

reached the summit near twilight, only to discover that the ridge's northeast extension led to still higher ground, from which its defenders were pouring fire upon the contested Hill 100. Equally threatening was fire from the enemy caves inside the parallel ridge to the west, called Five Brothers. In the settling darkness Pope's men, liberally supported by 2/1's heavy mortars, were able to hang on. Throughout the night, there was a series of enemy probes and counterattacks onto the ridge top. They were beaten off by the support-

ing mortars and by hand-to-hand brawls involving not only rifles but also knives, and even rocks, thrown intermittently with grenades, as supplies of them ran low. Pope's men were still clinging to the ridge top when dawn broke; but the number of unwounded Marines was by now down to eight. Pope was ordered to withdraw and was able to take his wounded out. But the dead he had to leave on the ridge, not to be recovered until 3 October, when the ridge was finally recaptured for good. This action was illustrative and prophet-

ic of the Japanese defenders' skillful use of mutually supporting positions throughout Umurbrogol.

By D plus 4, the 1st Marines was a regiment in name only, having suffered 1,500 casualties. This fact led to a serious disagreement between General Rupertus, who kept urging Puller onward, and the general's superior, Major General Roy S. Geiger, III Amphibious Corps commander. Based on his own experiences in commanding major ground operations at Bougainville and Guam, Geiger was very aware of the lowered combat efficiency such losses impose upon a committed combat unit.

*Near the edge of a clearing, a Marine rifleman fires a rifle grenade with good effect into an enemy position up ahead into the northern, difficult portion of Peleliu.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 96106



On 21 September, after visiting Colonel Puller in his forward CP and observing his exhausted condition, and that of his troops, Geiger conferred in the 1st Division CP with Rupertus and some of his staff. Rupertus was still not willing to admit that his division needed reinforcement, but Geiger overruled him. He ordered the newly available 321st Regiment Combat Team (RCT), 81st Infantry Division, then on Angaur, to be attached to the Marine division. Geiger further ordered Rupertus to stand down the 1st Marines, and to send them back to Pavuvu, the division's rear area base in the Russell Islands.

On 21 September (D plus 5), Rupertus had ordered his 7th Marines to relieve what was left of the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 1st Marines. By then, the 1st Marines was reporting 1,749 casualties. It reported killing an estimated 3,942 Japanese, the capture of 10 defended coral ridges, the destruction of three blockhouses, 22 pillboxes, 13 antitank guns, and 144 defended caves.

In that fighting the assault battalions had captured much of the crest required to deny the enemy observation and effective fire on the airfield and logistic areas. Light aircraft had begun operating on D plus 5 from Peleliu's scarred, and still-under-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 95661  
*At a conference held in the 1st Marine Division command post, Col Harold D. "Bucky" Harris, 5th Marines commander, center, explains to MajGen Roy S. Geiger, Commanding General, III Amphibious Corps, left, and MajGen William H. Rupertus, commander of the division, his plan of operations in northern Peleliu.*

repair airfield. With Purple Beach in American control, the division's logistical life-line was assured. Although the Japanese still had some observation over the now operating airfield and rear areas, their reduced capability was to harass rather than to threaten.

Furthermore, the Marine front lines in the Umurbrogol had by now reached close to what proved to be the final Japanese defensive positions. Intelligence then available didn't tell that, but the terrain and situation suggested that the assault requirements had been met, and that in the Umurbrogol it was time for siege tactics. The Japanese defenders

also learned that when aerial observers were overhead, they were no longer free to run their weapons out of their caves and fire barrages toward the beach or toward the airfield. When they tried to get off more than a round or two, they could count on quick counter-battery, or a much-dreaded aerial attack from carrier-based planes, or—after 24 September—from Marine attack planes operating from the field on Peleliu.

### *The Early Battle in the Division Center*

On D plus 1, when the 1st Marines had launched their costly Umur-

brogol assault, the 5th Marines on its right also faced an assault situation, but one of substantially less opposition and easier terrain. Lieutenant Colonel Boyd's 1/5 had to fight across the airfield, from southwest to northeast, and through the built-up area similar to that which faced Honowetz's 2/1. The battalion was subjected to observed fire from the Umurbrogol and to small arms fire from Japanese defenders in the rubble-filled built-up area. Boyd's coordinated tank-infantry attack quickly carried the day. He soon had control of that area, and the east-west, cross-island road, which could lead the 5th toward its next objective, the eastern peninsula of Peleliu.

On the 5th Marines' right, 2/5 had a more difficult time. Its progress was stubbornly opposed by infantry from the woods on its right, and by artillery from Umurbrogol, which took a particular interest in the tanks 2/5 was using to support its attack along the edge of the woods. Whether the Japanese infantry in those woods had been posted to defend that position, or whether they were just surviving Japanese infantry from the D-Day counterattack, was never established. The fight took all day and inflicted heavier casualties on Gayle's battalion than had D-Day. By dusk, 2/5 had battled beyond the north end of the airfield, and halted for the night near the woods concealing the approaches to the eastern peninsula.

As the two-battalion attack of the 5th Marines (D plus 1) was heavily engaged on its front and right, the regimental headquarters near the beach was hit by an artillery barrage which, coupled with D-Day's loss of 3/5's commanding officer and executive officer, engendered a significant rearrangement in command assignments. The early D plus 1 barrage hit the regimental CP, took out numbers of the staff, and buried the regimental commander in the crumbling Japanese antitank trench in which the CP was "sheltered." Fortunately, the

burial was temporary, and Colonel Harris emerged with a twisted and battered leg, but still able to hobble. Two of his principal staff officers were casualties, and his sergeant major killed. Harris elected not to be evacuated, but he needed help in the regimental CP. Ordering Lieutenant Colonel Walt back from the 3d Battalion to the regimental CP, Harris directed the commanding officer of 2/5 to send his executive officer, Major John H. Gustafson, to take command of 3/5. Then Harris directed Boyd to send his 1/5 operations officer, Major Hierome Opie, to join 3/5 as Gustafson's executive officer.

Fortunately, 3/5 was having a relatively quiet day, unlike its hair-raising regrouping on the night of D-Day. After daylight, as 2/5 attacked north, 3/5 stretched along the east edge of the mangrove lagoon which separated Peleliu from the eastern peninsula. In that position, 3/5 also tied into 3/7 as that battalion attacked south. Thus 3/5 protected each regiment's flank against any Japanese movement across the intervening water, and into the rear of the attacking battalions. No such threat developed, and as the afternoon grew on, there emerged a more pressing employment for 3/5.

As Walt returned to his post beside the now only semi-mobile Harris, Major Gustafson was told to get 3/5 into position to bolster and then relieve 1/5, as it closed in on its O-2 objectives.

Throughout the next day (D plus 2), the 5th Marines kept tied in with the 1st Marines on its left and captured some control of the foot of the East Road. On the right, 2/5 hacked and combed its way through the jungle and mangrove north of the airfield, alongside the road leading toward the eastern peninsula. The thick scrub, nearly impenetrable, reduced progress to a crawl. It compensated by concealing most of the advancing Marines from enemy observation from high ground to 2/5's north and northwest.

That 5th Marines' forward position generally coincided with the northeast sector of the airfield earlier mentioned. Possession of that visual boundary meant that in most places on the regimental right, front-line Marines were spared the hostile observation and directed fire from Umurbrogol. As with the 7th Marines, largely hidden in the jungle of the south, this lessened the need for headlong assault. There would now be freedom to maneuver more deliberately and to coordinate supporting fire more carefully.

### *The 7th Marines' Complete Destruction of Enemy in the South*

In the south, from D plus 1 through D plus 3, the 7th Marines was in vigorous assault against extensive fortifications in the rear of the Scarlet Beaches. These were defended by a full battalion, the elite *2d Battalion, 15th Regiment*. Although isolated and surrounded by the Marines, this battalion demonstrated its skill and its understanding of Colonel Nakagawa's orders and mission: to sell Peleliu at the highest possible price. The 7th Marines attacked with 3/7 on the left and 1/7 on the right. They enjoyed the advantage of attacking the extensive and well-prepared defenses from the rear, and they had both heavy fire support and the terrain for limited maneuver in their favor. Both sides fought bitterly, but by 1530 on 18 September (D plus 3), the battle was substantially over. The Marines had destroyed an elite Japanese reinforced infantry battalion well positioned in a heavily fortified stronghold. Colonel Hanneken reported to General Rupertus that the 7th Marines' objectives he had set for D-Day were all in hand. The naval gunfire preparation had been significantly less than planned. The difference had been made up by time, and by the courage, skill, and additional casualties of the infantry companies of 1/7 and 3/7.

Now the 7th Marines, whose 2d Battalion was already in the thick of the fight for Umurbrogol, was about to move out of its own successful battle area and into a costly assault which, by this time, might have been more economically conducted as a siege.

### *Maneuver and Opportunity*

As the 7th Marines moved to its mission, the 5th Marines was again successfully opening up opportunities on Peleliu's eastern, "lobster claw" peninsula. Most of those opportunities, unfortunately were never exploited.

By the end of D plus 2, the 5th Marines stood at the approach to the eastern peninsula, and astride the East Road just east of the 1st Marines' terrible struggle in Umurbrogol. It had fought somewhat clear of the galling fires from Umurbrogol, and planned an assault on the eastern peninsula across a narrow causeway, which the Japanese should certainly defend. Then a D plus 3 reconnaissance of the causeway revealed that the causeway was not defended. The 2d Battalion hastened to seize the opportunity and moved across in strength. The attack was hit by its own supporting fires. The forward battalion CP group was strafed by Navy planes and then hit by artillery airburst, causing the loss of 18 battalion headquarters personnel to "friendly fire."

Nevertheless, a bridgehead across the causeway was well established on D plus 3, and the 5th Marines' Colonel Harris moved to exploit it. During the afternoon, he thinned his forces holding the East Road sector, gave the former 3/5 mission to Company L, 3/5, and gave the remainder of 3/5 a new mission. He ordered Gustafson into a position within the bridgehead established by 2/5, and further ordered both battalions then to capture and clear the eastern peninsula. Earlier he had expected



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 96936

*A Marine war dog handler reads a note just delivered by canine messenger, a Doberman Pinscher, one of the breeds used in the Pacific. This Marine has a pump shotgun.*

such an attack to be against the strong defending forces originally reported on the eastern peninsula. However, the apparent reduction of defending forces now appeared to offer an opportunity to seize Purple Beach quickly, a logistic prize of some significance. Harris knew that the division would need to shift its logistical axis to Purple Beach, away from the fire from Umurbrogol, and away from the threat of westerly storms.

Before dark, Gustafson moved two of his 3/5 companies across the causeway, and moved his own CP group in with the 2/5 CP, where the two commanders jointly planned the next day's advance. Hoping for little resistance, they directed rapid movement, but armed their point units with war dog sections to guard against ambush. Their lead companies moved out just after dawn. In the 3/5 sector, there was an ambush,

but the war dogs warned of, and effectively thwarted, the attempted surprise.

By the end of D plus 4, the two battalions had cleared the main body of the eastern peninsula and had reached Purple Beach from the rear. The defenses were most impressive, but many were unmanned. Those enemy troops encountered seemed more interested in hiding than in fighting, leading to speculation that Nakagawa's trained infantry had been moved west to the fight on D-Day and/or D plus 1. By D plus 5, Purple Beach was cleared, as were the long peninsulas southwest and northeast of Purple Beach. On D plus 6, 2/5 seized the two islands immediately north of the northeast peninsula, and the next day occupied the small unnamed islet just 1,000 yards east of the northern ridges of Peleliu.

From that position, and positions

elsewhere on the other islands, and near Ngardololok, there appeared to be many opportunities to attack by fire against the cave-infested north-south ridges of central and northern Peleliu. Such positioning of heavy weapons would be very difficult, but relative to the intense infantry battles underway in Umurbrogol, such difficulties seemed acceptable. Many of the prospective targets could have been vulnerable to direct, flat trajectory fire across the front of U.S. units advancing north in central Peleliu. Corps artillery units had conducted such direct fire training before embarking for the Peleliu campaign. Such tactical advantages and opportunities from the eastern peninsula were advocated but never exploited. Only later, in the fighting for northern Peleliu was the 5th Marines able to secure point-blank, heavy, single-gun fire support.

### *Encirclement of the Umurbrogol Procket*

With southern and eastern Peleliu captured, there now began an encirclement of the Japanese defenders in central Peleliu, and an attack against the Japanese defending northern Peleliu and nearby Ngesebus and Kongauru. This was the obvious next tactical phase for combat on Peleliu. However, securing it was less necessary for the basic Peleliu tactical and strategic goals than for the mopping-up of the island. As the 1st Marine Division's Assistant Commander, Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, later phrased it, "by the end of the first week, the Division had control of everything on the island that it then needed, or later used."

The airfield had been seized, was under repair and improvement, and in use. It was no longer any threat, if it had ever been, to MacArthur's long-heralded return to the Philippines. Peleliu's best logistical beach (Purple) had been secured, providing a secure logistic axis to the main battle areas. The Japanese defenders in

their caves, and in northern Peleliu and on Ngesebus, retained some capability to harass American rear installations, but that was sharply curtailed by the Marines' counterfire.

Only two significant Japanese capabilities remained: they could bitterly resist from their cave positions and they had a limited capability to reinforce Peleliu from Babelthuap. Such reinforcement could only be by small-unit infiltration, which faced U.S. naval screening operations in the area. Likewise, American encirclement of the stubborn Umurbrogol Pocket faced two obstacles. First was the lack of additional maneuver regiments from III Amphibious Corps' reserve. General Geiger in fact had no corps reserve pending the release of some units from the forces involved in the seizure of Angaur. That landing by the 81st Infantry Division (less the 323d RCT) had been launched on 17 September, after which there was no corps reserve.

The operation on Angaur, the planning which attended it and the decision on its timing, impacted heavily upon the Peleliu operation. The naval planners early on proposed landing on Angaur before Peleliu. Only when Major General Julian C. Smith, commanding Expeditionary Troops/X-Ray Planning Group, explained that such timing would invite the numerous Japanese in northern Palau to reinforce Peleliu was it agreed that Angaur be assaulted only after the Peleliu landing was assured of success. However, the Angaur landing was initiated before the Peleliu landing had been clearly resolved. The commanding general of the 81st Division wanted to land as soon as possible, and he was supported in his view by his naval task unit commander, Rear Admiral William H. P. Blandy. Opposing the 17 September date for the Angaur landing was Marine Major General Julian Smith. Smith argued that committing the element of III Corps Reserve before the Peleliu operation was more

fully developed would be premature. His advice was ignored by Vice Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson.

A related decision on 17 September committed the III Corps' final reserve to the Ulithi landing. The task was assigned to the Western Attack Force, which was ordered to seize Ulithi with "available resources." Over General Smith's advice, Wilkinson chose to commit the entire 323d RCT, the 81st Division's other maneuver element. The 321st subsequently and successfully occupied an undefended Ulithi while reserves were sorely needed at Peleliu.

By 20 September, the 81st Division had defeated or cornered all survivors of Angaur's 1,400 defenders. The 81st's commander declared Angaur secure. He tasked his 322d RCT to complete the mop-up, and reported to General Geiger that the 321st RCT was available for further operations. The lack of enough troops to begin encircling Umurbrogol was no longer an obstacle.

The other obstacle to reinforcing the division on Peleliu and encircling the Pocket lay in the thinking of

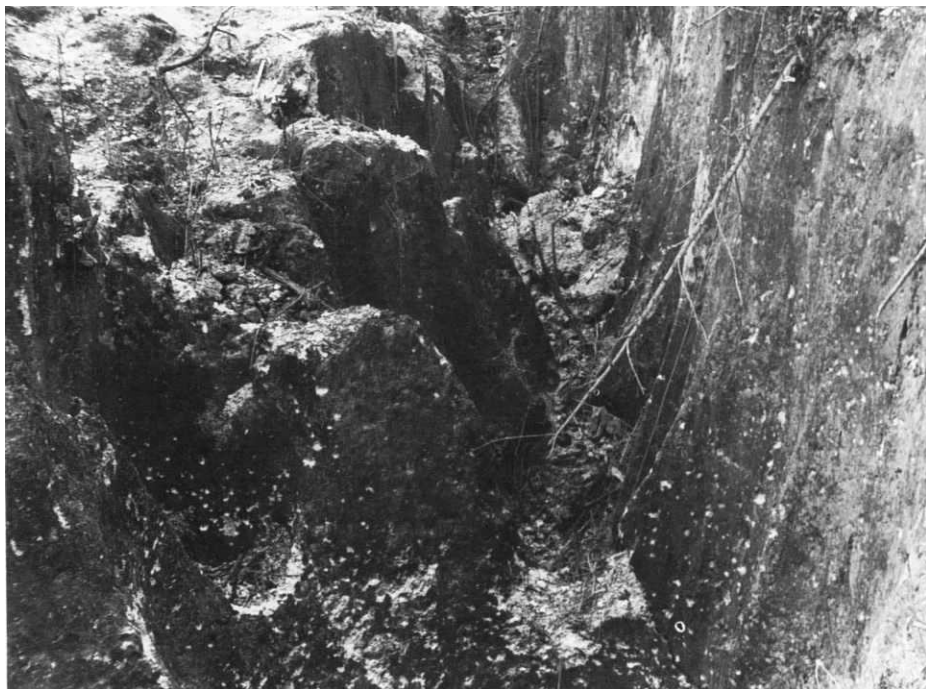
General Rupertus, who clung to a belief that his Marines could do it without help from the Army. The III Corps plan tasked the 81st Division to reinforce the Marines in seizing Peleliu and then to relieve the 1st Marine Division for the mop up, but the general continued to exhort his commanders to "hurry up."

Earlier, General Rupertus and Colonel Puller had shrugged off a suggestion from the 5th Marines' "Bucky" Harris that they take a look at the Umurbrogol Pocket from the newly available light planes of Marine Observation Squadron 3. Harris' own aerial reconnaissance, made immediately after those planes arrived on 19 September, had altered his view of the Umurbrogol from sober to grave. It convinced him that attacking the Pocket from the north would be less costly than the originally planned and ordered attempts from south to north. Both Puller and Rupertus responded to Harris that they had their maps.

The prelanding scheme of maneuver was built on the tactical concept that, after capturing the airfield, the

*Once the troops entered the Umurbrogol Mountain, they found sinkholes and difficult terrain much as pictured here. Japanese soldiers in the caves and heights above could fire at will at the Marines, who were like so many "fish in a barrel."*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 108432



1st Marine Division would push north along a line across the width of the main or western part of the island. Once abreast of the southern edge of Umurbrogol, that concept and maneuver scheme were reflected in a series of four west-to-east phase lines, indicating an expected linear advance, south to north. Clearly, it was expected that the advance along the flatter zones west and east of Umurbrogol would be at approximately the same pace as that along the high-central ground of Peleliu. Such thinking may have been consistent with Rupertus' prediction of a three-day assault. Developments in Sabol's sector to the west, and in the 5th Marines' sector to the east, apparently did not change division-level thinking. Until additional forces became available, such a linear advance may have seemed all that was possible.

Even so, there was no apparent reexamination of the planned south-to-north linear advance, and for days after the Pocket was sealed off at its northernmost extremity, the division commander kept ordering attacks from south to north, generally following the initial landing plan. As had been revealed to "Bucky" Harris in his early aerial reconnaissance of the Umurbrogol Pocket, such attacks would offer little but casualties. Troops, heavily supported, could advance into "the Horseshoe" and into "Death Valley," but the positions they reached then proved untenable and withdrawal was usual at day's end.

Some part of this thinking may have well come from the inadequacies of the map in use. The 5th Marines in early October produced a new and more representative sketch map. It located and identified the details within Umurbrogol sufficiently to facilitate maneuver and fire coordination.

That mapping effort, incidentally, led to the misnaming of Honsowetz Hill 100, where Captain Everett P. Pope earned his Medal of Honor.

The 5th's mapping team, launched after Harris' regiment was committed against the Pocket, encountered Lieutenant Colonel Walt, the regimental executive officer, on Hill 100 during their sketching, and so named the hill.

Even after General Geiger had ordered General Rupertus on 21 September to stand down Puller's shattered 1st Marines, General Rupertus expressed the belief that his Marines, alone, would shortly clear the entire island. After taking a closer look at the situation on the ground, Geiger ordered RCT 321 from Angaur and attached it to the Marine division. Encirclement of the Umurbrogol Pocket now became tactically feasible.

Capture of northern Peleliu and Ngesebus became more pressing with the discovery on 23 September that some part of the enemy's substantial troop strength in the northern Palaus was being infiltrated by barge from Koror and Babelthuap into northern Peleliu.

Although the naval patrol set to protect against just that reinforcing action had discovered and destroyed some of the Japanese barges, most enemy troops seemed to have wad-

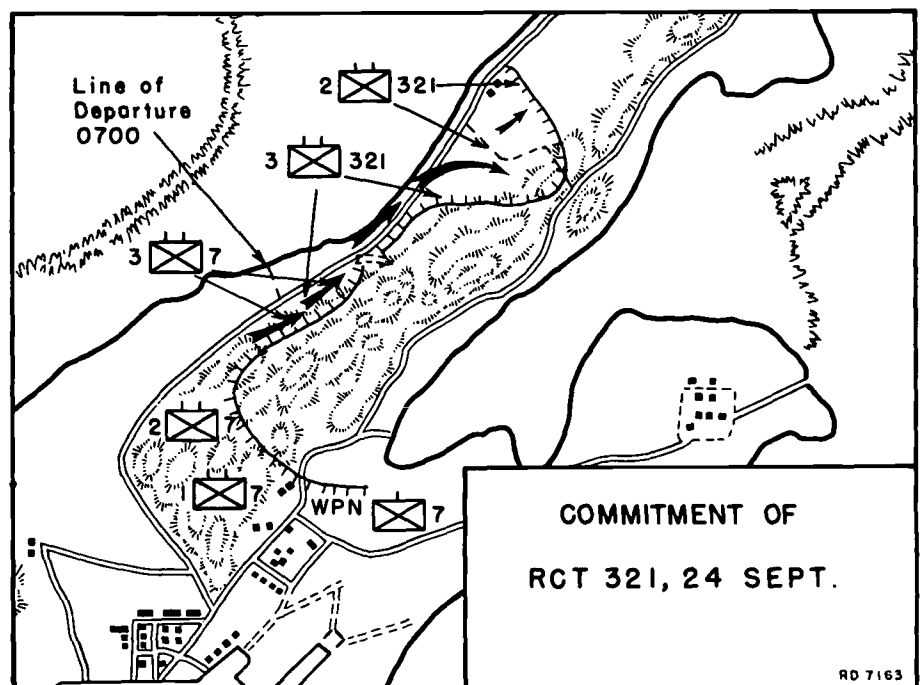
ed ashore on the early morning of 23 September. Colonel Nakagawa suddenly had reinforcements in the form of a partially mauled infantry battalion in northern Peleliu.

### *Encirclement of Umurbrogol and Seizure of Northern Peleliu*

A plan to encircle the Pocket, and deny reinforcement to northern Peleliu was immediately formulated. General Rupertus' staff was closely attended by selected III Corps staff officers, and General Geiger also was present.

The plan called for two regiments to move up the West Road, the Army 321st Infantry leading in the attack, and the 5th Marines following. The Marines were to pass through the Army unit after it had gone beyond the Pocket on its right, and the 5th would continue then to take northern Peleliu and Ngesebus.

The 321st RCT, by now battle tested, was tasked to push up the West Road, alongside and just atop the western edge of coral uplift which marked the topographical boundary between the flat western plain, and the uplifted coral "plateau." That plateau, about 300 yards west to east,

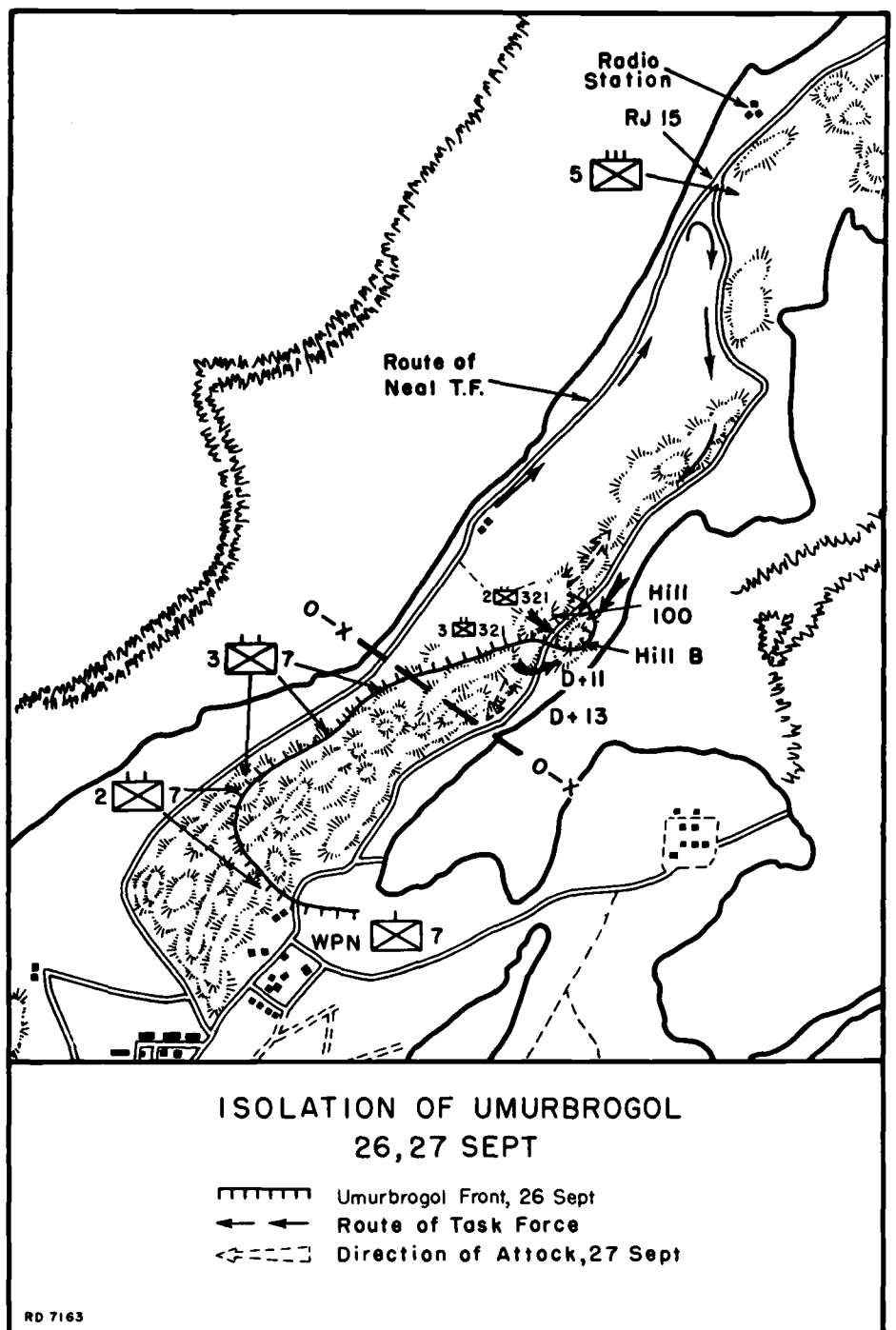


constituted the western shoulder of the Pocket. The plateau rose some 30-80 feet above the West Road. Its western edge, or "cliff," was a jumble of knobs and small ridges which dominated the West Road, and would have to be seized and cleared to permit unharrassed use of the road.

Once the 321st RCT was past this up-lift, and the Pocket which it bounded, it was to probe east in search of any routes east through the 600 yards necessary to reach the eastern edge of that portion of Peleliu. Any opportunities in that direction were to be exploited to encircle the Pocket on the north.

Behind the 321st RCT, the 5th Marines followed, pressed through, and attacked into northern Peleliu. Hanneken's 7th Marines relieved the 1st, which was standing down to the eastern peninsula, also relieving the 5th Marines of their then-passive security role. The 5th was then tasked to capture northern Peleliu, and to seize Ngesebus-Kongauru.

This maneuver would involve the use of the West Road, first as a tactical route north, then as the line of communications for continued operations to the north. The road was comparatively "open" for a distance about halfway, 400 yards, to the northern limit of the Pocket, and paralleled by the ragged "cliff" which constituted the western shoulder of the up-lifted "plateau." That feature was no level plateau, but a veritable moonscape of coral knobs, karst, and sinkholes. It had no defined ridges or pattern. The sinkholes varied from room-size to house-size, 10 to 30 feet in depth, and jungle- and vine-covered. The "plateau" was generally 30 to 100 feet above the plain of the road. Some 200-300 yards further to the east, it dropped precipitiously off into a sheer cliff, called the China Wall by those Marines who looked up to it from the southern and eastern approaches to the Pocket. To them, that wall was the western edge



of the Pocket and the coral "plateau" was a virtually impassable shoulder of the Pocket.

The plateau was totally impenetrable by vehicles. The coral sinkholes and uplifted knobs forced any infantry moving through to crawl, climb, or clamber down into successive small terrain compartments of rough and jagged surfaces. Evacuating any casualties would involve unavoidable rough handling of stretchers and their wounded passengers. The area was occupied and defended by scat-

tered small units and individuals who did not sally forth, and who bitterly resisted movement into their moonscape. When Americans moved along the West Road, these Japanese ignored individuals, took under fire only groups or individuals which appeared to them to be rich targets.

The only tactical option along the West Road was to seize and hold the coral spires and cliffs commanding the road, and to defend such positions against infiltrators. Once those heights were seized, troop units and

trucks could move along West Road. Until seized, the "cliff" offered concealment and some cover to occupying Japanese. Until those cliff positions were seized and held, the Japanese therein could be only temporarily silenced by heavy firepower. Until they were driven from their commanding positions, the road could not be treated as truly open.

Those terrain conditions existed for three-quarters of a mile along the West Road. There, abreast the north end of the Pocket, the plateau of coral sinkholes merged into a more systematic group of limestone ridges. These ridges trended slightly north-east, broadening the coastal strip to an east-west width of 200 to 400 yards.

Into that milieu, the 321st RCT was launched on 23 September, behind an hour-long intensive naval gunfire and artillery preparation against the high ground commanding the West Road. The initial Army reconnaissance patrols moved generally west of the road, somewhat screened from any Japanese still on the "cliff" just east of the road by vegetation and small terrain features. These tactics worked until larger units of the 2d Battalion, 321st, moved out astride the West Road. Then they experienced galling fire from the heights above the road.

The 321st's 2d Battalion had relieved 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, along an east-west line across the road, and up onto the heights just above the road. Near that point, the 1st Marines had been tied into the forward left flank of 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. The orders for the advance called for 3/7 to follow behind the elements of 2/321, along the high ground as the soldiers seized the succeeding west edge of the cliff and advanced northward. However, the advanced elements along the ridge were immediately out-paced by the other 2/321 elements in the flat to their west. Instead of fighting north to seize the ridge, units responsible



Caption and photo by Phillip D. Orr  
*Discovered during a trip to Peleliu in 1994 was this 1,000-man cave, littered with empty sake bottles, deep in the tunnels in the Amiangal Mountain in north Peleliu.*

for that cliff abandoned it, sidestepping down to the road. They then advanced along the road, and soon reported that 3/7 was not keeping contact along the high ground.

On orders from Colonel Hanneken, the 7th Marines' commanding officer, 3/7 then captured the high ground which 2/321 had abandoned, but at a cost which did little for inter-service relations. Thereafter, 3/7 was gradually further committed along the ridge within the 321st zone of action. This of course stretched 3/7, which still had to maintain contact on its right in the 7th Marines' zone, generally facing the southern shoulders of the Umurbrogol Pocket. Further north, as the 321st pressed on, it was able to regain some of the heights above its axis of advance, and thereafter held onto them.

Abreast the northern end of Umurbrogol Pocket, where the sinkhole terrain blended into more regu-

lar ridgelines, the 321st captured parts of a key feature, Hill 100. Together with an adjacent hill just east of East Road, and designated Hill B, that position constituted the northern cap of the Umurbrogol Pocket. Seizing Hill B, and consolidating the partial hold on Hill 100 would occupy the 321st for the next three days.

As the regiment probed this eastern path across the north end of Umurbrogol, it also pushed patrols north up the West Road. In the vicinity of the buildings designated "Radio Station," it reached a promising road junction. It was in fact the junction of West and East Roads. Colonel Robert F. Dark, commanding officer of RCT 321, determined to exploit that route, back south, to add a new direction to his attack upon Hill 100/Hill B. He organized a mobile task force heavy in armor and flamethrowers, designated Task



Force Neal, named for Captain George C. Neal. He sent it circling southeast and south to join 2/321's efforts at the Hill 100/Hill B scene. Below that battle, the 7th Marines continued pressure on the south and east fronts of the Pocket, but still attacking south to north.

As those efforts were underway, the 5th Marines was ordered into the developing campaign for northern Peleliu. Now relieved by the 1st Marines of its passive security mission on the eastern peninsula and its nearby three small islands, the 5th moved over the West Road to side-step the 321st action and seize northern Peleliu. Having received the division order at 1100, the 5th motored, marched, and waded (off the northeastern islets) to and along the West Road. By 1300, its 1st Battalion was passing through the 321st lines at Garekoru, moving to attack the radio station installations discovered by 321st patrols the previous afternoon.

In this area, the 5th Marines found flat ground, some open and some covered with palm trees. The ground was broken by the familiar limestone ridges, but with the critical tactical difference that most of the ridges stood alone. Attackers were not always exposed to flanking fires from mutually supporting defenses in adjacent and/or parallel ridges, as in the Umurbrogol. The Japanese had prepared the northern ridges for defense as thoroughly as they had done in the Umurbrogol, with extensive tunnels and concealed gun positions. However, the positions could be attacked individually with deliberate tank, flamethrower, and demolition tactics. Further, it developed that the defenders were not all trained infantrymen; many were from naval construction units.

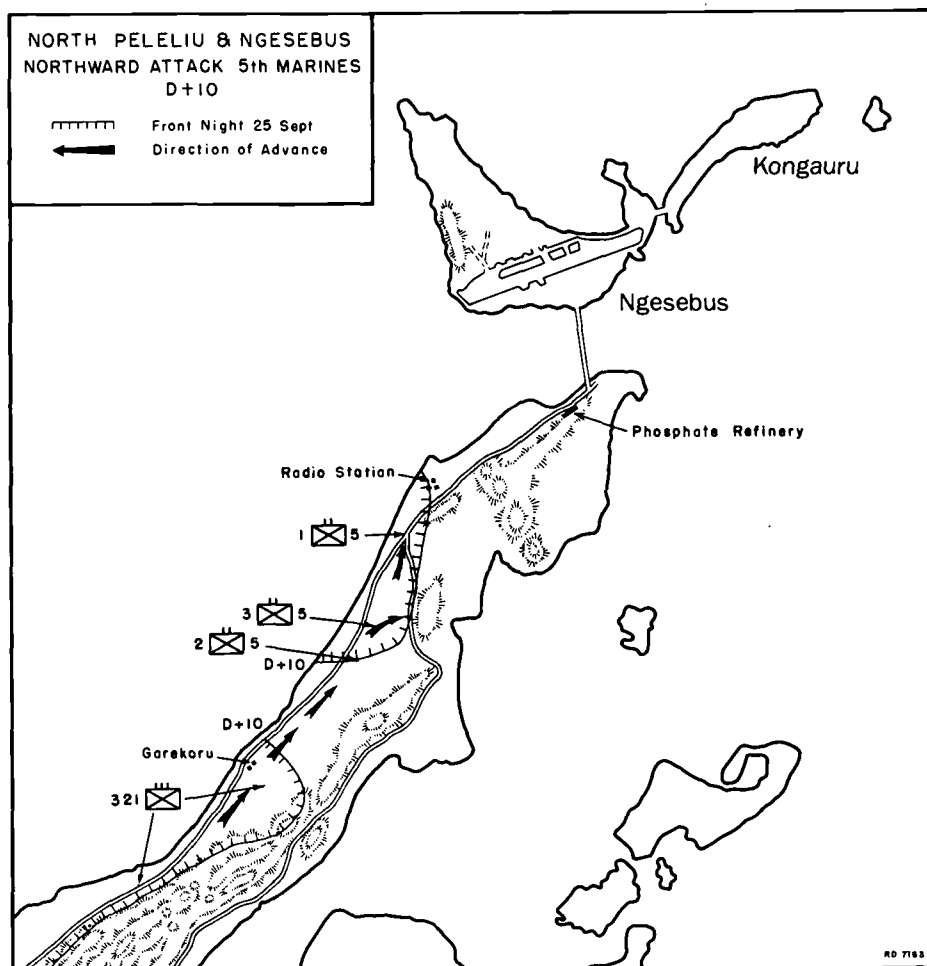
On the U.S. side of the fight, a weighty command factor shaped the campaign into northern Peleliu. Colonel Harold D. "Bucky" Harris was determined to develop all avail-

able firepower fully before sending his infantry into assault. His aerial reconnaissance earlier had acquainted him with an understanding of the terrain. This knowledge strengthened his resolve to continue using all available firepower and employing deliberate tactics as he pursued his regiment's assigned missions.

On the afternoon of 25 September, 1/5 seized the Radio Station complex, and the near portion of a hill commanding it. When 3/5 arrived, it was directed to seize the next high ground to the east of 1/5's position. Then when 2/5 closed, it tied in to the right of 3/5's position, and extended the regimental line back to the beach. This effectively broke contact with the 321st operations to the south, but fulfilled Colonel Harris' plans to advance north as rapidly as possible, without over-extending his lines. By suddenly establishing this regimental "beachhead," the 5th Marines had surprised the defenders

with strong forces challenging the cave defenses, and in position to engage them fully on the next day.

The following day, 26 September, as the 321st launched its three-pronged attack against Hill 100/Hill B (northern cap of the Umurbrogol Pocket) and the 5th Marines attacked four hills running east to west across Peleliu, dubbed Hills 1, 2, 3, and Radar Hill in Hill Row. The row was perpendicular to and south of the last northern ridge, Amiangel Mountain. These hills and the ridge were defended by some 1,500 infantry, artillerymen, naval engineers, and the shot-up reinforcing infantry battalion which landed the night of 23 September, in caves and interconnected tunnels within the ridge and the hills. As the fight for Hill Row developed, Colonel Harris had his 2d Battalion side-step west of Hill Row and begin an attack on the Amiangel ridge to the north. Before dark, the 2d Battalion had taken the southern end





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 95375

Marines using rifle grenades, hand grenades, and "Molotov cocktails" battle Japanese holed up in caves in northern Peleliu. Note the torch in the foreground which was used to ignite the "cocktails" and the flaming bottle of gas ready to be thrown.

and crest of the ridge, but was under severe fire from cave positions in the central and northwestern slopes of the ridge.

During the night of 27 September, one of the weapons from the 8th 155mm Gun Battalion was moved into position in 2/5's sector about 180 yards from Amiangal Ridge.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 95941

What was not yet appreciated was that the Marines were confronting the most comprehensive set of caves and tunnels on Peleliu. They were trying to invade the home (and defensive position) of a long-established naval construction unit most of whose members were better miners than infantrymen. As dark fell, the 2d Battalion cut itself loose from the units to its south, and formed a small battalion beachhead for the night.

The next morning, as the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, tried to move along the route leading to the northern nose of Amiangal Ridge, it ran into a wide and deep antitank ditch which denied the attacking infantry the close tank support they had so successfully used earlier. At this point, the 5th Marines command



asked, again, for point-blank artillery.

This time, division headquarters responded favorably. During the night of 27 September Major George V. Hanna's 8th 155mm Gun Battalion moved one of its pieces into position in 2/5's sector. The gun was about 180 yards from the face of Amiangal Ridge. The sight of that threat at dawn elicited enemy machine-gun fire which inflicted some casualties upon the artillerymen. This fire was quickly suppressed by Marine infantry fire, and then by the 155mm gun itself. Throughout the morning, the heavy 155mm fire played across the face of Amiangal Ridge, destroying or closing all identified caves on the west face, except for one. That latter was a tunnel mouth, down at ground level and on the northwestern base of the hill. It was too close to friendly lines to permit the gun to take it under fire. But by then, tanks had neutralized the tunnel mouth, and a tank bulldozer filled in a portion of the anti-tank ditch. This allowed 2/5's tank-infantry teams to close on the tunnel mouth, to blast and bulldoze it closed, and to press on around the northern nose of Amiangal. Simultaneously, Marines swept over the slopes above the tunnel and "seized" the crest of the small mountain.

The term seizure is qualified, for although 2/5 held the outside of the hill, the stubborn Japanese defenders still held the inside. A maze of interconnected tunnels extended throughout the length and breadth of the Amiangal Ridge. From time to time the Japanese inside the mountain would blast open a previously closed cave or tunnel mouth, and sortie to challenge the Marines. Notwithstanding their surprise effect, these counterattacks provided a rare and welcome opportunity for the Marines actually to see their enemy in daylight. Such tactics were inconsistent with the general Japanese strategy for Peleliu, and somewhat

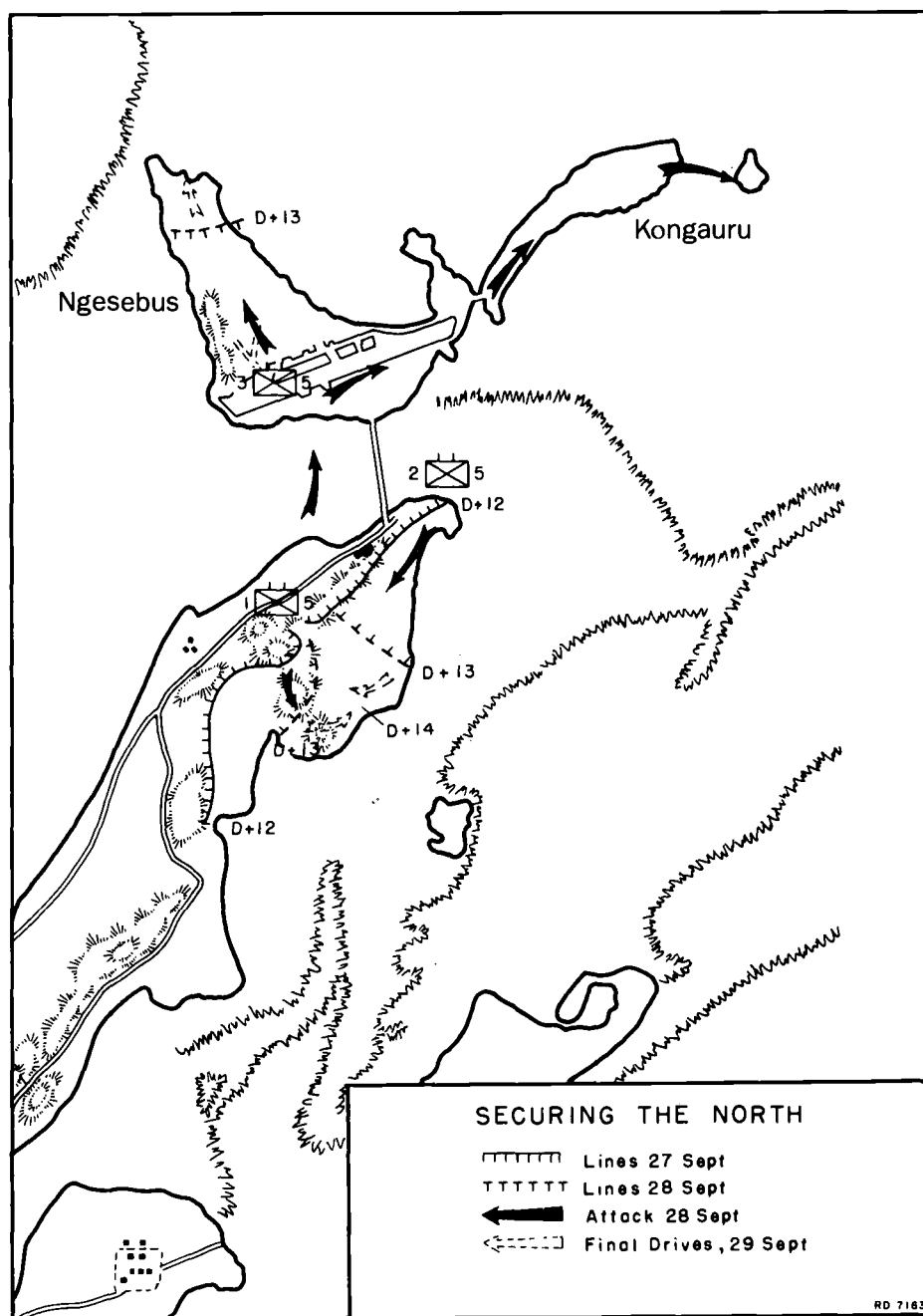
shortened the fight for the northern end of the island.

As that fighting progressed, the 5th Marines assembled its 3d Battalion, supporting tanks, amphibian tractors, and the entire panoply of naval gunfire, and air support to launch a shore-to-shore operation to seize Ngesebus and Kongauru, 600 yards north of Peleliu, on 28 September.

There followed an operation which was "made to look easy" but which in fact involved a single, reinforced (but depleted) battalion against some 500 prepared and en-

trenched Japanese infantry. For some 35 hours, the battalion conducted the most cost-effective single battalion operation of the entire Peleliu campaign.

Much of the credit for such effectiveness was due to supporting aviation. VMF-114, under Major Robert F. "Cowboy" Stout, had landed on Peleliu's air strip just three days prior to this landing, and immediately undertook its primary service mission: supporting Marine ground operations. The Ngesebus landing was the first in the Pacific War for which the entire air support of a





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 95931

*The crews of amphibian tractors board a severely damaged Japanese landing craft which was intercepted by U.S. naval patrols when it carried troops attempting to infiltrate northern Peleliu and reinforce Ngesebus Island off northwest Peleliu. A western-looking aerial view of the northern end of Peleliu showing Peleliu village and the Amiangal Mountain. Ngesebus*

*patrols when it carried troops attempting to infiltrate northern Peleliu and reinforce Ngesebus Island off northwest Peleliu. Island is in the upper right. Veterans of Peleliu will be amazed to note how fully the island has been recaptured by vegetation.*

Caption and Photo by Phillip D. Orr



landing was provided by Marine aviation. As the LVTs entered the water from Peleliu's shore, the naval gunfire prematurely lifted to the alarm of the assault troops. Stout's pilots immediately recognized the situation, resumed their strafing of Ngesebus until the LVTs were within 30 yards of the beach. They flew so low that the watching Marines "expected some of them to shoot each other down by their ricochets." This action so kept the Japanese defenders down that the Marines in the leading waves were upon them before they recovered from the shock of the strafing planes.

The 3d Battalion got ashore with no casualties. Thus enabled to knock out all the Japanese in beach defenses immediately, it turned its attention to the cave positions in the ridges and blockhouses. The ridges here, as with those on northern Peleliu, stood individually, not as part of complex ridge systems. This denied their defenders opportunities for a mutual defense between cave positions. The attacking companies of 3/5 could use supporting tanks and concentrate all fire means upon each defensive system, without being taken under fire from their flanks and rear. By nightfall on 28 September, 3/5 had overrun most of the opposition. On 29 September, there was a day of mopping up before Ngesebus was declared secure at 1500. As planned, the island was turned over to 2/321, and 3/5 was moved to division reserve in the Ngardolok area.

Seizure of Ngesebus by one depleted infantry battalion gave a dramatic illustration of an enduring principle of war: the effective concentration of means. To support that battalion, General Rupertus concentrated the bulk of all his available firepower: a battleship; two cruisers; most of the divisional and corps artillery; virtually all of the division's remaining armor; armored amphibian tractors; all troop-carrying amphibian tractors; and all Marine aviation on Peleliu.

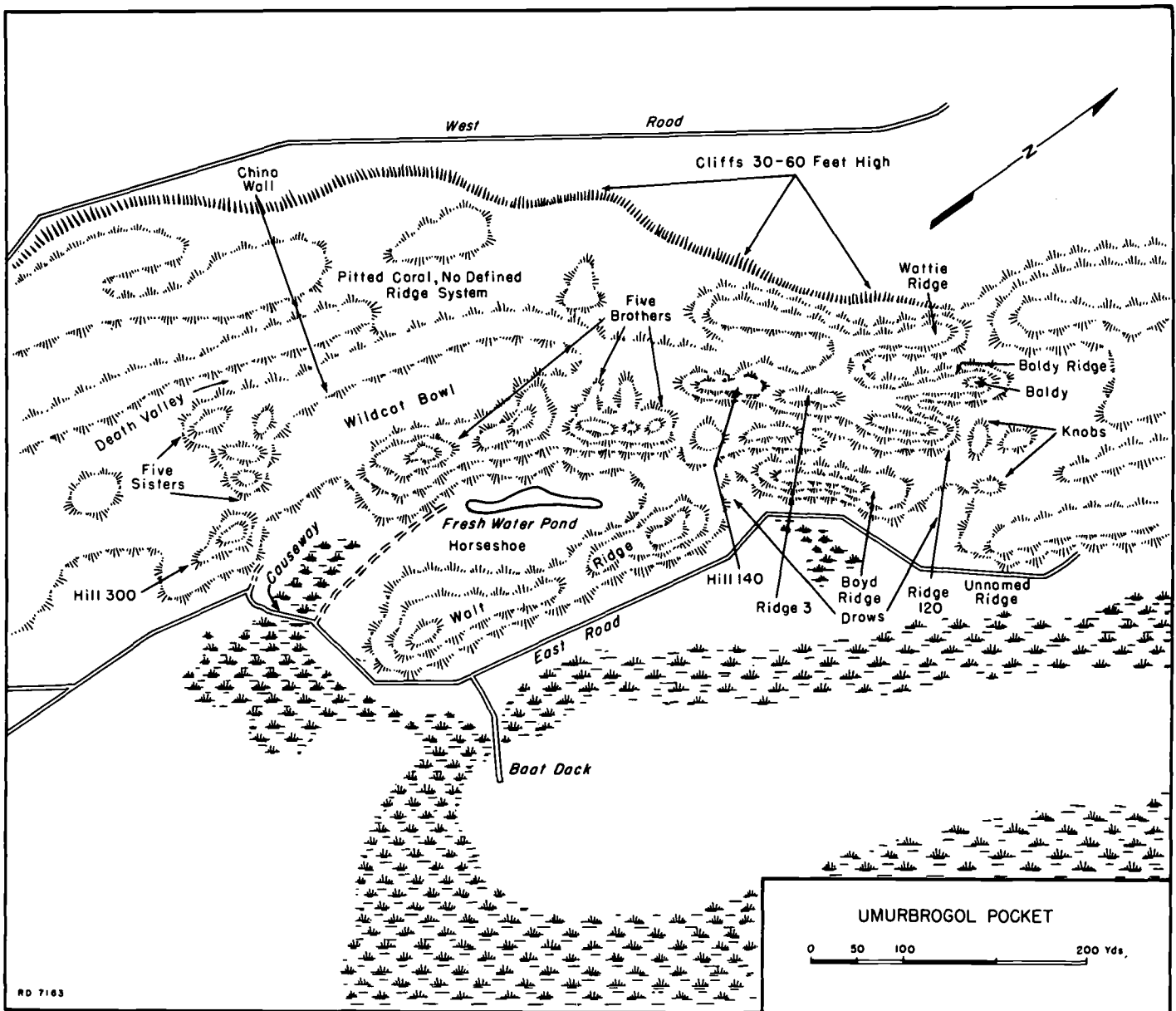


Caption and photo by Phillip D. Orr  
*Possibly one of the best preserved specimens of its kind in the Pacific, this Model 10 120mm dual-purpose anti-aircraft and coastal defense gun is on the western shore of Ngesebus. The gun rests on its skid plate and was sited in a natural position.*

Such concentrated support enabled the heavily depleted 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, to quickly seize Ngesebus, destroying 463 of Colonel Nakagawa's battle-hardened and well-emplaced warriors in 36 hours, at a cost of 48 American casualties.

Other maneuver elements on Peleliu also were attacking during those 36 hours, but at an intensity adjusted to the limited support consequent upon General Rupertus' all-out support of the day's primary objective.

As 3/5 was clearing Ngesebus, the rest of the 5th Marines was fighting the Japanese still in northeast Peleliu. After capturing Akarakoro Point beyond Amiangel Mountain, 2/5 turned south. It swept through the defenses east of that mountain with demolitions and flamethrowers, then moved south toward Radar Hill, the eastern stronghold of Hill Row. That feature was under attack from the south and west by 1/5. After two days, the two battalions were in command of the scene, at least on the



topside of the hills. Inside there still remained stubborn Japanese defenders who continued to resist the contest for Radar Hill, as did the defenders within Amiangal Mountain's extensive tunnels. All could be silenced when the cave or tunnel mouths were blasted closed.

As these operations were in progress, the 321st at the north end of Umurbrogol completed seizing Hills 100 and Hill B, then cleared out the ridge (Kamilianlul Mountain) and road north from there to the area of 5th Marines operations. On 30 September the 321st relieved the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 5th Marines in northern Peleliu. That regiment reassembled in the Ngardolok area, before it became once more necessary

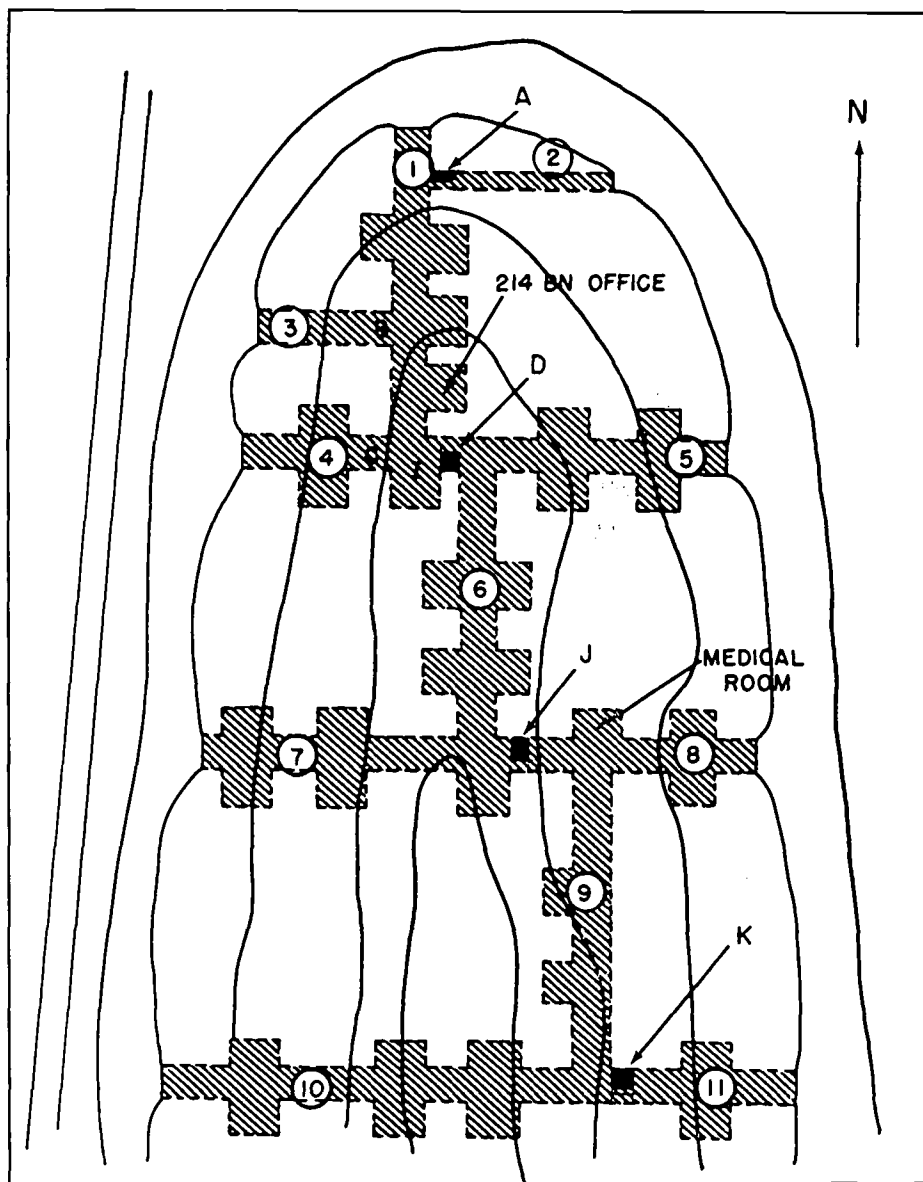
to commit it to the Umurbrogol Pocket.

### *The Umurbrogol Pocket: Peleliu's Character Distilled*

In a very real sense, the Umurbrogol Pocket typified the worst features of the post D-Day campaign for Peleliu. It provided the scene of some of Peleliu's worst and most costly fighting, and of some of the campaign's best and worst tactical judgments. Its terrain was the most difficult and challenging on the island. Prelanding planning did not perceive the Pocket for what it was, a complex cave and ridge fortress suitable to a fanatic and suicidal defense. Plans for the seizure of the area treated the Pocket's complex ter-

rain as oversimplified, time-phased linear objectives to be seized concurrently with the flat terrain abutting it to the east and west.

The southern slopes (generally called Bloody Nose) dominated the landing beaches and airfield, over which the Pocket had to be approached. After those heights were conquered by the heroic and costly assaults of Puller's 1st Marines (with Berger's 2/7 attached), and after the division had set in artillery which was controlled by aerial observers overhead, the situation changed radically. The Pocket's defenders thereafter retained only the capability to harass and delay the Americans, to annoy them with intermittent attacks by fire and with night-time raids. But



*This sketch shows the floor plan of the largest and most elaborate tunnel system discovered by Marines on Peleliu. It was prepared by Japanese naval construction troops and was so elaborate the Americans thought it might be a phosphate mine.*

after D plus 4, Umurbrogol's defenders could no longer seriously threaten the division's mission.

Nevertheless, after the critical enemy observation sites were seized, General Rupertus kept urging "momentum," as though the seizure of the Pocket were as urgent as had been seizure of the commanding heights guarding it from the south. The stubborn character of the terrain, and its determined defenders, became entwined with the determined character of the general commanding the 1st Marine Division. This admixture was sorted out only by time and by the reluctant intercession of General Geiger. Most of

the offensive effort into the Pocket between 21 and 29 September was directed from south to north, into the mouths or up onto the ridges of the twin box canyons which defined the Pocket. Infantry, supported by tanks, air, and flame-throwing LVTs could penetrate the low ground, but generally then found themselves surrounded on three sides. Japanese positions inside the ridges of the canyons, hidden from observation and protected in their caves, were quite capable of making the "captured" low ground untenable. Other attacks, aimed at seizing the heights of the eastern ridges, while initially successful, in that small infantry units could

scramble up onto the bare ridge tops, thereafter came under fire from facing parallel ridges and caves. They were subject to strong night counterattacks from Japanese who left their caves under cover of darkness.

During 20 September, D plus 5, the 7th Marines had relieved the 1st Marines along the south and southwest fronts of the Pocket, and on the 21st the 3d and 1st Battalions resumed the attack into the Pocket, from southwest and south. These attacks achieved limited initial successes behind heavy fire support and smoke, but succeeded only in advancing to positions which grew untenable after the supporting fire and smoke was lifted. Assault troops had to be withdrawn under renewed fire support to approximately their jump-off positions. There was little to show for the day's valiant efforts.

Attacks the next day (22 September) against the west shoulder of the Pocket, from the West Road, up the western box canyon (Wildcat Bowl) and toward Higashiyama (Hill 140), all liberally supported with firepower, again produced early advances, most of which had to be surrendered at day's end, as all three attacking groups came under increasing fire from the Japanese hidden in mutually supporting cave positions. The 7th Marines had, unbeknown to it, reached within about 100 yards of Colonel Nakagawa's final command cave position. However, many supporting ridges, and hilltops, would have to be reduced before a direct attack upon that cave could have any hope of success.

The fight for Umurbrogol Pocket had devolved into a siege situation, to be reduced only by siege tactics. But the 1st Marine Division's commander continued to cling to his belief that there would be a "break-thru" against the enemy's opposition. He insisted that continued battalion and regimental assaults would bring victory "very shortly."

When the 321st's probes eastward



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 98260

*Many of the participants in the battle with a literary turn of mind best compared the ridge areas of Peleliu with the description of Dante's "Inferno." Here a flame thrower-mounted amphibian tractor spews its deadly stream of napalm into a cave.*

near the northern end of the Pocket brought them within grasp of sealing off that Pocket from the north, they deployed two battalions (2d and 3d) facing eastward to complete the encirclement.

This attack against Hill B, the stopper at the northern end of the Pocket absorbed the 321st Infantry's full attention through 26 September, as the 5th Marines was fighting in northern Peleliu. The 7th Marines continued pressuring the Pocket from the south, and guarding it on the west. With the 321st victory on the 26th, that unit's mission was expanded to press into the Pocket from the north. This it did, while simultaneously clearing out the sporadically defended Kamilianlul Ridge to its north. Its attack south from Hill B and adjacent ridges made very limited progress, but permitted some consolidation of the American hold along the north side of the Pocket, now 400 yards wide in that zone. On 29 September, the 7th Marines was ordered to relieve the Army unit in that northern sector.

To relieve 2/7 and 3/7 of their now largely static guard positions along

the west and southwest sectors of the Pocket, the division stripped hundreds of non-infantry from combat support units (artillery, engineer, pioneer), and formed them into two composite "infantry" units. Under 11th Marines' Lieutenant Colonel Richard B. Evans and 5th Marines' Major Harold T. A. Richmond, they were assigned to maintain the static hold in the sectors earlier held by 2/7 and 3/7. They faced the karst plateau between the West Road and the Pocket.

The 7th Marines' flexibility restored by this relief, its 1st and 3d Battalions relieved the 321st units on 29 September, along the north edge of the Pocket. Then on the 30th, they pushed south, securing improved control of Boyd Ridge and its southern extension, variously called Hill 100, Pope's Ridge, or Walt Ridge. The latter dominated the East Road, but Japanese defenders remained in caves on the west side. The 7th Marines' partial hold on Pope Ridge gave limited control of East Road, and thereby stabilized the east side of the Pocket. But the U.S. hold over the area needed improvement.

On 3 October, reinforced by the attached 3/5 (back from Ngeesebus), the 7th Regiment organized a four-battalion attack. The plan called for 1/7 and 3/7 to attack from the north, against Boyd Ridge and the smaller ridges to its west, while 2/7 would attack Pope (Walt) Ridge from the south. The attached 3/5 was ordered to make a diversionary attack from the south into the Horseshoe canyon and its guardian Five Sisters on its west. This regimental attack against the Pocket committed four infantry "battalions," all now closer to company than battalion strength, against the heights near the southern end of the Pocket (Five Sisters), and the ridges at the eastern shoulder of the Pocket (Pope and Boyd Ridges). After heavy casualties, the attack succeeded, but the Five Sisters (four of which 3/5 scaled) were untenable, and had to be abandoned after their seizure.

The next day, 4 October, the 7th Marines with 3/5 still attached made one more general attack—in the south, again to seize, then give up, positions on the Five Sisters; in the north, to try to advance and consolidate the positions there earlier seized.

In that 4 October action, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines' push led to an unexpectedly rapid advance which it pressed to get up onto Hill 120. It was hoped that this would provide a good jump-off for the next day's operation against the next ridge to the west. However, Hill 120, as with so many others in the Umurbrogol, was then under enemy crossfire which made it completely untenable. The attacking company was withdrawn with heavy casualties. Among these casualties was Captain James V. "Jamo" Shanley, commanding Company L. His company was attacking Ridge/Hill 120 when several of his men fell, wounded. Shanley dashed forward under heavy fire, rescued two of the men and brought them to safety behind a tank. He then rushed back to help a third,



when a mortar round landed immediately behind him, mortally wounding him. His executive officer, Lieutenant Harold J. Collins ran out to rescue him, only to fall by his side instantly killed by a Japanese anti-tank round.

For his heroism Captain Shanley was awarded a Gold Star (second) for the Navy Cross he had earned at Cape Gloucester, New Britain. There, his company was in the lead in seizing Hill 660, a key terrain feature in the Borgen Bay area.

The 7th Marines had now been in the terrible Umurbrogol struggle for two weeks. General Rupertus decided to relieve it, a course General Geiger

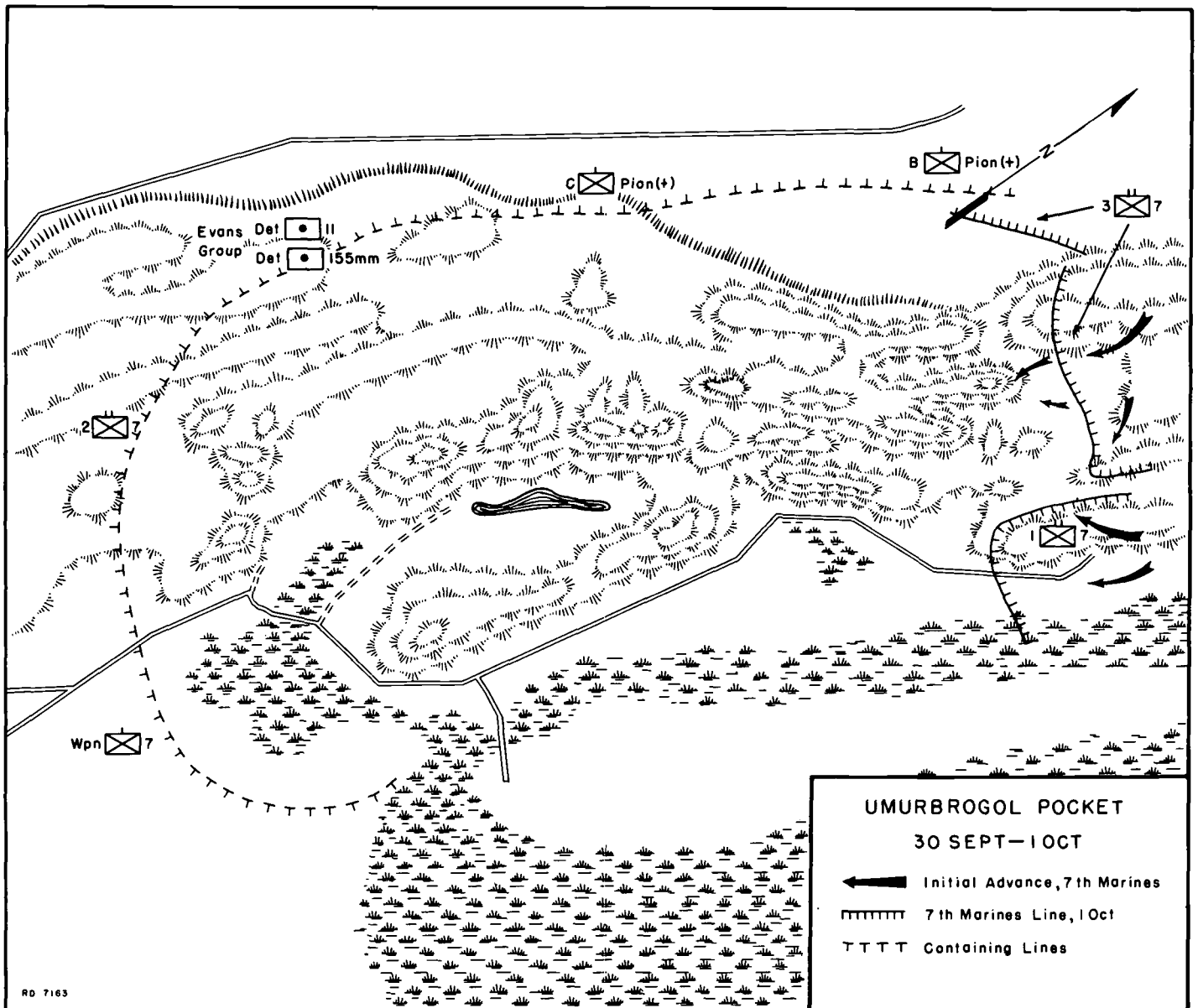
also suggested. Still determined to secure the Pocket with Marines, General Rupertus turned to his only remaining Marine regiment, the 5th.

Colonel Harris brought two firm concepts to this final effort for his 5th Marines. First, the attack would be from the north, an approach which offered the greatest opportunity to chip off one terrain compartment or one ridge at a time. His 1st Battalion positions along the east side of the Pocket would be held statically, perhaps incrementally adjusted or improved. No attacks would be launched from the south, where the 3d Battalion was positioned in reserve.

Colonel Harris' aerial reconnais-

sance during the first week on Peleliu had convinced him that siege tactics would be required to clear the multitude of mutually defended positions within Umurbrogol. As he had earlier expressed himself in the presence of the corps and division commanders visiting his regimental CP, Harris continued with his policy to "be lavish with ammunition and stingy with . . . men's lives." He was in a strong command position to prepare support thoroughly before ordering advances.

The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, relieved 3d Battalion, 7th Marines in position on 5 October, but did nothing but reconnoiter positions where





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 97433

*Marine riflemen accompanied by tanks push forward to the inner recesses of Horseshoe Ridge in an effort to cut off the enemy water supply and rid it of Japanese troops once and for all. The going got no easier as the Americans pushed forward.*

heavier firepower could come into play. Engineer dozers were brought up to prepare paths into the north ends of the box canyons, along which LVT flame throwers and tanks could later operate. A light artillery battery was emplaced along the West Road to fire point-blank into the west-facing cliffs at the north end of the Pocket, as were weapons carriers and tanks later. Troublesome sections of certain cliffs were literally demolished by direct fire, and the rubble dozed into a ramp for tanks to climb toward better firing positions. Light mortars were used extensively to strip vegetation from areas in which firing caves were suspected, and planes loaded with napalm-filled belly tanks were used to bomb

suspected targets just south of the key Hill 140, which 2/5 had selected as its key objective.

As 2/5 picked off successive firing positions in the north, 3/5 on 7 October sent a tank sortie into the Horseshoe. This time, the mission was not to seize and hold, but to destroy by fire all identifiable targets on the faces of the Five Sisters, and on

Marines who fought on Pope Ridge would not recognize it in this photograph of the southern end of the ridge looking north showing how the vegetation took over.

Caption and photo by Phillip D. Orr



the western (lower) face of Hill 100 (Pope Ridge). When all ammunition was expended, the tanks withdrew to rearm then returned, accompanied by LVT flame-throwing tanks and guarded by small infantry fire-teams. Considerably more destruction was effected, a large number of Japanese were killed in caves, and many of the Japanese heavy weapons in those caves were silenced. Previous to this time, some single artillery pieces firing from within the Horseshoe had occasionally harassed the airfield. No such nuisance attacks occurred after the 7 October tank sorties.

For the next six days, the 5th Marines headquarters afforded all available support to small, incremental

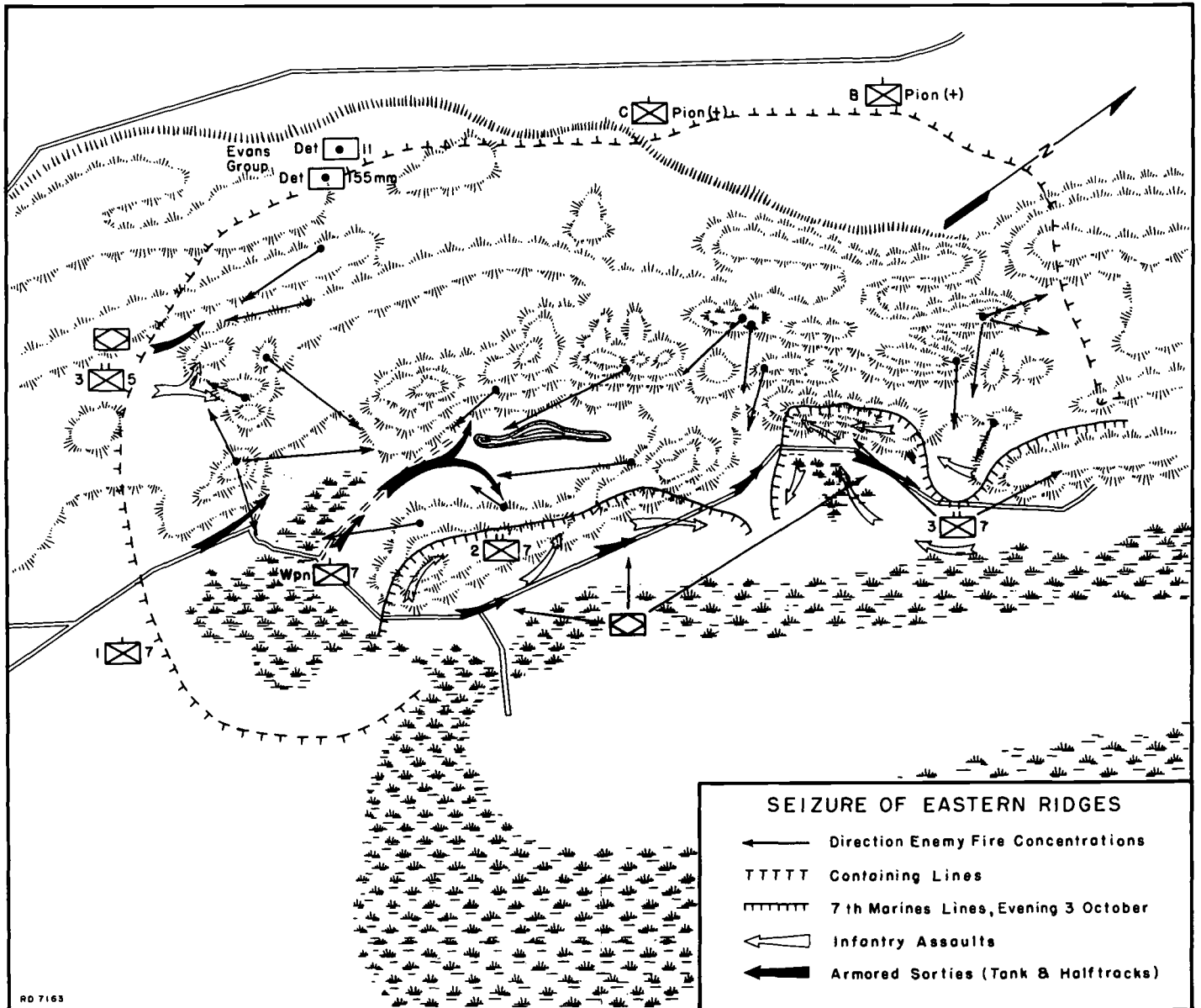
advances by 2/5 from the north. Light mortars were repeatedly used to clear all vegetation from small objectives and routes of advance. Both tanks and artillery were used at point-blank ranges to fire into all suspected caves or rough coral areas. Aerial bombardment with napalm was used to clear vegetation and, hopefully, drive some defenders further back into their caves. All advances were very limited, aimed simply at seizing new firing positions. Advances were made by squads or small platoons.

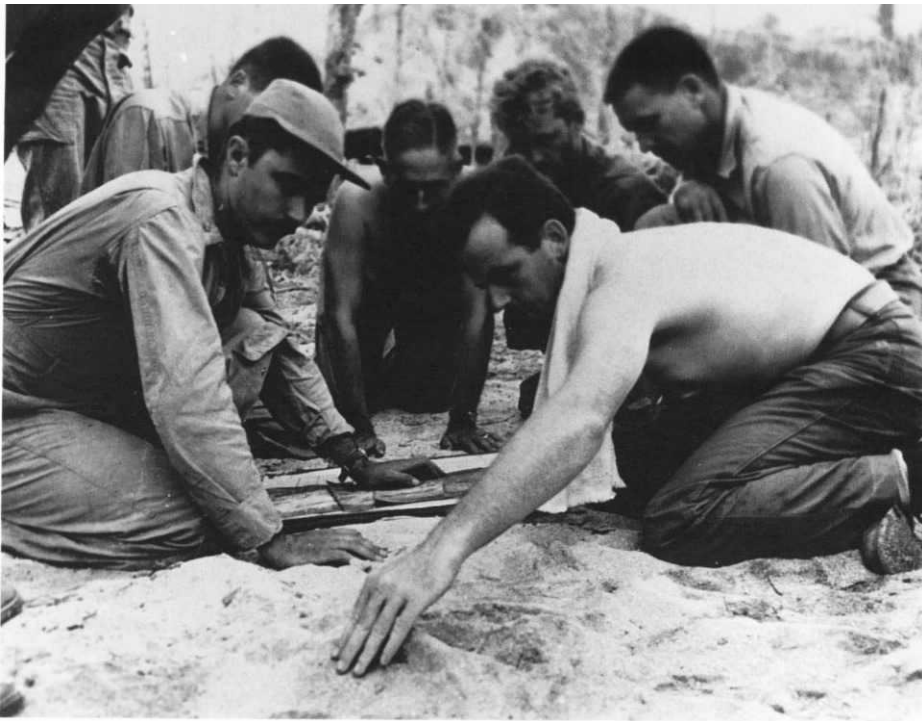
The last position seized, Hill 140, just north of the Five Brothers, afforded a firing site to which a 75mm pack howitzer was wrestled in dis-

sembled mode, reassembled, sandbagged, and then effectively fired from its then-commanding position. It could fire into the mouth of a very large cave at the base of the next ridge, from which serious fire had been received for days.

Sandbagging this piece into position posed special problems, since the only available loose sand or dirt had to be carried from the beach, or occasional debris slides. Nevertheless, the use of sandbags in forward infantry positions began to be used increasingly, and the technique was later improved and widely used when 81st Infantry Division soldiers took over further reduction of the Pocket.

By this mode of careful advance,





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 97878

*Maj Gordon D. Gayle, commander of 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, outlines in the sand proposed enemy targets in the north for LtCol Joslyn R. Bailey, Marine Aircraft Group 11. Looking on are Col Harold D. Harris, 5th Marines commander, center, and LtCol Lewis W. Walt, behind Gayle, 5th Marines executive officer.*

a number of small knobs and ridges at the head of the two murderous box canyons were seized. Direct fire could be laid into the west face of Walt and Boyd Ridges, whose tops were occupied by 1/5, but those cave-filled western slopes were protected by other caves on the opposite, parallel ridge known as Five Brothers.

A week of such siege-like activity pushed the northern boundary of the Pocket another 500 yards south. On 12 October, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines was called in to relieve 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. The relief was seriously marred, primarily because the forward positions being relieved were so close to the opposing enemy. The incoming troops, including a company commander, were picked off by snipers during this exchange, and a small group of enemy reoccupied a position earlier subdued by frequent interdiction fires. Despite these losses and interruptions, the relief was completed on schedule, and on 13 October, 3/5 continued the slow and deliberate wedging forward.

Directly south of Hill 140, there seemed no feasible axis for advance, so 3/5's axis was shifted southwest, approximately paralleling the West Road, and into the coral badlands in front of the containing lines manned by the composite groups guarding West Road. While the composite groups held in place, 3/5 operated across their front, north to south. By this means the coral badlands were cleared out for an average (east-west) depth of 75-150 yards, along some 500 yards of the north-south front. This terrain, earlier judged unsuitable for any but the costliest and most difficult advance, was now traversed with the aid of preparatory fire-scouring by napalm bombs. Major "Cowboy" Stout's VMF-114 pilots' bombs fell breathtakingly close to both the advancing 3/5 front and to the stationary composite units holding just east of West Road.

A similar effort was then launched from the south by what was left of Lieutenant Colonel John Gormley's 1/7. Together, these two advances seized and emptied about one-half of

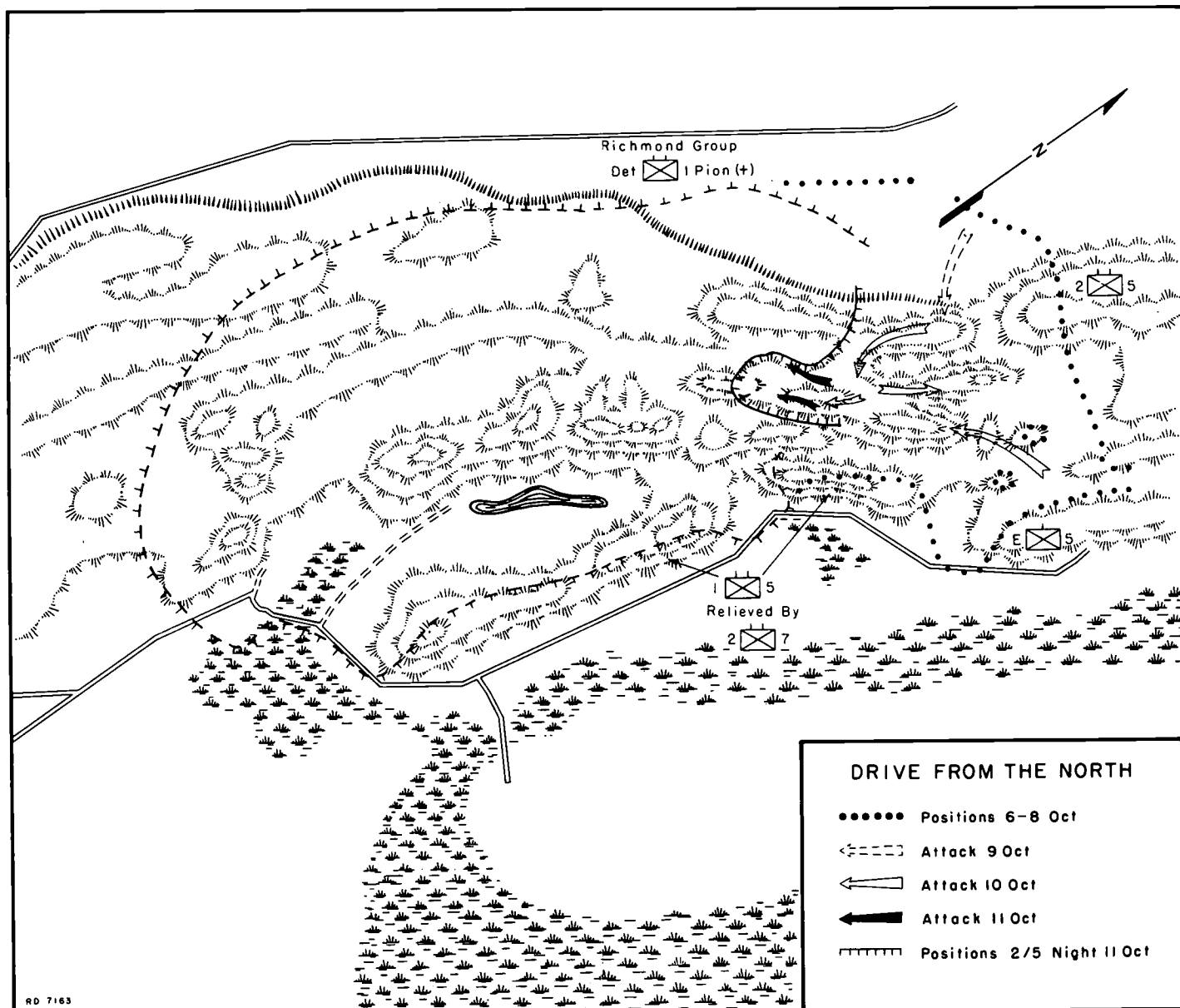
the depth of the coral badlands, between West road and the China Wall. This clearing action allowed the composite "infantry" unit to advance its lines eastward and then hold, as far as the infantry had cleared, toward the back of China Wall.

Overall, the actions of the 5th and 7th Marines in October had reduced the Pocket to an oval some 800 yards, north to south, and 400-500 yards, east to west. According to Colonel Nakagawa's contemporaneous radio report back to Koror, he still had some 700 defenders within the Pocket, of which only 80 percent were effective. In early October, some wag had suggested that the Pocket situation be clarified by enclosing it with barbed wire and designating it as a prisoner of war enclosure. Spoken in bitter jest, the concept did recognize that the Pocket no longer counted in the strategic balance, nor in completing the effective seizure of Peleliu.

But it still weighed significantly in the mind of Major General Rupertus, who wanted to subdue the Pocket before turning over to Major General Mueller the 81st Division's previously specified mopping-up task. In point of fact, Rupertus' successful seizure of Ngesebus and northern Peleliu had terminated the enemy's capability to reinforce the now-isolated Japanese on Peleliu. Creation of that tactical situation had effectively secured Peleliu.

Without pressing for a declaration that Peleliu had been effectively secured, which would have formalized the completion of the 1st Marine Division's mission, General Geiger had for some days suggested that in continuing his attacks into the Pocket, Rupertus relieve first the 5th, then the 7th Marines with his largest and freshest infantry regiment, the 321st RCT, still attached to 1st Marine Division. To all such suggestions, General Rupertus replied that his Marines would "very shortly" subdue the Pocket.

Two events now overtook Gener-



al Rupertus' confidence. First, the 81st Division was made whole by the return of its 323d RCT, fresh from its critically important seizure of Ulithi. Second, the perception that Peleliu was effectively secured was validated by a message which so stated from Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet/Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas. Major General Geiger was directed to turn over command to Major General Mueller, whose 81st Division was now directed to relieve the 1st Marine Division, to mop up, and to garrison Peleliu, as long planned. Rear Admiral George E. Fort, Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson's successor as commander of operations in the Palaus, was

directed to turn over that responsibility to Vice Admiral John H. Hoover, a sub-area commander. When relieved by the 81st Division, the 1st Marine Division would embark for return to Pavuvu.

During the movement and turn-over, tactical operations ashore necessarily remained under 1st Marine Division control until the 81st Division could move its command post from Angaur. General Mueller established his CP near Peleliu's Purple Beach on 20 October. The Wildcat Division thereupon acquired "custody" of the Pocket, and responsibility for final reduction of its determined, able, battered defenders.

Meanwhile, the relief of the 5th Marines by the 321st RCT took place

on 15 and 16 October. While that relief was in progress, Lieutenant Colonel Gormley's 1/7 was still engaged in the earlier-described coral badlands action, to make possible the eastward movement of the containing lines protecting West Road. The relief of 1/7 was accordingly delayed until the next day. On 17 October, a full-strength Company B, 1/323, newly arrived from Ulithi, relieved Gormley's surviving battalion, approximately man for man.

### *Post-assault Operations in the Palaus*

When on 20 October Major General Mueller became responsible for mopping up on Peleliu, he ad-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC 98401

*As a result of Maj Gayle's targetting of enemy positions in the Umurbrogol, napalm-laden Marine Corsairs lifted from Peleliu's airfield, and returned to the field to be rearmed, in perhaps the shortest wheels-down bombing run of the Pacific War.*

dressed the tactical problem as a siege situation, and directed his troops to proceed accordingly. Over a period of nearly six weeks, his two regiments, the 322d and 323d Infantry, plus 2/321, did just that. They used sandbags as an assault device, carrying sand up from the beaches and inching the filled sandbags forward to press ever nearer to positions from which to attack by fire the Japanese caves and dug-in strong points. They made liberal use of tanks and flamethrowers, even improving upon the vehicle-mounted flamethrower. They thrust a gasoline pipeline forward from a roadbound gasoline truck, thereby enabling them, with booster pumps, to throw napalm hundreds of feet ahead into Japanese defensive areas. Noting the effective-

ness of the 75mm pack howitzer which the Marines had wrestled up to Hill 140, they sought and found other sites to which they moved pack howitzers, and from which they fired point-blank into defending caves. To support their growing need for sandbags on ridge-top "foxholes," their engineers strung highlines to transport sand (and ammo and rations) up to such peaks and ridgetops.

Notwithstanding these deliberate siege tactics, the 81st troops still faced death and maiming as they ground down the bitter and stubborn Japanese defenses. The siege of the Umurbrogol Pocket consumed the full efforts of 81st Division's 322d RCT and 323d RCT, as well as 2/321, until 27 November 1944 (D plus 73).

This prolonged siege operation

was carried on within 25 miles of a much larger force of some 25,000 Japanese soldiers in the northern Palaus. Minor infiltrations aside, those Japanese were isolated by U.S. Navy patrols, and by regular bombing from Marine Aircraft Group 11, operating from Peleliu.

Difficult and costly as the American advances were, the Japanese defenders in their underground positions had a similarly demanding and even more discouraging situation. Water was low. Sanitation was crude to nonexistent. Rations were short, and ammunition was even scarcer. As time wore on, some of the Japanese, when afforded opportunity, chose to leave their defenses and undertake futile, usually suicidal night attacks. A very few succeeded

in being captured.

Toward late November, even Major General Murai apparently came to this point of view. Still not in command, he nevertheless proposed, in a radio message to Lieutenant General Inoue on Koror, a *banzai* finale for their prolonged defense. But General Inoue turned down the proposal. By this time, Nakagawa's only exterior communications were by radio to Koror. As he had anticipated, all local wire communications had been destroyed. He had issued mission orders to carry his units through the final phase of defense.

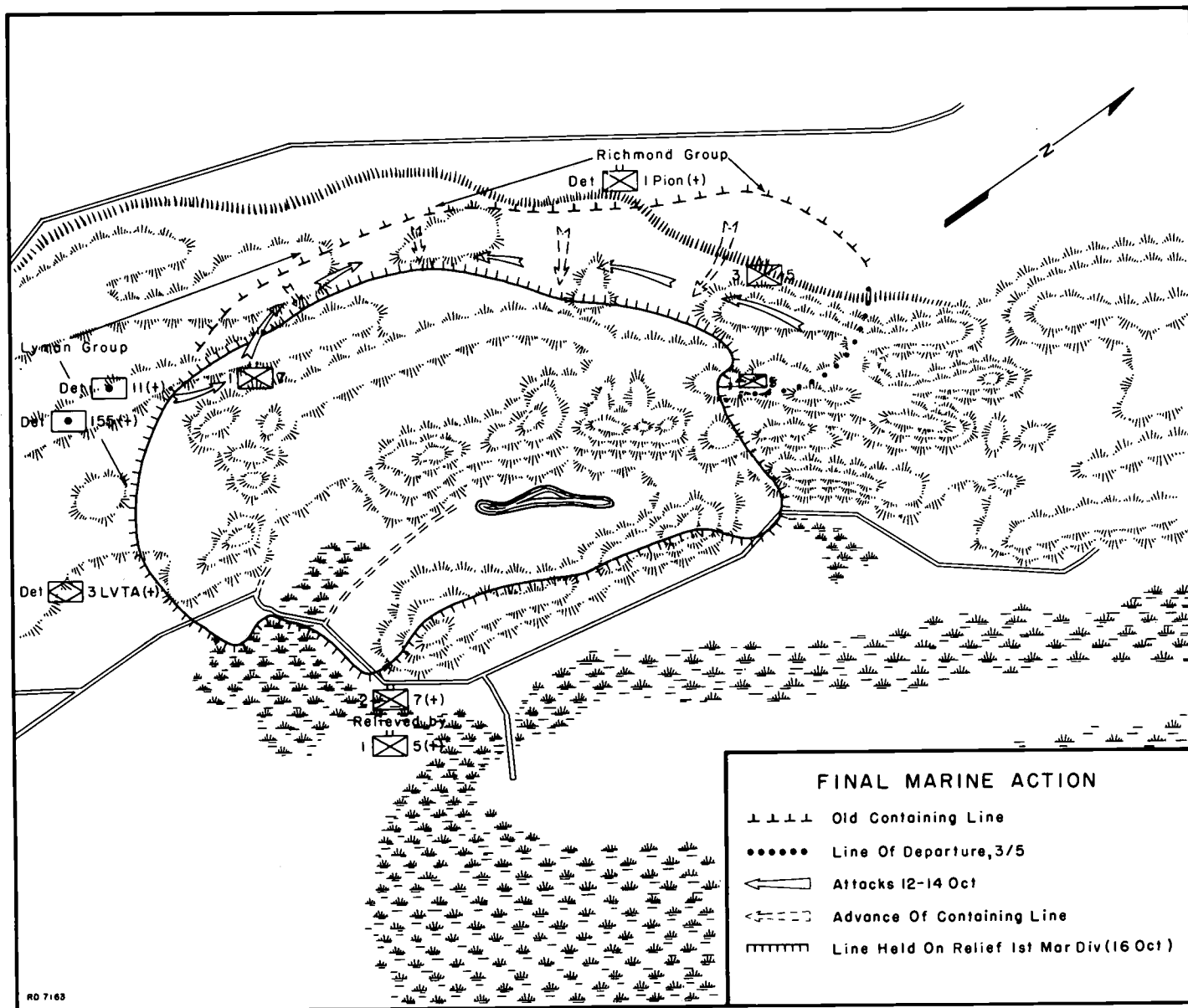
As the tanks and infantry carefully pressed their relentless advances,

the 81st Division's engineers pressed forward and improved the roads and ramps leading into or toward the heart of the Japanese final position. This facilitated the tank and flamethrower attacks to systematically reduce each cave and position as the infantry pushed its sandbag "fox-holes" forward.

On 24 November, Colonel Nakagawa sent his final message to his superior on Koror. He advised that he had burned the colors of the *2d Infantry Regiment*. He said that the final 56 men had been split into 17 infiltration parties, to slip through the American positions and to "attack the enemy everywhere." During the night of 24-25 November, 25 Japanese, in-

cluding two officers, were killed. Another soldier was captured the following morning. His interrogation, together with postwar records and interviews, led to his conclusion that Colonel Nakagawa and Major General Murai died in the CP, in ritual suicide.

The final two-day advance of the 81st Division's soldiers was truly and literally a mopping-up operation. It was carefully conducted to search out any holed-up opposition. By mid-day on 27 November, the north-moving units, guarded on the east by other Army units, met face-to-face with the battalion moving south, near the Japanese CP later located. The 323d's commander, Colonel Ar-



RD 7163



On 27 September 1944, the U.S. flag was raised over Peleliu, symbolizing that the island was secured. The honor guard was comprised of 1st Marine Division Band members. The general editor of this pamphlet, Benis M. Frank, is eighth from the left.

thur P. Watson, reported to General Mueller that the operation was over.

Not quite. Marine air on Peleliu continued to attack the Japanese positions in Koror and Babelthuap, joining the patrolling Navy units in destroying or bottling up any remaining Japanese forces in the northern Palaus. A late casualty in that action was the indomitable Major Robert F. "Cowboy" Stout, whose VMF-114 had delivered so much effective air support to the ground combat on Peleliu.

The stubborn determination of the

Japanese to carry out their emperor's war aims was starkly symbolized by the last 33 prisoners captured on Peleliu. In March 1947, a small Marine guard attached to a small naval garrison on the island encountered unmistakable signs of a Japanese military presence in a cave in the Umurbrogol. Patrolling and ambushes produced a straggler, a Japanese seaman who told of 33 remaining Japanese under the military command of Lieutenant Tadamichi Yamaguchi. Although the straggler reported some dissension within the ranks of that varied group, it seemed

that a final *banzai* attack was under consideration.

The Navy garrison commander moved all Navy personnel, and some 35 dependents, to a secure area and sent to Guam for reinforcements and a Japanese war crimes witness, Rear Admiral Michio Sumikawa. The admiral flew in and travelled by jeep along the roads near the suspected cave positions. Through a loudspeaker he recited the then-existing situation. No response. Finally, the Japanese seaman who had originally surrendered went back to the cave armed with letters from Japanese fa-



milies and former officers from the Palaus, advising the hold-outs of the end of the war. On 21 April 1947, the holdouts formally surrendered. Lieutenant Yamaguchi led 26 soldiers to a position in front of 80 battle-dressed Marines. He bowed and handed his sword to the American naval commander on the scene.

### *Was the Seizure of Peleliu Necessary? Costs vs. Benefits*

What advantages to the United States' war effort grew from the conquest of Peleliu? It assured absolute domination of all of the Palaus, thereby adding, marginally, to the security of MacArthur's right flank as he continued westward, then northward from New Guinea into his Philippines campaign. Within the

Palaus group, it destroyed facilities which survived Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's devastating strike of March 1944. It insured total denial of support to the enemy from Koror's submarine basing facilities, incrementally decreasing the already waning Japanese submarine capability east of the Philippines. The United States position on Peleliu completed the neutralization of the some 25,000 Japanese troops in northern Palau. The landing on Peleliu did not contribute to the Regimental Landing Team (RLT) 323 unopposed seizure of Ulithi. Admiral William F. Halsey had earlier believed that his forces could seize Ulithi without first seizing Peleliu.

The most visible benefit of a subdued Peleliu lay in its use as a link in the flight path and line of commu-

nications from Hawaii, and from the Marianas, to the Philippines. The holding was a convenience, but not a necessity.

Such judgment could be disputed, however, by the survivors of the *Indianapolis'* 29 July 1945 sinking. Having delivered atomic bomb parts to Tinian shortly before, the ship was headed for the Philippines, when it was suddenly torpedoed at night. The ship went down in 12 minutes, and no report of the contact or the sinking was received. The fourth day after the sinking, its 316 survivors (from a crew of 1,196) were sighted by a Navy patrol bomber working out of Peleliu. The sighting led directly to their rescue, and most certainly would not have occurred, but for American occupation of Peleliu.

*(Continued on page 48)*

*With the senior officers present, division chaplains dedicate a new cemetery created at Orange Beach 2. The 1st Division commander, MajGen Rupertus, with a cane, is near the center and to his right is Col Puller (1st Marines). Grouped on the*

*extreme right are: BGen Smith, assistant division commander; Col Harrison (11th Marines), and Col Harris (5th Marines). Not present at this time was the 7th Marines' commander, Col Hanneken, whose regiment was still engaged with the enemy.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 96989



## Tom Lea's Paintings

**T**om Lea, the artist of the paintings which illustrate this pamphlet, wrote of his experiences on Peleliu in *Battle Stations*, published in 1988 by Still Point Press in Dallas. Some of the sketches from this book were reproduced with commentary in Volume 14, Number 2 of *Discovery*, a journal published by the University of Texas at Austin. In this issue, James Jones, author of *From Here to Eternity*, wrote: "Lea was one of the artists put in the field by *Life* . . . Various of his works appeared in the magazine, and up until the time he went into Peleliu, most of them could be pretty well classified as excellently done but high-grade propaganda. There was very little American blood, very little tension, very little horror. Mostly, it was what could be called the *Bravo America!* and *This is Your Boy* type of war art. His almost photographic style easily lent itself to that type of work . . . ."

"But something apparently happened to Lea after going into Peleliu. The pictures painted out of his Peleliu experience show a new approach. There is the tension of terror in the bodies here, the distorted facial expressions of the men under fire show it, too . . . ."

"One of the most famous, of course, is the *Two-Thousand-Yard Stare* portrait of a young marine who has had all, or more than, he can take. The staring eyes, the slack lips, the sleepwalker's stance. I've seen men with that look on their faces. I've had it on my own face. It feels stiff, and the muscles don't want to work right when you try

*Life Magazine* artist Tom Lea accompanied Marines on Peleliu.



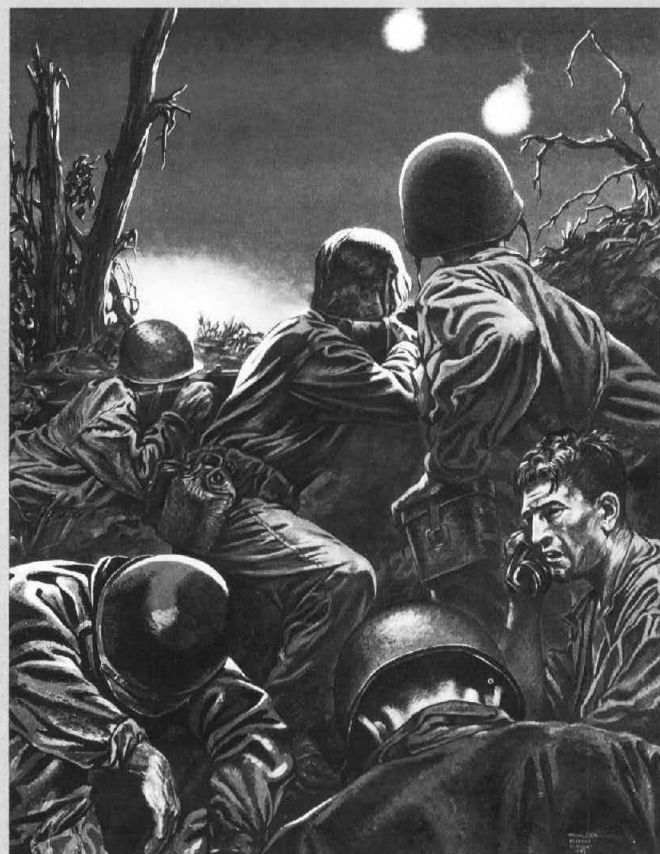
to smile, or show expression, or talk. Mercifully, you're out of it for a while; unmercifully, down in the center of that numbness, though, you know you will have to come back eventually."

Reprinted by permission of *Discovery*, the University of Texas at Austin. Tom Lea's artwork in this pamphlet is reproduced with the permission of the artist. The captions under each of the Lea paintings are the artist's own words. Benis M. Frank

**ABOVE RIGHT: "Artillery Support"** At the southern end on our side of the field opposite the hill our artillerymen had dug holes and carried 75-mm field howitzers to the sites. As we came down to them these batteries were firing continuously, throwing shells into the Jap hangars and buildings at the foot of the hill, and at caves in the hill where Jap mortar and artillery and machine-gun fire was dealing out misery to marines.

**BELOW RIGHT: "The Blockhouse"** Looking up at the head of the trail I could see the big Jap blockhouse that commanded the height. The thing was now a great jagged lump of concrete, smoking. I saw our lead man meet a front line detail posted by the blockhouse while the other troops advanced down the hill with the three tanks and the flamethrowers. Isolated Jap snipers were at work on our slope, small groups of marines fanned out on both sides of the trail to clean them out, while we climbed toward the blockhouse.

**BELOW: "Counterattack"** The phone rang. A battalion CO reported the Japs' infiltration and the beginning of the counterattack. He asked what reserves were available and was told there were none. Small arms fire ahead of us became a continuous rattle. Abruptly three star shells burst in the sky. As soon as they died floating down, others flared to take their place. Then the howitzers just behind us opened up, hurling their charges over our heads, shaking the ground with their blasts.





(Continued from page 45)

What did the seizure of Peleliu cost? Marine casualties numbered 6,526, including Navy corpsmen and doctors, of whom 1,252 were killed. The 81st Division totalled 3,089 casualties, of whom 404 were killed in action. Total U.S. troop casualties was 9,615 for Peleliu, Angaur and Ngesebus, with 1,656 dead.

By inflicting that many casualties, the Japanese were successful in implementing their longstanding "delay and bleed" strategy. The actions cost them an estimated 10,900 casualties, all but a tiny fraction killed. Just 202 prisoners of war were captured, only 19 of whom were Japanese military (seven Army, 12 Navy). The others were laborers, largely Korean. Among the Japanese military defenders, less than two per thousand were captured.

The costs at Peleliu held warnings aplenty for the remaining Allied operations to be conducted across the Pacific to Japan. Even with total local air and naval superiority, with lavish naval gunfire and bombs, with the dreaded napalm weaponry, and with a 4:1 troop superiority, the seizure of Peleliu consumed one American casualty and 1,589 rounds of heavy and light troop ammunition for each single Japanese defender killed or driven from his prepared position. A few months later, the attacks on Iwo Jima and Okinawa would confirm this grim calculus of war against determined Japanese defenders, ably led, in prepared defenses.

The question of whether the Peleliu operation was necessary remains moot, even today, some 52 years after the 1 September 1944 landing. The heroism and exemplary conduct of the 1st Marine Division, its Marines and Navy corpsmen, and the soldiers of the 81st Infantry Division on that miserable island is written in the record. But there is an enduring question of whether the capture of Peleliu was essential, especially in view of Admiral William

F. Halsey's recommendation through Admiral Nimitz to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 September 1944, two days before D-Day, that the landing

be cancelled. By that time, it was too late. And Peleliu was added to the long list of battles in which Marines fought and suffered, and prevailed.



## For Extraordinary Heroism

**T**he Secretary of the Navy awarded the Presidential Unit Citation to the 1st Marine Division, and its reinforcing organizations, for "extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces at Peleliu and Ngesebus from September 15 to 29, 1944." In addition, Marine Aircraft Group 11 and the 3d 155mm Howitzer Battalion were awarded the Navy Unit Commendation. On an individual basis, 69 participants in the battle for Peleliu were decorated with the Navy Cross, the second seniormost combat award in the Naval service.

The nation's highest award, the Medal of Honor, was presented to eight Marines in the fight for Peleliu; five were decorated posthumously, as indicated by (\*): \*Corporal Lewis K. Bausell, USMC, 1/5; Private First Class Arthur J. Jackson, USMC, 3/7; \*Private First Class Richard E. Kraus, USMCR, 8th Amphibian Tractor Battalion; \*Private First Class John D. New, USMC, 2/7; \*Private First Class Wesley Phelps, USMCR, 3/7; Captain Everett P. Pope, USMC, 1/1; \*Private First Class Charles H. Roan, USMCR, 2/7; and First Lieutenant Carlton R. Rouh, USMCR, 1/5.

## Sources

The basic source work for this pamphlet is the Marine Corps' official monograph, *The Assault on Peleliu*, by Maj Frank O. Hough, published by the Government Printing Office in 1950, while LtCol Gordon D. Gayle was serving as deputy director of Marine Corps history, and editor of the monograph series. Other books used in this narrative were: George W. Garand and Truman R. Strobridge, *Western Pacific Operations*, vol IV, *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II* (Washington: Historical Division, HQMC, 1971); George P. Hunt, *Coral Comes High* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946); E. B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa* (Presidio Press, 1981); Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991); Edward Behr, *Hirohito: Behind the Myth* (New York: Vantage Books & Random House, 1989); Bill D. Ross, *Peleliu: Tragic Triumph, The Untold Story of the Pacific War's Forgotten Battle* (New York: Random House, 1992); James H. Hallas, *The Devil's Anvil: The Assault on Peleliu* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1944); Harry A. Gailey, *Peleliu 1944* (Annapolis, Maryland: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Inc., 1983); Masataka Chihaya, *Fading Victory: The Diary of Admiral Matome Ugaki, 1941-45* (University of Pittsburg Press, 1962); Larry L. Woodward, *Before the First Wave: The 3rd Armored Amphibian Tractor Battalion - Peleliu and Okinawa* (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower Univ. Press, 1944); Burke Davis *Marine: The Life of Lieutenant General Lewis B. (Chesty) Puller, USMC (Ret)* (Boston: Little, Brown Company, 1962).

The Oral History and Personal Papers Collections in the Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C., hold a number of interviews and diaries of participants in the Peleliu operation. These documents from the following were particularly useful: LtGen Oliver P. Smith; BGen Harold D. Harris; BGen Harold O. Deakin; and LtGen Lewis J. Fields, along with numerous personal interviews with campaign veterans - officers and enlisted men.

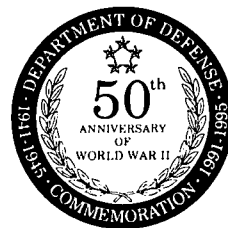
The author wishes to thank the Army Center of Military History for the loan of the photographs of Tom Lea's artwork appearing in this pamphlet. He also wishes to thank Phillip D. Orr for permitting use of the interesting photographs of Peleliu as it appeared in 1994.



## About the Author

Brigadier General Gordon D. Gayle, USMC (Ret), graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in June 1939 and was commissioned a Marine second lieutenant. After completing Basic School in Philadelphia in 1940, he was assigned to the 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division with which he served in three Pacific campaigns: Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, and Peleliu. For his extraordinary heroism while commanding the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, on Peleliu, he was awarded the Navy Cross.

He returned to 1st Marine Division in the Korean war to serve first as the executive officer of the 7th Marines, then as G-3 on the division staff. He is a graduate of the Army's Command and General Staff College. In 1963-65, he chaired the Long Range Study Panel at Quantico, developing concepts for the Corps' operational, organizational, logistical and R&D needs for the 1985 period. He was promoted to brigadier general in 1964. Retiring in 1968, he joined Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies.



### WORLD WAR II

**THIS PAMPHLET HISTORY**, one in a series devoted to U.S. Marines in the World War II era, is published for the education and training of Marines by the History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., as a part of the U.S. Department of Defense observance of the 50th anniversary of victory in that war.

Editorial costs of preparing this pamphlet have been defrayed in part by a grant from the Marine Corps Historical Foundation and a bequest from the estate of Emilie H. Watts, in memory of her late husband, Thomas M. Watts, who served as a Marine and was the recipient of a Purple Heart.

### WORLD WAR II COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

*DIRECTOR EMERITUS OF MARINE CORPS HISTORY AND MUSEUMS*  
Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, USMC (Ret)

*GENERAL EDITOR,*  
*WORLD WAR II COMMEMORATIVE SERIES*

Benis M. Frank

*CARTOGRAPHIC CONSULTANT*  
George C. MacGillivray

*EDITING AND DESIGN SECTION, HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION*  
Robert E. Struder, Senior Editor; W. Stephen Hill, Visual Information Specialist; Catherine A. Kerns, Composition Services Technician

Marine Corps Historical Center  
Building 58, Washington Navy Yard  
Washington, D.C. 20374-5040

1996

PCN 190 003137 00

