orders, he sent runners to find the commanders of his companies and guide them to him. He also sent a runner to locate Major Donovan, who had the rest of the battalion command post personnel with him.

Riseley informed Jones that both of the assault battalion commanders had been wounded. Easley, although wounded, was trying to move the 3d Battalion inland to set up a line opposite Red Beach 3. The 2d Battalion, under Major Hunt, was setting up a defensive line from Red Beach 1, facing Garapan to the north. Riseley ordered Jones to attack inland, tie into the flanks of the other two battalions, and push east towards the first objective.

Soon a runner returned to guide Jones to the battalion command post. Donovan was setting it up close to the regimental one. The company commanders started to arrive. All had survived the harrowing trip from the reef to the beach, but in the process all companies had lost many killed and wounded. They had interesting accounts of what they had seen on the beach. One reported that Lieutenant Colonel Jim Crowe was lying on the beach awaiting evacuation with his thumb stuck in a hole in his chest, and a back pack protecting his belly from shrapnel. A runner saw a Catholic chaplain with a canvas gas-mask carrier slung over each shoulder. He obviously had left the gas mask on the ship, for in one carrier he had fried chicken and in the other bottles of Scotch whiskey. As he knelt by a young, scared, wounded Marine, he was invariably asked "Am I going to be O.K.?" "Sure you are," came the cheerful answer, "Now, would you rather have a drumstick or a wing while you're waiting?" The startled youngster was so surprised he forgot his troubles, and when the priest asked him if he'd like to "wash it down with a swig of Scotch," he couldn't believe what he was hearing amidst all of the noise, confusion, shrapnel, and explosions. A young doctor listening to the story observed, "That man probably saved more young lives from dying of shock today than will ever be known!"

The 1st Battalion reorganized quickly and carried out its orders—Company C under Captain Joseph T. Golding on the right, Company A under Captain Charles R. Durfee on the left, and Company B under Captain Claude G. Rollins in reserve. The attack moved against trenches and enemy pillboxes. Within the hour Jones received word that Golding had been killed. The company executive officer, 1st Lieutenant Peter F. Lake, took his place. The battalion continued on, while evacuating its killed and wounded as quickly as possible. The beach behind it was beginning to become less cluttered. The enemy artillery and mortar fire shifted from the beach to the advancing Marines. LVTs were able to speed the evacuation of the wounded from the beaches to the ships and return with much-needed supplies. The battalion pushed on, keeping contact with the 2d Battalion on the left and the 3d Battalion on the right. The 3d Battalion, in turn, had established contact with the left elements of the 8th Marines. After noon three enemy tanks attacked companies A and G, 6th Marines (adjacent flank companies of the 1st and 2d Battalions). Marines armed with rocket launchers soon destroyed all three tanks.[22] The 2d Battalion, with its flank on Red Beach 1, gradually swung to the north, facing toward Garapan, and started digging in for the expected night "Banzai" attack. The 1st Battalion had passed through a clump of trees behind Red Beach 2 and were advancing through undergrowth to the east towards the foothills and the first objective. It was dusk. Jones halted the line and ordered the battalion to dig in for the night. The command post registered defensive fires while the companies dug foxholes. Everyone drew food, ammunition, and water.

After eating cold C-rations, the battalions put out listening posts and settled down for a restless night. Few slept. The day had been too exciting. They were still alive, but what of the families of their dead friends and the fate of their wounded buddies?

Around midnight the 2d Battalion started hearing movement to its front from the direction of Garapan. Supporting destroyers fired illumination shells over the area. The Marines dimly saw a mass of humanity moving their way. The command post recalled all listening posts. The battalion held its fire. When about 500 yards away from the Marines' front lines, the enemy halted. It was as if they were working up courage to charge. The chants and yelling could be heard clearly—some of it sounding drunken. Then a lone tank appeared. The turret opened and a Japanese bugler appeared.

A Marine yelled, "Tell the colonel the kitchen sink is here!" The bugler sounded the charge, the cry of

"Banzai" rang out, and the enemy attacked. The Marine line, amused at the kitchen sink cry, was relaxed and held its fire until ordered. The enemy force was wiped out before it could break the Marine line. A few enemy survivors made their way back to Garapan. At morning's light, a Marine patrol found the destroyed tank with a dead bugler hanging out of its turret. A bullet had gone straight up the stem of the bugle. The battlefield itself was littered with nearly 700 Japanese dead, indicating that a force of battalion strength had been committed to the attack.[23]

The rest of the night was quiet. As it grew lighter, the Marines ate cold food, cleaned and checked their weapons, and prepared to continue the attack.

D Plus 1, 16 June 1944

On the morning of 16 June, Lieutenant Colonel Easley was finally evacuated from the 3d Battalion. The executive officer, Major John E. Rentsch, took command.

Rather than continuing the attack to the O-1 line, the 6th Marines received orders to consolidate and reorganize its front lines since it was on the left pivot flank of the corps. It did spend some time mopping up bypassed Japanese.

It turned out that 238 Marines had died on D-day in the two assault divisions, with an untold number wounded. By nightfall of that day the hospital ships and many of the transports were filling up with wounded. The day of the landing, 15 June 1944, turned out to be the roughest day in Marine Corps history to date for majors and lieutenant colonels.[24] Of the first seven battalion commanders ashore, only Jones of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, and Lieutenant Colonel Guy Tanneyhill of the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines, escaped injury on D-day. Tanneyhill was wounded two days later.[25] Several battalions and staffs had their majors killed or wounded. Yet the regiments never became disorganized or hesitant in their attack.

Everyone welcomed using the day of D + 1 for some reorganizing and resting because who knew what that

A Marine from Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, inspects one of the Japanese light tanks destroyed on Saipan during the Japanese attack on the night of 17 June 1944. The tank turret, blown off by an antitank round, and two Japanese soldiers lie to the left.

Photo courtesy of SgtMaj L. J. Michelony, Jr.

night or the next day would bring. Lieutenant Colonel Wood B. Kyle rejoined the division from a corps assignment and landed his battalion, the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines. It later relieved the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, which had taken losses and had been hurt by the Japanese counterattack. The Japanese still enjoyed the use of the height of Mount Tapotchau and the safety of its many caves. Therefore, every American unit coming ashore took some casualties, and the Marines digging in on the plain had the enemy looking down on them and firing at all available targets.

D Plus 2, 17 June 1944

It was a hazy night; thin clouds muted the moonlight. The Marines were nervous, and no one slept very much. All night the artillery of both sides dueled with each other. Jones' 1st Battalion was about in the middle of the line, with Kyle's 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, on his left. The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, was in regimental reserve, but located about even with Jones' CP. His Company A was on the left of his line, with Company C directly behind in battalion reserve. Company B was on the right of Company A, and tied in with Company F of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, still attached to the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines. The entire area between the front lines and the beach was packed with Marine units of every description.

The 1st Battalion had received warning of a possible enemy tank attack. In the early evening hours, the battalion's supporting destroyer fired illuminating shells spasmodically once the listening posts were in place.

At 0330 Captain Claude G. Rollen of Company B called Jones on the field telephone to notify him that enemy tanks and troops could be heard approaching from his direct front. Jones gave him permission to withdraw his listening posts, and sent word to Company A to do the same. All hands were alerted. The battalion notified the regimental headquarters, and requested constant illumination. Regiment agreed to get a reserve support destroyer on station. At the battalion's direction, artillery, the battalion's own 81mm mortars, and an attached platoon of 37mm guns began firing their prepared fires in front of both Companies A and B. Even though Company A had not discerned an approaching enemy, Jones didn't want the attack to slide northward to Company A's front, and he wasn't yet certain that this was not just a feint. It wasn't.

By 0345 the first wave of tanks, closely followed by enemy infantry, hit Company B. The prepared interlocking bands of machine gun fire on their final protective lines, combined with all of the high explosives raining down in the sector, rapidly removed most of the enemy infantry threat. However, the machine guns, rifles, and shrapnel from friendly guns had no effect on the enemy tanks.

One of the first tanks headed straight for Captain Rollen's command post. He rose from his foxhole to fire at it with his carbine's grenade launcher. When he rose to fire a Japanese bullet detonated the rifle grenade on the end of Rollen's carbine. The explosion punctured both of his ear drums, and he could not hear. He had this fact relayed to Jones as his usefulness as a company commander was gone. The tank missed the command post, and rolled on, burning furiously from another hit. By this time the entire sector was full of noise—burning tanks, exploding shells, and yelling Marines. Another tank, leaking oil heavily, soaked a Marine when it went over his foxhole. A Marine stuck a cocunut log in another tank's bogey wheels as it passed his foxhole. This caused the tank to spin around in a circle. The bewildered tank commander opened his turret top to look out and see what was happening. The Marine jumped on top of the tank and hurled a thermite grenade down the open turret. The tank erupted like a volcano.

After receiving the information on Rollen's incapacitation, Jones ordered his Headquarters Company commander, Captain Norman J. Thomas, to lead a carrying party with replacement ammunition on their stretchers to Company B. Once there, Thomas, who had commanded Company B creditably at Tarawa, was to take command and send the litter bearers back with Rollen and any wounded Marines they could find. Thomas was killed before reaching Company B, and command of the company fell to its executive officer.

It later turned out that while Captain Thomas was leading his party to Company B's command post they ran into a Japanese machine gun which fired, instantly killing Thomas. The Headquarters Company First Sergeant, Michelony, took control and moved on to Company B. When the party reached the command post it was being pursued by Japanese tanks and some infantry. Captain Rollen was sitting on top of his foxhole directing his company until evacuated as ordered by Jones.

By this time, the entire company position had been penetrated by tanks and a few enemy infantrymen foolishly trying to guide them in the dark. Luckily the burning tanks silhouetted other tanks, making them easier targets. The 37mm gun section attached to Company B had mixed luck. One of its two guns jammed but the squad held its position and fired its

Photo courtesy of SgtMaj L. J. Michelony, Jr.

Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, look over the bodies of Japanese soldiers killed on Saipan when they attacked American lines on the night of 17 June 1944.

two rocket launchers and two antitank grenade launchers. The other gun fired rapidly with the men sighting down the barrel as it was too dark to use the sights. The section made many hits but the armor piercing ammunition merely made holes in the tank unless they were able to hit a vital spot. This squad claimed four tanks.[26]

Private First Class Herbert J. Hodges, a gunner on one of Company B's rocket launcher teams, hit seven tanks with seven rounds.[27] Another team got three hits out of four. The rocket launcher teams left their foxholes and hit the tanks from many angles. Because of this, and the fact that one tank often drew the fire of several sources, it was impossible to tell exactly how many tanks were destroyed by rocket launchers, 37mm guns, grenades, or other means. Also, the regiment had requested support from 75mm gun half-tracks when first warned, and by 0415 these vehicles were making a slow advance over irrigation ditches and trenches. They eventually joined the fight, and when dawn broke any Japanese tank attempting to escape back to the hills was usually destroyed.

Before the dawn, the scene was one of many savage little fights and bayonet encounters with what few determined enemy infantry had been able to penetrate the Marine lines. The 2d Marine Division's command post and the division artillery were only about 500 yards behind this action, so a large-scale enemy penetration could have been disastrous. The regimental headquarters was between the division elements and the battalion sector, therefore, even closer to the fighting. Many Marines were run over by the tanks but few were crushed. Deep foxholes, quick thinking, and determination won the battle.

During the battle, a little more than an infantry battalion of Marines, reinforced by artillery and other weapons destroyed at least 24 Japanese tanks and about 700 enemy infantrymen. It was the largest tank attack of the Pacific War up to that time.[28]

In spite of the tank attack, the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, jumped off in a new offensive at 0730 on that day with the rest of the division. The 1st and 3d Battalions moved forward towards the O-1 line, but could move only as fast as the 8th Marines to their right could advance. The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, had been attached to the 6th Marines when it relieved the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines the morning of D+1. Now the 2d Marines regained control of its 1st Battalion, and took over the left, beach sector of the hinge of the swinging-gate movement. Enemy fire was heavy from the hills,

making evacuation of the wounded and the landing of supplies on Red Beaches 1, 2, and 3 extremely hazardous. It was vital that the Marines gain control of the high ground. During its advance, the 1st Battalion spotted the only remaining Japanese tank from the attack as it climbed the winding road on the hill immediately to the battalion's front. Jones sent for his naval gunfire officer, who quickly adjusted 20 salvoes on the target. The tank sent up an oily smoke and burned the rest of the day.[29]

At the close of the first two days, the 2d and 6th Marines were nearing the O-2 line with the 8th Marines on the division's right on the O-1 line. By this time the U.S. forces had suffered about 3,500 casualties, or almost 20 percent of the total for the entire operation.[30] The tank battle had cost the 2d Division a total of 55 killed and 218 wounded.[31] Added to this, the severe casualties suffered in landing as well as the casualties taken by the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, on the night of D-day, meant that the division as a whole, and the 6th Marines in particular, had suffered more than the 20-percent figure above.

D Plus 3, 18 June 1944

Lieutenant General Holland Smith's orders for 18 June called for an attack by all three divisions: the two Marine divisions at 1000 and the one Army division at 1200 (to allow the 27th Infantry Division time to move one of its regiments into position).[32]

The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, started up the winding road to the top of the hill keeping contact with 2d Marines on its left and the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, on the right. As the gap opened between the 3d Battalion and the 8th Marines to its right, it was filled by the 6th Marines' reserves, the 2d Battalion. Jones' command post element was at the foot of the hill, preparing to move to the top as he had been advised that Company A was on top of the hill. A radio call came in from the company executive officer, 1st Lieutenant Albert Wood, to Jones. He stated that Captain Durfee had been killed directing friendly tank fire at an enemy machine gun emplacement. Jones told Wood that he was in charge, and immediately went up the road with a small command group to find that Wood was himself wounded. Jones had Wood evacuated and appointed the next senior officer as the company commander. The 1st Battalion had lost five of its seven captains in three and a half days—four killed and one wounded and evacuated. The two remaining captains were in important staff positions. The battalion was now short of officers of any rank, with NCOs leading many of the platoons and lieutenants commanding companies. The other two 6th Marines battalions had also suffered heavy casualties, with both of them having lost their battalion commanders and one its executive officer.

D Plus 4 to D Plus 6, 17-20 June 1944

The swing-gate movement and the need to maintain contact on both flanks slowed the fighting in the 6th Marines sector to mainly patrol action. Many frightened civilians were convinced they could safely leave their caves by Marines using the phonetic phrases taught to them at Camp Tarawa. The Japanese had told the native Chamorros that Americans would torture them, causing some to commit suicide. Those that surrendered were sent to the rear where they were cared for. Othertimes, foolish Marine or Navy souvenir hunters would enter caves only to have themselves killed by a Japanese soldier who was either wounded or left behind for harassing purposes.

A Marine unit moves across relatively open, rolling terrain during the battle for Saipan.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 81836

Patrols from the 2d Marines moved almost to the outskirts of Garapan on D+5, and the entire 2d and 6th Marines line crept slowly forward, its speed being held back not by the enemy but by the progress of the units to its right. By this time, the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines, was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Rathvon McC. Tompkins, who had relieved Tanneyhill when the latter was wounded on D+2. The 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, had been squeezed out by Tompkin's battalion, and was now in regimental reserve. Tompkins tied in with the 8th Marines on his right.

By the evening of 20 June, both the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions were facing north on the O-4 line. The wheeling movement had been completed.[33] Aslito Airfield was in American hands. Mount Tipo Pale and nearby Mount Tapotchau loomed straight in front of the Marine lines.

Both of the Marine divisions systematically cleaned out the caves to their front, cauterizing them with flame throwers and sealing them with demolitions. The work was slow and dangerous. Some caves had compartments at different levels, allowing the Japanese to retreat from one cave to another. Some caves, inaccessible on the sheer cliff side, could not be reached by infantrymen. These were left to the tanks for destruction by fire.

During the afternoon of D+6, the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, was relieved on the right side by the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines. Patrolling the extremely rough terrain to their front became an everyday chore, particularly for the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, and the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, who were in the foothills. The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, tied into the 3d Battalion on the right and the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, on the left, had easier terrain to navigate, but it was open and in clear view of the enemy. After the almost successful Japanese tank and infantry thrust on the early morning of D+3, 18 June, Jones had become very concerned about command post security. Some days the lines of the 1st Battalion didn't seem to move at all. Since the battalion was near the hinge of the swinggate, he wasn't allowed to move forward. Of course, there was plenty of Marine patrol action during the day and enemy probes of his lines at night, but he worried about his command post security. He realized to let the post stay static invited heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire since the enemy had the advantage of good observation. So, the command post moved daily. Reasoning that it was easier to hit a target moving away than one moving forward or sideways, he kept the movement of his headquarters to forward when possible, or at least sideways. Additionally he had great confidence in the human fear of flame. Consequently, in setting up the night defenses, Jones had his men emplace 50-gallon drums and five-gallon cans of fuel along his front. The Marines could set off these with an 81mm or 60mm incendiary shell triggered by a blasting cap on either a pull wire or trip wire. This not only foiled the nightly Japanese patrols probing for a weak spot in the line, but also kept the machine gunners happy to stay on their final protective lines rather than act as free guns upon hearing any unusual noise.

D Plus 7, 22 June 1944

The battle for the mountain began at 0600. The division's lines had compressed by the insertion again of the 8th Marines. The battalion line-up, reading from west to east was: 2d Marines on the beach and plains; next, the 6th Marines with the 1st and 3d Battalions in that order and the 2d Battalion in reserve; then, the 8th Marines with its 1st Battalion tied in with the 6th Marines on the left and its 3d Battalion tied in with the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines, on the extreme right flank of the division.[34] The 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, was the regimental reserve.

Straight ahead towered grim Mount Tapotchau. It was a mass of needled coral, lava heads, and limestone crags which were almost as much a threat as the Japanese themselves. Sharp and rough, the terrain was no place for tanks and jeeps. It would have to be captured by infantrymen, and Tompkins' 1st Battalion, 29th Marines, had to hit it head on. On down the line towards the ocean, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, had to take the subsidiary peak called Mount Tipo Pale. Not as towering as Tapotchau, it nevertheless had similar terrain filled with desperate enemy soldiers fighting from invisible positions, caves, and underground forts. As Richard W. Johnston described it in his history of the 2d Marine Division, *Follow Me!*, "The terrain ranged from the improbable to the impossible, but somehow the Marines dragged themselves up over it, and at the same time fought and hacked their way through gigantic pandamus roots that shielded machine gun nests and seemed as big as pyramidal tents and as impenetrable as pillboxes."[35]

The next day the 27th Infantry Division moved in between the two Marine divisions. The right flank elements of the 2d Division continued to assault Mount Tapotchau, and on 25 June the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines, was to attack the mountaintop. It was tough going, but it was vital that this prime observation spot be in friendly hands. Below it spread the slopes where the 6th Marines fought, and, further on, the plain

where the 2d Marines, after hard house-to-house fighting, was in control of the capital city, Garapan. By the night of 25 June, Tompkins' battalion was on top of Tapotchau where it relieved the small group of division scouts who had previously reached the tiny plateau at the peak.

On 22 June, Colonel Riseley had moved his 6th Marines headquarters to Mount Tipo Pale soon after Rentsch had captured it. By 25 June, Jones had moved the 1st Battalion forward several thousand yards in concert with the 3d Battalion's advance on his right. On the morning of the 25th, a Japanese sniper had killed Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth F. McLeod, the 6th Marines executive officer. Earlier Tompkins had been seriously wounded in the fighting for Mount Tapotchau. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel George R. E. Shell of the 2d Battalion, 10th Marines, had been seriously wounded, and Lieutenant Colonel Ralph E. Forsyth, executive officer of the 10th Marines, had been killed in fierce counter-battery exchanges—four more lieutenant colonels were lost to the 2d Marine Division.

It was during the rapid advance of the 1st Battalion that Jones discovered that Company A had advanced too far and too rapidly. About this time Sergeant Michael A. Convertino reported that Company A had been cut off by a Japanese counterattack. He and the battalion communication officer, Lieutenant Edward L. Walsh, reported to Jones that in addition to the company being cut off, the telephone line was cut, and the company radioman, Private First Class Billy Laird, didn't answer, which indicated he was dead or badly wounded.

When asked what could be done, Sergeant Convertino, who was on his second tour in the Pacific, answered: "I know about where they were cut off. They went through a small ravine, and were near the top of a hill several hundred yards ahead. I can try to get up there with a SCR 300 [a heavy walkie-talkie] and a spool of field wire. I was a pretty good broken field runner when I played high school football."

Walsh, noting Convertino's build, suggested he should send one of the few communication men still alive.

"No, Mr. Walsh," he insisted, "I volunteered for the job. I've got a pretty good idea where the company is, and nobody else does."

With that, he picked up the radio and spool of wire and headed for the jungle. It seemed like an eternity until they heard a voice asking for Billy Red 1, the code name for Jones. The accent was Brooklyn, and it had to be Convertino.

"Put on Tom Carroll (the Company A executive officer), Jones fumed. Captain William E. Schweren had advanced his company too far and got cut off. Jones wanted someone who would follow orders.

Carroll, the captain and former star of the basketball team at La Salle College in Philadelphia, gave Jones the company's location, and asked for an air strike and artillery support. Jones made sure he got them, forthwith, and sent reserve units to help break the ring around the entrapped company.

When Convertino returned to the battalion command post, his jacket had several bullet holes in it, but he was not seriously wounded. He reported the radioman had been killed, the radio put out of action, and the wire cut many times.

Jones recommended him for a Navy Cross.

The Marines were no longer physically fresh or psychologically eager. They had been ashore almost two weeks, always under enemy fire, seldom out of the front lines. Casualties had been heavy, and the replacements sent up were eager but untested in actual warfare. No hot meals, and just enough water for drinking and brushing teeth, also made daily living rigorous. The mosquitoes, while not as bad as on Guadalcanal, were a nuisance. The tired, bearded Marines were in the same uniforms (by now board stiff) they had worn on D-day. Still, Jones and Rentsch pushed the 1st and 3d Battalions over successive ridges, cleaning out caves and occasional Japanese machine gun nests.

On 2 July the attack to the north jumped off. The 6th Marines and the 8th Marines were to move out at 0830, followed by the 2d Marines on their left at 1030. At first it seemed easy. Jones' 1st Battalion wheeled slightly to come up against the eastern base of what was called Sugar Loaf Hill. On his left was Kyle's 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, forming an arc around the hill's long southern side. Immediately to Kyle's front was a small flower-covered hill. It turned out to be full of Japanese. Kyle's Marines took it in a furious assault and looked across the valley floor at the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, preparing to assault Sugar Loaf Hill. It was a prelude to Iwo Jima—a stone mountain hollowed into a fortress.[36] Japanese mortar shells from the fortress and the guns in hidden positions peppered the Marine lines. Marine 75mm half-tracks fired against the towering sides but couldn't see any targets.

The Marines came up off of their bellies and charged—the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, from the west and the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, from the east. During the assault many dead and wounded Marines fell to the sharp coral below, where their bodies were shattered. Surviving Marines clutched stony knobs, silen-

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 84974

A Marine infantry unit advances toward the ridge on Saipan known as Sugarloaf, scene of heavy fighting by the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, during conquest of that island.

cing the caves with grenades thrown with their free hands. Lieutenant Raymond M. Graves led Company A in a furious assault, and was wounded himself. (Graves was the fourth commander of Company A killed or wounded on Saipan.[37] Company C was under the command of Lieutenant Peter F. Lake, one of the few officers left in the company. Company B was in equally bad shape).

A Company A platoon leader had an unforgettable day. As he was advancing, he felt his runner, who was directly behind him, grab his belt and whisper, "Don't move. Now look between your feet." Alfred A. (Al) Mannino saw between his feet a Japanese land mine only about an inch from each foot. Had he stepped on it, both he and the runner would have been killed. Later, as they neared Sugar Loaf Hill they came under heavy enemy fire. The Japanese had a mountain gun in a cave halfway up the sheer cliff. It was protected by a steel door that tanks or artillery couldn't penetrate. The enemy would open the door, run the gun out, fire, and duck back in the cave. Jones called for an air strike from a carrier lying offshore. Six planes reported on station and were briefed on their mission. The first five planes were right on target and silenced the gun. The sixth plane dropped his bomb too short, and hit the Marines' front lines. Mannino heard the bomb coming and dove into a fox hole. The bomb landed a few yards away, so close, in fact, that Mannino was lifted out of the hole. Both of his eardrums were broken. (In his right ear he has lost 45 percent of his hearing to this day. He swore at the time if he lived through the day he would live to be a hundred years old.)

During the attack of the 1st Battalion, either a Marine grenade or a stray bullet ignited an underground Japanese ammunition bunker filled with shells. It exploded, killing or wounding several Marines nearby. One entire fire team, of which Private First Class Robert Lee Barker was a member, required evacuation to the aid station. Barker later talked his way out and rejoined his unit.

Finally the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, camped on the top at nightfall. The two Marine battalions had killed all but a handful of the Japanese hiding in the many caves and hallways of the fortress.

The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, swept on to the west of Sugar Loaf Hill, while the 3d Battalion, on it's right, continued attacking to the north. Here the 6th Marines encountered a Japanese lighthouse defended by many rapid-fire guns. The Marines killed the enemy soldiers and settled down for the night.[38]

While this fighting was happening in the front lines, there was plenty of activity in the rear, where bypassed Japanese continued to take their toll. A good example comes from an account by then-First Sergeant Lewis J. Michelony (mentioned in the previous chapter).

Early in the afternoon of 3 July, Michelony, the first sergeant of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, had just moved forward with the rear command post to a new location selected by Jones. It was Jones' custom early each morning to take with him a small group he called his forward command post to guide his companies in the day's attack. The bulk of Headquarters Company, including such things as the aid station and supply activities, remained in the location of the previous night under the supervision of the executive officer, Major Donovan. Michelony's duties included assigning a specific area of the new command post to each section of the company. Each section then was responsible to see that its area was secure and cleared of the enemy before nightfall. After handing out these assignments one day, he began supervising the digging-in and the internal security arrangements of the command post.

Suddenly a private from the Joint Assault Signal Company (JASCO) ran up to Michelony shouting that his entire group led by their lieutenant had been checking out their area and suddenly found themselves unable to move because of heavy enemy fire. Nearby was a series of cliffs about 50 feet high which covered the approach to a valley. Michelony moved toward the area, followed by the JASCO private, a sergeant, a Marine with a flamethrower, and two riflemen. The group came upon the body of the lieutenant, apparently dead of a head wound. As Michelony bent over him checking for any signs of life, the enemy opened fire from both cliffs with rifles and machine guns. The Marines were caught in a crossfire, which wounded the sergeant. Michelony, giving an order to the JASCO Marine, said, "Return to the command post and send up a few men with another flamethrower." Then, not knowing how many men the dead lieutenant initially had taken with him or their present location, Michelony called out, "If there are any of you alive up there give me a loud yell or a moan." Finally there was a response from a JASCO sergeant, whose voice Michelony recognized. The sergeant yelled, "Help me, Micky!" This man was right underneath a cave entrance which concealed an enemy machine gun. Use of the flamethrower would destroy the sergeant and the enemy alike. Michelony charged the cave, silencing the machine gun with a well thrown hand grenade. The sergeant was bleeding from both legs, couldn't walk, and had wounds in his head and sides. Picking up the sergeant in a "fireman's carry" Michelony ran down the trail under the supporting fire of the two riflemen with him. A corpsman and additional Marines met him and took charge of the wounded man.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 83447

A small patrol from the 6th Marines passes through a tree-covered area on Saipan on 22 June 1944.

Michelony, by now quite angry, returned to the cave with a few more men and two additional flamethrowers. Throwing grenades he silenced a machine gun in one cave. A second cave started firing at the Marines. He threw a grenade in that cave and ordered a flamethrower man to burn it. He then had all three flamethrowers burn all the caves. Upon later investigation charred bodies lay both in the caves and around them—approximately a platoon of the enemy.

The next day the 6th Marines attacked from the foothills to the harbor above Garapan. During the afternoon the 1st Battalion pinched out Kyle's 1st Battalion, 2d Marines. At 1630 the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, pinched out Jones' 1st Battalion and tied in with the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, in Garapan.

Lieutenant Colonel Easley, who had been wounded on D-day, returned and was once again in command of the 3d Battalion. Fighting furiously, the battalion broke across the coastal road by sundown and captured the shattered concrete apron of what had been a great Japanese sea-plane base. It was deserted except for the wrecks of huge enemy four-engine bombers. The Marines enjoyed dipping their crusty heads and grimy hands in the cool sea water.

"Son of a bitch!" exclaimed a Marine private to no one in particular. "Tomorrow is the 4th of July."[39]

The 6th Marines, with the rest of the division, had accomplished its mission. Although the battle of Saipan was not over, there was now a breathing spell of sorts. The men rested, washed and swam in the ocean, shaved, and wrote letters home. There were plenty of

war stories to exchange among companies, battalions, and even regiments.

The 1st Battalion had some of the best, but not all of them stories of heroism. The men were now camped inshore on the sloping red foothills, and the stories were told and retold. On 25 June around 0200 three machine gunners—Private First Class Harold G. Epperson of Ohio, Corporal Malcolm Jonah of Connecticut, and Private First Class Edward Bailey of Washington, all members of Company C, were hit by a small enemy force. The Japanese were able to sneak very close because of the nearness of the jungle and the blackness of the night. Young Epperson manned the gun and maintained a steady stream of devastating fire against the Japanese. A supposedly dead Japanese body near the muzzle of the gun suddenly threw a hand grenade directly in the machine gun emplacement. Before Jonah or Bailey could move, Epperson dived headlong onto the grenade, spreading his body to deliberately absorb its blast. He died in so doing. He received a posthumous Medal of Honor.[40]

Many heroes were not rewarded, however. Some were dead, but others like Private First Class Robert Lee Barker, mentioned earlier, are very much alive at this writing. He walked straight into machine gun fire to rescue a wounded buddy.[41] The wounded Marine, Private First Class Mignault, had taken cover behind a coral head. He raised his head to try to locate the enemy machine gun holding up their fire team. The Japanese machine gun fired, hit the coral head, and blinded Mignault with splinters of coral. He cried out to Barker, who dashed over, carried Mignault to cover, and saw that he was taken to the aid station.

The soldiers of the 27th Infantry Division had cut across to the ocean on the western side of the island, pinching out the 8th Marines, who went into bivouac as the 6th Marines had. All of the 2d Marine Division was now out of the line and contact with the enemy. Division artillery, including the 3d and 4th Battalions, 10th Marines, had emplaced behind the 105th Infantry in the coastal area north of Tanapag harbor. The Army regiment dug in for the night with two battalions forward, but leaving a large gap between them which they planned to "cover by fire." The

LtCol William K. Jones, commanding the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, studies a map while discussing the tactical situation with his battalion staff officers during the Saipan battle.

Author's collection

Photo courtesy of Mr. A. A. Mannino

Second Lieutenant Alfred A. Mannino and another Marine from the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, display a small Japanese flag acquired during the Saipan battle.

Japanese discovered the gap and launched their final desperate attack in the battle of Saipan at 0300 on 7 July.[42]

Approximately 1,500 mixed Japanese Army and Navy survivors, all poorly armed, took part in the "Banzai" attack. Besides hitting both forward battalions of the 105th Infantry, they poured through the gap they had discovered. The first Marine battalion to be hit was the 3d Battalion, 10th Marines. The gunners could not set the fuses fast enough to fire so they lowered the muzzles and produced ricochet fire by bouncing the shells off the ground. Those not manning the guns fired every type of weapon they could get their hands on. The 4th Battalion, 10th Marines, further inland in the foothills, were experiencing the same attack. The fire direction center of the 3d Battalion was almost wiped out. The canefield just ahead of the 3d Battalion was swarming with enemy troops. The Americans spent the rest of the morning and most of the afternoon killing them. The Army division moved up the reserve battalion of the 105th Infantry and parts of the 106th.

The "Banzai" charge cost the 3d and 4th Battalions, 10th Marines, 45 killed and 82 wounded, but they killed more than 300 enemy and stopped their advance. The commander of the 3d Battalion, Major William L. Crouch, was killed.

The 6th and 8th Marines came out of bivouac at first light. The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, was attached to the 27th Infantry Division.[43] The 1st Battalion was attached to the 8th Marines, which was charged with advancing to the coast and cleaning up the mess made by the enemy behind the lines of the 27th Infantry Division. Dead and wounded Americans and Japanese littered the battlefield. As one Marine recalls, "You could hardly take a step without walking on a body."

The only intact battalion was the one of the 105th Infantry. The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, was "to advance only to conform to the movement of the right of the 106th Infantry."

By noon of 7 July the 106th Infantry still had not made contact with the two battered battalions of the 105th Infantry. These two battalions were therefore evacuated by LVTs. By nightfall the last survivors had been evacuated and the 27th Division's (Reinforced) line ran unbroken from the beach to where it tied in with the 4th Division in the mountains.

The next day, 8 July, the 2d Marine Division passed through the Army division with the 6th and 8th Marines in the assault. Upon passing through the 27th Infantry Division the 2d Division regained control of the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines.

Mopping Up

The mop-up really started on 8 July. The Marines encountered large numbers of poorly armed and disorganized enemy soldiers, but no real organized resistance except in a woody swamp east of Tanapag Village. Company F of the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, remained behind to contain and destroy the enemy. The rest of the regiment reached the water's edge and set up security for the night.

Many Japanese had waded out to the reef to avoid the assault. Marine infantry patrols and language officers in amphibian tractors went out to try to induce them to surrender. Those who refused were killed. Unfortunately, only 14 prisoners were taken. About 100 either took their own lives or were killed by their officers. "One Japanese officer was observed beheading four of a group of his soldiers before he himself was killed by the Marines."[44]

The 6th Marines conservatively estimated there were about 1,500 Japanese dead in its area on 8 July. During the night small groups of Japanese survivors attempted to breach the Marine lines. The 6th Marines reported killing "50 or more" the nights of the 8th and 9th.

Lieutenant Merril R. Frescoln, a platoon leader in Company A, was assigned the job of separating the many bloated bodies of the dead which were attracting horse flies, maggots, and other insects. Working furiously with natives and Koreans (used as a work force battalion by the Japanese) Frescoln used bulldozers to bury the Japanese dead in one large grave. The dead Americans were buried individually in the division cemetery.

Many small groups of Japanese were bypassed by the 4th Marine Division in its sprint to the O-9 line on the extreme northwestern tip of Saipan. The division reached O-9 on 9 July. Admiral Turner, the Expeditionary Force Commander, declared the island secured at 1615, 9 July 1944.[45] True, all organized resistance had been shattered, but the mopping-up continued for days.

On 10 July interpreters, using public address systems, begged the enemy soldiers and natives in the caves to come out and surrender. This effort was made from both the land and the sea. The results were not encouraging. The Japanese military and the native Chamorros had been thoroughly propagandized into believing the Americans would torture and kill them.[46] Hundreds of civilians killed themselves. Flinging their children ahead of them, they jumped to their deaths on the jagged rocks below the cliffs at Marpi Point. Many times Japanese soldiers would not permit the civilians to surrender, and would kill them if they tried to do so. Also on 10 July American units killed more than 2,000 additional Japanese soldiers on this "secured" island, more than 500 of them by units of the 2d Marine Division. Tired Marines who had been fighting for 25 straight days nevertheless laid down their guns to carry wounded civilians or lost children to camps where they could receive care.[47]

Rugged cliffs on Saipan serve as the last battleground of the 1944 campaign on that Central Pacific island.
Author's collection

In Tanapag harbor lay Maniagassa Island—250 yards wide, 300 yards long. It was about 2,500 yards northeast of the seaplane base, and the enemy still occupied it. It had to be captured. Even one radio set could send information to Japan on United States harbor activities and ship movements.

This assignment went to the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines. The battalion, supported by amphibian tractors and a 20-minute artillery preparation by the 10th Marines, landed at 1100, 13 July. Companies I and K were in the assault waves and landed unopposed. Within one hour, the island was overrun by the Americans. Of the 31 Japanese defenders, the Marines captured 15 and killed 16. One Marine died. One rifle platoon, with a 60mm mortar platoon attached, remained behind to garrison the island. The rest of the battalion rejoined the division.[48]

The American units on Saipan had lost a total of 3,126 killed; 13,160 wounded; and 338 missing. The 2d Division had the most killed, and the 4th Division the most wounded.[49] The 2d Division had 73 officers and 1,077 enlisted men killed, 226 officers and 4,688 enlisted men wounded, and 1 officer and 105 enlisted men missing in action. The division had lost a total of 300 officers and 5,870 enlisted men.[50] Some of the battalions' casualty rates approached 60 percent of their strength. As an example, the 3d Battalion rated 35 officers and 841 enlisted men by table of organization. On Saipan it had 22 officers and 513 enlisted men either killed or wounded. The 6th Marines' casualties totaled 356 killed and 1,208 wounded officers and enlisted men. This was more than any other regiment or unit in the 2d Marine Division.

On to Tinian

A steady stream of replacements had arrived on Saipan, both during and after the battle. As units moved into bivouac they were fleshed out with newly arrived officers and men. Some had been wounded on Guadalcanal or in later battles and were returning to the fight. Most, however, were new replacements yet to experience the horrors of war. A typical infantry battalion in the 2d Division which had participated in Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Saipan had suffered 137 percent casualties for the war thus far.[51]

The 2d Division got seven new battalion commanders but the 6th Marines only needed one of them, since Lieutenant Colonel Easley had returned to command the 3d Battalion, and Jones of the 1st Battalion was neither killed nor wounded. Lieutenant

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 90505

Fields of sugar cane on Tinian make visual contact difficult for these advancing Marines.

Colonel Edmund B. Games received command of the 2d Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Russell Lloyd, the executive officer of the regiment on Tarawa, returned and took up his old job when Lieutenant Colonel McLeod was killed.

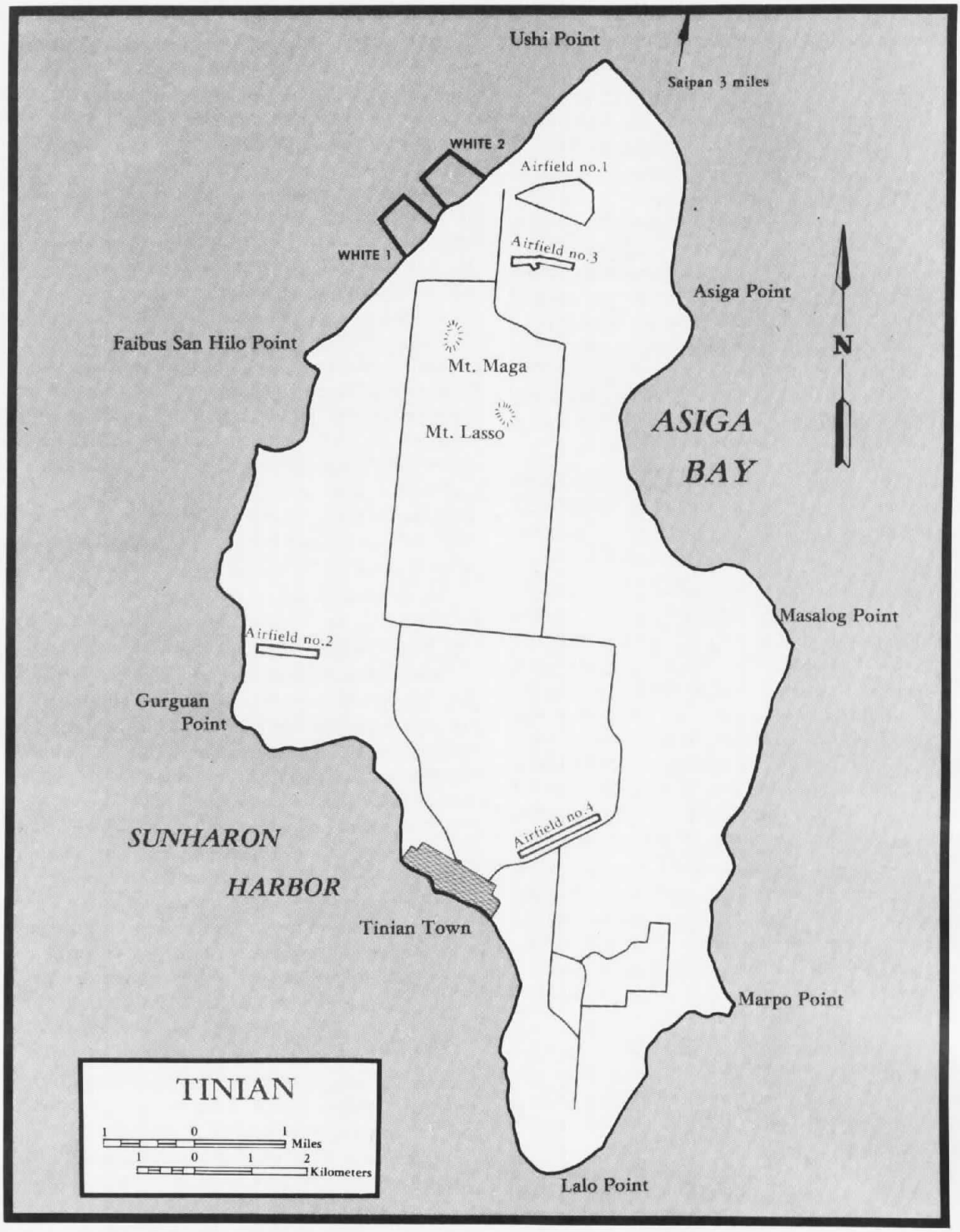
Although Saipan was declared secured on 9 July, the exhausted Marines had their hands full rooting out stragglers and bypassed enemy soldiers. Yet they also were expected to make a fresh assault on 24 July against a nearby Japanese garrison of an estimated 8,000 fighting enemy, 3,000 laborers, and an undetermined number of Japanese civilians.[52] There was a great deal of reorganization to be accomplished in a relatively short time if the units were to undertake even rudimentary training with the new personnel. It was not a period of rest and rehabilitation as one might have hoped.

Tinian, the nearby next target, could be seen easily. It was only slightly smaller than Saipan, eleven miles long by five miles wide, but it was almost flat. No Mount Tapotchau. No Sugar Loaf Hill. It was a series of gently sloping plateaus covered, for the most part, with canebrakes. The highest plateau was about 500 feet on the southern end, and it had crags and sharp escarpments. On the southwestern beach was Sunharon, or Tinian Town. On its flat northern coast, just across from Saipan, was Ushi airdrome, the finest Japanese airport in the Central Pacific.[53]

For three days before J-day (D-day was for Saipan and William-day for Guam) the battleships and destroyers concentrated on Tinian Town. The beaches there on the southwestern coast were by far the best and most likely choice for an amphibious assault. While this was going on, the daring members of the Corps Reconnaissance Battalion, under Major James L. Jones, stole ashore in blackface and carrying only knives so as to not give away their presence. They landed from a submarine on the northwest and eastern beaches. They found two narrow beaches on the northwest coast backed by cliffs with but no enemy installations—only barbed wire and foot patrols.

On J-day, 24 July 1944, the 2d Division put on a demonstration off Tinian Town, using the 2d and 8th Marines. The enemy got hits on a battleship and on a destroyer, so when 60 minutes before H-hour the U.S. forces suddenly withdrew, the Japanese thought they had scored a victory. The rest of the division and the 6th Marines became corps reserve as the 4th Division was chosen to lead the assault across the two small northwestern beaches. Carrier aircraft and Army fighters from Aslito airfield on Saipan began bombing and strafing Ushi airdrome. Thirteen battalions of corps and division artillery reversed their positions and fired across the straits in support. Now battleships and destroyers which had been bombarding Tinian Town added their weight to the supporting fires. Armored amphibian tanks lead the way. Very little enemy fire came from either of the White Beaches, as the two were named. The 4th Division was safely ashore and dug in by the night of J-day. The demonstration evidently had succeeded. Meanwhile the 6th Marines boarded LSTs at Garapan to make the short trip to Tinian.

The Japanese attacked the Marines the night of J-day, but the 4th Division and supporting artillery from the 2d Division (2d Battalion, 10th Marines) were


Ushi Point
Saipan 3 miles
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1 0 1 Miles
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ready for them. The next morning the Marines found more than 1,500 Japanese bodies. The same day, J+1, the rest of the 2d Division started landing.

The 6th Marines landed during the afternoon of J+1 and went into division reserve in back of the 2d and 8th Marines. The following morning the two divisions attacked eastward. The Marines overran the Ushi airdrome virtually without losses. By midafternoon the eastward objectives had been taken. The 6th Marines moved in on the right of the 2d Marines. Both wheeled to the south. By nightfall they were almost up to the 4th Division's line across the right flank of the island.[54] The next day the two regiments advanced more than 2,000 yards against little enemy opposition. That night they tied in with the 4th Division. The Marines had a line across the island while controlling the entire northern portion, including the fine airfield pointing right at Japan.

During the next two days of advancing, the two divisions ran into only light opposition. Some of the maps turned out to be faulty, causing some arguments between adjoining battalion commanders.

Lieutenant Colonel Lloyd, executive officer of the 6th Marines, had brought along a fine pair of Japanese long-range binoculars mounted on a stand which he had found on Saipan. Once, when he couldn't spot the position of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, in the canebreak in front of the small hill on which he was standing with the binoculars, he told Jones to wave his map. Jones demurred, pointing out it would show the enemy his location. Lloyd insisted. Jones waved his map, which immediately got riddled by Japanese machine gun fire. No more map-waving occurred.

When the two divisions halted to consolidate on the afternoon of J+5, they occupied two-thirds of the island. On the left was the high escarpment of the last plateau. On the right was Tinian Town. The enemy had to be waiting to make a last desperate stand in those two places. There was still a large number of them unaccounted for.

The 6th Marines attacked towards the escarpment. The closer it approached this last rugged plateau, the more opposition it encountered. While moving towards the base of the escarpment, Company A received enemy artillery and mortar fire, as did the battalion headquarters. The commander of Company A was wounded and had to be evacuated. He was the fifth commander of this company to be either killed or wounded since landing on Saipan. Casualties increased.

The Japanese had mounted a mobile cannon in a cave and were holding up the advance of the 1st Battalion. Again the battalion radio went out. Convertino took a jeep to the rear to get both a radio and some more wire. Jones was stymied in calling for an air strike. Soon he spotted the platoon's jeep loaded with wire and a radio running wide open as it crossed in front of the battalion line. It was Convertino and the driver, Private First Class Chick Ciekelenski. "You silly bastards," Jones roared as they drove into the battalion command post, "You could have been killed by us or the Japs." "It was the only road that wasn't mined that we could use to get to you in a hurry," Convertino explained. Jones then called for an air strike by the B-25s on Saipan. With their nose cannons and machine guns blazing, they soon cleaned out the caves in the cliffs. The mystery of the dead radio was solved shortly after dark. Private First Class Chick Bursa, the youngest man in the communication platoon, crawled to the 1st Battalion lines with his battered radio. "I got pinned down, and they even shot off my short antenna, making transmission impossible," he told Jones with a soft Cajun accent. "I hid in the sugar cane until it got dark enough for me to return."

The weather turned for the worse. The monsoon had begun. It was 27 July. Now the Marines had to dig their foxholes in the mud and sleep in the rain.

The division attack jumped off at 0830 on J+7, 31 July. The 8th Marines, on the right with the 6th Marines in the middle, started to climb. The 2d Marines held its position on the left flank at the base to contain the enemy. There was no way to assault the eastern part of the escarpment in front of them, so the attempt was made on the western approach.

The 6th Marines reached the approaches to the plateau on the top of the escarpment at 1330 without meeting very much enemy resistance. On its right, in the 8th Marines' sector, it was a different story. The Japanese resistance was heavy. Equally bad, because of the canebreaks at the base and jungle on the sides of the escarpment, it was difficult for the battalions of this regiment to maintain contact. One of its battalions was the first to claw its way to the top.

Early on J+8, 1 August, the 6th Marines made the top and reinforced the 8th Marines. The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, along with the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, swept across the plateau and established a line on its southern rim.[55] Below them were numerous caves in the face of the rocky cliff. Grenades could be heard popping in many of them. On the narrow beaches civilians were jumping out in the water to drown. Once again the Japanese and natives were committing suicide rather than surrender.

The news came from Corps: Tinian was declared secure as of 1855.[56] By this time both the 1st and 2d Battalions, 6th Marines, had fought their way to the top. The 2d Battalion was fed into the line along the rim, closing the gap between the 3d Battalion on its right and the 2d Marines holding position at the foot of the escarpment. The 1st Battalion became the 6th Marines' reserve.

On the top of the plateau was a hedgerow of short, windstunted trees. It ran mainly from south to north. Two branches ran from the main line almost to the rim where the 3d Battalion was dug in. The rest of the plateau was like a pasture. The hedgerow had probably been planted to cut down on the wind sweeping the plateau, thereby making the rest more useful.

The night of 1 August, the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, chose to locate its command post in the open field to the west of the main hedgerow. Emplacing a ring of listening posts equipped with field telephones and thermite grenades around the position, it strung as much concertina barbed wire as possible before dark. This wire, located just behind the listening posts, would act as a second line of defense in front of the men's foxholes.

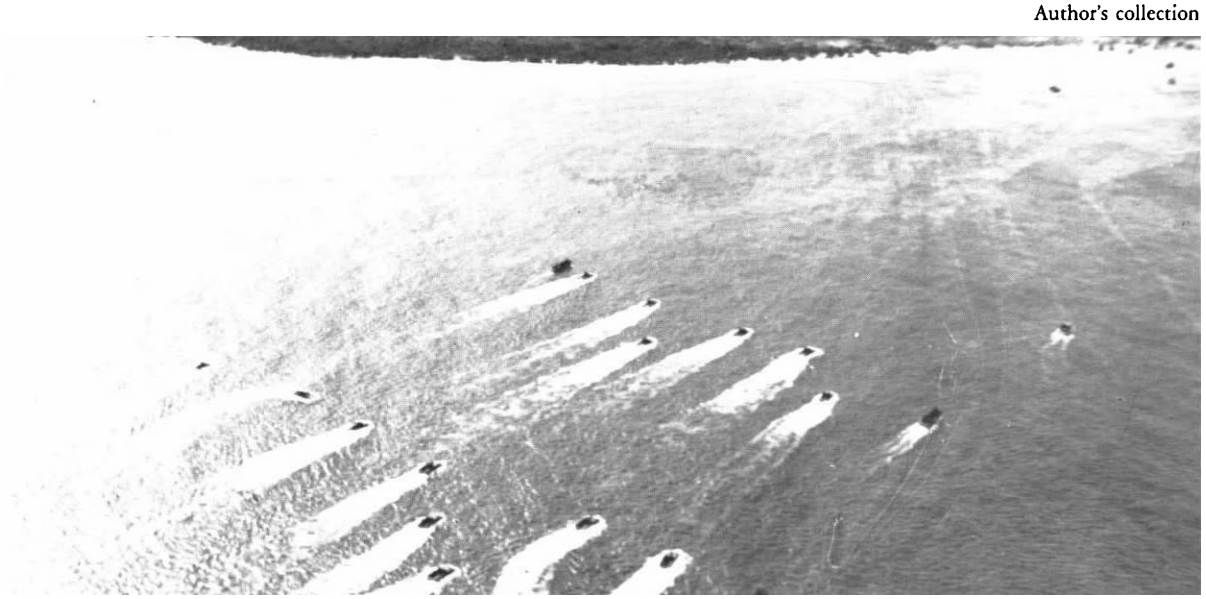
The 3d Battalion set up its command post in the southern-most grouping of trees which ran along the main south-north line. The Marines did have clear fields of fire to both the north and south.

Before midnight, enemy forces made several probes of the 1st Battalion's position. These were probably bands of Japanese coming from the jungle-covered escarpment to the south in the sector of the 8th Marines. These groups broke off their probes in the face of liberal use of thermite grenades thrown by members of the listening posts. Early in the morning of 2 August this band or bands of enemy congregated in the main tree line to the east of the 1st Battalion's command post. About 0500 a large number attacked the 3rd Battalion's command post by moving down the tree line leading to the Marine position. The fight was brief and violent. Before a tank rolled up to the rescue, the defending Marines had killed more than 100 Japanese. The 1st Battalion, hearing the fighting a little above and just to the east of them, called on the field phone to offer help. It was not needed, and the fighting was quite brief. In a subsequent phone call shortly thereafter the battalion executive officer, Major Rentsch, informed Jones that his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel John Easley, had risen up on his knees to see what was going on and had been shot.[57] He was at that time being put on a stretcher on the back of a jeep on his way to the rear via a dirt road just in back of the main hedgerow.

Jones walked up to the road and waited for the jeep. It stopped when it reached him. Easley, stripped down to the waist, was attended by a corpsman. The wounded man appeared to be unconscious. The corpsman shook his head when his eyes met Jones'. Jones took Easley's right hand in his, tears blurring his vision. He could see a small purplish dot about the size of

The invasion fleet is clearly visible from the high ground on Tinian following the Americans' near-perfect amphibious assault on the Japanese-held island in the Marianas in 1944.

Author's collection



an eraser on a pencil just above the heart. Holding his hand, Jones watched his old friend die. The battle for Tinian was indeed over and costly to some.

Marine units spent that day and others trying to neutralize the caves in Tinian's rugged southern cliffs. In fact, the mopping-up took elements of the 2d Marine Division a full three weeks to accomplish. Hundreds of Japanese and some Marines died in the effort.[58] Marine language teams with loudspeakers convinced many civilians to surrender. The battle for Tinian had ended officially in only nine days. The Marines had counted and buried 5,000 Japanese, rescued more than 9,000 civilians, and captured 152 Japanese prisoners, as well as 103 Korean laborers. The 2d Marine Division lost 22 officers and 268 enlisted men, for a total of 290 killed, and had 79 officers and 1,435 enlisted men wounded, for a total of 1,514.[59] Of the 24 Americans originally carried as missing, all but three were still missing at war's end. Of these totals, the 6th Marines had 34 killed and 165 wounded.

The week immediately following the incidents on the plateau, the 6th Marines moved down to the flat area immediately inland of Tinian Town. Time was now available to clean up and pack. The 2d Division started moving back to Saipan on 9 August, except for the 8th Marines which stayed on Tinian to clean out the caves and to garrison the island. By 13 August the move was over.[60] Men of the division heard they were not going back to New Zealand, or even the camp they had finally assembled on Hawaii. The word was out—they were to remain in the Marianas and build another camp!

Lessons Learned

Probably the best lesson learned was what could be accomplished by a group of determined and well led Marines. After almost two months of fighting a tenacious enemy in rugged terrain, in spite of many losses and an influx of replacement personnel, the Marines were ready for the next task.

Most of the specific lessons learned came from fighting on Saipan, reinforced by action on Tinian. Fighting in mountains, jungles, caves, and bad weather had drawn these Marines closer together, as well as hardening them into veterans.

The surviving officers and enlisted men had learned that caution was more laudable than bravery; patience more important than aggressiveness. The unspoken maxim applied: "Look before you leap."[61] They realized beforehand that the canned rations would be monotonous—they were. Naval gunfire was much more effective as a result of lessons learned at Tarawa, as was the air support. The very weight of both astounded the Japanese. The artillery units showed that they were not only well led but also well trained. Here, as on Tarawa, the Japanese found their hands tied by the failure of their communications, due mainly to the incessant air, ground, and naval bombardments. Its importance was pointed up in the breakdown of contact between the higher Japanese headquarters and the enemy's tank-led assault on the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, on D+3 on Saipan.

Later the division learned that the decisive defeats at Saipan and Tinian had really shaken Tokyo. Most informed Japanese concluded that the war was lost.[62] It was indeed "the beginning of the end."