CHAPTER 3

THE 52D DEFENSE BATTALION

Many of the troubles that had plagued the 51st Defense Battalion in its infancy were greatly lessened for the 52d. The key to its relatively smooth training period was the cadre of 400 officers and men that had spent three to six months in the 51st. They brought their experience on the antiaircraft and seacoast defense guns, searchlights, height and range finders, and other technical equipment with them. They were soon joined in the early part of 1944 by the experienced field artillerymen of the 7th Separate Pack Howitzer Battery, which was disbanded on 31 March. The cadre and the pack howitzer men made up more than a third of the strength of the new battalion. The 52d was in far better shape than the 51st had been to rely on on-the-job training, using experienced blacks to train others.

The new battalion's commanding officer, a native Floridian, Colonel Augustus W. Cockrell, had spent a year at West Point and then four years as a Marine enlisted man before he was commissioned in 1922. Cockrell, like many of his field officers and battery commanders, was already a veteran of overseas service in World War II. He had been executive officer of the 2d Defense Battalion in Samoa when the war broke out and had commanded the 8th Defense Battalion in Samoa and on Wallis Island until August 1943.[1] Known respectfully as "old Gus" to the black NCOs who served most closely with him, Colonel Cockrell was a good choice to oversee the formative months of the battalion.

In addition to the fact that one out of three men in the 52d was a Marine with some antiaircraft, seacoast, or field artillery experience, there was also another aspect of the battalion which pleased its officers. The senior black NCOs had some time under their belts, certainly not as much as white NCOs of comparable rank, but for the most part they had been around Montford Point for a year or more. Just as important, they were not trying to command men they had gone through boot camp with. They had had some seasoning as military leaders and were more aware of the responsibilities of their rank.

Not only did Colonel Cockrell have a more favorable ratio of experienced NCOs and men in the 52d than Lieutenant Colonel Stephenson had had in the 51st, he also managed to increase the number of men who received technical school training in their respective specialties. When the 52d moved into the 51st's old quarters at Camp Knox in February and began training in earnest, its prospects for effective end results were far better than those of the 51st had been. The morale in the new outfit was excellent, helped on as the 51st's had been by a distinctive battalion shoulder patch that set the men apart from the other units at Montford Point. The 52d's colorful insignia featured a red shield with a blue diagonal bar across the center supporting four white stars; in the upper left corner was a gold shell burst with a scarlet "52" on it and in the lower right was a gold 90mm gun and mount with a scarlet "USMC" superimposed.

Following the pattern of the 51st, the 52d also took to the sand dunes and scrub growth of Onslow Beach for firing practice as its training program progressed. And like defense battalions throughout the Marine Corps it lost its seacoast artillery group on 12 June 1944 in the universal reorganization of these units to antiaircraft artillery battalions. Most of the 292 officers and men who had manned the 155mm guns were transferred to the heavy antiaircraft group, where an additional 90mm battery was formed. The light antiaircraft group dropped its 20mm guns and added another 40mm battery, and a new searchlight battery was formed.

Shortly after this reorganization, the battalion also lost its first commanding officer as Colonel Cockrell was transferred to camp headquarters where he was slated to replace Colonel Woods. On 12 July 1944 Lieutenant

Colonel Joseph W. Earnshaw took command of the battalion. A native of Kansas and graduate of the Naval Academy (Class of 1927), he had come to Montford Point from Washington where he had spent two years in the Planning Division of the Navy's Bureau of Ordnance. At the outbreak of the war, he had served as technical advisor to the Army's commander in the Society Islands. Like his predecessor, Lieutenant Colonel Earnshaw was an experienced artillery officer.[2]

August 1944 saw the battalion end its training at Montford Point. Its weapons and equipment were cleaned, checked, and turned in to the quartermaster at Camp Lejeune. Like the 51st, it would make its move overseas traveling light. As a necessary preliminary to that move the battalion was completely reorganized on 15 August. In effect two nearly identical half battalions were formed, each containing a headquarters and service group and a heavy antiaircraft group with an equal proportion of gun, searchlight, and equipment crews and other specialists. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas C. Moore, Jr., the battalion executive officer, took command of Detachment A, 52d Defense Battalion. Moore, from Georgia and a graduate of Georgia Tech, had served overseas with the 3d Defense Battalion in the Guadalcanal campaign. He had joined the 52d in May 1944 after serving for some time with the Artillery Battalion of the Training Center at Camp Lejeune.[3]

On 19 August, the two new administrative units of the battalion entrained together at Camp Lejeune and headed west.

First to the Marshalls

After an uneventful cross-country trip, the 52d arrived at Camp Pendleton on 24 August. Nearly a month was spent encamped in the barren hills of Pendleton, but it was a month that included some liberty in the coastal towns and cities. Some of the men from other parts of the country learned to like the Golden State so much during their brief stay there that they asked to be discharged in California when they later returned from overseas.[4]

On 21 September 1944, both administrative units of the battalion boarded the transport USS *Winged Arrow* (AP–170) at San Diego, sailing the same day for Pearl Harbor. Six days later, the ship arrived at Oahu and then lay berthed in the Navy Yard for a week and a half

75mm pack howitzer gun crew trains on the piece at Montford Point. (Photo from Montford Point Pictorial).

with the troops on board. The *Winged Arrow* got underway on 8 October, this time headed south for the Marshall Islands. Majuro Atoll was its first destination.

Majuro, which was situated on the eastern edge of the Marshalls, was the home base for the scout bomber squadrons of Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 13 and of the 1st Antiaircraft Artillery (AAA) Battalion which protected its airstrips. Detachment A disembarked at Majuro on 17 October to relieve the 1st AAA Battalion which had been part of the original landing force when the atoll was occupied in February 1944.[5]

The remainder of the 52d Defense Battalion sailed on to the westward, to Kwajalein Atoll in the center of the Marshalls. Arriving at the twin islands of Roi-Namur on the 18th, the battalion stayed on board ship for several days before landing on the 22d. It relieved the 15th AAA Battalion of its mission of guarding the airfield and installations that housed the fighter squadrons of MAG–31. Like Detachment A at Majuro, the half of the 52d at Roi-Namur was soon hard at work test firing the guns it had taken over, holding tracking drills, and in general getting settled into position.

The prime mission of the Marine aircraft at Majuro and Roi-Namur was to continue the neutralization of the Japanese garrisons that existed on Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit Atolls. Although no known aircraft still existed at these Japanese bases, the enemy did possess the ability to repair the airfields there and planes might be flown in for supply, evacuation, or reconnaissance purposes.[6] Although the possibility of a Japanese air attack was remote, it existed, and this was the reason for the 52d's presence, with one antiaircraft battalion replacing two as a reduced scale of air defense was called for.

Lieutenant Colonel Moore's detachment at Majuro, in addition to its air defense duties, found itself acting as reconnaissance Marines. Monthly after the detachment arrived, patrols of 60–65 men from the firing batteries would board naval landing craft and check out the atolls, mostly Erikub and Aur, which lay between Majuro and the nearest Japanese bases. These two-to-six day excursions were generally uneventful, although a Battery C patrol to Tabal Island in December brought in three Japanese prisoners the natives had taken, and a Battery D patrol to Aur in January brought back 186 natives to be resettled at Kwajalein.

The battalion's stay in the Marshalls was only six months long as the war was moving forward to the Western Pacific and the 52d, like many of the Marine units in the islands, was to move with it. MAG–31 was among the units marked for participation in the Okinawa operation, scheduled for 1 April 1945. Rumors were rife amongst the men of the 52d on Roi-Namur that the black battalion would be moving forward with them. Relations between the two units were cordial, even to the extent of the staff NCOs of both setting up an integrated staff club.[7] But the hoped-for joint move was not to be, and MAG–31's ground echelon and its planes departed in March.

The naval activity attending the departure seemed to have attracted enemy submarines, and there was a flurry of action as the 52d's men outposted nearby islands, patrolled others farther away, and manned their guns, but found no targets. Under a new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel David W. Silvey, who had relieved Lieutenant Colonel Earnshaw on 10 January, the battalion loaded out on 28 April, boarding a merchantman, the SS *George W. Julian.* Silvey had joined the battalion at Montford Point in May 1944 after serving with the 6th Defense Battalion at Midway since 1941[8] Since Silvey was junior to Lieutenant Colonel Moore, when the battalion reunited he was destined to become the executive officer while Moore took over the 52d.

The reunion was not too far in the future, for Detachment A had made a move also about a month and a half earlier than the elements at Roi-Namur. On 9 March 1945, the detachment had boarded the transport USS *DeGrasse* (AP–164) at Majuro, taking with it the commendation of the atoll's commander, Captain Harold B. Grow, USNR, who noted to Lieutenant Colonel Moore:

> Your officers have been most cooperative and your men have been examples of deportment, willingness to work, and military behavior. They have been of inestimable value to us in our various armed reconnaissance, and we shall greatly feel your absence.[9]

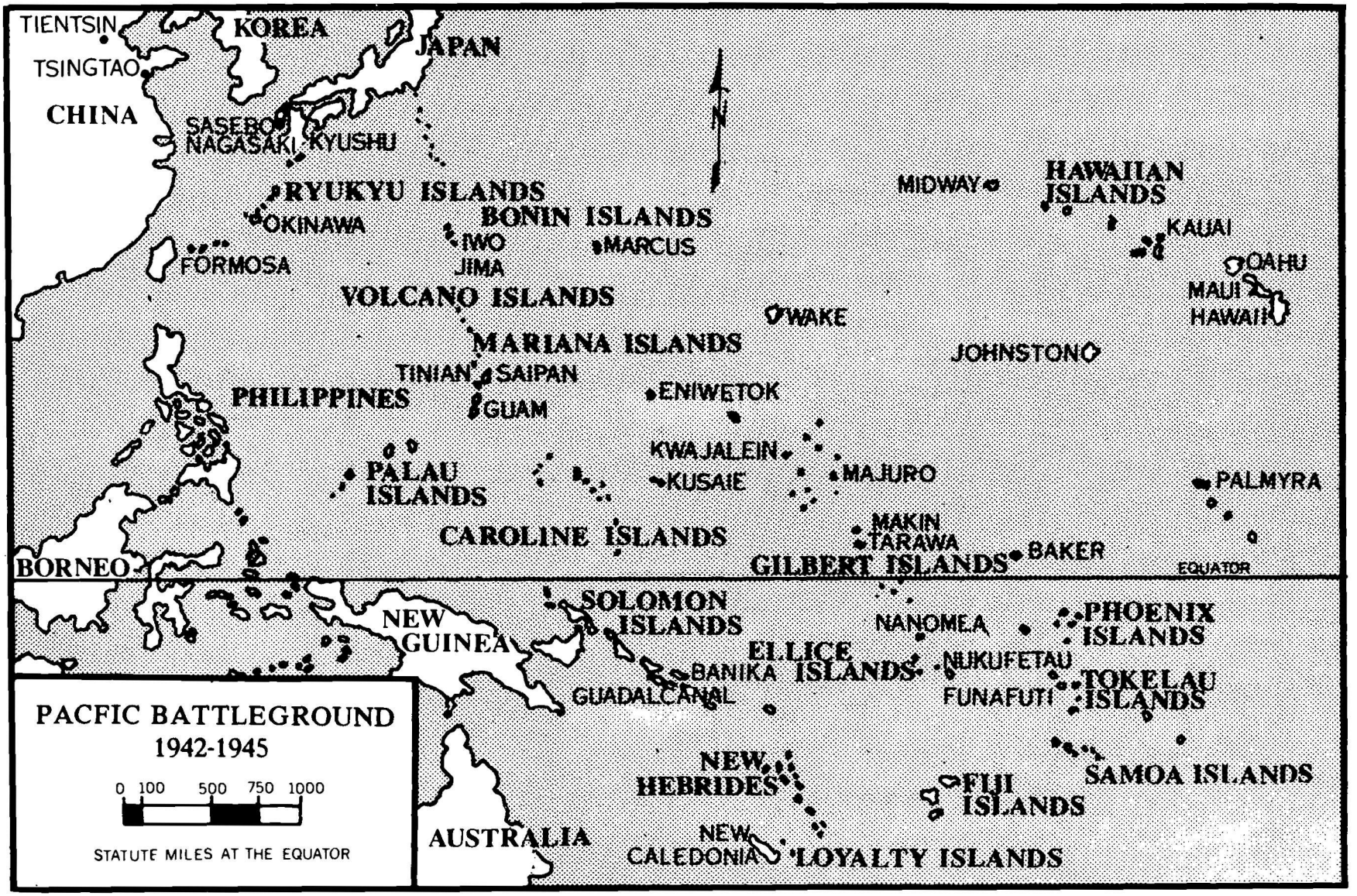
The destination of both elements of the 52d Defense Battalion was Guam, and the prospect was not bad for further forward movement to combat.

Forward to Guam

Detachment A landed on Guam on 24 March and went ashore to set up camp near Barrigada village on the eastern side of the island just above its narrow waist. It was not long before regular patrols and ambushes were being sent out, for there were hundreds of armed Japanese troops still loose in the jungles on the island, men who had gone into hiding when the island was seized in July and August 1944. Impotent as a combat force, and not very aggressive unless cornered, these stragglers were mainly interested in foraging and staying alive.

Small 10-man patrols and ambush groups were sent out all around the camp area; the use of larger forces was restricted by the dense vegetation which one later patrol commander described as "thick as the hair on a dog's back." [10] The patrols made their first contact on 1 April, killing one of two Japanese discovered within 1,000 yards of the camp. Further sightings were made in the following days, with one of the enemy killed and one wounded on 13 April, another killed on the 21st, and three wounded on the 26th, when an ambush party received return fire, which wounded one member of the 52d, PFC Ernest J. Calland.[11]

Lieutenant Colonel Silvey's group arrived at Guam on 4 May, landed and rejoined the bat-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talion. The next day, the 52d, which came under control of the 2d Provisional AAA Group, was directed to undertake intensive training to be accomplished preparatory to movement forward. On 10 May, the formal reorganization of the battalion to its original table of organization took place, and Lieutenant Colonel Moore took command.

As soon as the rest of the 52d was settled in, the intensified round of training and checking equipment began with a readiness date for movement of 15 June. The patrolling and ambushes continued and it was soon obvious that some men had a natural aptitude for the job. Sergeant (later Platoon Sergeant) Ezra Kelly from Mississippi, a member of the Searchlight Battery, was one of these; he killed the first Japanese accounted for by the battalion on Guam and accounted for five others in later patrols.[12] He was, as one of his seniors remarked, "really gung ho. Absolutely fearless." [13]

Insofar as the battalion commander knew, the next destination of the 52d was Okinawa. Loading out for the Ryukyus actually started on 9 July, but the orders were countermanded, and the 52d was directed to remain on Guam, replacing the 9th AAA Battalion. The actual relief of the 9th began on 24 July when Battery C moved into tactical positions with its 90mm guns.

The cancellation of the orders to move forward was unpopular in the 52d. One of the battalion's clerks, PFC John R. Griffith, recalled, "our morale dropped 99%, for the next week or ten days the men stayed around their tents writing letters and what not—mad at the world and everyone in it. Instead of being a Defense Unit, we turned out to be nothing more than a working battalion."[14]

Events had taken a turn for the worse soon after debarkation. On 12 July, the battalion began furnishing Island Command with working parties which grew in strength until by the end of the month nearly half the battalion was working each day, mostly as stevedores. The assignment, much disliked in the 52d, must have amused the men in the black Marine depot companies on Guam, who were heavily committed to this physically demanding work. About this time, Sergeant Major "Hashmark" Johnson appeared from Montford Point and noted with displeasure that "when I arrived the 52d Defense Battalion was performing the duties of a depot company at Apra Harbor." [15] The new battalion sergeant major was instrumental in getting the patrols and ambushes started again, in fact, the first one that he led himself drew and returned Japanese fire.

The end of the war also saw the end of the tactical employment of the 52d as an antiaircraft battalion. Battery C stood down on 19 August 1945 and after that no unit was tactically emplaced. Concurrent with the move of the battalion to a new camp area formerly occupied by an Army engineer battalion, the 52d began to furnish the 2d Military Police Battalion and Island Command with large daily details of men for guard duty. On 30 September operational control of the defense battalion was passed to the 5th Service Depot, parent command also of the black ammunition and depot companies on the island. Six days later, the battalion began turning in all of its equipment to the depot.

Lieutenant Colonel Moore received word on 18 October that elements of his battalion would be relieving the 51st Defense Battalion at Eniwetok and Kwajalein, so that the older unit could return to the States. In November the battalion split into three parts: Headquarters and Service Battery and the Light Antiaircraft Group stayed on Guam; a composite group designated Battery A (Reinforced), composed of Battery A and four searchlight sections, was told off as the relief at Kwajalein; and the Heavy Antiaircraft Group, less two firing batteries, plus the Searchlight Battery, was set as the relief on Eniwetok. Attached to both the relieving detachments were small groups of high point men who would continue on to the United States with the 51st for discharge.

Both elements of the 52d sailed on 16 November from Guam, on the cargo ships USS *Sibik* (AK–121) for Eniwetok and USS *Wyandot* (AKA–92) for Kwajalein. After the relief of the 51st was effected, the duties of the men at both atolls were non-tactical; there were guard details and general duty chores connected with the winding down of the war effort but little to relieve the boredom. No one was unhappy when word came to return to Guam, since it meant for most men a further return to home.

Postwar Activities

On 29 January 1946, the attack transport USS *Hyde* (APA–173), having picked up the members of the 52d Defense Battalion in the Marshalls, berthed at Guam. A month of

change and reorganization followed until on 28 February one of the postwar Pacific units of the Marine Corps destined to be manned by black Marines was formed. Heavy Antiaircraft Group (Provisional), Saipan was activated by redesignation of the 52d's similar group. Low point men were transferred into the new unit, and it began moving piecemeal to Saipan.

Before this happened, however, the ranks of the battalion were thinned even further by the departure of another large group of high point men for the States on 1 February. Among this group were a number of the original Montford Point volunteers of 1942. When their ship arrived in San Francisco on the 22d, they received a pleasant surprise. The receiving barracks were not segregated, nor were those at Camp Pendleton when the men arrived there for processing for discharge.

One gunnery sergeant from Louisiana, Alex "Buck" Johnson, even found himself bossing all-white police details, which he regarded as a welcome change from his previous experience. He noted that contrary to time-honored practice in most units, he did not have to spend his time "running and ducking and looking and trying to find out what happened to my detail." Instead, the men did their work and asked him if there was anything else that he wanted them to do.[16] The imminence of discharge must have disordered the normal proclivity of enlisted Marines to avoid police duties.

The experience of the remainder of the 52d Defense Battalion was more in keeping with the segregated nature of life in the Marine Corps in World War II, since it returned home as a unit. On 13 March 1946, the 357 officers and men still on the rolls of the battalion embarked on the transport USS *Wakefield* (AP–21) at Guam and sailed for San Diego. Arriving on the 26th, the 52d immediately moved to Camp Pendleton, dropped off the men who had enlisted west of the Mississippi who would be discharged there, and entrained for Camp Lejeune.

On 4 April 1946, the 52d Defense Battalion arrived back at Montford Point Camp. Further discharges and separations took place immediately, and on 21 April Lieutenant Colonel Moore relinquished command of the battalion he had served with for 23 months. On 15 May 1946, the 52d Defense Battalion passed out of history, redesignated as a new postwar unit to be based at Montford Point, the 3d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion (Composite).

Neither of the two antiaircraft units that had grown out of the 52d had a long life. The group on Saipan lasted until 28 February 1947 when it was disbanded and its remaining men transferred into provisional depot companies which returned to Guam.[17] The 3d Antiaircraft had a life of 12 months before it too was disbanded on 15 May 1947, with most of its men joining Headquarters Company, Montford Point Camp.[18]

Although not directly responsible for the demise of all black antiaircraft units, the sentiments expressed by Lieutenant Colonel Moore after he had been with the 52d for 20 months are indicative of the line of reasoning that eventually prevailed when the Marine Corps drastically reduced its troop strength in postwar years. He reported to the Commandant that "so long as social conditions make segregation desirable it is believed that Negro Marines could be more advantagously employed in almost any other type unit." He reasoned that antiaircraft units were among the most highly technical in the Marine Corps and needed to draw on the whole Corps for their men, men who would have all possible schools readily available to them as they were not to black Marines. He pointed out that the normal scattered deployment of batteries, radars, and searchlights "defeats the purpose of segregation," because these small units were forced to rely on neighboring organizations for support which would be difficult to get and might not be forthcoming "so long as any evidence of individual racial prejudice continues to exist."[19]

An objective examination of the experiences of the men of the 52d Defense Battalion, weighing all pros and cons, must conclude that despite racial adversity they performed well collectively as Marines. The conclusion is inescapable when one meets veterans of the 52d that both they and the Marine Corps benefited from their service.

CHAPTER 4

DEPOT AND AMMUNITION COMPANIES

One of the ironies of the service of black Marines in World War II was that the units which had been designated, trained, and publicized as combat organizations, the 51st and 52d Defense Battalions, never saw combat. Instead, the "labor troops," the Marine depot and ammunition companies, and the officers' stewards were the ones who garnered the battle credits and took the casualties suffered by black Marines during the war. The Personnel Department at Headquarters Marine Corps in a postwar tabulation of casualties established that nine black Marines were killed in action or died of wounds, while 78 others were wounded in action and nine suffered from combat fatigue; 35 men died of other causes.[1] Inasmuch as the duties of the men in the depot and ammunition companies and those of the stewards were not supposed to bring them into direct confrontation with the Japanese, the casualty toll was not inconsiderable.

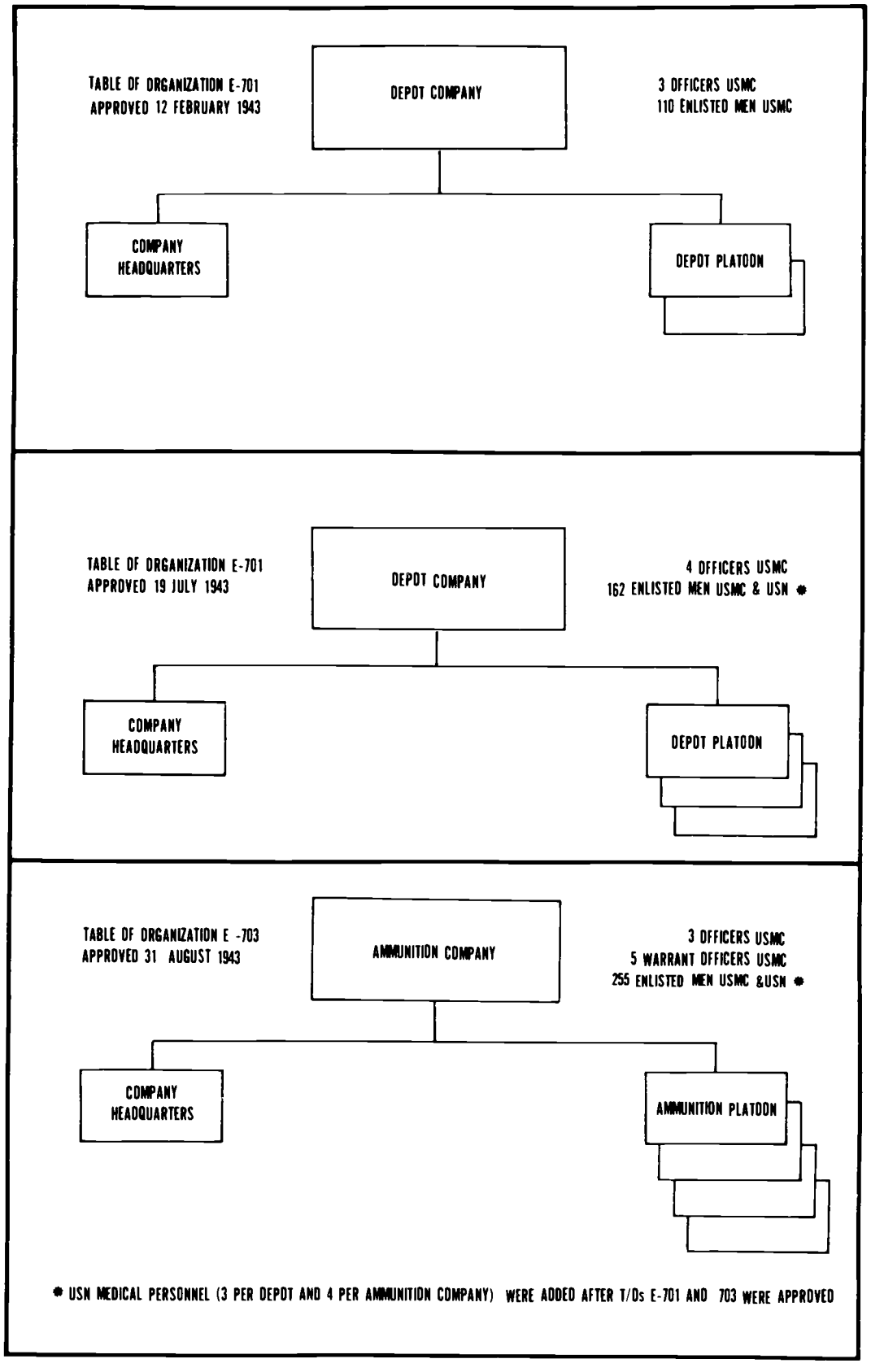
It was quite apparent to Marine planners in the early part of the war that the Marine Corps needed a vastly increased and improved supply system in the Pacific, one that could support the offensive thrust of hundreds of thousands of Marines. The need was felt not only at the rear and forward area support bases but in combat itself in the crucial area of shore party operations, the ship-to-shore movement of essential equipment and supplies. And once those supplies were ashore, they had to be stockpiled, shifted, sorted, and moved forward into the hands of the Marines battling the Japanese.

Gradually, an elaborate system did evolve which included base depots, which received, stored, processed, and shipped supplies of all sorts to combat units, and field depots, which were intended to be forward supply activities in operational areas. There were other organizations too, service and supply battalions, for instance, which performed these support activities for local base areas. All of these organizations were primarily composed of specialist companies which handled various types of supplies and equipment, salvaging and repairing non-expendable items where possible. What was missing at first was an essential element of the Marine logistical system, labor troops. All the vast assemblage of equipment had to be moved by ship and those ships had to be unloaded and reloaded time and again. The Marine Corps had no stevedores and found in its early combat operations that using combat troops for the unloading tasks was highly unsatisfactory. They were not doing the job for which they had been trained.

When the prospective number of black Marines was greatly increased in 1943, the problem of their employment arose. Headquarters Marine Corps began thinking about additional pioneer units, not the organic pioneer battalions of the Marine divisions, which were engineer organizations specializing in shore party operations, but units which would in effect serve as stevedores. The thousands of men destined for Montford Point were a ready-made manpower reservoir. Instead of organizing battalions or larger organizations, the Marine Corps formed the black Marines into company-sized units that could be deployed as soon as their ranks were filled from boot camp and shifted about more easily as the need for their services arose.

On 8 March 1943, the 1st Marine Depot Company was activated at Montford Point; its commander was Captain Jason M. Austin, Jr. Organized according to a table of organization approved less than a month before, the company included three officers and 110 enlisted men formed into a headquarters and two platoons and lightly armed with rifles, carbines, and submachine guns.[2] All but one of the 101 blacks in the company were privates; the other was an assistant cook, Ulysses J. Lucas. The nine NCOs in the company were white. Until enough black NCOs could be selected and

DEPOT AND AMMUNITION COMPANIES 1943-1946



trained this was to be the pattern for the black Marine depot companies. Eventually, black NCOs moved up through the ranks replacing the whites who were transferred out to other organizations. On the whole, the first units to leave the States became all black below the officer level overseas. In 1944 and 1945 depot companies leaving Montford Point had black NCOs from first sergeant on down the line.

This policy of replacing white NCOs with blacks was in keeping with Letter of Instruction 421 which the Commandant issued on 14 March 1943. In the letter, in an attempt to avoid racial friction, General Holcomb stated that in no case would there be black NCOs senior to white men in the same unit and that it was desirable that few, if any, be of the same rank. The instructions specifically stated that it was not the intent of the letter to hinder promotion of blacks, in fact the Commandant indicated it was his aim that commanders exert every effort to locate blacks "having the requisite qualities of intelligence, education, and leadership to become noncommissioned officers." As an example he noted that if a black corporal was qualified for promotion to sergeant while there were still white corporals in his unit, he would be promoted but he would be transferred to a billet where his services could be used at the higher rank.[3] Although this letter to commanding officers was classified "Confidential," there was no doubt in the minds of most black Marines that such an order existed; they could see its dictums in operation. Still others saw the letter, including the sergeant major of the 51st Defense Battalion. He later remarked, in emphasizing that men of "intelligence, education, and leadership" had been found, that no black men in his office had a general classification test score of less than 110.[4]

After 10 depot companies had been formed and deployed in the period between March and September 1943, a new type of black unit came into being, the Marine ammunition company. Conceived of as a hard-working partner of the white ordnance companies in the base and field depots, the ammunition companies were to load and unload, sort and stack, manhandle and guard ammunition, moving it from ship to shore to dump, and in combat, forward to the frontline troops and firing batteries. The 1st Marine Ammunition Company was organized at Montford Point on 1 October 1943 with Second Lieutenant Placido A. Gomez in command.

Where the depot companies had a minimum of training before they shipped out, the ammunition companies usually spent at least two months at Montford Point before going overseas. The men were given familiarization courses on various types of ammunition and fuses, often practising moving ammunition containers from landing craft to inshore dumps. Some potential NCOs were sent to camouflage school and others were given special training in handling ammunition. The staff NCO billets in the companies went to white ordnance specialists, a condition that remained throughout the war. While the handling of ammunition required heavy labor, it also required experienced supervision to emphasize and enforce safety regulations.

The ammunition company was a large organization with a total strength of eight officers and 251 enlisted men. The unit was organized into a headquarters and four ammunition platoons with the men armed with rifles and carbines. Unlike the depot companies which had no organic transportation, the ammunition company rated a number of its own jeeps, trucks, and trailers.[5] The permanent complement of white line and specialist staff NCOs in the ammunition companies stifled Negro promotions to those ranks but the units operated effectively despite this. In the 3d Ammunition Company, one black veteran recalled: "The white NCOs we had was wonderful, a bunch of swell fellows. You couldn't go wrong with them . . . we were together; we worked as a team." [6]

From October 1943 until September 1944, one ammunition company and two depot companies were organized every month at Montford Point. The last of 12 ammunition companies was activated on 1 September 1944, the same day that the 33d and 34th Marine Depot Companies came into being. Depot companies continued to be formed, however, and 51 were organized, with the last four (the 46th, 47th, 48th, and 49th) activated on 1 October 1945 after the war was over. There were actually two 5th and 6th Marine Depot Companies; the first pair were sent out to New Caledonia in August 1943 to provide reinforcements for the four earlier depot companies when the addition of a third platoon to the table of organization brought each companies' total strength up to 163 officers and men.[7]

Into Service Overseas

A colorful description of the state of training of the depot companies before they shipped out was provided by the former first sergeant of one of them, who recalled:

> . . . there was no training these Negroes was doing, such as infantry training. The only training they had was what they had received at boot camp. And of course they did a hell of a lot of drilling. They were some of the drillingest people that you'd ever seen in your life.

From his point of view all the black depot company Marine needed "was a strong back," and "he already had that and so there was no need of training him because that was all he was going to do, to load and unload ships and haul ammunition and supplies into the line for the fighting troops." [8]

Like those depot units which followed it, the 1st Marine Depot Company did not spend much time at Montford Point once it had been formed. Three weeks after its organization, the company was on a train bound for the west coast. When the men arrived at San Diego on 5 April 1943, the Marine Corps base newspaper noted their arrival and reported: "after spending their first few hours squaring their gear, the men put on a warm-up demonstration of close order drill that left observers gaping." [9]

On 16 April, the company boarded ship, the destroyer USS *Hunt* (DD–674) and two days later sailed for Noumea on New Caledonia. This was the first of many such sailings from San Diego; other depot and ammunition companies left the States from San Francisco and Pleasanton in California, and Norfolk, Bayonne, and Davisville on the east coast, and from New Orleans and Gulf Port in the south, depending on where the shipping was available.

The destination of the 1st Marine Depot Company and of the next five companies to follow it was New Caledonia, where the 1st Base Depot was headquartered, its responsibility the support of Marine forces in the Solomons, where the campaign for Guadalcanal had just ended. In the same month that the 1st Marine Depot Company left the States, a new base depot, the 4th, was organized on New Caledonia, absorbing half the quartermaster personnel and taking the title to half the supplies stored in 1st Base Depot facilities. In May the new organization moved forward to the island of Banika in the Russell Group north of Guadalcanal to be in position to support Marine combat troops as they moved forward into the central and northern Solomons.[10] A number of black depot and ammunition companies were to serve in both base depots while the advance northward continued to its eventual culmination in mid-1944 with the encirclement and neutralization of the Japanese base at Rabaul on New Britain.

The value of the first depot company was immediately felt when it arrived at Noumea in May. Prior to this time, the shorthanded base depot had had to call on other Marine units for working parties, including convalescent wounded in mobile base hospitals, to augment ship loading and unloading details. The 1st Marine Depot Company was really welcome; "these troops offered the first solution to the depot's labor problem." [11] Other black Marine depot companies were soon on hand. The 2d and 3d Companies arrived together on 30 June, having been raised simultaneously at Montford Point in April, a pattern that applied to many pairs of depot companies which served together throughout the war.

The next company to come, the 4th, arrived alone in late July but did not stay long on New Caledonia. In concert with the earliest arrival, the 1st Depot Company, it boarded the transport USS *Crescent City* (AP–40) on 5 August and sailed north for Guadalcanal. Arriving in time on the 12th to be greeted with a harmless flyover by a Japanese pilot who had just finished attacking the island, the black Marines transhipped to smaller inter-island transports and left for Banika where they were to provide the first labor troops to join the 4th Base Depot. The two companies arrived 13 August and disembarked in a period of nightly air raids, got their first taste of a bombing raid on the 14th, and provided their first working parties on the docks on the 15th.[12]

After the initial movement of depot companies to New Caledonia and the Solomons to help support ongoing operations in the South and Southwest Pacific theatres, the next destination for many units was the Hawaiian Islands. The first pair to start that way were the 7th and 8th Marine Depot Companies, which arrived by way of Davisville, Rhode Island and the Panama Canal, with a stopover at Pago Pago in American Samoa, and a nine-month stint supporting operations in the Gilberts and Marshalls at the FMF Base Depot at Funafuti. By the time these companies finally arrived at Pearl Harbor in July 1944, a number of other

depot and ammunition companies from Montford Point had already joined the 6th Base Depot on Oahu. Others were assigned to service and supply depots and battalions on other islands, like Hawaii, Maui, and Kauai, where Marine units trained and staged for Central Pacific operations. Two companies were sent down into the Marshalls, the 1st Marine Ammunition Company, which had a short stay at Kwajalein right after the atoll was taken in February before it returned to Oahu, and the 15th Marine Depot Company, which reached Allen Island at Kwajalein on 7 March and stayed there for the rest of the war.

Some of the units reporting to the Hawaiian Islands in the spring of 1944 were assigned to the 7th Field Depot: 3d Marine Ammunition Company and the 18th, 19th, and 20th Marine Depot Companies. Two ammunition companies, the 2d and 4th, were sent to Guadalcanal where they became part of the 5th Field Depot. These were destined to be the first black Marine units to take part in combat operations.

Combat in the Marianas

Saipan was the first target in the Marianas with D-Day 15 June 1944. The black Marines assigned to the 7th Field Depot helped load the supplies of the assault forces of the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions of the V Amphibious Corps. The two ammunition companies of 5th Field Depot on Guadalcanal performed similar duties for the 3d Marine Division and the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade of the III Amphibious Corps, which was slated to land in assault on Guam. In all cases the units were assigned to ship unloading details and to the shore parties of the assault echelons.

Elements of most of the black Marine units at Saipan got ashore on D-Day. A member of the 3d Marine Ammunition Company, Sergeant Ernest W. Coney, gave his version of the landing:

> Sixteen men were assigned to the ships' platoons and twenty-five to floating dumps [pontoon barges moored just off the reef's edge as transfer points]. The rest got ready to disembark at 0700. At 0600 it was bright enough to see an island dead ahead and smoke was pouring up from the earth as our planes was bombing and strafing. . . .
>
> We went over the side at 0700 and into the waiting landing boat. We shoved off toward the island and as usual we rode around in circles before going ashore. When we did start for the island, shells began to fall all around us. We was given orders to turn around and get into an amphibious alligator 'cause we could not make it in—in the landing boat.
>
> We changed over and then waited . . . we hit the beach at 1400 and immediately started diggin' in because it seemed as though the Japs had gotten the range. One team had an amphibian tractor shot out from under it as it was being unloaded—miraculously all the men escaped without injury.[14]

Others were not as fortunate; PFC Leroy Seals of Brooklyn, New York was wounded a few hours after the landing and died the next day. Men from the company positioned near the beachhead perimeter helped repulse an enemy counterattack during the night of D-Day and were credited with knocking out a Japanese machine gun.

The depot companies were no less active on 15 June; most of the men of the 18th and 20th Companies landed in support of the 4th Marine Division while the 19th, which was part of the 2d Division's shore party, sweated cargo out of the holds and into landing craft for the trip to the fire-swept shore. One platoon of the 18th attached to the 3d Battalion, 23d Marines landed on Blue Beach 1, directly behind the town of Charan Kanoa, about two and a half hours after the assault wave had landed. As it disembarked, a mortar shell hit and exploded about 25 feet away. It caused four casualties (PFC Charles F. Smith and Privates Albert W. Sims, Jeff Smith, and Hayse Stewart) who were evacuated back to a transport. The platoon pushed inland to find cover from the enemy shelling. One squad was called up to replace riflemen in the front lines which were not more than 100 yards off the beach.

During the night, small enemy groups probed the left flank of the 23d Marines in the gap between that regiment and the 8th Marines to the north. Those who penetrated were mopped up by units in the rear, including the 18th Depot. When the line was stabilized, the 18th was pulled out to take over its normal duties of handling supplies. Of this period, the company commander, Captain William M. Barr, reported:

> Mortar shells were still raining down as my boys unloaded ammunition, demolition material, and other supplies from amphibious trucks. They set up "security" to keep out snipers as they helped load casualties aboard boats to go to hospital ships. Rifle fire was thick as they rode guard on trucks carrying high octane gasoline from the beach. A squad leader killed a Jap sniper that had crawled into a foxhole next to his. They stood waist deep in surf unloading boats as vital supplies of food and water were brought in. . . there

On D-Day at Saipan, black Marines pause at the beach's edge before receiving orders to move inland. (USMC Photo 83928).

were only a few scattered snipers on the beach. My boys accounted for several of these.[14]

A brief account of the D-Day experiences of the 20th Marine Depot Company reached the American press in the account of its commander, Captain William C. Adams:

> My company landed about 2 p.m. on D-Day [on Yellow Beach 2 supporting the 1st Battalion, 25th Marines]. We were the third wave, and all hell was breaking when we came in. It was still touch and go when we hit shore, and it took some time to establish a foothold.
>
> My men performed excellently. I had previously told them: "You are the first Negro troops ever to go into action in the Marine Corps. What you do with the situation that confronts you, and how you perform, will be the basis on which you, and your race, will be judged. . . .
>
> They did a swell job . . . Among my own company casualties, my orderly was killed. My men are still living in foxholes.[15]

The orderly was Private Kenneth J. Tibbs of Columbus, Ohio, who died of wounds on D-Day. He was the first black Marine fatality as the result of enemy action in World War II. The rest of the men in his company were not unmindful of the precarious situation on the beaches of Saipan and immediately took steps to improve their defenses. As Captain Adams noted: "they were very provident, and by the second day had all types of arms they had never been issued, such as . . . machine guns, and even .50 [caliber] machine guns." [16]

The 19th Marine Depot Company did not come ashore until 22 June and remained as part of the 2d Division shore party for five more days before it reverted to operational control of the 7th Field Depot. The 19th was a lucky outfit; it suffered no casualties on Saipan, nor was anyone hit when it took part in the Okinawa campaign nearly a year later. There were still other casualties in the Negro companies on Saipan, though, after the holocaust of D-Day. On 16 June, Private Willie J. Atkinson of the 18th Company was wounded

and PFC Robert L. Neal of the ammunition company was shell-shocked and hospitalized. The next day PFC William B. Townsend of the 18th Company was hit. One of the officers of the 18th Company, Second Lieutenant Edmund C. Forehand, was wounded on the 21st, and PFC Lawrence Pellerin, Jr., of the 20th Company became a casualty the next day. As the fighting wore on into July, Corporal John S. Newsome of the 18th and Private Willie S. King of the 20th were wounded on the 4th, Private John S. Novy of the ammunition company was hit on the 9th, and the last black Marine casualty during the battle, Private Willie Travis Jr. of the 18th Company was wounded on the 13th.

The men in these four black companies were not the only black Marines on Saipan. The action was such that areas normally considered "safe" and "behind the lines" were subjected to enemy fire. During Japanese shelling that dropped in on the headquarters compound of the 2d Marine Division on 20 June, Cook 3d Class Timerlate E. Kirvin and Steward's Assistant 2d Class Samuel J. Love, Jr., both received leg wounds, thus earning the unwanted distinction of being the first Stewards' Branch combat casualties of the war.

The action of the black Marines under heavy fire and in a situation of unremitting toll and danger on Saipan did not go unnoticed at Headquarters Marine Corps or in the national press and news magazines. The Commandant, General Vandergrift, was quoted as saying: "The Negro Marines are no longer on trial. They are Marines, period." [17] Robert Sherrod, the war correspondent, reported in *Time*: "Negro Marines, under fire for the first time, have rated a universal 4.0 on Saipan." [18] In the naval efficiency rating system there could be no higher mark.

Indeed the black Marines had performed well under fire and the units of the 7th Field Depot that directly supported the 4th Marine Division, (3d Ammunition and 18th, 19th, and 20th Depot Companies) were included in the award of the Presidential Unit Citation given to that organization for its combat role on Saipan and Tinian. The latter island, close to Saipan, was taken in a classic shore-to-shore amphibious assault during the last week of July 1944. No black Marine casualties were incurred in the fighting, although elements of the 3d Ammunition Company did accompany the assault troops and the depot companies provided, as usual, loading and unloading support.

The last of the trio of operations in the Marianas was the recapture of Guam, lost to the Japanese in the early days of the war. The landing, originally set for 18 June 1944, was put off as a result of the heavy fighting on Saipan, and all the troops headed for the target were ship weary from their many weeks on transports when the actual landing was made on 21 July 1944. Just as eager as the rest to get ashore were the 2d and 4th Marine Ammunition Companies. Three platoons of the 2d were assigned to direct support of the 3d Marine Division landing on the Asan beachhead north of Orote Peninsula; the 4th Company, with the 4th Platoon of the 2d Company attached, was in direct support of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade landing to the south of the peninsula at Agat.

A heavy naval bombardment, most intense of the war in the Pacific thus far, leveled most of the beach defenses of Guam, but there were still some antiboat guns operative and Japanese mortars and machine guns were active. The fire was particularly devastating on the 1st Brigade's beaches and in the waters offshore, and the black Marines were in the thick of it, unloading cargo from LSTs standing off the reef. The 3d Division had landed in a natural amphitheater with the Japanese holding the high ground overlooking the beaches. Considering the situation, the 2d Marine Ammunition Company was lucky to have only one man wounded, PFC Henry L. Jones, on 22 July.

On the night of D-Day, one of the platoons of the reinforced 4th Ammunition Company, which was guarding the brigade ammunition dump, intercepted and killed 14 Japanese soldiers laden with explosives. There were no casualties in this fire fight but a few days later (24 July) three men working on the beaches were wounded by fire from Japanese guns on Orote Peninsula: PFC Wilbert J. Webb and Privates Darnell Hayes and Jim W. Jones.

During the rest of the fighting on this island, the two companies continued to support the advancing Marines, reverting to operational control of the 5th Field Depot on 22 August, 12 days after the island was declared secure. The 4th Marine Ammunition Company and the 4th Platoon of the 2d Company were included in the Navy Unit Commendation awarded to the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade for its actions on Guam. The brigade com-

Men of the 3d Ammunition Company take a break during the fighting on Saipan. Seated on the Japanese bike is PFC Horace Boykin; seated (l to r) are Corporal Willis T. Anthony and PFCs Emmitt Shackelford and Eugene Purdy. (USMC Photo 86008).

mander, Brigadier General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., wrote the 4th Company's commander, First Lieutenant Russell S. LaPointe, commending:

> . . . the splendid and expeditious manner in which supplies and equipment were unloaded from the LST's and LCT's of our Attack Group. Working long hours, frequently during nights, and in at least two instances under enemy fire . . . [you] so coordinated your unloading efforts as to keep supplies flowing to the beach. You have contributed in large measure to the successful and rapid movement of combat supplies in this amphibious operation.[19]

The end of the operation on Guam did not mean the end of encounters with the Japanese. Two men from the 4th Ammunition Company, PFCs George F. Gaines and Lawrence H. Hill, were wounded on 27 September by enemy troops. Some of the ammunition company men were particularly adept at hunting the stragglers down. One man, brought up in the Mississippi bayou country, who was a truck driver in Memphis when he joined the Marines, ran up quite a personal score. PFC Luther Woodward of the 4th Ammunition Company also earned the highest decoration won by a black Marine in World War II for a feat performed in December 1944. One afternoon, he saw some fresh footprints close to the ammunition dump he was guarding; he followed them through the thick brush to a native hut in a clearing, where he spotted six

Japanese. Opening fire, he killed one and wounded another before the survivors fled. Returning to camp, Woodward got five of his comrades to join him in hunting down the enemy and before they were through they had killed two more of the Japanese, one of them falling to Woodward's rifle. For his courage and initiative, he was decorated with the Bronze Star on 11 January 1945, an award subsequently upgraded to the Silver Star.[20]

Combat on Peleliu

The 11th Marine Depot Company, raised at Montford Point on 7 October 1943, had originally joined the 4th Base Depot on Banika when it went overseas in December, but in July 1944 it was transferred to Guadalcanal and joined the 16th Field Depot, which supported the 1st Marine Division. In August, the 7th Marine Ammunition Company, formed only four months before at Montford Point, arrived and also joined the 16th Depot. The two black Marine companies were destined to take part in the bloody battle for the island of Peleliu in the Palau Islands.

On the last day of August, the 1st Marine Division mounted out for the operation, and on 15 September its assault waves began landing on Peleliu in the face of heavy enemy fire. For the first few days, most of the black Marines served in ships' platoons unloading supplies for the run to the beaches, but soon, in small detachments, they began to come ashore to work in the dumps, to move supplies and ammunition to the front lines, and to help evacuate the wounded.

The fierceness of the Japanese resistance on the small island was soon attested to by the mounting toll of black casualties. The first black Marine wounded was Private Dyrel A. Shuler of the ammunition company, hit on 20 September. Two days later, the 11th Depot had its first casualty, Private Predell Hamblin. Then, on 23 and 24 September, eight of the depot company Marines were wounded by enemy fire: Corporal Clifford W. Stewart; PFCs Willie A. Rushton; Carleton Shanks, Jr.,; Kenneth R. Stevens; Edward J. Swain; Bernard L. Warfield; and Earl L. Washington; and Private Joseph Williams. Two days later, six more men were wounded: Corporal Lawrence V. Cole; PFCs Irving A. Banks; Timothy Black; Paul B. Cook; Oscar A. Edmonds; and Edgar T. Grace. In October, two more men of the 11th Depot Company were wounded, both on the 19th, Gunnery Sergeant Victor B. Kee and Private Everett Seals, giving the company the highest casualty rate of any black Marine unit in World War II.

The 7th Ammunition Company suffered the last black Marine casualties on Peleliu. Corporal Charles E. Cain was wounded on 9 October and Private John Copeland died of wounds received the same day. On the 26th, PFC James E. Moore was hit, and Private John Edmunds was wounded and evacuated on the last day of October.

The fighting on the island was as intense as any in the Pacific war and the two black Marine companies bore their share of the load. Even while the close combat was raging, Major General William H. Rupertus, commanding the 1st Division, wrote an identical letter of commendation to each of the commanding officers, which stated:

> 1. The performance of duty of the officers and men of your command has, throughout the landing on Peleliu and the assault phase, been such as to warrant the highest praise. Unit commanders have repeatedly brought to my attention the whole-hearted cooperation and untiring efforts exhibited by each individual.
>
> 2. The Negro race can well be proud of the work performed by the 7th Ammunition Company [11th Depot Company] as they have demonstrated in every respect that they appreciate the privilege of wearing a Marine uniform and serving with Marines in combat. Please convey to your command these sentiments and inform them that in the eyes of the entire Division they have earned a "Well Done."[21]

Combat on Iwo Jima

Black Marines were also present and accounted for at the largest all-Marine amphibious operation in the Pacific—Iwo Jima. Besides the Stewards' Branch personnel who served in all combat operations that the ammunition and depot companies took part in, the black Marines that landed on the small volcanic island were all members of the 8th Field Depot. As part of that unit they were cited with the rest of the support troops of the V Amphibious Corps in the Navy Unit Commendation awarded for their part in the furious month-long battle for Iwo Jima.

All four of the black Marine companies at Iwo were assigned to the V Corps shore party and two, the 8th Ammunition and 36th Depot, landed on D-Day, 19 February 1945. The soft,

Two black Marines take cover on the beach at Iwo Jima on D-Day while the shattered hulk of a DUKW smokes behind them. (USMC Photo 111123).

clinging volcanic sand and the almost constant enemy shellfire made life on the beaches a living hell, but the black Marines stuck to their jobs of unloading landing craft and amphibious vehicles. Amazingly, no one was hit for the first few days but then a steady attrition started.

On 22 February, a white officer, Second Lieutenant Francis J. DeLapp, and Corporal Gilman D. Brooks of the ammunition company were wounded. Three days later, PFC Sylvester J. Cobb from the same company was also wounded and Corporal Hubert E. Daverney and Private James M. Wilkins of the 34th Depot died of wounds received on the fire-swept beaches. Three other men from the 34th Company were hit on 25 February, Sergeant William L. Bowman, PFC Raymond Glenn, and Private James Hawthorne, Sr, as was a black Marine replacement, PFC William T. Bowen. The 34th Company's last casualty in February, PFC Henry L. Terry, was wounded the next day. The 33d and 34th Depot Companies had landed on 24 February after the men had served in ships' platoons getting supplies started on the way to the beach.

In early March the ammunition company suffered several more casualties. On the 2d, Private William L. Jackson was wounded and evacuated and PFC Melvin L. Thomas died of wounds. On 8 March, Private "J" "B" Saunders was wounded. As the fighting moved to the northern tip of the island the likelihood of further casualties in the black companies seemed remote. But the beleaguered Japanese had a painful surprise left for the Americans. Early on 26 March, 10 days after Iwo Jima was officially delcared secure, a well-armed column of 200-300 Japanese, including many officers and senior NCOs, slipped past the Marine infantrymen who had them holed up near the northernmost airfield and launched a full-scale attack on the Army and Marine troops camped near the western beaches. The units struck included elements of the Corps Shore Party, the 5th Pioneer Battalion, Army Air Forces squadrons, and an Army antiaircraft artillery battalion. The action was wild and furious in the dark; it was hard to tell friend from foe since many Japanese were armed with American weapons.[22] The black Marines were in the thick of the fighting and took part in the mop-up of the enemy remnants at daylight. Two members of the 36th Marine Depot Company, Privates James M. Whitlock and James Davis, both received Bronze Star Medals for "heroic achievement in connection with operations against the enemy." [23]

There was a cost too for the black Marines. PFC Harold Smith of the 8th Ammunition Company died of wounds received in the fighting; Corporals Richard M. Bowen and Warren J. McDaughtery were wounded but survived. The 36th Depot Company lost Private Vardell Donaldson who succumbed to his wounds, but PFC Charles Davis and Private Miles Worth recovered from their injuries.

The Commander, Corps Shore Party, Colonel Leland S. Swindler, who was also commander of the 8th Field Depot, was particularly pleased with the actions of the black Marines in this battle and in his report for Iwo Jima stated that he was:

> . . . highly gratified with the performance of these colored troops, whose normal function is that of labor troops, while in direct contact with the enemy for the first time. Proper security prevented their being taken unaware, and they conducted themselves with marked coolness and courage. Careful investigation shows that they displayed modesty in reporting their own part in the action.[24]

Once the fighting was over, the units of the 8th Field Depot returned to Hilo in the Hawaiian Islands to prepare for the next operation. The rear echelons of the four black companies, which had moved forward to Saipan while the main bodies were on Iwo, now rejoined. The next deployment of the 8th Field Depot would have been during the invasion of Japan, but the ending of the war made it occupation duty instead.

Combat on Okinawa

The largest number of black Marines to serve in combat took part in the seizure of Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands, the last Japanese bastion to fall before the atomic bomb and the threat of invasion of the home islands combined to bring the war to an end. Three ammunition companies, the 1st, 3d, and 12th, and four depot companies, the 5th, 18th, 37th, and 38th, of the 7th Field Depot arrived at Okinawa on D-Day, 1 April 1945. Later in the month, the 20th Marine Depot Company came in from Saipan and in May the 9th and 10th Companies arrived from Guadalcanal and the 19th from Saipan.

The black Marines on the attack transport USS *Bladen* (APA-63), the 1st and 3d Ammuni-

tion Companies, the 5th Depot Company, and part of the 38th Depot, and those on the USS *Berrien* (APA-62), the rest of the 38th and part of the 37th Depot, took part in the 2d Marine Division demonstration landing off the southeast coast of Okinawa. At the same time the assault troops of the Tenth Army (III Amphibious Corps and the Army's XXIV Corps) went ashore on the western coast at the narrow waist of the 60-mile-long island. In the feint attack, the men climbed into landing craft, rendezvoused, formed assault waves, and roared in toward the beach, turning around 500 yards from the shoreline.[25] The next day this maneuver was repeated in hope that it would prevent the Japanese commander from moving troops north to oppose the actual landings.

On 3 April, most of the black Marines landed on the island, ready to support the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions, the assault troops of the III Corps. Unlike previous landings in which the depot and ammunition companies had been involved, there was little opposition on the beaches or in the first days ashore in the Marines' operational area, the northern two-thirds of the island. The Japanese had concentrated their defenses on the south, but there was more than enough action in the north to keep everyone in III Corps busy before the two Marine divisions moved south to join the main battle. Japanese air raids were frequent, mostly aimed at the cluster of ships offshore, and the barrier of antiaircraft fire thrown up loosed a deadly shower of shell fragments that often fell on the troops near the beaches.

Many of the casualties suffered by the black units occurred in April, when their camps and work areas were still relatively near the front lines. The 5th Marine Depot Company had

Three Marines of the 34th Depot Company on the beach at Iwo Jima, (l to r) PFCs Willie J. Kanady, Eugene F. Hill, and Joe Alexander. (USMC Photo 113835).

three men wounded, PFC Willie Hampton on the 6th, Private Therrance J. Mercier on the 15th, and Private Eldridge O. Oliver on the 28th. The 1st Ammunition Company had two men wounded, PFC Thomas Early on the 10th and PFC Joshua Nickens on the 15th. The 3d Marine Ammunition Company, veteran of the Saipan and Tinian operations, suffered one of its last casualties of the war when Private Clifford Bryant was also wounded on 15 April. The 38th Depot Company had one man wounded, PFC Alvin A. Fitzpatrick, on 27 April. One of the blacks assigned to the officers' mess of the 29th Marines, Steward's Assistant 1st Class Joe N. Bryant, was wounded on 5 April, and in the 1st Marine Division's headquarters, Steward's Assistant 2d Class Ralph Woodkins caught a shell fragment in his face on 12 April.

Once the Tenth Army started to drive south with its two corps abreast striking against the deeply dug-in Japanese, the black labor troops had formidable transportation problems. Distances to the front lines lengthened and the roads turned into quagmires when the spring rains began to fall in torrential proportions. Carrying parties had to be organized to get supplies and ammunition to the troops and bring the casualties out of the forward areas. The black Marines of the depot and ammunition companies struggled with heavy and vital loads going both ways. Casualties were scattered, but continued to occur. Private Arthur Bowman, Jr., of the 12th Ammunition Company and Private Charles L. Burton of the 3d Ammunition Company were wounded in May and PFC Clarence H. Jackson of 3d Ammunition and PFC Richard E. Hines of 10th Depot in June.

The stewards in corps, wing, division, and regimental headquarters, some of whom volunteered as stretcher bearers when the fighting was heaviest, did not escape unscathed. Steward 2d Class Warren N. McGrew, Jr., was killed and shell fragments wounded Steward's Assistant 3d Class Willie Crenshaw of the 1st Division on 9 May and four days later two men in the 6th Division, Cook 3d Class Horace D. Holder and Steward's Assistant 3d Class Norman "B" Davis, were both struck in the same fashion. On 26 May, three stewards on the 29th Marines headquarters, Steward's Assistant 1st Class Joe N. Bryant, Steward's Assistant 3d Class Jerome Caffey, and Private Morris E. Clark, were all wounded; Bryant's second wound in the campaign gave him an unsought-after "first" among black Marines. On the whole, however, considering the fury and length of the battle, the black Marines were lucky to have suffered so few casualties out of the more than 2,000 Montford Point men who served on Okinawa.

When the island was declared secure on 22 June 1945, there was little let-up in the workload of the black service troops. Okinawa was to be the principal supply and staging area for the invasion of Japan. Ships arrived continuously and supply dumps expanded to enormous proportions. When the war ended in mid-August, the thrust of preparations turned to occupation duty not only in Japan but in North China, where Marines were to help repatriate the Japanese troops and civilians in Hopeh and Shantung Provinces. Some of the black units that had served in the Okinawa operation would go forward to North China which was the objective of the III Amphibious Corps; others would remain on the island to help support the occupation effort. Similarly,

Men of the 12th Ammunition Company rest at the base of a Japanese Memorial on Okinawa during the drive to the north in April; on the steps (l to r), PFC Floyd O. Snowdon, Sr., and Pharmacist's Mate 2d class James R. Martin, on the monument (l to r), Privates John T. Walton, and Robison T. Ellingburg, PFC Clyde Brown and Private Robert Brawner. (USMC Photo 117624).

some of the Marine depot and ammunition companies that had served on Iwo Jima would accompany the V Amphibious Corps to Kyushu, the Japanese home island choosen as the objective for Marine occupying forces.

Occupation Duty[26]

The Sixth Army, which had been destined to make the assault on Kyushu if the war had continued, now provided the occupation troops for the seizure of southern Japan. As part of that army, the V Amphibious Corps would occupy Kyushu and southern Honshu with the 2d and 5th Marine Divisions and the Army's 32d Infantry Division. Speculation about how the Japanese would receive the Americans was rife in late August. Would some diehards ignore the Emperor's orders to lay down all arms? The swift and bloodless occupation of Yokusuka naval base on Tokyo Bay by the reinforced 4th Marines on 30 August provided the answer. The Japanese were fully prepared to cooperate.

The V Corps could now plan for administrative landings rather than the show of force once thought necessary. Corps headquarters and service troops and the 5th Marine Division mounted out from the Hawaiian Islands in late August and early September. The black Marines, now part of the 8th Service Regiment (redesignated on 1 June from the 8th Field Depot), moved forward with the corps troops in a variety of transports and landing ships. The convoy paused at Saipan to pick up the 2d Marine Division. The objective of the 5th Division and Corps Headquarters was the Japanese Naval base at Sasebo on the northwest coast of Kyushu; the 2d Division would initially occupy Nagasaki, 30 miles to the south. Once the entry ports were secure, the Marines, and the Army troops to come up later on turn-around shipping, would spread out all over the large island with its population of 10,000,000 people.

Three ammunition companies, the 6th, 8th, and 10th, made the voyage to Japan together with the 24th, 33d, 34th, 42d, and 43d Depot Companies. All arrived and disembarked at Sasebo between 22 and 26 September. The 36th Marine Depot Company came up to Sasebo in late October with the rear echelon of the 8th Service Regiment. The duties of the black Marines were not onerous and certainly did not compare with the intense activity of a combat operation. The dangerous task of disposing of Japanese explosives was handled by the Japanese themselves with minimal American involvement.

The stay in Japan was not a long one. The need for strong, reinforced combat forces became less and less apparent as time wore on with nothing but cooperation from the Japanese. The demobilization pressure from the States was strong and there were thousands of men in the V Corps with enough points for discharge when the word came that the 5th Marine Division would return home in December. The low point men of the 5th Division shifted to the 2d Division which would remain in Japan, and the high point men of the 2d joined the 5th Division for the homeward voyage.

The same reductions in force and transfers were taking place among the black Marine units. The 24th Depot Company was disbanded at Nagasaki on 15 November and a month later the 6th Ammunition Company passed out of existence at Sasebo. In both cases the men were transferred to units remaining in Japan or destined for service on Guam. In early January, the 8th Ammunition Company and the 33d, 34th, and 36th Depot Companies set sail for Guam to join the 5th Service Depot (formerly the 5th Field Depot). The 33d and 34th Companies were disbanded on Guam before the month was out. The 36th Depot Company stayed in existence a few months longer, making it back to Montford Point via San Francisco for disbandment on 17 June 1946. The 8th Ammunition Company, destined to be the last of its type to serve on active duty, stayed on Guam.

In Japan, the end of black Marine involvement in occupation duties was in sight. Except for a few stewards whose number was dwindling as demobilization took its toll, the last organized black units were slated to go. The 42d and 43d Depot Companies, which had been raised together at Montford Point on 14 March 1945, were disbanded exactly one year later at Sasebo. All those men eligible for discharge were transferred to the 10th Ammunition Company and those who still had time to serve were transferred to the 6th Service Depot in Hawaii. The last black Marine unit in Japan, the 10th Ammunition Company, boarded the merchant marine transport SS *Dashing Wave* on 5 April 1946 bound for San Diego. A month later at Montford Point the company was disbanded.

The experience of the black Marines who went to North China was quite similar to that of the men who served in Japan. The 7th Service Regiment (old 7th Field Depot) would support the III Amphibious Corps and have most of its men serving in the Tientsin area of Hopeh Province with corps headquarters and the 1st Marine Division. Two companies, 12th Ammunition and 20th Depot, would help support the 6th Marine Division at Tsingtao in Shantung Province. The mission of III Corps was to repatriate the Japanese troops and civilians in North China and to try to keep from getting involved in the civil war raging between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists. Since the U.S. Government recognized and supported the Nationalists as the legitimate government of China, the chances for peaceful accommodations with the Communists were slim. So there was always the chance of an ambush or some shots fired by a hidden sniper at Marines on guard or convoy duty.

The 1st Ammunition Company and the 5th, 37th, and 38th Depot Companies all left Okinawa with the III Corps-1st Division convoy in late September 1945, moving through mine-strewn waters and stormy weather to reach the anchorage off the Hai River which led to Tientsin. On the 30th, the 1st Ammunition and 38th Depot Companies went ashore with the first troops to land at Tangku, the port town for Tientsin. The other companies landed a few days later and all found their way to Tientsin.

The initial reception of the black Marines by the Chinese was a wary one. One of the black first sergeants recalled:

> We were moving down the street after we got to Tientsin, we were going down to the Melchior Building, and the Chinese would run out and touch a Marine on the face because they were very black, we had been out in the sun for a long time, and rub their hands on their face and see if it would come off, like they thought it was painted or something.
>
> . . . And they stayed clear of the Negroes, wouldn't have nothing to do with them for about a week. But soon as they found that this paint wouldn't come off, or what they thought was paint, I couldn't hardly separate [them] and had hell keeping them out of the barracks. They got to be very charming and very lovely.[27]

Like their counterparts in Japan, the black Marines in North China found that most heavy labor was performed by Orientals. A good part of the black companies' tasks consisted of guard duty both in Tientsin and Tangku and on the trains, landing craft, and trucks which ran the 30 miles between the two. Liberty was good, but segregation was the order of the day in China as it was in Japan and black and white Marines tended to congregate in their own special haunts.

The repatriation mission was handled with dispatch and hundreds of thousands of Japanese were sent home in the first few months the Marines were in China. The 1st Division, however, got involved in an unexpected task, guarding coal mines, trains, bridges, and rail lines from Communist attacks to ensure that coal would reach the city of Shanghai, which depended on Hopeh's mines to keep its factories and utilities running. This meant that the division would at least remain in China through the winter until the Nationalists could be persuaded to take over the guard duties. The need for many of the reinforced units of III Corps was greatly lessened and troop strength was cut drastically.

In January 1946, following the pattern prevalent throughout North China as demobilization measures accelerated, the low point men of the black companies transferred to the units that were to remain and those eligible for discharge joined the units going home. The 5th Depot and 1st Ammunition Companies boarded ship, the attack transport USS *Bolivar* (APA-34), on 7 January after being lightered from the docks at Tangku to the anchorage off the Hai River mouth. The *Bolivar* sailed south to Tsingtao and picked up the homeward-bound 20th Depot Company. The three units stayed together through San Diego and Camp Pendleton, where the west coast Marines remained to be processed for discharge, and the rest of the men entrained for Montford Point. On 21 February 1946, the trio of companies was disbanded at the camp where they had started their wartime careers.

The 37th and 38th Depot Companies left Tangku on 2 March, the same day that the 12th Ammunition Company cleared Tsingtao, ending the tour of black Marine units in North China. The two ships carrying the black troops reached San Diego a few days apart because the ammunition company stopped over at Pearl Harbor to transfer low point men and regulars to the 6th Service Depot. The journey onward to Montford Point ended in early April, where on the 2d the depot companies disbanded and on the 5th the ammunition com-

pany followed suit. With the exception of the 8th Ammunition Company, still on Guam, all of the black units that had taken part in the occupation of Japan and North China were gone.

Windup in the Pacific

Only seven of the 12 ammunition companies and 12 of the 51 depot companies raised during the war saw combat. For the rest, the war must have been as frustrating as it was for the two black defense battalions, but those troops at least had the satisfaction of knowing that they were trained for combat and might eventually take part in the fighting. With the labor companies there was only the satisfaction of doing their job well with just an outside chance that they might be tapped for battle. In the meantime, their job was to toil away at the essential but largely unrecognized or rewarded labor tasks that kept the supply channels filled to the combat echelons of the Marine Corps. In the 4th Service Depot on Banika, the 5th on Guam, and the 6th on Oahu and in the service and supply battalions on other islands, the routine was unending, 12-hour work days, six-day work weeks, with both periods lengthening when the schedule was stepped up to support new operations in forward areas.

The Hawaiian Islands at least had a tradition of multi-racial living and tolerance that softened the continued existence of segregation of blacks and whites in the services. The islands had towns and cities for liberty, places to go when time could be found. And the combat troops that rested and retrained there between operations had seen black Marines under fire on the beaches and knew that they had proved their mettle. Yet, there were continued reminders of the second-class status of blacks, racial slurs that were a reflection overseas of the situation at home. Some black Marines took the situation in stride, not expecting drastic change but seeing a gradual improvement in their status; other seethed with resentment at any unequal treatment, actual or imagined.

On Guam, which was very much a forward staging and supply area with few of the amenities that could be found in Hawaii, the inter-racial situation grew tense after the battle for the island was over. Yet, when a series of racial incidents flared up in December 1944, the black Marines were only peripherally involved. It is apparent when one reviews the lengthy 1,200-page report of the Court of Inquiry which resulted that the principal antagonists were white Marines and black sailors and that the black Marines generally kept to themselves and clear of entanglements.[28]

On the side of the blacks there was evidence that some white Marines, mainly members of the 3d Marine Division, were harassing individual blacks, shouting racial epithets, throwing stones and even, on occasion, smoke grenades into black encampments as they raced by in trucks. There was an apparent move to scare blacks away from Agana, the island capital, and make it, and the native women who lived there, a white preserve. In return, some blacks tended to act against individual whites when they had a chance, responding in kind with name calling and missiles. By mid-December 1944, the situation had grown serious enough in the eyes of the Island Command's Provost Marshal, Marine Colonel Benjamin A. Atkinson, for him to recommend to the island commander, Major General Henry L. Larsen, that he issue a general order on racial discrimination which was published on the 18th, stating:

> The present war has called together in our services men of many origins and various races and colors. All are presumed to be imbued with common ideals and standards. All wear the uniform of the United States. All are entitled to the respect to which that common service is entitled. There shall be no discrimination by reason of sectional birth, race, religion, or political beliefs. On the other hand, all individuals are charged with the responsibility of conducting themselves as becomes Americans.[29]

The sentiments were lofty, and certainly a truer reflection of the general's attitude than the famous remarks attributed to him at Montford Point in 1943. As the Court of Inquiry found, the general order was backed up by a serious intent to find and punish anyone who was indentified as a racial troublemaker. The order had little chance to take effect, however, before there was a series of shootings in and around Agana. In one, on 24 December, an off-duty white Marine MP fired on some blacks in the town without hitting anyone; more seriously, a white sailor shot and killed a black Marine of the 25th Depot Company in an argument over a native woman and a 27th Depot Company sentry shot a white Marine, who later died, who had harassed him on his post. Both men were convicted of voluntary manslaughter in subsequent trials.

The sum result of these incidents was that two truckloads of black sailors, labor troops

from the island's Naval Supply Depot, mistakenly believing the dead black to be one of their own men, roared into Agana to a confrontation with outnumbered Marine MPs. Nothing serious happened this time, but on Christmas Day there was a virtual repetition of this incident, which resulted in the arrest of 43 black sailors, who proved to be armed with an assortment of stolen pistols, knives, and other weapons. That night Marine MPs patrolling the roads adjacent to the black sailors' encampment were fired on and one man was hit. A shakedown of the black companies tents the following morning revealed a number of illegal weapons hidden away in the tents, some of them stolen from the supply depot armory.

General Larsen immediately convened a Court of Inquiry to investigate the circumstances attending "the unlawful assembly and riot." As president of the court he appointed Colonel Samuel A. Woods, Jr., the man who had organized Montford Point Camp. By happenstance, Mr. Walter W. White, Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was in the central Pacific on a visit and he came to Guam when he heard of the trouble. He made his own investigation of the series of incidents with the help of the Navy and eventually ended up as counsel for several of the black sailors involved in the abortive affray in Agana.

The month-long hearings ranged far beyond the actual events to examine the state of morale of black troops on Guam and the background of racial incidents. The board in its findings reported that there was no evidence of organized racial prejudice on the island, a point in which Mr. White concurred. The board did recommend, however, that the black sailors who had been arrested in Agana be tried for unlawful assembly and rioting. It also recommended that several white Marines who had been apprehended for harassing blacks be court martialled. This was later done and all accused, black and white, were convicted and received varying sentences according to the gravity of their offenses under military law.

As part of the hearings, several black Marines from the 2d and 4th Ammunition Companies were called as witnesses to testify as to the state of morale of their own units and their own experiences with racial prejudice on Guam. Their responses indicated that the Marine companies, in contrast to the Navy labor companies from which the accused blacks had come, were well disciplined and had had only scattered experience with racial incidents. One sergeant, Walter Averiett of the 2d Company, ascribed the relatively recent rash of racial name calling to replacements who had joined the 3d Marine Division since the seizure of Guam, pointing out that the black Marines had gotten "along well with old Third Marines, the fellows who hit the island, the ones who were here before being shipped home." [30] One fact that did obviously rankle the black Marines though was that blacks could not advance to line staff NCO rank in ammunition companies because these billets were held by white Marines. And it did not sit well with them either that the one black staff NCO in their companies, the mess sergeant, was not quartered with the other staff sergeants.

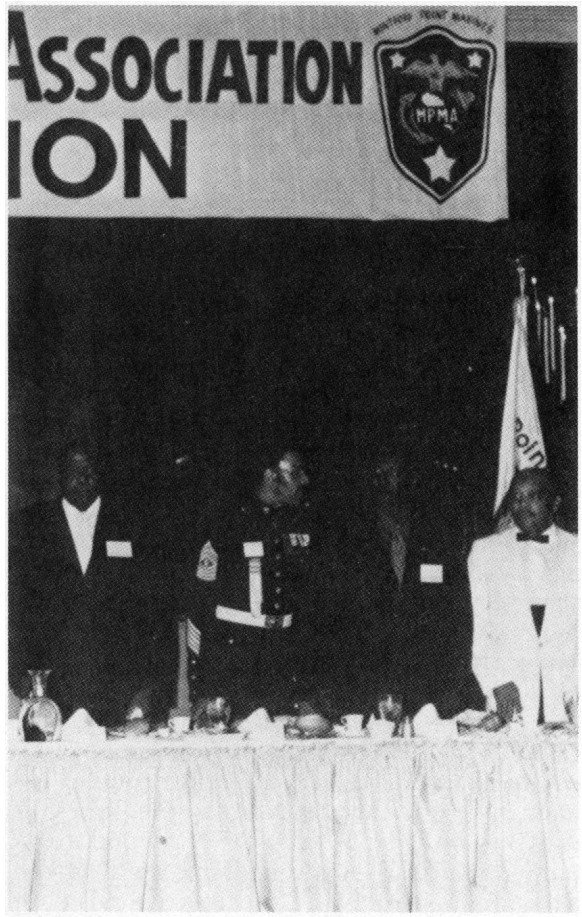
The so-called "Third Battle of Guam" was a minor *cause celebre* for a time, but it faded into the backwash of the war as the fighting came to a conclusion at Okinawa. Like other Marine units, the depot and ammunition companies were scheduled for return from the Pacific or disbandment as the requirement for their services lessened. There was a constant interchange of low point men with high point veterans as some companies left for home and others remained for a time overseas. The 4th Marine Depot Company was disbanded on Guam on 31 October 1945, the first such unit to go out of existence. The first three depot companies to go overseas returned together from Banika on the light cruiser *St. Louis* (CL-49) in December, disbanding at Montford Point on 4 January 1946. The first of the ammunition companies to disappear was the 6th which stood down in Sasebo on 15 December 1945. On 20 January, the 2d Ammunition Company disbanded on Guam and a month later (21 February) the 1st Ammunition Company was disbanded at Montford Point, followed five days later by the 3d Company.

In the early days of 1946, the rush to get the veterans qualified for discharge home used every conceivable type of Navy ship. Some black units returned to the States on escort carriers, some on cruisers, others on transports and cargo vessels. The routine was much the same in most cases, a stopover in California at Camp Pendleton to drop off those men being discharged on the west coast and a cross-country train trip for the rest to Montford Point and discharge there.

By mid-summer all but a few of the depot and ammunition companies had gone out of existence. On Oahu the sole remaining units were the 47th Depot Company and the 3d Platoon, 8th Ammunition Company, redesignated from a similar unit of the 11th Ammunition Company. This platoon, stationed at the Naval Ammunition Depot, Makaha Valley, was initially commanded by a black Marine, Platoon Sergeant Agrippa W. Smith, before a white officer was detailed to the task. On Guam the rest of the 8th Ammunition Company and the 49th Depot Company were all that remained of the units formed during and immediately after the war.

On 31 October 1946, the 47th Depot Company, now down to a strength of one officer, 18 black Marines and two black Navy medical corpsmen, was disbanded. In November, the ammunition platoon at Makaha Valley boarded ship for Guam and was disbanded there on its arrival on the 25th, its 80 men being absorbed by the parent 8th Ammunition Company. Eleven months later, on 30 September 1947, both the 8th and 49th Companies were deactivated and their men were transferred to the Headquarters and Service and Depot Support Companies of the 5th Service Depot; the latter company was a postwar organization designated as a black unit of the FMF.

Despite the unglamorous nature of the work they performed, the ammunition and depot companies of World War II helped make the reputation of black Marines, setting a high standard of discipline and combat effectiveness. The men, in common with most black servicemen during the war, suffered many personal slights as a result of segregation practices both in the States and overseas, but these shared adversities had the effect of bringing them closer together both as blacks and as Marines. When, in later years, an organization composed primarily of black Marine veterans was formed, its first president, Master Gunnery Sergeant Brooks E. Gray, Jr., would note: "There was much pride mixed with bitterness, in all of us at Montford Point during World War II. Real, as well as imagined, injustices were with us daily in those segregated units." But this situation "sparked a fierce determination to excel," and, he observed: "We represented the break-through of the final barrier in the American military by being part of the elite corps. . . ." [31]



Officials of the Montford Point Marine Association at their 1971 convention in New Orleans, (l to r) Sergeant Major Gilbert H. "Hashmark" Johnson, USMC (Ret.), Master Gunnery Sergeant Brooks E. Gray, Jr., USMC, Mr. William Hill, and Dr. Leonard L. Burns. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Burns).

For the depot and ammunition company veterans, this attitude of pride in having been successful Marines, in having done the job they were given to do and done it well, overrode other memories. The seemingly endless hours sweating in ships' holds, moving heavy loads across beaches and piers of a hundred islands, and stocking and sorting tons of supplies in a succession of dreary dumps had the virtue of toughening the men both physically and mentally. Looking back on it all, one veteran of the 3d Ammunition Company, Robert D. Little, summed up his, and others, feelings when he said: "If I had to do it all over again, I'd still be a black Marine . . . I think they made a man of me." [32]