

BREAKING THE
OUTER RING:
MARINE LANDINGS IN
THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

MARINES IN
WORLD WAR II
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

BY CAPTAIN JOHN C. CHAPIN
U.S. MARINE CORPS RESERVE (RET)





Breaking the Outer Ring: Marine Landings in the Marshall Islands

by Captain John C. Chapin, USMCR (Ret)

By the beginning of 1944, United States Marine forces had already made a dramatic start on the conquest of areas overrun by the Japanese early in World War II. Successful American assaults in the Southwest Pacific, beginning with Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands in August 1942, and in the Central Pacific at Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands in November 1943, were crucial campaigns to mark the turn of the Japanese floodtide of conquest. The time had now come to take one more decisive step: assault of the islands held by Japan before 1941.

These strategic islands, mandated to the Japanese by the League of Nations after World War I, were a source of mystery and speculation. Outsiders were barred; illegal fortifications were presumed; yet any Central Pacific drive towards Japan's inner defense ring had to confront these unknowns. The obvious target to begin with was the Marshall Islands. As early as 1921 a Marine planning officer had pinpointed their geographic significance.

Planning the Attack

In May 1943, the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided to seize them. This difficult assignment fell to Admiral Chester W. Nimitz who bore the impressive titles of Commander in

On the Cover: A flamethrower, center, is among weapons carried by men of the 22d Marines on Eniwetok. **At left:** Marine riflemen, under fire, leap from a just-beached amphibian tractor in the January 1944 landing. (Department of Defense Photo [USMC] 72411)

Chief, Pacific, and Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas (CinC-Pac/CinCPOA), based at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. He turned to four very capable men who would carry out the actual operation: three admirals who were experts in amphibious landings, fast carrier strikes, and shore bombardment, and Major General Holland M. Smith, who was the commanding general of the Marines' V Amphibious Corps and now also would be Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops. It was he who would command the troops once they got ashore. Original cautious plans for steppingstone attacks starting in the eastern Marshalls were modified, and the daring decision was made to knife through the edges and strike directly at Kwajalein Atoll in the heart of Marshalls' cluster of 32 atolls, more than 1,000 islands, and 867 reefs.

Kwajalein is the largest atoll in the world, 60 miles long and 20 miles wide, a semi-enclosed series of 80 reefs and islets around a huge lagoon of some 800 square miles. Located 620 miles northwest of Tarawa and 2,415 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor, its capture would have far-reaching strategic significance in that it would break the outer ring of Japanese Pacific defense lines. Within the atoll itself there were two objectives: Roi and Namur, a pair of connected islands shaped like weights on a four-mile barbell in the north end, and crescent-shaped Kwajalein Island at the south end. The 4th Marine Division under Major General Harry Schmidt was to assault Roi-Namur, and the Army 7th Infantry Division under Major General Charles H. Corlett would attack Kwajalein. Af-

ter these islands were taken, there was one more objective in the Marshalls: Eniwetok Atoll. This was targeted for attack some three months later by a task force comprised of the 22d Marine Regiment (called in the Corps the "22d Marines") and most of the Army's 106th Infantry Regiment. Brigadier General Thomas E. Watson, USMC, would be in command.

As a preliminary to these priority operations, the occupation of another atoll in the eastern Marshalls was planned. This objective was Majuro, which would serve as an advanced air and naval base and safeguard supply lines to Kwajalein 220 miles to the northwest. Because it was believed to be very lightly defended, only the Marine V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company and the 2d Battalion, 106th Infantry, 7th Infantry Division were assigned to capture Majuro. To support all of these thrusts there would be a massive assemblage of U.S. Navy ships: carriers, battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and an astonishingly varied array of transports and landing craft. These warships provided a maximum potential for intensive pre-invasion aerial bombing and ship-to-shore bombardment; the increased tonnage in high explosives, the lengthened duration of the softening-up process, and the pinpointing of priority enemy targets were all lessons sorely learned from the inadequate preparatory shelling which had contributed to the steep casualties of Tarawa. For the Marshalls, there were altogether 380 ships, carrying 85,000 men.

With the plans in place and a very tight schedule to meet the D-day

Major General Holland M. Smith

One of the most famous Marines of his time, General Smith was born in 1882. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1905. There followed a series of overseas assignments in the Philippines, Nicaragua, Santo Domingo, and with the Marine Brigade in France in World War I. Beginning in the early 1930s, he became increasingly focused on the development of amphibious warfare concepts. Soon after the outbreak of war with Japan in 1941, he was assigned to a crucial position, command of all Marines in the Central Pacific.

As another Marine officer later described him, "He was of medium height, perhaps five feet nine or ten inches, and somewhat paunchy. His once-black hair had turned gray. His once close-trimmed mustache was somewhat scraggly. He wore steel-rimmed glasses and he smoked cigars incessantly." There was one other feature that characterized him: a ferocious temper that earned him the nickname, "Howlin' Mad" Smith, although his close friends knew him as "Hoke."

This characteristic would usually emerge as irritation at what he felt were



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 72162B

On board Rocky Mount (AGC 3), newly designed and equipped to serve as a amphibious command ship, MajGen Holland M. Smith, V Amphibious Corps commander and commander of Expeditionary Troops at Roi-Namur in the Marshalls, points out a feature of the battle to his chief of staff, BGen Graves B. Erskine.

sub-standard performances. One famous example of this was his relief of an Army general from his command. It came when an Army division was on the line alongside two Marine divisions on Saipan in the Marianas Islands campaign following the Marshalls operation. A huge interservice uproar erupted!

Less than two years later, after 41 years of active service, during which he was awarded four Distinguished Service Medals for his leadership in four successive successful amphibious operations, he retired in April 1946, as a four-star general. He died in January 1967.

deadline, the complex task of assembling and transporting the assault troops to the target area was put in motion. Readyng the Army 7th Division was the easiest part of the logistical plan; it was already in Hawaii after earlier operations at Attu and Kiska in the Aleutian Islands off Alaska. The 22d Marines, however, had to come from Samoa (where it had been on garrison duty for some 18 months), and the 4th Marine Division was still at Camp Pendleton in California, where it had recently been formed. On 13 January 1944, the division sailed from San Diego to commence the longest shore-to-shore amphibious operation in the history of warfare: 4,300 miles!

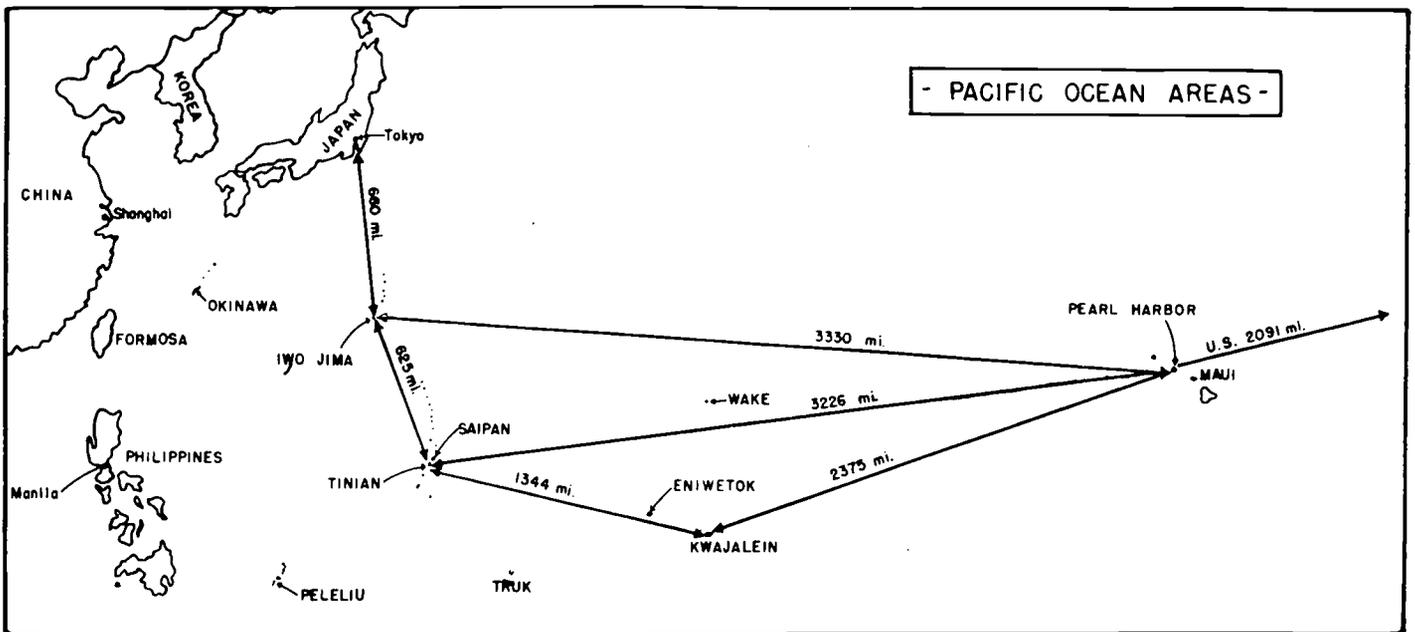
Life at sea soon settled down into a regular routine. All hands soon be-

came acquainted with the rituals of alerts for "General Quarters" in the blackness of predawn, mess lines stretching along the passageways, inspections and calisthenics on the cluttered decks, the loudspeaker with its shrill whistle of a "bosun's pipe" and its "Now hear this!" fresh water hours, and classes and weapons-cleaning every day. Off duty, the men took advantage of the opportunity to sleep, play cards, stand in line for ice cream, write letters, and, of course, engage in endless speculation about the division's objective (which was originally known only by the intriguing title of "Burlesque and Camouflage").

On 21 January the transports carrying the Marines anchored in Lahaina Roads off Maui, Hawaii, and

visions of shore leave raced through the minds of all the men: hula girls, surf swimming, cooling draughts in a local bar—just what was needed after the long nights in the crowded, humid troop compartments during the voyage. Over the ships' loudspeakers, sad to say, came a not unexpected announcement, "There will be no liberty. . . ."

After one day filled with conferences and briefings for the senior officers, the task force sailed again. Next stop: the Marshall Islands! En route, crossing the 180th Meridian, there were the traditional, colorful ceremonies in which the old salts initiated the men who had never before crossed the International Date Line into the "Domain of the Golden Dragon." On 30 January the ships thread-



ed their way through the eastern atolls of the Marshalls, and the following morning (dawn, 31 January) they halted before their objectives, with the northern component off Roi-Namur and the southern component facing Kwajalein Island. On every transport the men crowded the ships' rails to stare at the low-lying islets which they must soon attack. The 23d, 24th, and 25th Marines were assigned to the Roi-Namur operation, and the 32d, 17th, and 184th Infantry Regiments of the Army's 7th Division were to take the Kwajalein Island objectives.

Meanwhile, the small group assigned to Majuro (2d Battalion, 106th

Infantry, plus the V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company) had split off from the main task force and would make its own landing on 31 January. Advance intelligence estimates of minimal enemy forces proved accurate; there were no American casualties and just one Japanese officer was captured on the main islet. Three days later more than 30 U.S. ships lay at anchor in the Majuro lagoon.

Forward at the main theater, an awesome pre-landing saturation bombardment, begun on 29 January, was in full swing. U.S. Navy ships moved in on Roi-Namur, with some at the unprecedented short range of

1,900 yards, and poured in their point-bank massed fire. Continuing the repeated aerial strikes which had begun weeks earlier from the carriers, waves of planes swept in low for bombing and strafing runs. Key enemy artillery and blockhouse strong points had earlier been mapped from submarine and aerial reconnaissance, and individual attention was given to the destruction of each one. The combined total of shells and bombs reached a staggering 6,000 tons.

As a result of the underwater obstacles and beach mines uncovered at Tarawa, for the first time Navy underwater demolition teams had been formed for future operations. For-

Major General Harry Schmidt

The leader of the 4th Marine Division at Roi-Namur was born in 1886 and entered the Corps as a second lieutenant in 1909. By extraordinary coincidence, his first foreign duty was at Guam in the Marianas Islands, an area he would return to 33 years later under vastly different circumstances!

The Philippines, Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua (where he was awarded a Navy Cross – second only to the Medal of Honor), interspersed with repeated stays in China, were the marks of a

diverse overseas career. At home, there were staff schools, paymaster duties, and a tour as Assistant Commandant.

By the end of the war, he had been decorated with three Distinguished Service Medals. Retiring in 1948 after 39 years of service, he was advanced to the four-star rank of general. He died in 1968.

A contemporary described him as "a Buddha, a typical old-time Marine: he had been in China; he was regulation Old Establishment; a regular Marine."



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 1118D
MajGen Harry Schmidt

The 4th Marine Division

This division was formed as the result of the organization and redesignation of several other units. The 23d Marines began as infantry detached from the 3d Division in February 1943, the same month that an artillery battalion of the 12th Marines became the genesis of the 14th Marines and engineer elements of the 19th Marines formed the nucleus of the 20th Marines. In March the 24th Marines was organized, and then in May it was split in two to supply the men for the 25th Marines.

This war-time shuffling provided the major building blocks for a new division. The units were originally separated, however, with the 24th Marines and a variety of reinforcing units (engineer, artillery, medical, motor transport, special weapons, tanks, etc.) at Camp Pendleton in California. The

rest of the units were at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. This East Coast echelon moved to Pendleton by train and transit of the Panama Canal in July and August. When all the units were finally together, the 4th Marine Division was formally activated on 14 August 1943.

After intensive training, it shipped out on 13 January 1944, and in 13 short months made four major assault landings: Roi-Namur, Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima, suffering more than 17,000 casualties. It was awarded two Presidential Unit Citations and a Navy Unit Commendation, and then deactivated 28 November 1945. In February 1966, however, it was reactivated as the lead division in the Marine Corps Reserve, and major units later served with distinction in the Persian Gulf.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A707113
Shoulder patch of the 4th Marine Division: a gold "4" on scarlet background, official colors of the U.S. Marine Corps. This emblem was designed by John Fabion, in the division's Public Affairs Office before the Marshalls campaign, and his commanding officer was astonished to find that the layout of the runways on the Japanese airstrip on Roi were "an exact replica."

tunately, they found no mines at Roi-Namur and were not needed at Kwajalein.

Another factor which would assist the assault troops was the configuration of the atoll. The two main objectives, at the north end and at the south, were each adjoined by islets, and these neighboring locations were to be seized on D-day, 31 January, as bases to provide close-in artillery support for the infantry landing. On either side of Roi-Namur the 14th Marines would bring in its 75mm and 105mm howitzers and dig them in to support the main landing from islets which carried the exotic names of Ennuebing, Mellu, Ennubirr, Ennumennet, and Ennugarret. As is always the case in war, there were problems. The task was assigned to the 25th Marines, and, because of communications difficulties, the different units going ashore on different islets could not coordinate their landings. Their radios went dead from drenching sea swells that swept over the gunwales of the amtracs (LVTs, landing vehicles, tracked, or

amphibian tractors). Nevertheless, by nightfall, the beachheads had been secured, and, for the first time, U.S. Marines had landed on a Japanese mandate.

On board the transports outside the lagoon, the men of the 23d and 24th Marines spent the afternoon of D-day transferring to LSTs (Landing Ships, Tank). That night saw a muddled picture of amphibian tractors stranded or out of gas inside the lagoon, with many others wandering in the blackout as they sought to find their own LST mother ship.

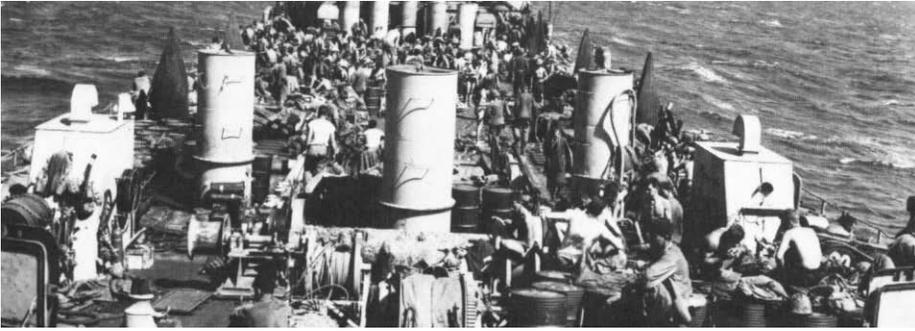
While this scramble was going on, the assault troops on board the LSTs were facing, each in his own way, the prospect of intensive combat on the following morning. One rifleman, Private First Class Robert F. Graf, remembered:

As I thought of the landing that I would be making on the morrow, I was both excited and anxious. Yes, I thought of death, but I wasn't afraid. Somehow I couldn't see myself as dead. "Why wasn't there

fear?" I wondered. Even though I was nervous, it was with excitement, not fear. Instead there was a thrill. I was headed for great adventure, where I had wanted to be. This was just an adventure. It was "grown up" Cowboys and Indians, it was "grown up" Cops and Robbers. . . . Thoughts of glory were in my mind that night. Now it was my turn to "carry the flag" into battle. It was my turn to be a part of history. To top it all off, I was going into battle with the "Elite of the Elite," the United States Marines. Just prior to falling asleep, I prayed. My prayers were for courage, for my family, and I prayed to stay alive.

By the next morning, D plus 1, 1 February, the LSTs had moved inside the lagoon. Up before dawn, the infantrymen filed into the cavernous holds of the LSTs and clambered onboard their amphibious tractors. Graf described his equipment:

Landings were made with each



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 146975

Jammed all together in the fetid multi-tiered bunks below decks, Marine troops welcomed being in the fresh air on deck even if they were also crowded there.

person loaded with weight. We wore our dungarees, leggings, and boondockers (shoes). Our skivvies (underwear) had been dyed green while we were still in the States. White ones were too good a target. In addition, our packs were loaded with whatever gear we thought we would need, such as extra socks, toilet gear, poncho, and our "D" and "K" rations. Extra cigarettes were stuffed in also. Believe it or not, some of us carried books that we were reading.

I wore two knives. The K Bar [knife] that was issued was tucked into my right legging. The throwing stiletto that I had purchased was on my belt; a leather thong at the bottom of the sheath was tied around my leg so that the knife would not flop around. My bayonet was in its sheath and attached to my pack. On went the loaded pack. Around my waist went the cartridge belt, fully loaded, with ten clips of M1 rifle ammo, each clip holding eight rounds. Over my shoulder were two bandoleers of M1 ammo, holding an additional eighty rounds. Hanging from my pockets were four hand grenades, only requiring a pulled pin to be activated. We donned our helmets with the brown camouflaged covering. Finally we slung our gas masks over our shoulders. Now we were ready for bear!

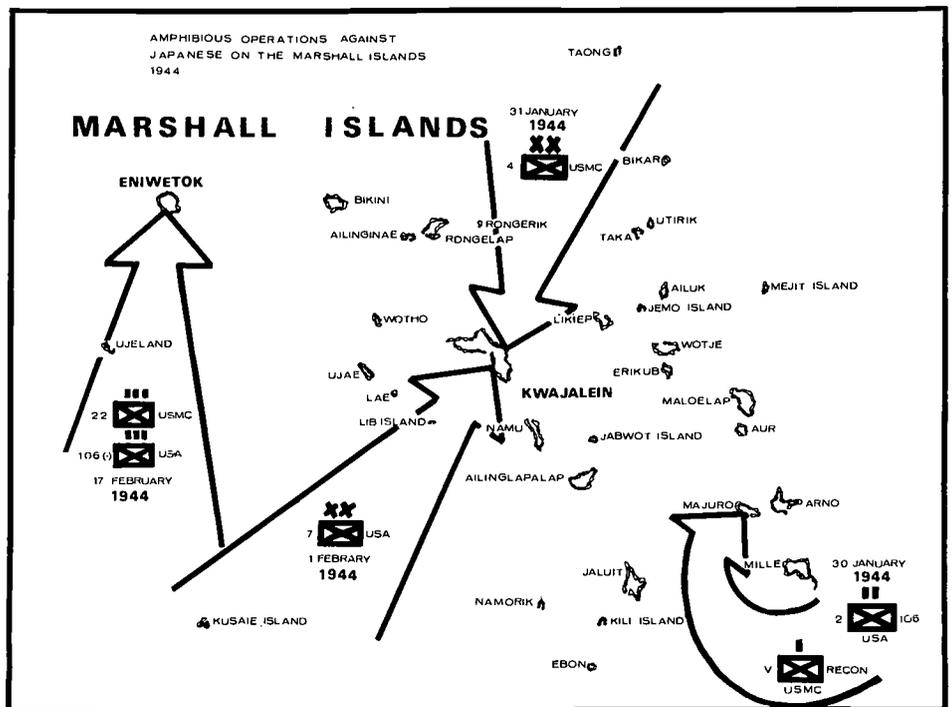
Out of the deafening din of the ships' holds, eerily lit by red battle lamps, down the ramps of the unfolding bows, lurching into the rough seas whipped up by the wind, the columns of amtracs went to war.

The Marine Attack: Roi-Namur

As the amphibian tractors sought to form up in organized attack waves, a series of problems arose. There was a continuation of the rough weather and radio communications difficulties of the day before; the amtrac crews had not previously practiced with the assault units; the control ship turned out to have been assigned firing missions as well

as wave control and left its control station (followed by some stray amtracs); the attack commander was reduced to racing around in a small ship and shouting instructions through a megaphone. As a result, W-hour, the hour for attack, had to be postponed from 1000 to 1100.

Meanwhile the men in the amtracs (and some in hastily scrounged up LCVPs [landing craft, vehicle or personnel]) were watching the awe-inspiring sight of the furious bombardment. Overhead, for the first time in the Pacific War, two Marines were in airplanes to act as naval gunfire controllers who would cut off the shelling when the troops approached the beach. Brigadier General William W. Buchanan later recalled how one of them "on one of his passes found one of the trenches on the north side of Namur filled with a number of troops crouching down in the trench. So he asked the pilot to go in on a strafing attack, and then as they came over he was going to continue raking them with the machine guns. He did this to such a point that, after they got back to the ship, it was determined that in his [the spotter's] enthusiasm he practically shot off the tail end!"





Department of Defense Photo (USMC 70490)

Col Franklin A. Hart, commander of the 24th Marines, briefs his staff on the operation plan for the invasion of Roi-Namur. To his left is his regimental executive officer, LtCol Homer L. Litzenberg, Jr. Both would retire as general officers.

Down in the lagoon the signal finally came to the assault waves, "Go on in!" The two lead battalions of the 23d Marines headed for Roi, with the two lead battalions of the 24th Marines churning towards Namur. The memories of this run-in were burned forever into the mind of young Second Lieutenant John C. Chapin, leading his platoon in the first wave:

By now everything was all mixed up, with our assault wave all entangled with the armored tractors ahead of us. I ordered my driver to maneuver around them. Slowly we inched past, as their 37mm guns and .50-cal. machine guns flamed. The beach lay right before us. However, it was shrouded in such a pall of dust and smoke from our bombardment that we

could see very little of it. As a result, we were unable to tell which section we were approaching (after all our hours of careful planning, based on hitting the beach at one exact spot!) I turned to talk to my platoon sergeant, who was manning the machine gun right beside me. He was slumped over—the whole right side of his head disintegrated into a mass of gore. Up to now, the entire operation had seemed almost like a movie, or like one of the innumerable practice landings we'd made.

Now one of my men lay in a welter of blood beside me, and the reality of it smashed into my consciousness.

The landing then became a chaotic

jumble of rapid events for that officer and his men. There was a grinding crash to their right, and looking over they saw an LVT collide at the water's edge with an armored tractor, climb on its side and hang there, crazily atilt. Simultaneously, there was a grating sound under their tractor as they hit the beach. Keeping low, the men slid over the side of the tractor and dove for cover, for their LVT was a perfect target sitting there on the sand. The lieutenant was the last one to drop to the deck, and as he sprawled on the sand, the amtrac ground its way backwards into the ocean.

Now the lieutenant faced his first combat in a situation that characterized all the landing beaches. His intensive training stood him in good stead as he took stock of the situa-

tion. Being in the first scattered group of tractors ashore, his men had no contact yet with any other unit, so the Japanese were on both sides of them – as well as in front. One glance told him that they had landed on the west side of Namur, 300 yards to the right of the spit of land that their company had for its objective. The long hours of studying maps and aerial photographs had proved their worth. The lieutenant's account continued:

My immediate task was to reorganize my platoon, for it was scattered along the beach. The noise, smoke, and choking pall of burnt powder further complicated things. I turned to my sergeant guide, as we lay there in the sand, and asked him where his men were. He started to point and right before my eyes his hand dissolved into a bloody stump. He rolled over, screaming "Sailor! Sailor!" (This was our code name for a corpsman. Bitter past experiences of the Marines had shown that the Japs delighted in calling "corpsman" themselves, and then

shooting anyone who showed himself.) Soon our corpsman crawled over, and started to give the sergeant first aid, so I turned my attention to more pressing matters.

As yet the officer hadn't seen a single Japanese, even though he was in the midst of them. But now one of the men next to him gasped, "They're in there!" pointing to a slit trench four feet away; the Marine raised himself up to a crouching position and hurled his bayoneted rifle like a javelin into the slit trench. There was heavy enemy fire coming at the platoon, but it was almost impossible to determine its source. Ten feet in front of the Marines, however, the Japanese had dug a series of trenches running the length of the beach. Tied in with these trenches were scores of machine gun positions and foxholes, mutually supporting each other, all camouflaged so that they were invisible until a Marine was right on top of them. Accordingly, as soon as the men of the platoon would locate an emplacement, they would deluge it with hand grenades, and then work on the next one. The lieutenant's next

experience was almost his last:

At one point in this swirling maelstrom of action I was kneeling behind a palm tree stump with my carbine on the deck, as I fished for a fresh clip of bullets in my belt. Something made me look up and there, not ten feet away, was a Jap charging me with his bayonet. My hands were empty. I was helpless. The thought that "this is it" flashed through my brain! Then shots chattered from all sides of me. My men hit the running Jap in a dozen places. He fell dead three feet from me.

Shortly after this, the squad with the Marine officer was working on another Japanese emplacement. He pulled the pin from one of his grenades, let the handle fly off, and started counting to three. (The grenade's fuse was timed to give a man about five seconds before it exploded.) In the middle of his count, a Japanese started shooting at him from the flank. Instinctively he turned to look for the enemy. Then something in his mind clicked, "And what about that live grenade in your

Naval Support

The infantry assault units in the Marshalls operations were carried by an incredible array of ships designed to perform very specialized functions. Also included were converted destroyers. The amphibian tractors carried the invading Marines in to the beaches, supplemented by the older ramped landing craft. Added to these were a jumble of acronyms: LCI, LST, LSM, etc., for infantry, rockets, tanks, and trucks.

No landings would have been successful, however, without the crucial support of naval gunfire and aerial bombardment. The fast task force that roamed the Pacific and the support groups which stood off the island objectives were visual proof of the deadly striking power that had been reborn in the U.S. Navy in the two years since the debacle at Pearl Harbor. Nearly all the old, slow battleships which had lain shattered in the mud were back in action, and now were joined by brand new, fast counterparts, and the familiar old peacetime carriers were now supplemented by a steady flow of new fleet carriers and the

innovation of smaller escort carriers.

This is the roll call of the ships which poured in their fire before and during the landings:

Battleships: *Tennessee* (BB 13), *Colorado* (BB 45), *Maryland* (BB 46), *Pennsylvania* (BB 38), *Idaho* (BB 42), *New Mexico* (BB 40), and *Mississippi* (BB 41).

Heavy Cruisers: *Louisville* (CA 28), *Indianapolis* (CA 35), *Portland* (CA 33), *Minneapolis* (CA 36), *San Francisco* (CA 38), and *New Orleans* (CA 32).

Light Cruisers: *Santa Fe* (CL 60), *Mobile* (CL 63), and *Biloxi* (CL 80).

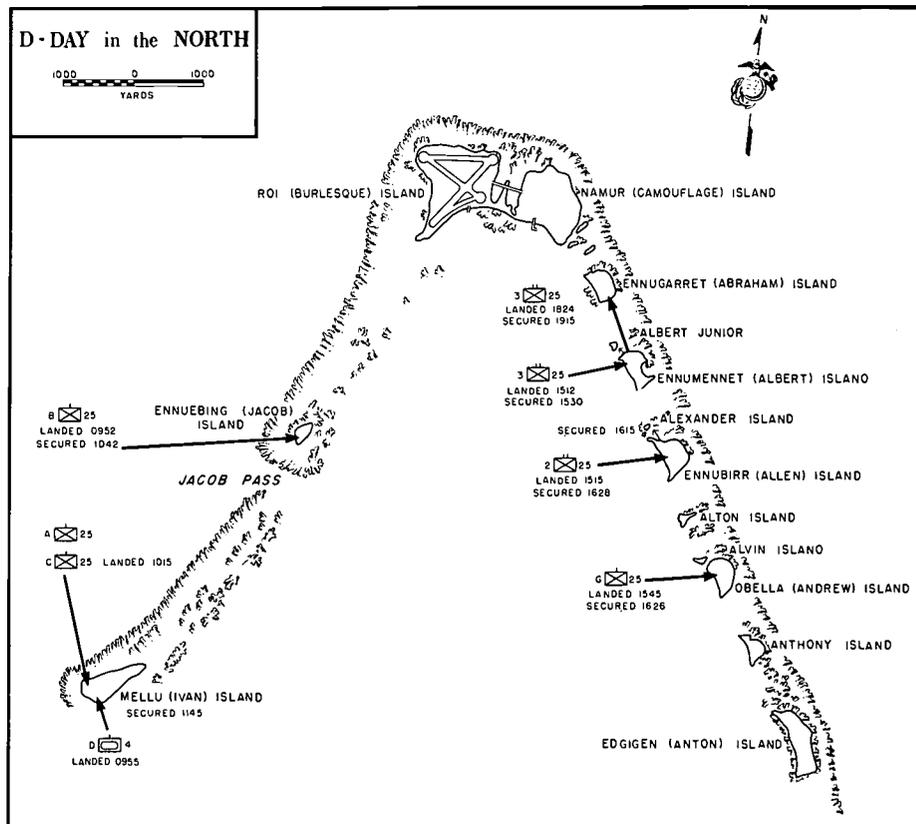
Carriers: *Saratoga* (CV 3), *Princeton* (CVL 23), *Langley* (CVL 28), *Enterprise* (CV 6), *Yorktown* (CV 10), *Belleau Wood* (CVL 24), *Intrepid* (CV 11), *Essex* (CV 9), *Cabot* (CVL 27), *Cowpens* (CVL 25), *Monterey* (CVL 26), and *Bunker Hill* (CV 17), plus six escort carriers.

Destroyers: The Kwajalein Atoll landings had 40 in direct support.

hand?" Without looking, he threw it and dove for the deck. It went off in mid-air and the fragments spattered all around him

Groups of Marines were forming now under their own initiative, and beginning to work their way slowly inland. It was nearly impossible to keep tight control of the platoon under these conditions, but the lieutenant was moving with them, trying to get them coordinated as best he could, when suddenly he dropped to the ground, stunned. He recalled:

My first reaction was that someone had hit my right cheek with a baseball bat. With the shock, instinct made me cover my right eye with my hand. Then I realized I'd been hit. Searing my mind came the question, "When I take my hand away, will I be able to see?" Slowly I lowered my arm and opened my eye. I could see! Relief flooded through me. The wound was on my cheekbone, just below the eye, and it was bleeding profusely, so I lay there and broke out my first aid packet. After shaking sulfa powder into the wound rather



awkwardly, I bandaged my right eye and cheekbone as best I could. The bullet had gone completely through my helmet just above my right ear, and left a jagged, gaping hole in the steel. My left eye was still functioning all right, however, so af-

ter a drink from my canteen, I started forward again.

A little later I encountered another lieutenant from our company, Jack Powers. He had been hit in the stomach, but was still fighting. Crouching behind a concrete wall, he showed me a pillbox about 25 feet away that was full of Japs who were still very much alive and full of fight. This strong point commanded the whole area around us and was holding up our advance very effectively. It was about 50 feet long and 15 feet wide, constructed of double rows of sand-filled oil drums. Grabbing the nearest men, we explained our plan of attack and went to work. With a couple of automatic riflemen, Jack covered the rear entrance with fire. Taking another man and a high-explosive bangalore torpedo, I crawled around to the front and observed for a few minutes. Then we inched our way up to the slit that served as a front entrance, and I threw a

Artillerymen unload ordnance on D-Day for the preparatory bombardment from the neighboring islets to pound targets before the infantry attacks on Roi-Namur.

Department of Defense Photo (Army) 324729



grenade in to keep down any Jap who might be inclined to poke a rifle out in our faces.

Next we lighted the fuse on the bangalore, jammed it inside the pillbox, and scrambled for shelter. The fuse was very short, we knew, and we barely had tumbled into a nearby shell hole when we were overwhelmed by the blast of the bangalore. Dirt sprayed all over us, billowing acrid smoke blinded us, and the numbing concussion deafened us. In a few moments we felt all right once more, and a glance told us that we had closed that entrance permanently. We worked our way back to where we'd left Jack Powers, and found that he'd managed to locate a shaped charge of high explosive in the meantime. Taking this, we repeated our job — this time blowing the rear entrance shut.

That took care of that pill-

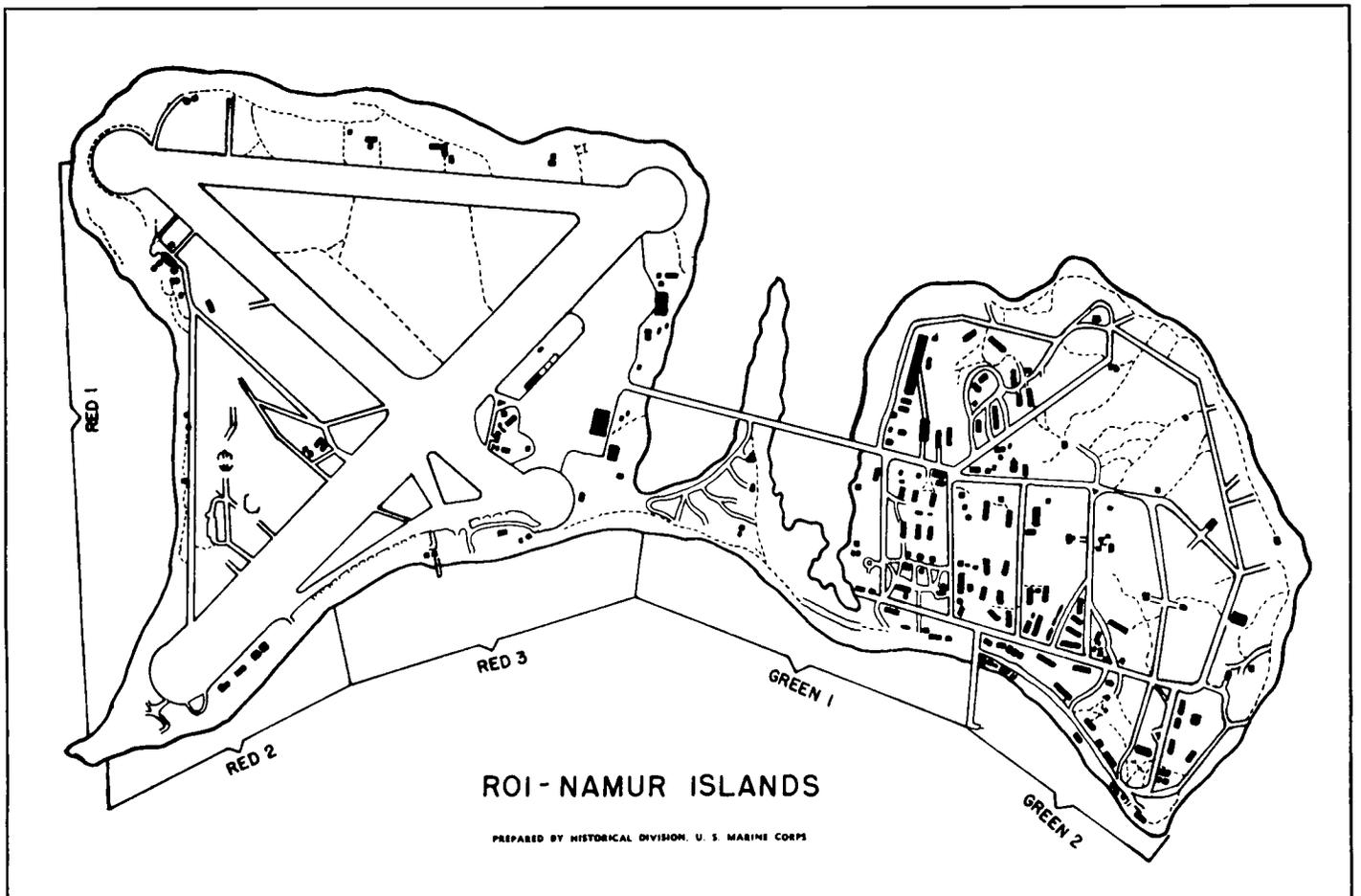
box! Jack looked like he was in pretty bad shape, and I urged him to go get some medical attention, but he refused and moved on alone to the next Jap pillbox (where, I later learned, he was killed in a single-handed heroic attack for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor).

All over Namur there were similar examples of individual initiative. They were needed, for the island was covered with dense jungle, concrete fortifications, administrative buildings, and barracks. It was difficult to mount an armored attack under these conditions. Meanwhile, the Japanese used them to their fullest extent for cover and concealment. Enemy resistance and problems of maintaining unit contact slowed the Marines' advance.

Amidst all of this, a Marine demolition team threw a satchel charge of high explosive into a Japanese bunker which turned out to be crammed with torpedo warheads. An enor-

mous blast occurred. From off shore, an officer watched as "the whole of Namur Island disappeared from sight in a tremendous brown cloud of dust and sand raised by the explosion." Overhead, a Marine artillery spotter felt his plane catapult up 1,000 feet and exclaimed, "Great God Almighty! The whole damn island has blown up!" On the beach another officer recalled that "trunks of palm trees and chunks of concrete as large as packing crates were flying through the air like match sticks . . . The hole left where the blockhouse stood was as large as a fair-sized swimming pool." The column of smoke rose to over 1,000 feet in the air, and the explosion caused the deaths of 20 Marines and wounded 100 others in the area.

Finally, at 1930, Colonel Franklin A. Hart, commander of the 24th Marines ordered his men to dig in for the night. The troops had come across a good portion of the island. Now they would hold the ground gained





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 70694

Landing Vehicles, Tracked (LVTs) equipped with rocket launchers new to the 4th Marine Division, churn towards the assault beaches of Roi-Namur on D-Plus One.

and get ready for the morrow. One rifleman, Robert F. Graf, later wrote about that time:

Throughout the night the fleet sent flares skyward, lighting the islands as the flares drifted with the prevailing wind. Ghostly flickering light was cast from the flares as they drifted along on their parachutes. Laying in our foxhole, my buddy and I were watching, waiting, and straining our ears trying to filter out the known sounds.

Our foxhole in that sand was about six feet long by two feet in depth and just about wide enough to hold the two of us. Since I had eaten only my "D" ration since leaving the ship, I was hungry. "D" rations were bitter-sweet chocolate bars about an inch and a half square and were supposed to be full of energy. I removed a "K" ration from my pack and opened it. "K" rations came in a box about the size of a Cracker Jack box and had a waterproof coating. These rations contained a small tin of powdered coffee or lemonade, some round hard candies, a package of three cigarettes, and a tin about the size of a tuna-fish can containing either cheese, hash, or eggs with a little bacon. We dined on our rations, drank water from our canteens, and prepared to settle in for the night

After finishing chow we elected to take two-hour watches, one on guard while the other slept. Also we made sure we knew where our buddies' foxholes were, both on the left and right of us. Thus we were set up so that anyone to our front would be an enemy. Our first night in combat had started.

Before dawn the Japanese mounted a determined counterattack which was finally repulsed. Nevertheless, it was a tragic night for one particular family. A 19-year-old Marine private

Troops of the 24th Marines near the beach on Namur, thankful for having made it safely ashore, are now awaiting the inevitable word to resume the attack.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 70209





Marine Corps Art Collection

A watercolor by combat artist LtCol Donald L. Dickson depicts members of a Marine fire team in a close-in attack on a Japanese defensive position on Namur.

and he became the most senior officer to die in the battle. For his superb leadership under fire he was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Across the sand spit, on Roi, it had been a different story. This island was nearly bare, for it was mostly covered by the airfield runways. When the 23d Marines hit the beaches on D plus 1, the fierceness of the pre-landing bombardment prevented the Japanese defenders from mounting a coordinated defense. Small groups of Marine riflemen joined their regiment's attached tanks in a race across to the far side of the island. This charging style caused considerable confusion as to who was where. Re-organized into more coherent units, the men made a final orderly drive to finish the job.

In spite of the rapid progress on Roi, there were still some major enemy strongpoints which had to be dealt with. An after-action report of the 2d Battalion described one example of this perilous work in matter of fact terms:

[There] was a blockhouse

constructed of reinforced concrete approximately three feet thick. It had three gunports, one each facing north, east, and west, another indication of the enemy's mistaken assumption that the Americans would at-

tack from the sea rather than the lagoon shore. Two heavy hits had been made on the blockhouse, one apparently by 14-inch or 16-inch shells and the other by an aerial bomb. Nevertheless, the position had not been demolished

[The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Dillon] then ordered Company G to take the blockhouse. The company commander first sent forward a 75mm halftrack, which fired five rounds against the steel door. At this point a demolition squad came up, and its commander volunteered to knock out the position with explosives. While the halftrack continued to fire, infantry platoons moved up on each flank of the installation. The demolition squad placed charges at the ports and pushed bangalore torpedoes through a shell hole in the roof. . . .

"Cease fire" was then ordered, and after hand-grenades were thrown inside the door, half a squad of infantry went into in-

Members of the 23d Marines on Roi turn to look in astonishment at the black plume of the giant explosion which took many lives in the 24th Marines on Namur.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 71921





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 70241

One of the very few Japanese finally persuaded to surrender in the Roi-Namur operation, this stripped-down soldier is well covered by suspicious Marine riflemen as he leaves his hiding place in a massive but shell-shattered blockhouse.

investigate. Unfortunately, the engineers of the demolition squad had not got the word to cease fire, and had placed a shaped charge at one of the ports while the infantry was still inside. Luckily, no one was hurt, but as the company commander reported, "a very undignified and hurried exit was made by all concerned." Inside were three heavy machine guns, a quantity of ammunition, and the bodies of three Japanese.

Many Japanese had to be flushed out of or blown up in the airfield's drainage ditches and culverts, but by 1800 that day, D plus 1, Roi had been secured. ("Secured" seemed a somewhat flexible term when the first service of Mass, held the next day, was interrupted by Japanese shots.) By 6 February, however, the ground elements of a Marine aircraft wing were ensconced at the airfield, preparing for the arrival of their planes in five more days. For the entire remainder of the war these planes pounded the by-passed atolls with such power that the Japanese on them were eliminated from any further role in the war. (There was one

surprise Japanese air raid on Roi, staged from the Mariana Islands, on 12 February. This caused a number of casualties and major damage to material.)

The repair of the airfield and its quick return to action was a tribute to the skills of both the 20th Marines, an engineer regiment, and the 109th Naval Construction Battalion (Seabees). This achievement was one more illustration of the vital role

played by a dizzying list of units that supported the assault rifle battalions. Besides the vast armada of naval planes, ships, and landing craft, there were Navy chaplains and corpsmen (two specialties which are always Navy). In addition to the Marine air, artillery, and engineer units, there were the tanks, heavy weapons, motor transport, quartermaster, signals, and headquarters supporting units. An amphibious operation, to be suc-

Marine tanks and infantry worked effectively together when the terrain permitted.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 70203



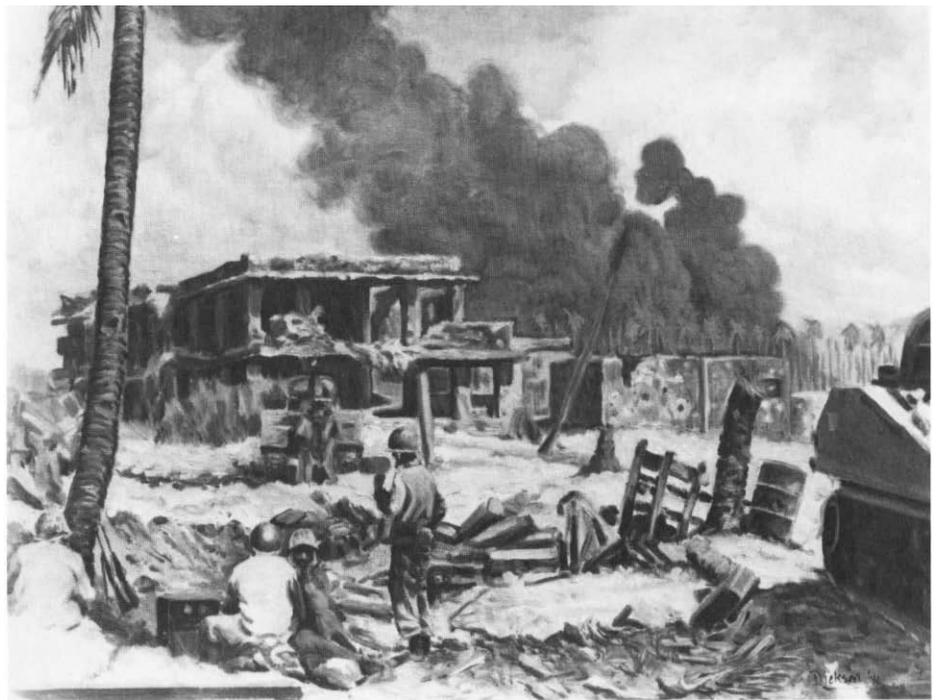
cessful, must be a finely tuned, highly trained juggernaut that depends on all its parts working smoothly together and this was clearly demonstrated in the Marshalls.

The conquest of Roi-Namur had been a relatively easy operation when compared to some of the other Marine campaigns in the Pacific. (At Tarawa, for example, more than 3,300 men had been killed or wounded in 76 hours.) The 4th Division's victory came at a cost of 313 Marines and corpsmen killed and 502 wounded. By contrast, the defeated Japanese garrison numbered an estimated 3,563—with all but a handful of them now dead.

Two more tasks remained for the 4th Division; the first was mopping up the rest of the islets in the northern two-thirds of the atoll. The 25th Marines, which had supported the attacks of the 23d and 24th, took off on a series of island-hopping trips on board their LVTs. The regiment checked out more of the exotically named islets such as Boggerlapp, Marsugalt, Gegibu, Oniotto, and Eru. The 25th found no resistance and by D plus 7 it had covered all 50 of the islets that were its objectives. This assignment was a total change from what the regiment had experienced around Roi-Namur. One writer, Carl W. Proehl, described the expedition this way:

The once heavily overgrown terrain of Namur was almost completely denuded at the end of the battle by the combination of naval gunfire and bombing.

National Archives Photo 127-N-72407



This watercolor by LtCol Donald L. Dickson, USMCR, portrays Marines reviving themselves and taking it easy after the fighting near blockhouse skeleton.

It was on this junket that the men of the 25th got to know the Marshall Island natives, for it was these Marines who freed them from Japanese domination. On many islets, bivouacking overnight, the natives and Marines got together and sang hymns; the Marshall Islanders had been Christianized many years before, and missionaries had taught them such songs as "Onward Christian Soldiers." K rations and cigarettes also made a big hit with them. And more than one Marine sentry, walk-

ing post in front of a native camp, took up the islander's dress and wore only a loin cloth—usually a towel from a Los Angeles hotel.

The final task that remained for the division was a miserable one. Roi and Namur were littered with dead Japanese; the stench was overpowering as their bodies putrefied in the blazing tropical sun. All hands, officers and enlisted, were put to work day and night on burial details. "Hey, I just finished two days of brutal combat! We don't have any gloves or equipment for this!"—"Too bad, just start doing it anyway!" Health conditions were so bad that 1,500 men in the division were suffering from dysentery when the troops finally re-boarded transports for the journey back to their rear base at Maui in the Hawaiian Islands.

The Army Attack: Kwajalein

In accordance with the overall campaign plan for the seizure of the Marshall Islands, the Army's attack on Kwajalein Island at the south end of the atoll began in exact synchronization with the Marine assault in the north. The same softening-up process



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 71920

Using palm fronds for concealment, two Marines carefully scout out the terrain ahead of them on Roi in a firefight with the Japanese forward of their position.

was used on D-day, 31 January, with a large force of warships and planes pouring on a blanket of high explosive. The Navy, for instance, fired 7,000 shells. Because of the location of the islets immediately surrounding its main objective, the 7th Infantry Division was able to follow a plan identical to the Marines, with the 17th Infantry Regiment clearing the way for placement of close-by supporting artillery. The 145th Field Artillery Battalion then proceeded to inundate the target with 28,000 rounds.

Then, on D plus 1, the riflemen of the 32d and 184th Infantry Regiments landed on Kwajalein Island itself. Because of previous joint rehearsals held in Hawaii the amtracs carried in the assault troops with smoothness and efficiency. In addition, Major General Charles H. Corlett, the division commander, had an assemblage of DUKWs (amphibious trucks always called "ducks") available, and it proved valuable in ferrying priority supplies ashore to the fighting men.

Once ashore, the assault units found widespread devastation from the preinvasion bombing and shelling. Smashed seawalls, uprooted trees, demolished buildings, scarred pillboxes were everywhere. Dug in amidst all this debris, the Japanese fought resolutely. This kind of close combat usually forced the issue down

to the individual level. An Army officer, Lieutenant Colonel S. L. A. Marshall, who later interviewed the troops, gave this account of how they dealt with the deadly Japanese "spider holes" they encountered:

The holes were everywhere. Each one had to be searched from close up. Every spot where a man might be hiding had to be stabbed out. So greatly was the beach littered with broken foliage that it was like looking through a haystack for a few poisoned needles

The fire which cut the men down came from the spider holes farther up the line. It was the kind of bitter going that made it necessary for the junior leaders to prod their men constantly. The leader of the 3d Squad had been trying to get his men forward against the fire. Private First Class John Treager got up, rushed forward about ten yards, hit the dirt, fired a few shots with his BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] and crumpled with a bullet in his head.

Somewhat farther along, a bayonet was seen sticking up through a patch of fronds. The Jap crouched within it hadn't

A rifleman of the 23d Marines moves slowly past a Japanese airplane and a hangar destroyed on Roi by naval gunfire. The rifle slung over his shoulder and the adjacent Marine carrying supplies indicate that combat is no longer imminent.

National Archives Photo 127-GW-1253-70345

