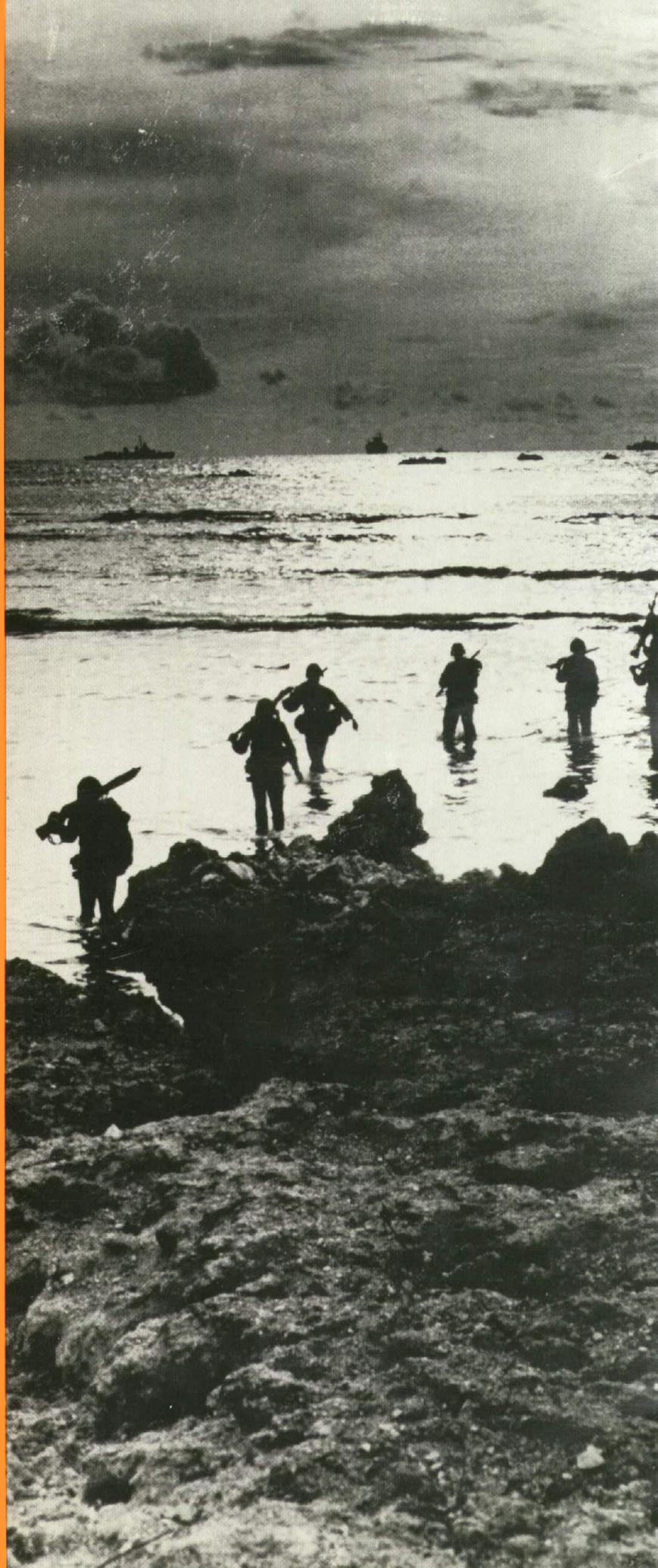


A CLOSE  
ENCOUNTER:  
THE MARINE  
LANDING  
ON TINIAN

MARINES IN  
WORLD WAR II  
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

BY RICHARD HARWOOD





# A Close Encounter: The Marine Landing on Tinian

by Richard Harwood

Three weeks into the battle for Saipan, there was no doubt about the outcome and V Amphibious Corps (VAC) commanders began turning their attention to the next objective—the island of Tinian, clearly visible three miles off Saipan's southwest coast. Its garrison of 9,000 Japanese army and navy combatants, many of them veterans of the campaigns in Manchuria, had been bombarded for seven weeks by U.S. air and sea armadas, joined in late June by massed Marine Corps and Army artillery battalions on Saipan's southern coast. The 2d and 4th Marine Divisions, both still in the thick of the Saipan fight, had been selected for the assault mission.

The crucial question of where they would land, however, was still undecided. There was strong support among the planners for a landing on two narrow sand strips—code named White 1 and White 2—on Tinian's northwest coast; one was 60 yards wide, the other 160. But Vice Admiral Richmond K. Turner, overall commander of the Marianas Expeditionary Force, was skeptical. He leaned toward Yellow Beach, made up of several wide, sandy strips in front of Tinian Town, the island's

**On the Cover:** Following the assault waves, 4th Division Marines wade ashore at Tinian from Coast Guard landing craft against no opposition on the beaches.

**At left:** Amphibian tractors and Higgins boats (LCVPs, landing craft, vehicle and personnel) leave wakes as they land Marines on White Beach 2 and return to assault shipping off shore to load more troops and supplies. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 87085

heavily fortified administrative and commercial center.

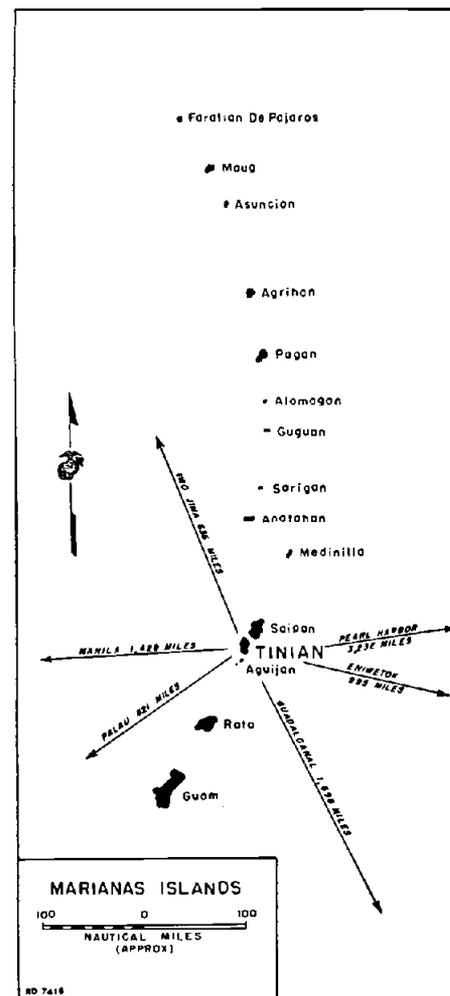
On 3 July, VAC's Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion, commanded by Captain James L. Jones, was put on alert for reconnaissance of these potential landing sites. On 9 July, the day Saipan officially was declared secured, Jones got his operation order from Marine Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, commander of Expeditionary Troops. His men were to scout out the Tinian beaches and their fortifications and determine their capacity to handle the landing force and keep it supplied. Accompanying naval underwater demolition teams would do the hydrographic work and locate underwater obstacles, natural or man-made.

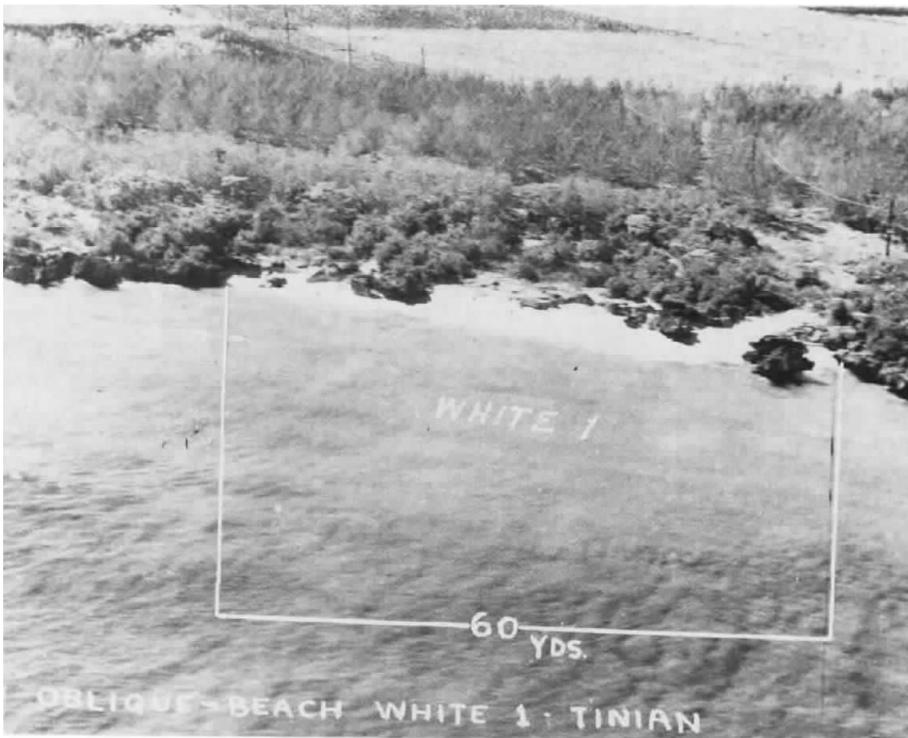
Captain Jones picked for the job Company A under the command of Captain Merwin H. Silverthorn, Jr., the son of a Marine general and World War I veteran, and Company B, commanded by First Lieutenant Leo B. Shinn. The Navy assigned to the mission Underwater (UDT) Team 5, led by Lieutenant Commander Draper L. Kauffman, and UDT Team 7 under Lieutenant Richard F. Burke. They rehearsed the operation on the night of 9-10 July off the beaches of Saipan's Magicienne Bay. On the evening of the 10th, the Marine and Navy units boarded the destroyer transports *Gilmer* and *Stringham* for the short trip into the channels separating the two islands.

The teams debarked in rubber boats at 2030, paddled to within 500 yards of the beach and swam to their destinations. Fortunately, it was a black night and although the moon rose at 2230, it was largely obscured by clouds.

Yellow Beach was assigned to Sil-

verthorn's Company A. He led 20 Marines and eight UDT swimmers ashore. They found a beach near Tinian Town flanked on each side by formidable cliffs. There were many floating mines and underwater boulders in the approaches. On the beach itself, double-apron barbed wire had been strung. Second Lieutenant Donald F. Neff worked his way 30 yards inland to locate exit routes for vehicles. Nearby, talkative Japanese work crews were building pillboxes and trenching with blasting charges. Neff spotted three Japanese sentries on a cliff overlooking the beach; now and then searchlights scanned the beach approaches.





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 151969

*An oblique photograph of White Beach 1 was taken before naval gunfire, artillery, air bombardment, and bulldozers altered its appearance. This 60-yard beach later became the port of entry for most of V Amphibious Corps' heavy equipment.*

Silverthorn, Burke, and their men made it back to the *Gilmer* safely. Their impression of Yellow Beach as a landing site was distinctly unfavorable.

To the north, at the White Beaches assigned to Company B, things had not gone well. Strong currents pushed the rubber boats off course. The team headed for White 1 was swept 800 yards north of its destination and never got ashore. The party headed for White 2 wound up on White 1 and reconnoitered the area. Both parties were picked up by the *Gilmer*. The next night 10 swimmers from Company A were sent back to reconnoiter White 2 and had a successful trip.

The reports on the White beaches were encouraging. Although the landing areas were very restricted, it was concluded that amphibian tractors (LVTs) and other vehicles could negotiate the reefs and get ashore, and that troops with little difficulty could clamber over the low cliffs flanking the beaches. Marines forced to disembark from boats at the reef

could safely wade ashore through the shallow surf. Members of Kauffman's UDT party confirmed the Marine findings and reported that "no mines or manmade underwater obstructions were found."

A few hours after the reconnaissance team returned from White 2, Admiral Turner's objections were withdrawn and a command decision to use the northern beaches was made. On 20 July, a time and date for the landing were fixed: 0730 on 24 July.

### *The Landing Force: Who, Where, When*

The task of seizing Tinian was assigned to the two Marine divisions on Saipan—the 2d and the 4th. The third division on the island—the Army's 27th Infantry—would remain on Saipan in reserve. All three had been severely battered during the Saipan campaign, suffering more than 14,000 casualties, including nearly 3,200 dead.

For the 2d Marine Division, the Tinian battle would be the fourth

time around in a span of little more than 18 months. The division left Guadalcanal in February 1943, having suffered 1,000 battle casualties. Another 12,500 men had diagnosed cases of malaria. Nine months later—on 20 November 1943—the division had gone through one of the most intense 72 hours of combat in the history of island warfare at Tarawa. It sustained 3,200 casualties, including nearly a thousand dead. Ten weeks before Tarawa, the division was still malaria-ridden, with troops being hospitalized for the disease at the rate of 40 a day. The ranks were filled with gaunt men whose skins were yellowed by daily doses of Atabrine pills. The Saipan operation seven months later, led by division commander Major General Thomas E. Watson, took a heavy toll of these men—5,000 wounded, 1,300 dead.

Watson had earned a reputation at Saipan as a hard-charging leader. When the division stalled fighting its way up Mount Topatchau, he was unimpressed. The historian Ronald Spector wrote, in the midst of that effort, "he was heard shouting over a field telephone, 'There's not a god-damn thing up on that hill but some Japs with machine guns and mortars. Now get the hell up there and get them!'" His assistant division commander was Brigadier General Merritt A. "Red Mike" Edson, who was awarded a Medal of Honor for his heroism on Guadalcanal.

The 4th Division had had a busy, if slightly less demanding, year as well. It went directly into combat after its formation at Camp Pendleton, California, landing on 31 January 1944 in the Marshall Islands where it suffered moderate casualties—fewer than 800 men—in the capture of Roi-Namur. At Saipan its losses reached 6,000, including about 1,000 dead. The Tinian landing would be its third in a little over six months and would be the first under a new divisional commander—Major General Clifton B. Cates, a well-decorated

# Selection of White Beach

The selection of the northwestern beaches was universally regarded as the key to the quick success of the Tinian operation. The credit for this choice, however, has been debated for years. Carl Hoffman, in his history of the battle, quoted Major General Harry Schmidt on the issue: "Many high ranking officers have asked who originated the plan . . . While the 4th Division was under my command and prior to the Marianas campaign, my planning officer, Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson, made such a plan and probably such a plan was turned in to the V Amphibious Corps."

The division's intelligence officer, Lieutenant Colonel Gooderham L. McCormick, a Reservist who later became mayor of Philadelphia, agreed. So did Lieutenant Victor Maghakian of the division's reconnaissance unit: "The man who definitely planned that landing . . . was Evans F. Carlson . . . He told me all about that Tinian plan before he was wounded [22 June] on Saipan."

Others minimized Carlson's role, including Marine Major General Graves B. Erskine, who was then the V Amphibious Corps chief of staff, and Marine Colonel Robert E. Hogaboom, the operations officer for the landing forces at Saipan and Tinian. Admiral Harry W. Hill, commander of the Northern Attack Force, told Hoffman that "if there were plans and I presume there were tentative ones, none of them were available to me or my staff."

Hoffman discovered that before the war, students at the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico had come up with the northern beaches solution to the "then-theoretical Tinian solution."

But historian Ronald Spector, in his Pacific war history, *Eagle Against the Sun*, left no doubt who had forced the issue. It was Marine Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith.

When he and Admiral Hill proposed the use of White Beaches 1 and 2, Admiral Turner firmly vetoed [the] proposal and told [Hill] to work on planning for a landing near Tinian Town. Hill reluctantly complied, but he ordered part of his staff to keep working on the White Beaches plan . . . [After reconnaissance reports] Hill and Smith tried once again to change Admiral Turner's mind, but he remained obstinate.

In a characteristic exchange, the admiral told General Smith: "You are not going to land on the White Beaches; I won't land you there." "Oh yes you will," replied the general. "You'll land me any goddamned place I tell you to." Turner was adamant: "I'm telling you now it can't be done. It's absolutely impossible." "How do you know it's impossible?" asked Smith. "You're just so goddamned scared that some of your boats will be hurt."

Neither this exchange nor the more subtle efforts of Admiral Hill served to convince Turner, so Hill reluctantly took the matter to Admiral Spruance [Turner's superior]. Spruance liked the White Beaches idea, but he was reluctant to overrule Turner, his expert on amphibious warfare. A conference with Turner and his subordinate commanders was arranged on board the flagship. All spoke in favor of the White Beaches. Spruance turned to Turner. The latter calmly announced that he favored the White Beaches also.

In a letter written to Hoffman in 1950, Turner said: ". . . before the reconnaissances of July 10 and 11 were made, I had (without announcement) tentatively decided to accept the White Beaches unless the reconnaissance reports were decidedly unfavorable."

This was one of those cases, as John F. Kennedy once said, in which "victory has many fathers but defeat is an orphan."

World War I veteran, who would become the 19th Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1948.

Still, "the morale of the troops committed to the Tinian operation was generally high," then-Major Carl W. Hoffman wrote in the official history of the battle. "This fact takes on significance only when it is recalled that the Marines involved had just survived a bitter 25-day struggle and that, with only a fortnight lapse (as distinguished from a fortnight rest), they were again to assault enemy-held shores . . . [Their] spirit . . . was revealed more in a philosophical shrug, accompanied with a 'here-we-go-again' remark, than in a resentful

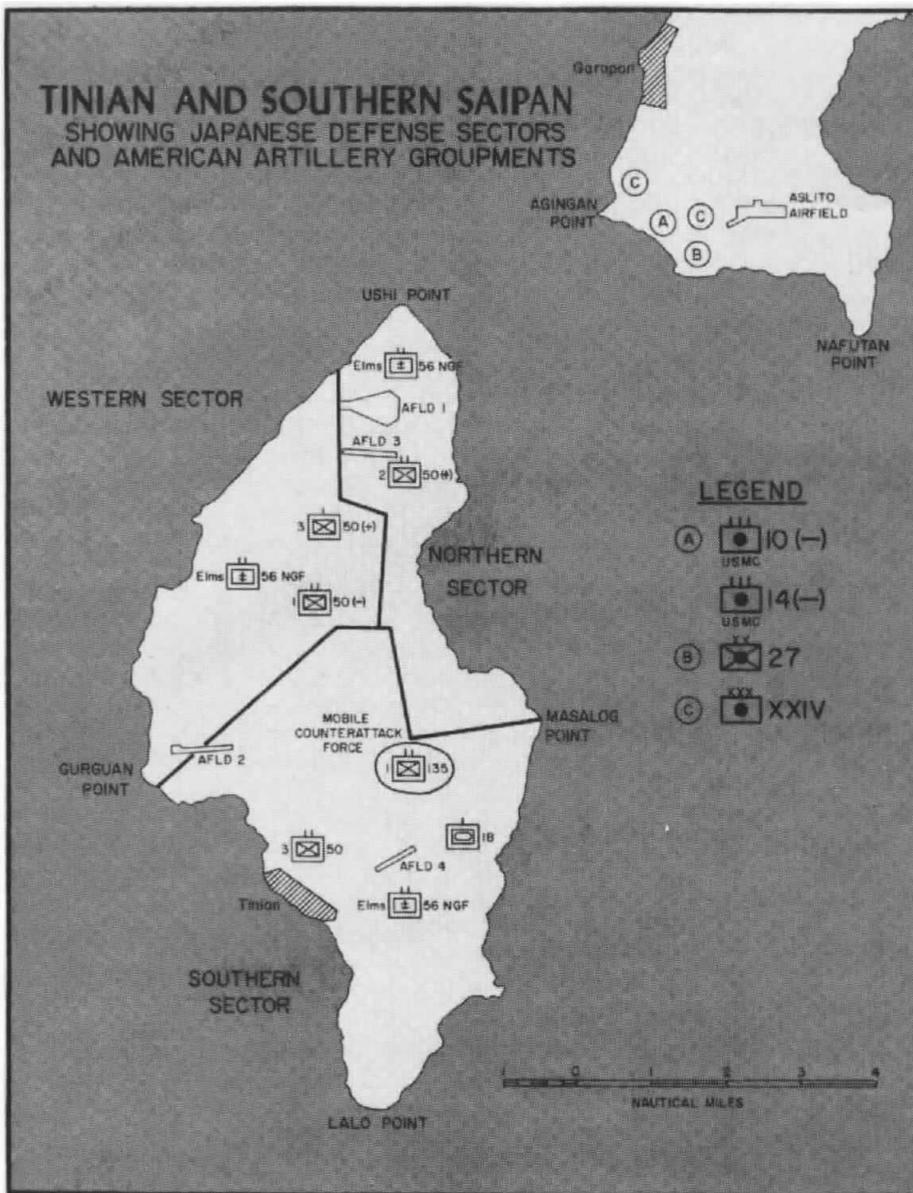
complaint [at] being called upon again so soon."

The morale of the troops was sustained by the preinvasion fires directed at Tinian. For Jig minus 1 and Jig Day (Jig being the name given to D Day at Tinian), Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill, commander of the Northern Landing Force, had divided the island into five fire support sectors, assigning specific ships to each. His purpose was two-fold: destruction and deception to confuse and deceive the Japanese as to the landing intentions of the Marines.

Tinian Town, under this scheme, got the heaviest pounding the day be-

fore the landing—almost 3,000 rounds of 5- to 16-inch shells from the battleships *Colorado*, *Tennessee*, and *California*, the cruiser *Cleveland*, and seven destroyers: *Ramey*, *Wadleigh*, *Norman Scott*, *Monssen*, *Waller*, *Pringle* and *Philip*. *Colorado* had the best day, knocking out with 60 rounds of 16-inch shells the two 6-inch coastal defense guns the Japanese had emplaced on the west coast near Faibus San Hilo Point, guns that easily could have covered the White Beaches.

Firing on the White Beach area itself was minimal for purposes of deception and for lack of suitable targets. The cruiser *Louisville* fired 390



rine Division troops. Rations for three days, water and medical supplies, ammunition, vehicles, and other equipment had been pre-loaded, beginning on 15 July. The troops were going to travel light: a spoon, a pair of socks, insect repellent, and emergency supplies in their pockets, and no pack on their backs.

“Close at hand,” the historians Jeter Isely and Philip Crowl wrote in their classic *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, “rode the ships of the two transport divisions that would carry two regiments of the 2d Marine Division on a diversionary feint against Tinian Town and would later disembark them along with the third regiment across the northwestern beaches.” (A similar feint was made by 2d Division Marines less than a year later off the southeast beaches of Okinawa, and by the same division lying off Kuwait City nearly 50 years later in the Desert Storm operation).

The 4th was designated the assault division for Tinian. The beaches were not wide enough to accommodate battalions landing abreast, much less divisions. Instead, the assault troops would land by columns – squads, platoons, and companies.

The 2d Division would follow on

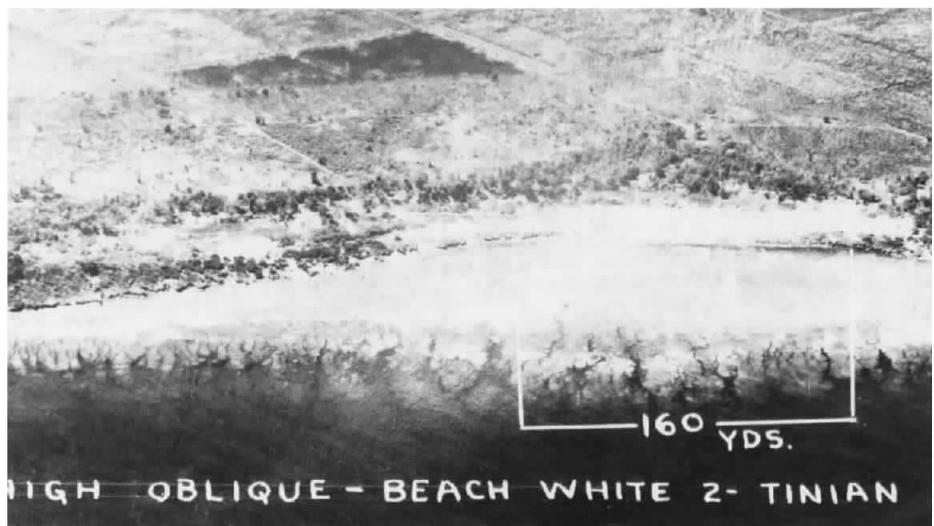
rounds into the area before calling it a day.

There was a lot of air activity on the 23d. At three periods during the day, naval gunfire and artillery barrages were halted to allow massive air strikes on railroad junctions, pillboxes, villages, gun emplacements, cane fields, and the beaches at Tinian Town. More than 350 Navy and Army planes took part, dropping 500 bombs, 200 rockets, 42 incendiary clusters, and 34 napalm bombs. This was only the second use of napalm during the Pacific War; napalm bombs were first used on Tinian the day before.

That evening, 37 LSTs at anchor off Saipan were loaded with 4th Ma-

*White Beach 2 accommodated two battalions landing in file, with a single rifle company in the assault. The 25th Marines crossed this 160-yard beach on Jig Day, literally unopposed followed by two light artillery battalions and the 23d Marines.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 150633



# General Clifton B. Cates, USMC

Clifton B. Cates, a native Tennessean, was commissioned in 1917, and was sent to France with the 6th Marines in World War I. He had outstanding service in five major engagements of the war, and returned to the United States a well-decorated young officer after his tour in the occupation of Germany. One of his early assignments following the war was as aide to Major General Commandant George Barnett. During his more than 37 years as a Marine, Cates was one of the few officers who held commands of a platoon, a company, a battalion, a regiment, and a division in combat. He was the 19th Commandant of the Marine Corps at the outset of the Korean War.

His assignments during the interwar years consisted of a combination of schooling, staff assignments, and command, such as his tour as battalion commander in the 4th Marines, then in Shanghai. In 1940, he took command of

the Basic School, then in the Philadelphia Navy Yard. He took command of the 1st Marines in May 1942.

In World War II, Cates commanded the 1st Marines in the landing on Guadalcanal. After returning to the States, he was promoted to brigadier general. He went back to the Pacific war in mid-1944 to take command of the 4th Marine Division in time for the Tinian operation. He also led it in the Iwo Jima assault, and was decorated at the end of the fighting with his second Distinguished Service Medal. Part of the citation accompanying the medal reads: "Repeatedly disregarding his own personal safety, Major General Cates traversed his own front lines daily to rally his tired, depleted units and by his undaunted valor, tenacious perseverance, and staunch leadership in the face of overwhelming odds, constantly inspired his stout-hearted Marines to heroic effort during critical phases of the campaign."



On 1 January 1948, General Cates took over as Commandant of the Marine Corps, remaining until 31 December 1951, when he reverted to the three stars of a lieutenant general and began his second tour as Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico, Virginia. General Cates retired on 30 June 1954. He died on 4 June 1970.

after taking part in the massive feint off the beaches of Tinian Town, hoping to tie down the main Japanese defense forces and spring the surprise of a landing over the lightly defended northern beaches.

To give the 4th more punch immediately after landing, the 2d was stripped of some of its firepower, such as tank and artillery units. It would, accordingly, be at the lowest strength at Tinian of any Marine division involved in an amphibious operation in World War II.

Despite these additions, the 4th, too, would be understrength—"skinny" was the descriptive word used by Lieutenant Colonel Justice M. "Jumping Joe" Chambers, commander of the 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, who was to earn a Medal of Honor in the Iwo Jima operation little more than six months later. The division's infantry battalions had received only one replacement draft after the Saipan fighting. At full strength they averaged 880 men; at

Tinian the average strength was down by more than 35 percent to 565.

For all these reasons—combat fatigue, heavy losses during previous weeks and months, and understrength units—the Marines on Tinian would play a cautious game. Admiral Turner had said he would give them two weeks to seize the island. Major General Harry Schmidt, who relieved Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith as VAC commander, promised to get it done in 10 days. In the event, the island was secured after nine days. In retrospect, analysts say the operation could have been finished off sooner by more aggressive tactics. Time, however, was no great factor; the relatively slow pace of the operation probably kept casualties at a minimum and reduced the probabilities of troop fatigue. Tinian was easy on the eyes, but the heat and humidity were brutal, the cane fields were hard going, and it was the season of monsoons.

## Jig Day: Feint and Landing

The first troop ships moved out of Saipan's Charan Kanoa harbor at 0330, 24 July. They were the transports *Knox*, *Calvert*, *Fuller*, *Bell*, *Heywood*, and *John Land*. They were carrying the 2d and 8th Marines (infantry regiments) of the 2d Marine Division on a mission of deception that turned out to be far bloodier than the White Beach landings and far bloodier than anyone had anticipated. They had a muscular escort—the battleship *Colorado*, the light cruiser *Cleveland*, and the destroyers *Ramey*, *Norman Scott*, *Wadleigh*, and *Monssen*.

The convoy moved into Sunharon Harbor opposite Tinian Town just before dawn. A few minutes after 0600, the *Calvert* began lowering its landing craft and by 0630 all 22 of its boats were in the water. Marines climbed down the cargo nets. Within a half hour, 244 Navy and Army planes began strafing and bombing

runs paying particular attention to Tinian Town. Shells and rockets from battleships, heavy and light cruisers, destroyers, and 30 gunboats saturated the beaches. The massed artillery battalions on southern Saipan thundered in with their 105s and 155s.

After a half-hour of this furious bombardment, the LCVPs (landing craft, vehicle and personnel) from *Calvert* began their run toward the beach at Tinian Town, receiving heavy artillery and mortar fire from the shore. Admiral Hill, seeking to

avoid casualties, ordered the boats to withdraw and reform. A second run started and immediately drew fire from the shore; several boats were sprayed with shell fragments. But they continued on to within 400 yards of the beach before turning back.

While the small boats engaged in this maneuver, the battleship *Colorado* came under fire at a range of 3,200 yards from two 6-inch naval guns near Tinian Town, guns that had gone undetected during the weeks of

preinvasion surveillance and preparatory fires. Within 15 minutes, the Japanese gunners scored 22 direct hits on *Colorado* and six direct hits on the destroyer *Norman Scott*, which was attempting to protect the battleship. Casualties among the crews and Marine detachments on the two ships were heavy: 62 killed and 223 wounded. Ten Marines were among the dead, 31 were among the wounded. *Colorado* was through for the day and limped off back to Saipan. The Japanese battery survived for

## Napalm: Something New in the Arsenal

**E**arly in 1944, Army Air Corps personnel at Eglin Air Force base near Fort Walton Beach, Florida invented a new weapon. It was a "fire bomb," first used in combat during the Tinian campaign. The ingredients were diesel oil, gasoline, and a metallic salt from the naphtha used in the the manufacture of soap. Mixed with petroleum fuels, the salt created an incendiary jelly that clung to any surface and burned with an extremely hot flame. The concoction was called "napalm." It could be dropped in wing or belly tanks attached to the underside of an aircraft and was fired by an igniter on contact with the ground.

On 19 July, five days before the Tinian landing, Lieutenant Commander Louis W. Wang, USN, arrived at Saipan carrying a small supply of the "napalm" powder and a film made at Eglin demonstrating the potency of the bomb. It showed P-47s making low-level drops after diving from 2,000 feet.

The demonstration film so impressed Admiral Harry Hill and Major General Harry Schmidt that Hill immediately radioed Admiral Chester Nimitz in Hawaii, requesting 8,599 pounds of the powder. They also ordered trial raids on Tinian by P-47 pilots of the Army's 318th Air Group, using powder and detonators already on hand. These trials were not particularly impressive. Their purpose was to burn off wooded areas that had previously resisted white phosphorous and thermite. The "napalm" scorched the trees but left the foliage only partially burned. One problem was the wood itself—a virtually indestructible type of ironwood. Another was the napalm mixture. Wang had brought with him the wrong formula. "We tried using Jap aviation gasoline," according to Colonel Lewis M. Sanders, commander of the fighter group, "but that gave too much fire effect. Then we tried Jap motor gas and oil, with the napalm powder, and it was quite successful."

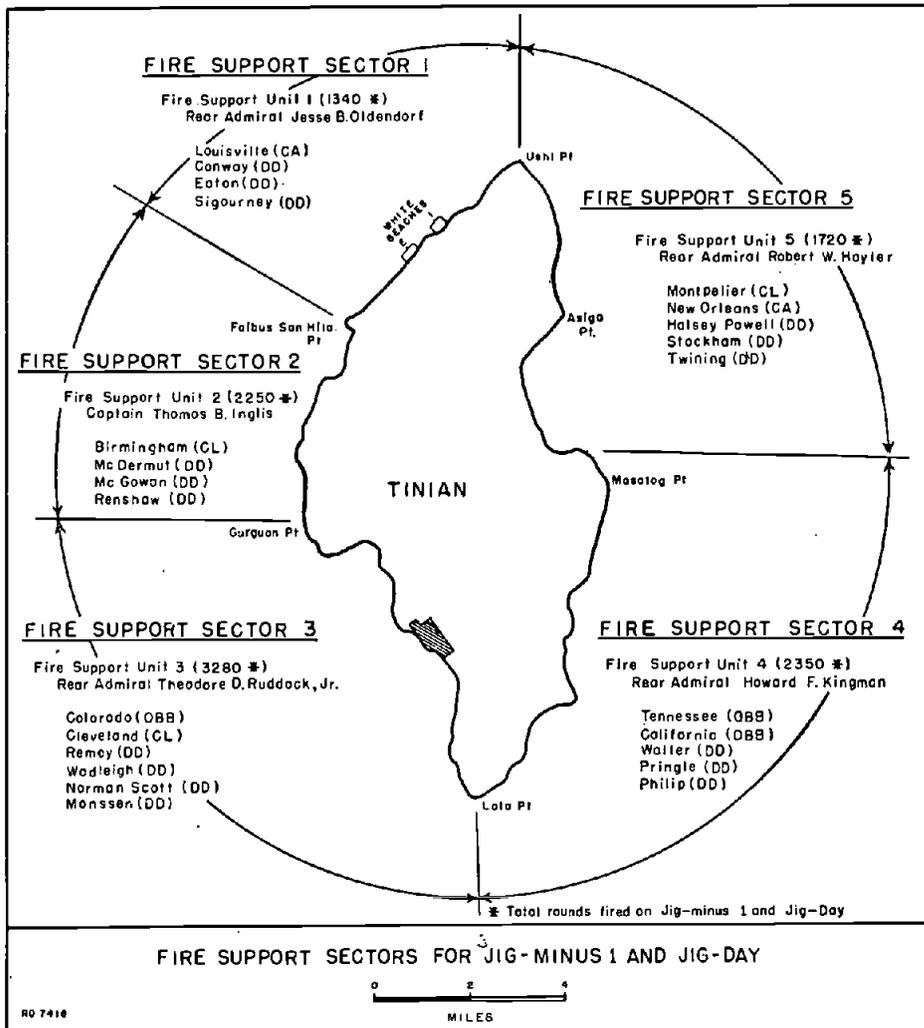
The P-47 pilots were uncomfortable with napalm missions. They dropped their tanks at extremely low altitudes—50 feet in some cases—and were highly vulnerable to ground fire. They were also unimpressed with the

efficiency of these "fire bombs"; much of their incendiary effect was wasted in excessive upward flash. Napalm also had a very short burning time—less than two minutes.

Nevertheless, 147 "fire bombs" were used during the Tinian operation, 91 of them containing the napalm mixture. They were most effective in clearing cane fields. As Major General Clifton B. Cates, the 4th Division commander, later recalled: "The first morning they put it down, I went up to the front line and those planes came in over our heads it seemed to me like about a hundred feet in the air . . . [They] let go their napalm bombs right over our heads . . . maybe two or three hundred yards in front of us. It was a very devastating thing and particularly to the morale of the Japanese . . . I didn't feel too comfortable sitting up there . . . I figured that some of them might drop short."

Each bomb cleared an area approximately 75 by 200 feet and, in some cases, left behind the charred bodies of Japanese troops. The Marines were impressed. Infantry commanders sought napalm for their flamethrower tanks. It was used widely in 1944 in support of ground troops in the Philippines. On one operation on Luzon, 238 fighters saturated an area with napalm: "The usually stoic [Japanese]," an Air Force historian recorded, "seemingly lost all caution and fled into the open, [becoming] easy targets for other forms of attack."

Napalm was used effectively in the fire bombing of Japanese cities. It was also used in preinvasion efforts to soften up the defenses of Iwo Jima. Beginning on 31 January 1945, Liberator bombers of the Seventh Air Force began 16 days of daytime sorties against the island in which 602 tons of bombs were dropped and 1,111 drums of napalm were used in an unproductive effort to burn off camouflage from defensive positions and gun emplacements. A Marine intelligence officer is quoted in the official Air Force history of operations over Iwo Jima as saying that "the chief effect of the long bombardment of Iwo was to cause the enemy to build more elaborate underground defenses."



White Beach Two to the 25th. In the vanguard for the 24th was Company E of the 2d Battalion—200 men commanded by Captain Jack F. Ross, Jr. Company A of the 1st Battalion, commanded by Captain Irving Schechter, followed and by 0820 the entire 2d Battalion, commanded by Major Frank A. Garretson, was ashore.

Almost simultaneously, two battalions of the 25th Marines loaded into 16 LVTs landed in columns of companies on White Beach 2. The 2d Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Lewis C. Hudson, Jr., was on the right; the 3d Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Chambers) was on the left.

The units of the 24th, loaded into 24 LVTs, crossed the line of departure—3,000 yards offshore—at 0717. Ahead of them, 30 LCIs (landing craft, infantry) and a company of the 2d Armored Amphibian Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Reed M. Fawell, Jr., raked the beaches with barrage rockets and automatic cannon fire. On the 26-minute run to the beach, the troop-laden LVTs took scattered and ineffectual rifle and machine gun fire.

At White 1, members of a small Japanese beach detachment, holed up in caves and crevices, resisted the landing with intense small arms fire. But they were silenced quickly by Company E gunners.

Within an hour, the entire 1st and 2d Battalions of the 24th were ashore on White 1, preparing to move inland. The 2d Battalion encountered sporadic artillery, mortar, and small arms fire during the first 200 yards of its advance. After that, Garretson later said, the battalion had a "cake walk" for the rest of the day, gaining 1,400 yards and reaching its O-1 line objective by 1600. He occupied the western edge of Airfield No. 3 and cut the main road linking Airfield No. 1 with the east coast and southern Tinian. Only occasional small arms fire was encountered before the battalion dug in for the night.

four more days until destroyed by the battleship *Tennessee*.

The losses sustained by the two ships exceeded those suffered that day by the Marine landing force on the northwestern beaches. But the feint served its purpose. It froze in place around Tinian Town a whole battalion of the 50th Infantry Regiment and various elements of the 56th Naval Guard Force. And it convinced the Japanese commander, Colonel Kiyochi Ogata, that he had thwarted an invasion. His message to Tokyo described how his forces had repelled 100 landing barges.

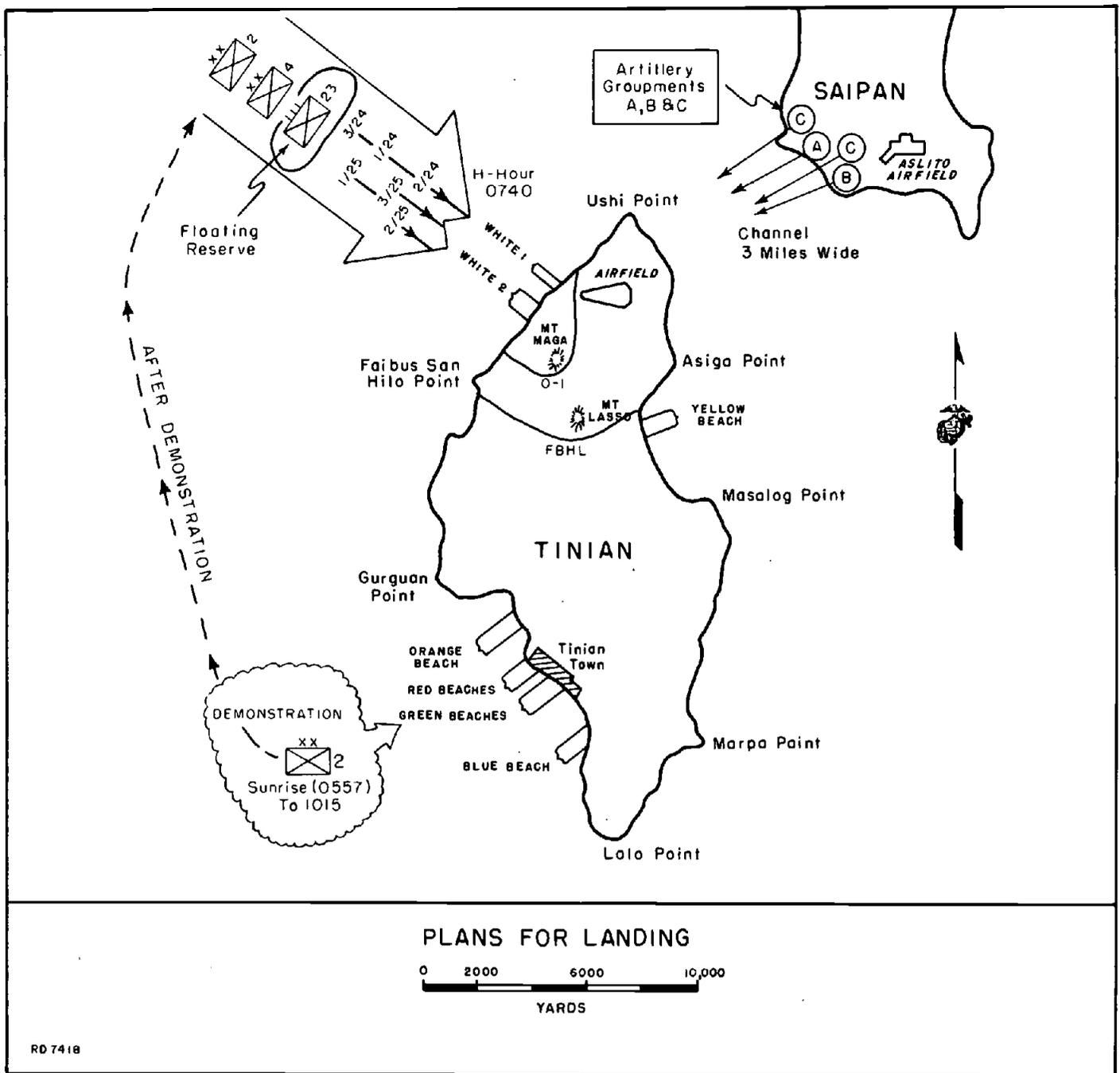
These "barges" were reloaded on the *Calvert* at 1000 and the convoy steamed north to the White Beaches where 4th Division troops had landed after a mishap in their planning. An underwater demolition team using floats carrying explosives swam to White Beach 2 shortly before dawn to blast away boulders and

destroy beach mines. The mission failed because of a squall. The floats scattered, the explosives were lost and a few hours later, Marines paid a price for this aborted mission.

To compensate for the failure of the UDT team, fire support ships lying off the White Beaches—the battleships *California* and *Tennessee*, the heavy cruiser *Louisville*, and four destroyers—blasted away at the landing areas. Air strikes were then ordered at about 0630 and observers claimed that five of the 14 known beach mines had been destroyed. A battery of 155mm "Long Tom" guns on Saipan fired smokesHELLS at the Japanese command post on Mount Lasso and also laid smoke in the woods and on the bluffs just beyond the beaches to obstruct Japanese observation.

### The Landing

The assault plan assigned White Beach 1 to the 24th Marines and



On Garretson's left, the 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Otto Lessing, was slowed by heavy fires from cave positions and patches of heavy vegetation. Flamethrower tanks were sent up against these positions, but the Japanese held on. As a result, Lessing pulled up late in the afternoon 400 yards short of his objective. This left a gap between his perimeter and Garretson's. To fill it, the regiment's 3d Battalion, waiting in reserve at the beach, was called up.

Almost simultaneously, the 25th ran into problems. The beach and

surrounding area had been methodically seeded with mines which neither UDT teams nor offshore gunners had been able to destroy. It took six hours to clear them out and in the process three LVTs and a jeep were blown up. The beach defenses also included a sprinkling of booby traps which had to be dealt with—watches and cases of beer, for example, all wired to explode in the hands of careless souvenir hunters.

Behind the beach, troops from Ogata's 50th Regiment put up a vigorous defense with mortars, anti-tank and anti-boat guns, and other

automatic weapons emplaced in pillboxes, caves, fortified ravines, and field entrenchments. Two 47mm guns in particular kept the Marines back on their heels. They finally bypassed these troublesome positions. Later waves took them out, leaving 50 dead Japanese in the gunpits.

The 3d Battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Chambers, later remembered a lot of confusion on the beach, "the confusion you [always] get when you land, of getting the organization together again." One of his company commanders, for example, was killed a half-hour after landing

# Tinian Defense Forces

Japanese military fortification of Tinian and other islands in the chain had begun—in violation of the League of Nations Mandate—in the 1930s. By 1944, the Tinian garrison numbered roughly 9,000 army and navy personnel, bringing the island's total population to nearly 25,000.

The *50th Infantry Regiment*, detached from the *29th Division* on Guam, was the principal fighting force. It had been stationed near Mukden, Manchuria, from 1941 until its transfer in March 1944 to Tinian. Many of its troops were veterans of the Manchurian campaigns. The regiment was commanded by Colonel Kiyoshi [also spelled "Keishi"] Ogata and consisted of three 880-man infantry battalions, a 75mm mountain artillery battalion equipped with 12 guns, engineer, communication, and medical companies, plus a headquarters and various specialized support units, including a company of 12 light tanks and an anti-tank platoon. He also had a battalion of the *135th Infantry Regiment* with a strength of about 900 men. Altogether, slightly more than 5,000 army troops were assigned to the island's defense.

The principal navy unit was the *56th Naval Guard Force*, a 1,400-man coastal defense unit, supplemented by four construction battalions with a combined strength of 1,800 men. Other naval units, totaling about 1,000 men, included ground elements of seven aviation squadrons and a detachment of the *5th Base Force*.

The navy personnel—about 4,200 altogether—were under the immediate command of Captain Oichi Oya. Both Oya and Ogata were outranked on the island by Vice Admiral Kakuji Kakuda, commander of the *1st Air Fleet* with headquarters on Tinian. But Kakuda, as the invasion neared, had no air fleet to command. Of the estimated 107 planes based at Tinian's air fields, 70 had been destroyed on the ground early in June by U.S. air strikes. By the time of the Tinian landing on 24 July, none of Kakuda's planes were operative.

Kakuda had a bad reputation. He was, by Japanese physical standards, a hulking figure: more than six feet tall, weighing more than 200 pounds. "He willingly catered," Hoffman wrote, "to his almost unquenchable thirst for liquor; he lacked the fortitude to face the odds arrayed against him at Tinian." Historian Frank Hough called him "a drunk and an exceedingly unpleasant one, from all accounts."

On 15 July, nine days before the invasion, Kakuda and his headquarters group attempted to escape via rubber boats to Aguijan Island where they hoped to rendezvous with a Japanese submarine. This effort failed. He tried again on five successive nights with the same results, finally abandoning the effort on 21 July. He fled with his party from Tinian Town to a cave on Tinian's east coast where they awaited their fate. A Japanese prisoner who described Kakuda's escape efforts assumed he had committed suicide after the American landing, but this was never verified. Toward the end of the battle for Tinian, one of Kakuda's orderlies led an American patrol to the cave. The patrol was fired upon and two Marines were wounded. A passing group of Marine pioneers sealed the cave

with demolition charges but it is unknown whether Kakuda was inside.

Admiral Kakuda in any case took no part in directing the Japanese resistance. For purposes of defending the island, command of both army and navy forces was assumed by Colonel Ogata, but co-operation between the two service branches was less than complete. Frictions were reflected in diaries found among the Japanese documents captured on Tinian. A soldier in the *50th Regiment's* artillery battalion wrote:

9 March—The Navy stays in barracks buildings and has liberty every night with liquor to drink and makes a big row.

We, on the other hand, bivouac in the rain and never get out on pass. What a difference in discipline!

12 June—Our AA guns [manned by the Navy] spread black smoke where the enemy planes weren't. Not one hit out of a thousand shots. The Naval Air Group has taken to its heels.

15 June—The naval aviators are robbers . . . When they ran off to the mountains, they stole Army provisions . . .

The defenses of Tinian were dictated by the geography of the island. It is encircled by coral cliffs which rise from the coastline and are a part of the limestone plateau underlying the island. These cliffs range in height from 6 to 100 feet; breaks in the cliff line are rare and where they occur are narrow, leaving little beach space for an invasion force. Along the entire coastline of Tinian, only four beaches were worthy of the name.

The largest and most suitable for use by an amphibious force was in front of Tinian Town in Suharon Harbor. It consisted of several wide, sandy strips. The harbor was mediocre but provided in fair weather limited anchorage for a few ships which could load and unload cargo at two piers available at Tinian Town.

From the beginning, Colonel Ogata assumed that this beach would be the first choice of the Americans. Of the roughly 100 guns in fixed positions on the island—ranging from 7.7mm heavy machine guns to 6-inch British naval rifles—nearly a third were assigned to the defense of Tinian Town and its beaches and to the airfield at Gurguan Point, two-and-a-half miles northwest of the town. Within a two-mile radius of the town were the *2d Battalion* of the *50th Infantry Regiment*, 1,400 men of the *56th Naval Guard Force*, a tank company of the *18th Infantry Regiment*, and the *1st Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment*, which had been designated as the mobile counterattack force.

Their area of responsibility extended to Laslo Point, the southernmost part of the island and, on the east, to Masalog Point. It was designated the "Southern Sector" in Ogata's defense plan.

The remainder of the island was divided into northeastern and northwestern sectors. The northeastern sector included

the Ushi Point airfields and a potential landing beach 125 yards wide south of Asiga Point on the east coast of the island. In this sector, between 600 and 1,000 navy personnel were stationed around the Ushi Airfields. The *2d Battalion* of the *50th Infantry Regiment*, along with an engineer group, was stationed inland of Asagi Point. The northwestern sector contained two narrow strips of beach 1,000 yards apart. One of them was 60 yards wide and the other about 160. They were popular with Japanese civilians. The sand was white and the water was swimmable. They were known locally as the White Beaches and that is what they were called when they were chosen – to the great surprise of the Japanese – as the American invasion route.

This sector was defended very modestly by a single company of infantry, an antitank squad, and, about 500 yards northeast of the White Beaches, gun crews situated in emplacements containing one 37mm antitank gun, one 47mm antitank gun, and two 7.7mm machine guns.

Ogata established his command post in a cave on Mount Lasso in the center of the northern region, roughly equidistant – a little over two miles – from beaches on either side of the island.

He issued on 25 June an operation order saying “the enemy on Saipan can be expected to be planning a landing on Tinian. The area of that landing is estimated to be either Tinian Harbor or Asiga Harbor [on the northeast coast].” Three days later he followed up with a “Defense Force Battle Plan” which outlined only two contingencies:

- (A) In the event the enemy lands at Tinian Harbor.
- (B) In the event the enemy lands at Asiga Bay.

On 7 July Ogata issued a “Plan for the Guidance of Battle” ordering his men to be prepared not only for landings at Tin-

ian Town and Asiga Bay, but also for a counterattack in the event the Americans were to invade across the White Beaches.

In each of the three sectors, according to his battle plan, commanders were to be prepared to “destroy the enemy at the beach, but [also] be prepared to shift two-thirds of the force elsewhere.” His reserve force was to “maintain fortified positions, counter-attack points [and] maintain anti-aircraft observation and fire in its area.” The “Mobile Counterattack Force” must “advance rapidly to the place of landings, depending on the situation and attack.” In the event of successful landings his forces would “counterattack to the water and . . . destroy the enemy on beaches with one blow, especially where time prevents quick movement of forces within the island.” If things were to go badly, “we will gradually fall back on our prepared positions in the southern part of the island and defend them to the last man.”

Some of these orders were contradictory and others were impossible of execution. But despite the odds against them – bereft of air or sea support and confronted by three heavily armed divisions only three miles away on Saipan – the fighting spirit of the Japanese forces had not been broken by 43 days of the heaviest bombardment, up to then, of the Pacific war. One of the men of the *50th Infantry Regiment* wrote in his diary on 30 June: “We have spent twenty days under unceasing enemy bombardment and air raids but have suffered only minor losses. Everyone from the Commanding Officer to the lowest private is full of fighting spirit.” His entry for 19 July, five days before the American landings, was upbeat: “How exalted are the gallant figures of the Force Commander, the Battalion Commander, and their subordinates, who have endured the violent artillery and air bombardment.”

and it took a while to get a replacement on scene and up to speed. Then there was the problem of the mines and a problem with artillery fire from the Japanese command post on Mount Lasso, two-and-a-half miles away.

By late afternoon, Chambers’ battalion had reached its objective 1,500 yards inland in the center of the line and had tied in on its left flank with Garretson of the 24th. The other battalions of the 25th came up short of their O-1 line, creating before sundown a crescent-shaped beachhead 3,000 yards wide at the shoreline and bulging inland to a maximum depth of 1,500 yards.

The day’s greatest confusion surrounded the landing of the 23d Marines. The regiment had been held on LSTs (landing ships, tank) in division

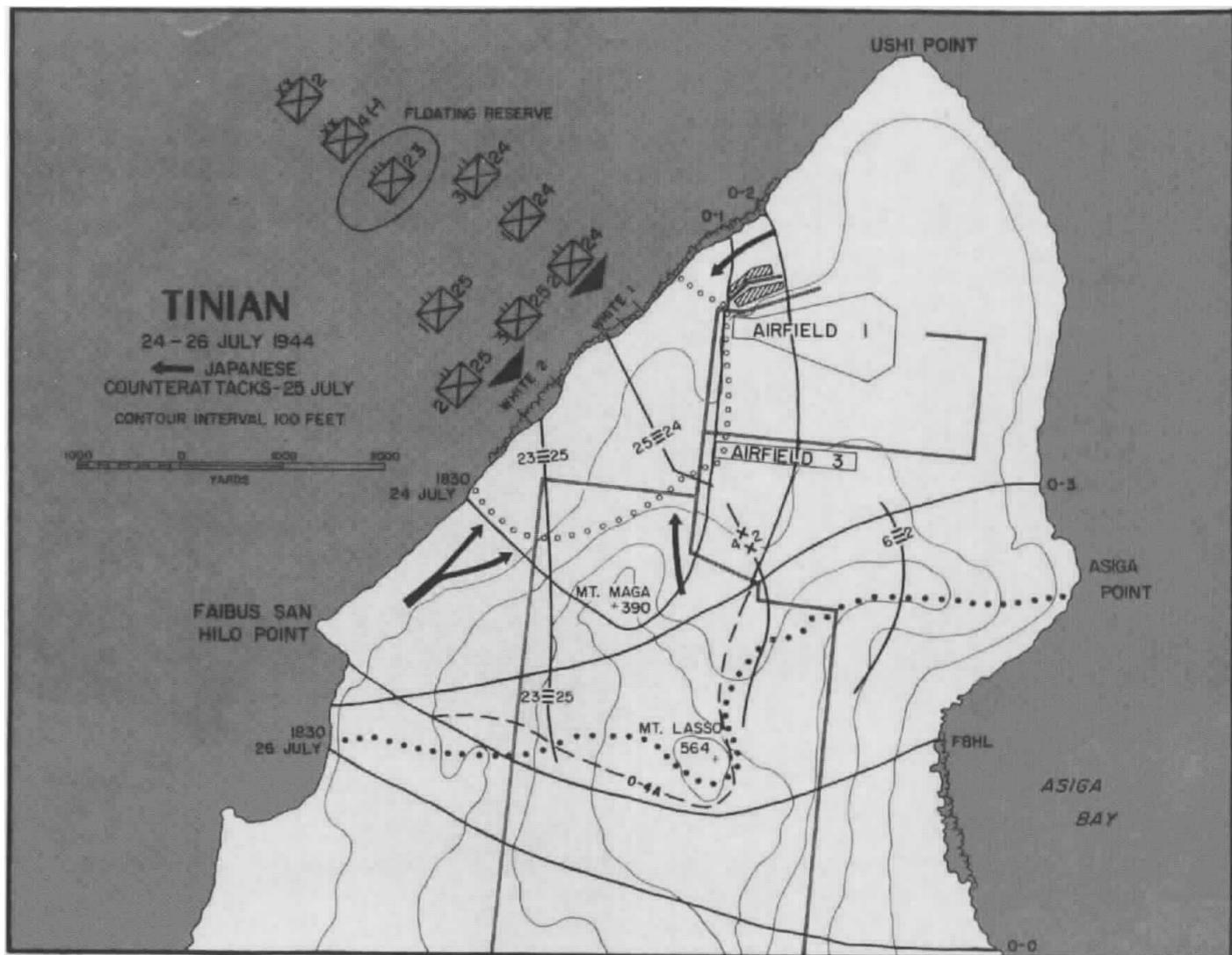
reserve during the landing of the 24th and 25th. At 0730, the troops were ordered below to board LVTs parked cheek to jowl on the tank decks. Their engines were running, spewing forth carbon monoxide. Experience had shown that troops cooped up under these conditions for more than 30 minutes would develop severe headaches, become nauseous, and begin vomiting.

To avoid that problem and in the absence of a launch order, the regimental commander, Colonel Louis R. Jones, soon unloaded his men and sent them topside. They returned to the tank decks at 1030 when an order to load and launch finally was received. The regiment debarked and eventually got ashore beginning at 1400 despite an incredible series of communication break-

downs in which Jones at crucial times was out of touch with the division and his battalions.

In addition to botched radio communications, Jones was stuck in an LVT with a bad engine; it took him seven hours to get ashore with his staff, leading to a division complaint about the tardiness of his regiment. The division noted that “fortunately no serious harm was done by [the] delay,” but at the end of the operation Jones left the division. He was promoted to brigadier general and assigned as assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division for the Okinawa landings.

A similar muck-up occurred involving the 2d Marine Division. After the feint at Tinian Town, the division sailed north and lay offshore of the White Beaches through the



day. At 1515, the landing force commander, Major General Harry Schmidt, ordered a battalion from the 8th Marines to land at White Beach to back up the 24th Marines. Schmidt wanted the battalion ashore at 1600. Because of communication and transport confusion the deadline was missed. It was 2000 when the unit entered in its log ". . . dug in in assigned position."

On the other hand, the big things had gone well in the morning and afternoon. By the standards of Tarawa and Saipan, casualties were light—15 dead, 225 wounded. The body count for the Japanese was 438. Despite drizzling rain, narrow beaches, and undiscovered mines, 15,600 troops were put ashore along with great quantities of materiel and equipment that included four battalions of ar-

tillery, two dozen half-tracks mounting 75mm guns, and 48 medium and 15 flame-throwing tanks which found the Tinian terrain hospitable for tank operations. The tanks had gotten into action early that morning, leading the 24th in tank-infantry attacks. They also had come to the aid of the 23d Marines as that regiment moved inland to take over the division's right flank. The beachhead itself was of respectable size, despite the failure of some units to reach their first-day objectives. It extended inland nearly a mile and embraced defensible territory. On the whole, it had not been a bad day's work.

### Counterattack

At about 1630, the 4th Division commander, General Cates, ordered his forces to button up for the night. A nighttime counterattack was ex-

pected. Barbed wire, preloaded on amphibian vehicles (DUKWs), was strung all along the division front. Ammunition was stacked at every weapons position. Machine guns were emplaced to permit interlocking fields of fire. Target areas were assigned to mortar crews. Artillery batteries in the rear were registered to hit probable enemy approach routes and to fire illuminating shells if a lighted battlefield was required. Of great importance, as it turned out, was the positioning up front of 37mm guns and cannister ammunition (antipersonnel shells which fired large pellets for close-in fighting); in the night fighting that followed, they inflicted severe losses on the enemy.

As the troops dug in to await whatever the night would bring, the 24th Marines, backed up by the 1st

# Preparatory Strikes

No battle in the Pacific was a "piece of cake." But there was less apprehension among the Americans about the outcome at Tinian than in any major operation of the war. Admiral Raymond A. Spruance later described it as "probably the most brilliantly conceived and executed amphibious operation of World War II." Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, commander of the Expeditionary Troops during the seizure of the Marianas, called it "the perfect amphibious operation."

It took place under optimal conditions for success. The small Japanese garrison on the island had no hope of relief, resupply, escape, or victory. Three miles away, across the narrow Saipan Channel, three battle-tested American divisions—more than 50,000 men—were available for the inevitable invasion. For seven weeks the bombardment from U.S. air and sea armadas, joined by the big guns on Saipan, had been relentless, day and night.

The effect on Tinian's civilian inhabitants was recorded by James L. Underhill, later a Marine lieutenant general, who became the island's military commander at the end of the battle:

The state of these people was indescribable. They came in with no possessions except the rags on their backs. They had been under a two-month intense bombardment and shelling and many were suffering from shell shock . . . They had existed on very scant rations for six weeks and for the past week had had practically nothing to eat. They had been cut off from their own water supply for a week and had caught what rainwater they could in bowls and cans. Hundreds of them were wounded and some of their wounds were gangrenous. Beri beri, syphilis, pneumonia, dysentery, and tuberculosis were common. [They needed] shelter, food, water, clothing, medical care, and sanitation.

The bombardment began on 11 June—four days before the Saipan invasion—when carrier planes from Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's Task Force 58 launched a three-and-a-half day pummeling of all the principal Mariana Islands. A fighter sweep on the first day, carried out by 225 Grumman Hellcats, destroyed about 150 Japanese aircraft and ensured American control of the skies over the islands.

Following the raid, a member of the Japanese garrison on Saipan, wrote in his diary: "For two hours, enemy planes ran amuck and finally left leisurely amidst the unparalleled inaccuracy antiaircraft fire. All we could do was watch helplessly."

Over the next two days, bombers hit the islands and shipping in the area with no letup. There was a fatalistic diary entry by one of the Tinian troops: "Now begins our cave life." Another soldier wrote of the ineffectual antiaircraft fire—"not one hit out of a thousand shots"—and reported

that "the Naval Air Group has taken to its heels." Yet another diarist was indignant, too: "The naval aviators are robbers . . . When they ran off to the mountains they stole Army provisions."

Fast battleships from Task Force 58 joined the bombardment from long range on 13 June. Their fires, analysts later said, were "ineffective" and "misdirected" at soft targets rather than at the concealed gun positions ringing the island. But, as an element in the cumulative psychological and physical toll on soldiers and civilians alike, harassing fires of this nature were not inconsiderable.

Over the next six weeks, the effort to degrade and destroy the defenses and garrison of Tinian escalated. On 18 June, Navy Task Force 52, commanded by Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, added its guns to the mission. Air-strikes involving carrier planes and Army P-47s were ordered. From 28 June until the Tinian landing on 24 July, massed artillery battalions, firing from Saipan's southern shore, poured thousands of tons of steel into the island. By mid-July, 13 battalions were engaged in the mission, firing 160 guns—105s and Long Tom 155s—around the clock. The six battalions of the XXIV Corps Artillery alone undertook 1,509 fire missions in that period, firing 24,536 rounds.

The precise effect of the artillery fires from Saipan will never be known, but it is reasonable to assume there were many scenes of the kind retired Brigadier General Frederick Karch described in his oral history memoir. He was a young major, serving as operations officer for an artillery regiment—the 14th Marines—during the Tinian campaign, and he recalled:

I remember going by a [Japanese] machine gun crew. They had been trying to get to a firing position and had been caught by the artillery barrage, apparently, and they were laid out just like a school solution, with each man carrying his particular portion of the gun crew's equipment. And that was where they had died in a very fine situation, except they were on the wrong side of the barrage.

During the two weeks from 26 June to 9 July, the cruisers *Indianapolis*, *Birmingham*, and *Montpelier* hit the island daily. Their fires were supplemented in the week preceding Jig Day (the D-day designation for Tinian) by the battleships *Colorado*, *Tennessee*, and *California*; the cruisers *Louisville*, *Cleveland*, and *New Orleans*; 16 destroyers; and dozens of supporting vessels firing a variety of ordnance ranging from white phosphorous aimed at wooded areas around the Japanese command post on Mount Lasso to 40mm fire and rocket barrages by LCIs (landing craft, infantry) directed at caves and other close-in targets.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 87701

*By the time the assault waves landed, most, if not all, Japanese beach defense weapons had been destroyed by the preinvasion bombardments. This Japanese navy-type 25mm machine cannon was knocked out before it could disrupt the landings.*

Battalion, 8th Marines, occupied the northern half of the defensive crescent. The 25th and a battalion of the 23d occupied the southern half of the crescent with the remainder of the 23d in reserve. On the beaches in the rear, artillery battalions from the 10th and 14th Marines, engineer battalions, and other special troops were on alert.

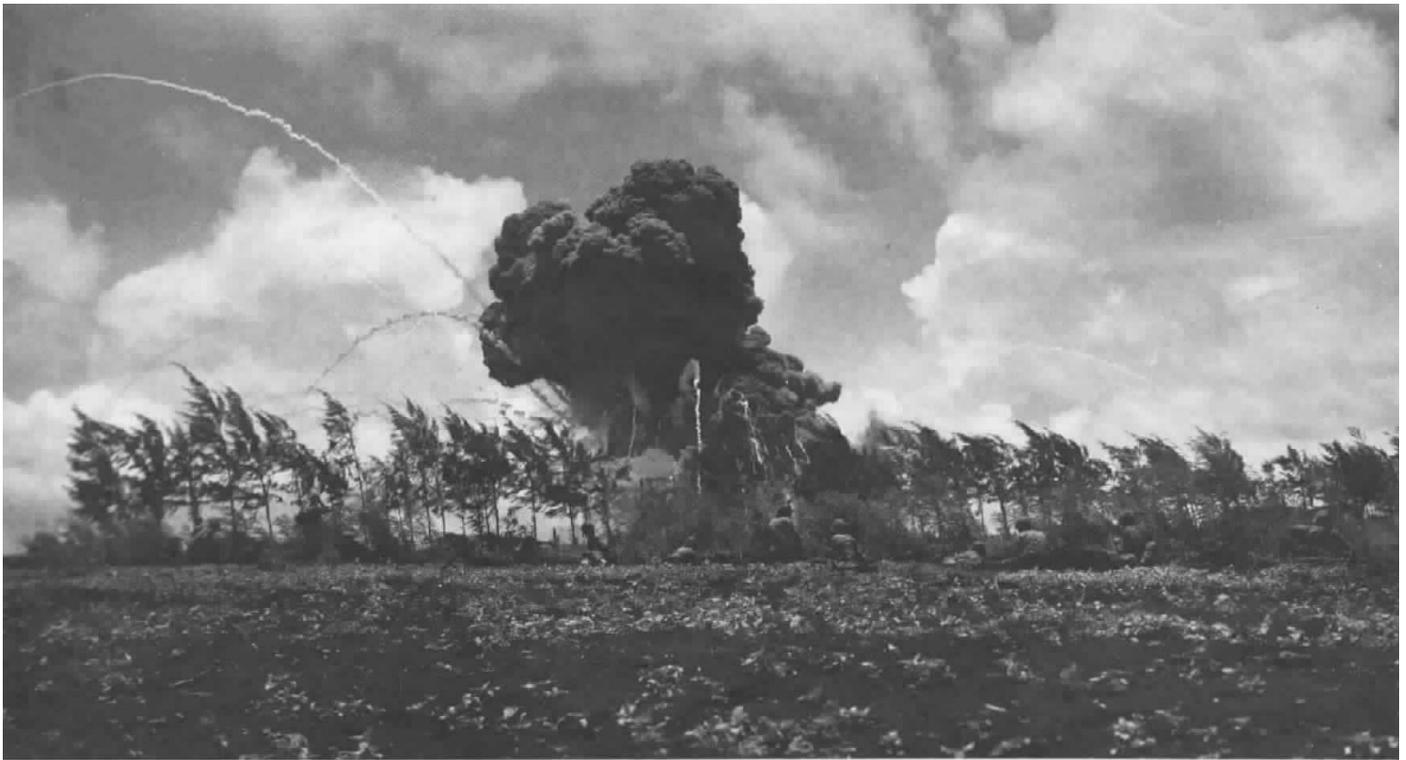
The Japanese, meanwhile, were preparing for their counterattack. Because of shattered communications lines, it could not be a coordinated operation. Units would act on their own under Colonel Ogata's general order of 28 June to "destroy the enemy on beaches with one blow, especially where time prevents quick movement of forces within the island."

They had on the left or northern flank of the Marine lines 600 to 1,000 naval troops at the Ushi Point airfields. Near Mount Lasso, opposite

*Even enemy weapons, such as this Japanese 120mm type 10 naval dual-purpose gun located not-too-far inland from the invasion beaches, was put out of action, but not before it, and two 6-inch guns, hit the battleship Colorado (BB 45) and destroyer Norman Scott (DD 690) causing casualties before being destroyed.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 91349





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 87298

*Attacking Marines hold up their advance in the face of an exploding Japanese ammunition dump after an attack by Navy planes supporting the drive across Tinian. Note the trees bent over by the force of shock waves caused by the eruption.*

the center of the Marine lines, were two battalions of the *50th Infantry Regiment* and a tank company, about 1,500 men all told. On the west coast, facing the Marine right flank, were about 250 men from an infantry company of the *50th Regiment*, a tank detachment and an anti-tank squad.

South of Mount Lasso, nearly six miles from the White Beaches, was the Japanese *Mobile Counterattack Force*—a 900-man battalion of the *135th Infantry Regiment*, equipped with new rifles and demolition charges. Its journey toward the northwestern beaches and the Marine lines was perilous. All movements in daylight were under air surveillance and vulnerable to American fire power. But the battalion set out under its commander—a Captain Izumi—and was hit on several occasions by unobserved artillery and naval gunfire. Izumi pushed on and got to his objective through skillful use of terrain for concealment. At 2230 he began probing the center of the Marine line

where the 2d Battalion, 24th Marines under Garretson was tied in with the 3d Battalion under Chambers.

“While most of these Japanese crept along just forward of the lines,” Carl Hoffman wrote, “. . . a two-man reconnaissance detail climbed up on a battered building forward of the 24th Marines and audaciously (or stupidly) commenced jotting notes about, or drawing sketches of, the front lines. This impudent gesture was rewarded with a thundering concentration of U.S. artillery fire.”

*Amphibian tractors line up waiting to discharge their Marine passengers on the beach. The almost complete devastation of Japanese beachhead defenses, which was not entirely expected by the Marines, permitted this peaceful combat landing.*

Chambers had a vivid memory of that night:

There was a big gully that ran from the southeast to northwest and right into the western edge of our area. Anybody in their right mind could have figured that if there was to be any counterattacks, that gully would be used . . . .

During the night . . . my men were reporting that they were hearing a lot of Japanese chattering down in the gully . . . .

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 93379

