

PART IV

Saipan: The Decisive Battle

Background to FORAGER

STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL PLANS

While the Japanese bolstered their defenses along the Central Pacific Front, American strategists were con-

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: FifthFlt OPlan Cen 10-44, dtd 12May44 (with changes); TF 51 Rpt of PhibOps for the Capture of the Marianas Islands, dtd 25Aug44, hereafter *TF 51 OpRpt*; TF 56 OPlan 3-44, dtd 26Apr44 (with changes); TF 56 Rpt of FORAGER Op (with encls covering Planning, Ops, Intel, Log, Pers, and StfRpts), dtd 25Oct44, hereafter *TF 56 OpRpt*; TF 52 AtkO A11-44, dtd 21May44 (with changes); TG 52.2 Rpt of Saipan Op, dtd 23Aug44, hereafter *TG 52.2 OpRpt*; NTLF OPlan 3-44 (with changes), dtd 1May44; NTLF Rpt of Marianas Op, Phase I (Saipan) (with encls containing Op and AdminOs, Daily DispSums, Stf and SpecRpts), dtd 12Aug44, hereafter *NTLF OpRpt*; 27th InfDiv Rpt of Ops, Saipan (with Narrative, Rpts of StfSecs and of SuborUs), dtd 24Oct44, hereafter *27th InfDiv OpRpt*; CominCh, *Amphibious Operations: Invasion of the Marianas, June to August 1944* dtd 30Dec44, hereafter CominCh, *The Marianas*; Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; Philip A. Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1960), hereafter Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*; Maj Carl W. Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1950), hereafter Hoffman, *Saipan*; Samuel Eliot Morison, *New Guinea and the Marianas, March 1944—August 1944—History of U. S. Naval Operations in World War II*, v. VIII (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1953), hereafter Morison,

cluding their lengthy debate concerning the future course of the Pacific war. At the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, the CCS had accepted in principle a Central Pacific offensive aimed toward the general area of the Philippines but proceeding by way of the Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas. In spite of objections by General MacArthur, this proposed offensive was finally incorporated in the Strategic Plan for the Defeat of Japan, with the seizure of the Marshalls and Carolines listed among the Allied goals for 1943-1944. Overall strategy against Japan called for two coordinated drives, one westward across the Central Pacific and the other, by MacArthur's forces, northward from New Guinea.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MARIANAS ²

The staunchest advocate of operations against the Marianas was

New Guinea and the Marianas. Unless otherwise noted, all documents cited are located in the Marianas Area OpFile and Marianas CmtFile, HistBr, HQMC.

² Additional sources for this section include: CCS 397 (Rev), SpecificOps for the Defeat of Japan, dtd 3Dec43, CCS 417, 417/1, 417/2, Overall Plan for the Defeat of Japan, dtd Dec43, JCS 581, 581/1, 581/2, SpecificOps for the Defeat of Japan, dtd Nov-Dec43; JPS 264, Outline Plan for the Seizure of the Marianas, Incl Guam, dtd 6Sep43 (OPD-ABC Files,

Admiral King, who believed that the capture of these islands would sever the enemy's lines of supply to Truk and Rabaul and provide bases for operations against targets farther west. During the Quebec meeting of Anglo-American planners, a conference that lasted from 14 to 24 August 1943, the admiral again stressed the importance of the Marianas. British representatives asked King if it might not be wise to restrict operations in MacArthur's theater so that the Allies might divert to Europe some of the men and material destined for the Southwest Pacific. The admiral answered that "if forces were so released they should be concentrated on the island thrust through the Central Pacific."³ He added, however, that he considered the two offensives against the Japanese to be complementary. General Marshall then pointed out that the troops scheduled for the New Guinea operations were either en route to or already stationed in the Southwest Pacific.

At Quebec the CCS approved the forthcoming operations against the Gilberts and Marshalls but merely listed the Marianas as a possible objective to be attacked, if necessary, when American forces had advanced to within striking distance. The Ameri-

WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.); CinCPOA Campaign GRANITE, prelim draft, dtd 27Dec43; CinCPOA Outline Campaign Plan GRANITE, dtd 13Jan44; CinCPOA Outline Campaign Plan GRANITE II, dtd 3Jun44; CinCPOA JntStfStudy FORAGER, dtd 20Mar 44; CinCPac-CinCPOA memo to CominCh, dtd 30Sep43, subj: GarRequirements for CenPacArea, with encls A-C (OPlan File, OAB, NHD).

³ King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 485.

can Joint Planning Staff, acting upon this tentative commitment, began preparing an outline plan for the conquest of the Marianas. When Admiral Nimitz turned his attention to the Central Pacific drive approved at Quebec, he noted that the Marianas might serve as an alternate objective to the Palaus. In brief, amphibious forces might thrust to the Philippines by way of the Carolines and Palaus or strike directly toward the heart of the Japanese empire after seizing bases in the Marianas and Bonins. The agreements reached at Quebec also affected General MacArthur's plans, for the Allies gave final acceptance to the JCS recommendation that Rabaul should be bypassed. This decision, although it changed the general's plans, actually enabled him to speed his own advance toward the Philippines. (See Map I, Map Section.)

As the next meeting of the Anglo-American Chiefs of Staff, scheduled for November 1943, drew nearer, the JCS began preparing its proposals for the future conduct of the Pacific war. Among the items under discussion was the employment of a new long-range bomber, the B-29, against Japanese industry. This plane, according to General Henry H. Arnold, Commanding General, Army Air Forces, "would have an immediate and marked effect upon the Japanese and if delivered in sufficient quantities, would undoubtedly go far to shorten the war."⁴

At this time, Arnold was planning to strike from bases on the Chinese main-

⁴ JCS, Minutes of the 122d Meeting, 9Nov43, p. 2 (OPD-ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

land, an undertaking which required new flying fields, a vast amount of fuel and supplies, numerous American flight crews, mechanics, and technicians, and a strengthening of the Chinese Nationalist armies defending the bases. The large airfield nearest Japan was at Chengtu, 1,600 miles from any worthwhile target. If necessary, the B-29's, loaded with extra gasoline instead of high explosives, could take off from India, fly to advanced airfields in China where the emergency fuel tanks could be replaced with bombs, then continue to the Japanese home islands. Unfortunately, the Chinese might prove incapable of holding these way-stations on the aerial road to Japan. What was needed were bases secure from enemy pressure but within range of the Home Islands. The solution lay in the Marianas, some 1,200 miles from the Japanese homeland, but this group was in the hands of the enemy. Army Air Force planners urged that the Marianas be captured and developed as B-29 bases, but they also desired to begin the strategic bombing of Japan as quickly as possible, using the India-China route.⁵

General Arnold was confident that masses of B-29s could destroy Japan's "steel, airplane, and other factories, oil reserves, and refineries," which were concentrated in and around "extremely inflammable cities."⁶ His colleagues, already looking ahead to the invasion of Japan, apparently shared his conviction, for they accepted as a basis for

planning the assumption, set forth by Vice Admiral Russell Willson, that: "If we can isolate Japan by a sea and air blockade, whittle down her fleet, and wipe out her vulnerable cities by air bombardment, I feel that there may be no need for invading Japan—except possibly by an occupying force against little or no opposition—to take advantage of her disintegration."⁷

The importance attached to strategic bombardment and naval blockade caused the Marianas to assume an increasing significance in American plans, since submarines as well as aircraft might operate from the island group. Evidence of the value of the Marianas was the recommendation by the Strategy Section to the Strategy and Policy Group of the Army Operations Division that the island bases, once they were ready for operations, should have priority over the mainland fields in the allotment of aircraft. "It is self-evident," Army strategists remarked, "that these aircraft should operate from bases within striking range of Japan proper, if that is possible, rather than from a more distant base such as Chengtu."⁸ Throughout SEXTANT, as the latest international meeting was called, the United States emphasized the need for air bases in the western Pacific.

The SEXTANT conference, 22

⁵ Gen of the AF Henry H. Arnold, USAF, *Global Mission* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), pp. 477-480.

⁶ JCS, Minutes of the 123d Meeting, 15Nov 43, p. 9 (OPD-ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

⁷ VAdm Russell Willson memo to Adm Ernest J. King, dtd 11Nov43, subj: Plan for Defeat of Japan (OPD-ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

⁸ Col J. J. Billo, USA, memo to BGen George A. Lincoln, USA, dtd 7Dec43, subj: Specific Ops for the Defeat of Japan (CCS 397) (OPD-AGC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

November-7 December 1943, actually was a series of discussions among Allied leaders. After conversations with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek at Cairo, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and their advisors journeyed to Teheran, Iran, where they met a Soviet staff led by Marshal Joseph Stalin. The Anglo-American contingent then returned to Cairo so that the combined staffs might revise their world-wide strategy to include commitments made to either Nationalist China or the Soviet Union.

Out of SEXTANT came a schedule, drafted for planning purposes, which called for the invasion of the Marianas on 1 October 1944 and the subsequent bombing by planes based in the islands of targets in and near the Japanese home islands. The date of the Marianas operation, however, might be advanced if the Japanese fleet were destroyed, if the enemy began abandoning his island outposts, if Germany suddenly collapsed, or if Russia entered the Pacific war. The strategy behind this timetable called for two series of mutually supporting operations, one by MacArthur's troops, and the other by Nimitz' Central Pacific forces. Since the advance across the Central Pacific promised the more rapid capture of airfields from which to attack Japan and could result in a crushing defeat for the Japanese navy, Nimitz would have priority in men and equipment. The timing of MacArthur's blows would depend upon progress in the Central Pacific. Planners believed that by the spring of 1945 both prongs of the American offensive would have penetrated deeply enough into the enemy's

defenses to permit an attack in the Luzon-Formosa-China area.

On 27 December, area planning began as Nimitz issued his GRANITE campaign plan, a tentative schedule of Central Pacific operations which also helped to establish target dates for landings in the Southwest Pacific that would require support by the Pacific Fleet. First would come FLINT-LOCK, scheduled for 31 January 1944, then the assault on Kavieng, 20 March, which would coincide with an aerial attack on Truk. On 20 April, MacArthur's troops, supported by Nimitz' warships, would swarm ashore at Manus Island. The fighting would then shift to the Central Pacific for the Eniwetok assault, then set for 1 May, the landing at Mortlock (Nomoi) 1 July, and the conquest of Truk to begin on 15 August. The tentative target date for the Marianas operation, which included the capture of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, was 15 November 1944.

As if to prove that his GRANITE plan was more flexible than the mineral for which it was named, the admiral on 13 January advanced the capture of Mortlock and Truk in the Carolines, to 1 August. If these two landings should prove unnecessary, the Palau Islands to the west could serve as an alternate objective. From the Palaus, the offensive would veer northeastward to the Marianas, where the assault troops were to land on 1 November. Late in January 1944, Nimitz summoned representatives from the South Pacific and invited others from the Southwest Pacific to confer with his own staff officers on means of further speeding the war against Japan.

Nimitz, informed of the recent deci-

sions concerning B-29 bases, offered the conference a choice between storming Truk on 15 June, attacking the Marianas in September, and then seizing the Palaus in November or bypassing Truk, striking at the Marianas on 15 June, and then landing in the Palaus during October. Some of those present, however, were interested in neither alternative. The leader of these dissenters was General George C. Kenney, commander of Allied air forces in General MacArthur's theater, who managed to convince various Army and Navy officers that the Central Pacific campaign be halted in favor of a drive northward from New Guinea to the Philippines. As Kenney recalled these sessions, he remarked that "we had a regular love feast. [Rear Admiral Charles H.] McMorris, Nimitz' Chief of Staff, argued for the importance of capturing the Carolines and the Marshalls [FLINTLOCK was about to begin], but everyone else was for pooling everything along the New Guinea-Philippines axis."⁹ Although fewer than Kenney's estimated majority were willing to back a single offensive under MacArthur's leadership, a sizeable number of delegates wanted to by-pass the Marianas along with Truk. Nimitz, however, brought the assembled officers back to earth by pointing out that the fate of the Marianas was not under discussion. When reminded that the choice lay between neutralizing or seizing Truk before the

advance into the Marianas, they chose to bypass the Carolines fortress.

General MacArthur also saw no strategic value in an American conquest of the Marianas. He dispatched an envoy to Washington to urge that the major effort against Japan be directed by way of New Guinea and the Philippines. Like those who dissented during Nimitz' recent conference, the general's representative accomplished nothing, for the JCS had reached its decision.

On 12 March, the JCS issued a directive that embodied the decisions made during the recent Allied conferences. General MacArthur's proposed assault on Kavieng was cancelled, and the New Ireland fortress joined Rabaul on the growing list of bypassed strongholds. Southwest Pacific forces were to seize Hollandia, New Guinea, in April and then undertake those additional landings along the northern coast of the island which were judged necessary for future operations against the Palaus or Mindanao. This revision in the tasks to be undertaken in the South and Southwest Pacific enabled the Army general to return to Nimitz the fleet units borrowed for the Kavieng undertaking.

In the Central Pacific, where amphibious forces had seized Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls and carrier task groups had raided Truk, Nimitz was to concentrate upon targets in the Carolines, Palaus, and Marianas. His troops were scheduled to attack the Marianas on 15 June, while aircraft continued to pound the bypassed defenders of Truk. In addition, the admiral had the responsibility of protecting General MacArthur's flank during the attack upon Hollandia and sub-

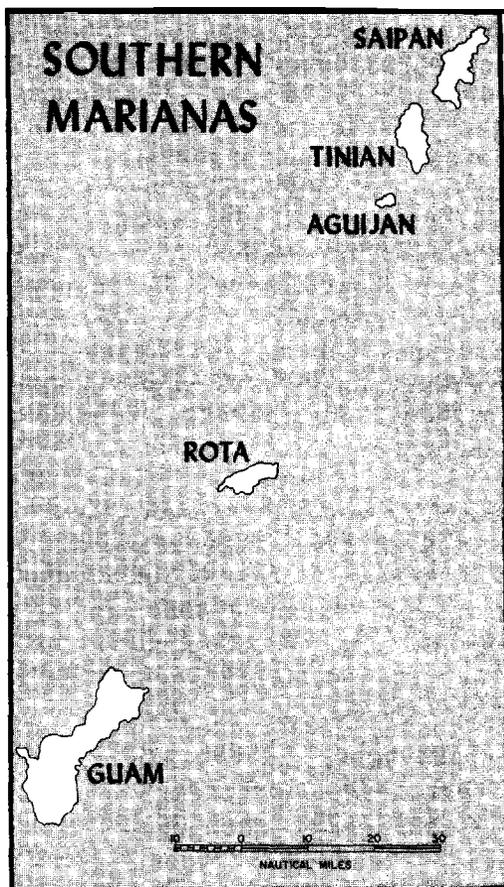
⁹ Gen George C. Kenney, USAF, *General Kenney Reports: A Personal History of the Pacific War* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1949), pp. 347-348.

sequent landings. Throughout these operations, the two area commanders would coordinate their efforts to provide mutual support.

Although the Marianas lacked protected anchorages, a fact which Nimitz had pointed out to the JCS, these islands were selected as the next objective in the Central Pacific campaign. The major factor that influenced American planners was the need for bases from which B-29s could bomb the Japanese homeland. Instead of seizing advance bases for the fleet, the mission which the Marine Corps had claimed at the turn of the century, Leathernecks would be employed to capture airfield sites for the Army Air Forces.

After receiving the JCS directive, Nimitz ordered his subordinates to concentrate upon plans for the Marianas enterprise and to abandon the staff work that had been started in preparation for an assault on Truk. On 20 March, the admiral issued a joint staff study for FORAGER, the invasion of the Marianas. The purpose of this operation was to capture bases from which to sever Japanese lines of communication, support the neutralization of Truk, begin the strategic bombing against the Palaus, Philippines, Formosa, and China. Target date for FORAGER was 15 June.

The decision to bypass Truk and Kavieng enabled Admiral Nimitz to alter the established schedule for the Central Pacific offensive. The revised campaign plan, GRANITE II, called for the capture of Saipan, Guam, and Tinian in the Marianas, to be followed on 8 September by landings at Palau. Southwest Pacific Area forces were to invade Mindanao on 15 November.



MAP 14

R. F. STIBIL

The final Central Pacific objective, with a tentative target date of 15 February 1945, would be either southern Formosa and Amoy or the island of Luzon. Not until October 1944 did the JCS officially cancel the Formosa-Amoy scheme, an operation that would have required five of six Marine divisions, in favor of the reconquest of Luzon.

The first of the Marianas Islands scheduled for conquest was Saipan. This objective was, in a military as well as a geographic sense, the center of the

group. Ocean traffic destined for the Marianas bases generally was channeled through Saipan. There, also, were the administrative headquarters for the entire chain, a large airfield and supplementary flight strip, as well as ample room for the construction of maintenance shops and supply depots. Finally, Saipan could serve as the base from which to attack Tinian, only three miles to the southwest, the island which had the finest airfields in the area. From Saipan, artillery could dominate portions of Tinian, but the western beaches of the northern island were beyond the range of batteries on Tinian. Thus, to strike first at Saipan was less risky than an initial blow at the neighboring island. Once the Americans had captured Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, the Japanese base at Rota would be isolated and subject to incessant aerial attack. (See Map 14.)

SAIPAN: THE FIRST OBJECTIVE¹⁰

The Mariana group is composed of 15 islands scattered along the 145th meridian, east longitude. The distance from Farallon de Pajaros at the northern extremity of the chain to Guam at its southern end is approximately 425 miles. Since the northern

¹⁰ Additional sources for this section include: JICPOA InfoBul 7-44, The Marianas, dtd 25Jan44, pp. 50-65; VAC G-2 Study of Southern Marianas, dtd 5Apr44; Tadao Yanaihara, *Pacific Islands under Japanese Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940); R. W. Robson, *The Pacific Islands Handbook* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1945, North American ed.).

islands are little more than volcanic peaks that have burst through the surface of the Pacific, only the larger of the southern Marianas are of military value. Those islands that figured in American and Japanese plans were Saipan, some 1,250 miles from Tokyo, Tinian, Rota, and Guam.

Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese explorer sailing for Spain, discovered the Marianas in 1521. The sight of Chamorros manning their small craft so impressed the dauntless navigator that he christened the group *Islas de las Velas Latinas*, Islands of the Lateen Sails, in tribute to native seamanship. His sailors, equally impressed but for a different reason, chose the more widely accepted name *Islas de los Ladrones*, Islands of the Thieves. Possibly moved by this latter title to reform the Chamorros, Queen Maria Anna dispatched missionaries and soldiers to the group, which was retitled in her honor the Marianas.

All of these islands were Spanish possessions at the outbreak of war with the United States in 1898. During the summer of that year, an American warship accepted the surrender of Guam, a conquest that was affirmed by the treaty that ended the conflict. In 1899, the remaining islands were sold to Germany as Spain disposed of her Pacific empire. Japan seized the German Marianas during World War I. After the war, the League of Nations appointed Japan as trustee over all the group except American-ruled Guam. When Japan withdrew from the League of Nations in 1935, she retained her portion of the Marianas as well as the Marshalls and Carolines. In the years that followed, the Japanese government

kept its activities in the group cloaked in secrecy.

No single adjective can glibly describe the irregularly shaped island of Saipan. Three outcroppings, Agingan Point, Cape Obiam, and Nafutan Point, mar the profile of the southern coast. The western shoreline of Saipan extends almost due north from Agingan Point past the town of Charan Kanoa, past Afetna Point and the city of Garapan to Mutcho Point. Here, midway along the island, the coastline veers to the northeast, curving slightly to embrace Tanapag Harbor and finally terminating at rugged Marpi Point. The eastern shore wends its sinuous way southward from Marpi Point, beyond the Kagman Peninsula and Magicienne Bay, to the rocks of Nafutan Point. Cliffs guard most of the eastern and southern beaches from Marpi Point to Cape Obiam. There is a gap in this barrier inland of Magicienne Bay, but a reef, located close inshore, serves to hinder small craft. Although the western beaches are comparatively level, a reef extends from the vicinity of Marpi Point to an opening off Tanapag Harbor, then continues, though broken by several gaps, to Agingan Point. (See Map 15.)

Saipan encompasses some 72 square miles. The terrain varies from the swamps inland of Charan Kanoa to the mountains along the spine of the island and includes a relatively level plain. The most formidable height is 1,554-foot Mount Tapotchau near the center of the island. From this peak, a ridge, broken by other mountain heights, runs northward to 833-foot Mount Marpi. To the south and southeast of Mount Tapotchau, the ground tapers down-

ward to form a plateau, but the surface of this plain is broken by scattered peaks. Both Mounts Kagman and Nafutan, for example, rise over 400 feet above sea level, while Mount Fina Susu, inland of Charan Kanoa, reaches almost 300 feet. The most level regions—the southern part of the island and the narrow coastal plain—were under intense cultivation at the time of the American landings. The principal crop was sugar cane, which grew in thickets dense enough to halt anyone not armed with a machete. Refineries had been built at Charan Kanoa and Garapan, and rail lines connected these processing centers with the sugar plantations.

Saipan weather promised to be both warm, 75 to 85 degrees, and damp, for the invasion was scheduled to take place in the midst of the rainy season. Planners, however, believed that the operation would end before August, usually the wettest month of the year. Typhoons, which originate in the Marianas, posed little danger to the expedition for such storms generally pass beyond the group before reaching their full fury.

As American strategists realized, Saipan offered no harbor that compared favorably with the atoll anchorages captured in previous operations. The Japanese had improved Tanapag Harbor on the west coast, but there the reef offered scant protection to anchored vessels. Ships which chose to unload off Garapan, just to the south, were at the mercy of westerly winds. The deep waters of Magicienne Bay, on the opposite shore, were protected on the north and west but exposed to winds from the southeast.

The geography of the objective influenced both planning and training. The size of the island, the reefs and cliffs that guarded its coasts, its cane fields and mountains, and the disadvantages of its harbors had to be considered by both tactical and logistical planners. Whatever their schemes of maneuver and supply, the attackers would encounter dense cane fields, jungles, mountains, cities or towns, and possibly swamps. The Marines would have to prepare to wage a lengthy battle for ground far different from the coral atolls of the Gilberts and Marshalls.

COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

Since FORAGER contemplated the eventual employment of three Marine divisions, a Marine brigade, and two Army divisions against three distinct objectives within the Mariana group, the command structure was bound to be somewhat complex. Once again, Admiral Nimitz, who bore overall responsibility for the operation, entrusted command of the forces involved to Admiral Spruance. As Commander, Central Pacific Task Forces, Spruance held military command of all units involved in FORAGER and was responsible for coordinating and supervising their performance.¹¹ He was to select the times of the landings at Tinian, Guam, and any lesser islands not mentioned in the operation plan and to determine when the capture and occupation of each objective had been

completed. As Commander, Fifth Fleet, he also had the task of thwarting any effort by the *Combined Fleet* to contest the invasion of the Marianas.

Vice Admiral Turner, Commander, Joint Amphibious Forces (Task Force 51), would exercise command over the amphibious task organizations scheduled to take part in FORAGER. The admiral, under the title of Commander, Northern Attack Force, reserved for himself tactical command over the Saipan landings. As his second-in-command, and commander of the Western Landing Group, which comprised the main assault forces for Saipan, Turner had the veteran Admiral Hill.¹² At both Tinian and Guam, Turner would exercise his authority through the appropriate attack force commander.

In command of all garrison troops as well as the landing forces was Holland M. Smith, now a lieutenant general. Smith, Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, also served as Commanding General, Northern Troops and Landing Force (NTLF) at Saipan. As commander of the expeditionary troops, he exercised authority through the landing force commander at a given objective from the time that the amphibious phase ended until the capture and occupation phase was completed. Thanks to his dual capacity at Saipan, the general would establish his command post ashore when he believed the beachhead to be secured, report this move to the attack force commander, and begin directing the battle for the island. Since Saipan was a large enough land mass to require a 2-divi-

¹¹ RAdm Charles J. Moore cmts on draft MS, dtd 1Feb63, hereafter *Moore comments Saipan*.

¹² Adm Harry W. Hill cmts on draft MS, dtd 6Feb63, hereafter *Hill comments Saipan*.

sion landing force, Smith would be the equivalent of a corps commander.

Faced with the burdens of twin commands, the Marine general reorganized his VAC staff as soon as the preliminary planning for the Marianas operation had been completed. For detailed planning, he could rely on a Red Staff, which was to assist him in exercising command over Northern Troops and Landing Force, and a Blue Staff, which would advise him in making decisions as Commander, Expeditionary Troops.

Apart from his role in FORAGER, Smith was charged, in addition, with "complete administrative control and logistical responsibility for all Fleet Marine Force units employed in the Central Pacific Area."¹³ Since all Marine divisions in the Pacific were destined for eventual service in Nimitz' theater, the general was empowered to establish an administrative command which included a supply service. Once the Marianas campaign was completed, Nimitz intended to install Smith as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, with control over the administrative command and two amphibious corps.¹⁴

Northern Troops and Landing Force was composed of two veteran divisions led by experienced commanders. The 2d Marine Division, which had earned battle honors at Guadalcanal and Tarawa, was now commanded by Major General Thomas E. Watson,

whose Tactical Group 1 had seized Eniwetok Atoll. Major General Harry Schmidt's 4th Marine Division had received its introduction to combat during FLINTLOCK. The second major portion of Expeditionary Troops, Southern Troops and Landing Force, was under the command of Major General Roy S. Geiger, a naval aviator, who had directed an amphibious corps during the Bougainville fighting. Geiger's force consisted of the 3d Marine Division, tested at Bougainville, and the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. The brigade boasted the 22d Marines, a unit that had fought valiantly at Eniwetok Atoll, and the 4th Marines. Although the 4th Marines, organized in the South Pacific, had engaged only in the occupation of Emirau Island, most of its men were former raiders experienced in jungle warfare.

During the interval between the Kwajalein and Saipan campaigns, the Marine Corps approved revised tables of organizations for its divisions and their components, a decision which affected both the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions. Aggregate strength of the new model division was 17,465, instead of the previous 19,965. The principal components now were a headquarters battalion, a tank battalion, service troops, a pioneer battalion, an engineer battalion, an artillery regiment, and three infantry regiments. Service troops included service, motor transport, and medical battalions; the component once designated "special troops" existed no longer. The new tables called for the elimination of the naval construction battalion that had been part of the discarded engineer regiment and the transfer of the scout company,

¹³ AdminHist, FMFPac, 1944-1946, dtd 13 May46 (AdminHist File, HistBr, HQMC).

¹⁴ A provisional Headquarters, FMFPac was established on 24 August 1944. A detailed account of the formation of FMFPac along with its administrative and supply components will be included in the fourth volume of this series.

now reconnaissance company, from the tank battalion to headquarters battalion. The artillery regiment was deprived of one of its 75mm pack howitzer battalions, leaving two 75mm and two 105mm howitzer battalions. The infantry regiments continued to consist of three infantry battalions and a weapons company. The old 12-man rifle squad was increased to a strength of 13 and divided into three 4-man fire teams. Finally, the special weapons battalion had been disbanded and its antitank duties handed over to the regimental weapons companies, while the amphibian tractor battalion was made a part of corps troops.

Except for the absence of LVTs, the most striking change in the revised division's equipment was the substitution of 46 medium tanks for 54 light tanks within the tank battalion. The authorized number of flamethrowers had been gradually increased from 24 portables to 243 of this variety plus 24 of a new type that could be mounted in tanks, thus giving official approval to the common practice of issuing prior to combat as many flamethrowers as a division could lay hands upon. The artillery regiment lost 12 75mm pack howitzers, but the number of mortars available to infantry commanders was increased from 81 60mm and 36 81mm to 117 60mm and 36 81mm. Since each of the newly authorized fire teams contained an automatic rifle, the new division boasted 853 of these weapons and 5,436 M1 rifles instead of 558 automatic rifles and 8,030 M1s. Although it would seem that the reorganized division could extract a greater volume of fire from fewer men, such a unit also would require reinforcements, no-

tably a 535-man amphibian tractor battalion, before attempting amphibious operations.¹⁵

Both Marine divisions scheduled for employment at Saipan were almost completely reorganized before their departure for the objective. Neither had disbanded its engineer regiment although the organic naval construction battalions were now attached and would revert to corps control after the landing.¹⁶ The two surviving Marine battalions were originally formed according to discarded tables of organization as pioneer and engineer units. Thus, they could perform their usual functions even though they remained components of a regiment rather than separate battalions. Reinforced for the Saipan landings, its infantry battalions organized as landing teams and its infantry regiments as combat teams, each of the two divisions numbered approximately 22,000 men.¹⁷ In contrast, the 27th Infantry Division, serving as FORAGER reserve, could muster only 16,404 officers and men when fully reinforced.

During the battle for Saipan, the attacking Marines would be supported by heavier artillery weapons than the 75mm and 105mm howitzers that had aided them in previous Central Pacific operations. Two Army 155mm how-

¹⁵ TO F-100, MarDiv, dtd 5May44; F-30, ArtyRegt, dtd 21Feb44; F-80 TkBn, dtd 4Apr44; F-89, ReconCo, HqBn, dtd 4Apr44; F-70, ServTrps, dtd 12Apr44 (TO File, HistBr, HQMC). A summary of TO F-100, Marine Division, is included as Appendix F.

¹⁶ BGen Ewart S. Laue ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 29Jun63, hereafter *Laue ltr*.

¹⁷ 4th MarDiv and 2d MarDiv WarDs, Feb-May44 (Unit File, HistBr, HQMC).

itzer battalions joined a pair of Army 155mm gun battalions to form XXIV Corps Artillery under command of Brigadier General Arthur M. Harper, USA. In addition, a Marine 155mm howitzer battalion was attached by VAC to the 10th Marines, artillery regiment for the 2d Marine Division. The 4th Marine Division, however, had to be content with an additional 105mm howitzer battalion. The remainder of VAC artillery was retained under corps control in Hawaii.¹⁸

Another division which might see action at Saipan was the FORAGER reserve, the 27th Infantry Division, an organization that had yet to fight as a unit. During GALVANIC, the division commanding general, Major General Ralph C. Smith, had led the 165th Infantry and 3/105 against enemy-held Makin Atoll. As part of Tactical Group 1, 1/106 and 2/106 had fought at Eniwetok Island. The remaining battalion of the 106th Infantry landed at Majuro where there was no opposition, and the other two battalions of the 105th Infantry lacked combat experience of any sort. Also in reserve was the inexperienced 77th Infantry Division, but this unit would remain in Hawaii as a strategic reserve until enough ships had returned from Saipan to carry it to the Marianas. Not until 20 days after the Saipan landings would the 77th Division become available to

Expeditionary Troops for employment in the embattled islands.

The effort against Saipan, then, rested in capable hands. The team of Spruance, Turner, and Holland Smith had worked together in the Gilberts and Marshalls. Both assault divisions were experienced and commanded by generals who had seen previous action in the Pacific war. Only the Expeditionary Force reserve, which might be employed at Saipan, was an unknown factor, for the various components of the 27th Infantry Division had not fought together as a team, and there was considerable difference in experience among its battalions.

LOGISTICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PLANNING ¹⁹

In attacking Saipan, Nimitz' amphibious forces would encounter an objective unlike any they seized in previous Central Pacific operations. The mountainous island, with a total land area of some 72 square miles, was a far different battleground from the small, low-lying coral atolls of the Gilberts and Marshalls. The capture of this limited land mass could not be accomplished at a single stroke, a fact that was reflected in the plan of resupply adopted at the urging of General Holland Smith. The assault forces were directed to carry a 32-day supply of rations, enough fuel, lubricants,

¹⁸ As a consequence of the assignment of XXIV Corps Artillery to FORAGER, VAC Artillery served as part of the XXIV Corps in the assault on Leyte. The role of Marine artillery and air units in the Philippines campaign will be covered in the fourth volume of this series.

¹⁹ Additional sources for this section include: NTLF AdminO 3-44, dtd 1May44; 2d MarDiv SplCmts, Phase I, FORAGER, n.d., p. 23; 4th MarDiv OpRpt Saipan, 15Jun-9Jul44, (incl Narrative, StfRpts, and Rpts of SuborUs), dtd 18Sep44, hereafter *4th Mar Div OpRpt*.

chemical, ordnance, engineer, and individual supplies to last for 20 days, a 30-day quantity of medical supplies, 7 days' ammunition for ground weapons, and a 10-day amount for antiaircraft guns.

Vast as this mountain of supplies might be, the Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, wanted still more. The Navy accepted his recommendations that an ammunition ship anchor off Saipan within five days after the landings and that supply vessels sailing from the continental United States be "block loaded." In other words, those ships that would arrive with general supplies after the campaign had begun should carry items common to all troop units in a sufficient quantity to last 3,000 men for 30 days. The portion of the plan dealing with ammunition resupply worked well enough, but block loading proved inefficient. Since the blocks had been loaded in successive increments, each particular item had to be completely unloaded before working parties could reach the next type of supplies. Admiral Turner later urged a return to the practice of loading resupply vessels so that the various kinds of cargo could be landed as needed. He saw no need in forcing many ships to carry a little bit of everything, when, by concentrating certain items in different ships, selective unloading was possible.

As usual, hold space was at a premium, so Expeditionary Troops kept close watch on the amount of equipment carried by assault and garrison units. The three divisions that figured in the Saipan plan adhered to the principles of combat loading, but only one, the 27th Infantry Division, made exten-

sive use of pallets. In fact, the Army unit exceeded the VAC dictum that from 25 to 50 percent of embarked division supplies be placed on pallets. The 2d Marine Division lashed about 25 percent of its bulk cargo to these wooden frames, while the 4th Marine Division placed no more than 15 percent of its supplies on pallets. General Schmidt's unit lacked the wood, waterproof paper, and skilled laborers necessary to comply with the wishes of corps. To complicate the 4th Marine Division loading, G-4 officers found that certain vessels assigned to carry cargo for Schmidt's troops were also to serve other organizations. In addition, the transports finally made available had less cargo space than anticipated. Under these circumstances, division planners elected to use every available cubic foot for supplies, vehicles, and equipment. Even if material had been available, there would have been room for few pallets.

Applying the lessons of previous amphibious operations, VAC addressed itself to the problems of moving supplies from the transports to the units fighting ashore. In April 1944, a Corps Provisional Engineer Group was formed, primarily to provide shore party units for future landings. The two Marine Divisions assigned to VAC for FORAGER had already established slightly different shore party organizations, but since both were trained in beachhead logistics, the engineer group did not demand that they be remodeled to fit a standard pattern. Backbone of the shore parties for both divisions were the pioneer battalions and the attached naval construction battalions.

The 2d Marine Division assigned pioneer troops as well as Seabees to each

shore party team, while the 4th Marine Division concentrated its naval construction specialists in support of a single regiment. If this construction battalion should be needed for road building or similar tasks, the 4th Marine Division would be forced to reorganize its shore party teams in the midst of the operation. Neither Marine division used combat troops to assist in the beachhead supply effort.

To support both the garrison and assault units assigned to FORAGER, the Marine Supply Service organized the 5th and 7th Field Depots.²⁰ Marines trained to perform extensive repairs on weapons, fire control equipment, and vehicles accompanied the landing forces, while technicians capable of making even more thorough repairs embarked with the garrison troops. The 7th Field Depot was chosen to store and issue supplies, distribute ammunition, and salvage and repair equipment on both Saipan and Tinian. The 5th Field Depot would perform similar duties on Guam. At the conclusion of FORAGER, the two depots were to assist in re-equipping the 2d and 3d Marine Divisions by accepting, repairing, and re-issuing items turned in prior to their departure from the Marianas by the 4th Marine Division and 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. Since plans called for Saipan to be garrisoned primarily by Army troops, the 7th Field Depot eventually would move its facilities to nearby Tinian, although it

²⁰ The story of the development of the Marine Supply Service as part of the overall picture of the formation of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, will be covered in the fourth volume of this series.

would continue to serve Marine units on the other island.

Authority to determine which boats were to evacuate the wounded from Saipan rested in the beachmasters. During the early hours of the operation, casualties were to be collected in three specially equipped LSTs, treated, and then transferred to wards installed in certain of the transports. One of the hospital LSTs would take station off the beaches assigned to each of the Marine divisions. The third such vessel was to relieve whichever of the other two was first to receive 100 casualties. Each of the trio of landing ships had a permanent medical staff of one doctor and eight corpsmen. An additional 2 doctors and 16 corpsmen would be re-assigned from the transports to each of the LSTs before the fighting began. Plans also called for hospital ships to arrive in the target area by D plus three or when ordered forward from Eniwetok by Admiral Turner. Detailed plans were also formulated for the air evacuation of severely wounded men from the Marianas. Planes of the Air Transport Command, Army Air Forces, would load casualties at Aslito airfield and fly them to Oahu via Kwajalein.²¹

In spite of the scope of the Saipan undertaking and the possibility of numerous casualties, no replacement drafts were included in the expedition, for G-1 planners believed that men transferred from one unit could replace those lost by another. During the Saipan fighting, the 2d Marine Division

²¹ Dr. Robert F. Futrell, USAF HistDiv, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, dtd 29Jan63, hereafter *USAF Comments*.

was to be kept at peak effectiveness by the reassignment of troops from the 4th Marine Division. This plan, however, had to be abandoned, for the mass transfers required under such an arrangement would have crippled General Schmidt's division. Instead, replacement drafts were dispatched to Saipan during June and July.

INTELLIGENCE FOR SAIPAN

Until carrier planes attacked Saipan on 22-23 February 1944, American intelligence officers had no accurate information concerning the island defenses. As a result of these strikes, planners received aerial photographs of certain portions of the island. Ideal coverage, General Holland Smith's G-2 section believed, could be obtained if photographic missions were flown 90, 60, 30, and 15 days before the Saipan landings. Unfortunately, Navy carrier groups were too busy blasting other objectives to honor such a request, but additional pictures were taken by long-range Navy photo planes. Between 17 April and 6 June, Seventh Air Force B-24s escorted their Navy counterpart PB4Ys from Eniwetok to the Marianas on seven joint reconnaissance missions.²² Although the final set of photographs reached Expeditionary Troops headquarters at Eniwetok, where the expedition had paused en route to the objective, the assault elements had already set sail for Saipan. As a result, the troops that landed on 15 June did not benefit from the final aerial reconnaissance. Equally useless to the attacking divi-

sions were the photographs of the island beaches taken by the submarine *Greenling*, for these did not cover the preferred landing areas.

The aerial photographs taken by carrier aviators were not of the best quality, for the taking of pictures was more or less a sideline, and a dangerous one at that. First in the order of importance was the killing of Japanese, but the most profitable target for American bombs was not always the island or area which the intelligence experts wanted photographed. Admiral Spruance did for a time contemplate a second carrier strike against Saipan, a raid which would have netted additional photographs to supplement those taken in February by carrier aircraft and in April and May by Eniwetok-based photographic planes. In order to avoid disclosing the Marianas as the next American objective, the Admiral decided against the raid.

The photos obtained during the February raid along with charts captured in the Marshalls provided the information upon which Expeditionary Troops based its map of Saipan. Since the sources used did not give an accurate idea of ground contours, map makers had to assume that slopes were uniform unless shadows in the pictures indicated a sudden rise or sharp depression. Clouds, trees, and the angle at which the photos were taken helped hide the true nature of the terrain, so that many a cliff was interpreted on the map as a gentle slope. Fortunately, accurate Japanese maps were to be captured during the first week of fighting.

The strength, disposition, and armament of the Saipan garrison was difficult to determine. Documents cap-

²² *Ibid.*

tured in previous campaigns, reports of shipping activity, and aerial photographs provided information on the basic strength, probable reinforcement, and fixed defenses of the garrison. As D-Day approached, Admiral Turner and General Smith obtained additional fragments of the Saipan jigsaw puzzle, but full details, such as the complete enemy order of battle, would not be known until prisoners, captured messages, and reports from frontline Marine units became available.

On 9 May, Expeditionary Troops estimated that no more than 10,000 Japanese were stationed at Saipan, but by the eve of the invasion, this figure had soared to 15,000-17,600. This final estimate included 9,100-11,000 combat troops, 900-1,200 aviation personnel, 1,600-1,900 Japanese laborers plus 400-500 Koreans, and 3,000 "home guards," recent recruits who were believed to be the scrapings from the bottom of the manpower barrel. The actual number of Japanese was approximately 30,000 soldiers and sailors plus hundreds of civilians.

Although aerial photographs gave the landing force an accurate count of the enemy's defensive installations, these pictures did not disclose the number of troops poised inland of the beaches. The number and type of emplacements, however, did indicate that reinforcements were pouring into the island. By comparing photos taken on 18 April with those taken on 29 May, intelligence experts discovered an increase of 30 medium antiaircraft guns, 71 light antiaircraft cannon or machine guns, 16 pillboxes, a dozen heavy antiaircraft guns, and other miscellaneous weapons.

Intelligence concerning Saipan was not as accurate as the information previously gathered for the Kwajalein campaign. The 1,000-mile distance of the objective from the nearest American base, the clouds which gathered over the Marianas at this time of year, and the fear of disclosing future plans by striking too often at Saipan were contributing factors. The lack of usable submarine photographs was offset by the possession of hydrographic charts seized in the Marshalls and by the boldness of underwater demolition teams. Under cover of naval gunfire, these units scouted the invasion beaches during daylight on D minus 1 to locate underwater obstacles.

TACTICAL PLANS

Northern Troops and Landing Force was assigned the capture of both Saipan and adjacent Tinian. For these operations, service and administrative elements of the command were banded together in Corps Troops, while the combat elements were the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions, supported by XXIV Corps Artillery. One Marine infantry battalion, 1/2, was withdrawn from the 2d Marine Division and placed under corps control for a special operation in connection with the Saipan landing. To replace this unit, General Watson was subsequently given the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines. This outfit, made up of drafts from the 2d Division, was located at Hilo, Hawaii. After the campaign, 1/29 was destined to join the rest of its regiment at Guadalcanal and form part of the

6th Marine Division.²³ In addition to the combat troops, NTLF also controlled two garrison forces, composed mainly of Army units for Saipan and Marine units for Tinian. The 27th Infantry Division, as Expeditionary Troops reserve, might be employed to reinforce Northern Troops and Landing Force at Saipan or Tinian, or to assist Southern Troops and Landing Force at Guam. As a result, the division G-3 section prepared 21 operation plans, 16 of them dealing with possible employment at Saipan.

The basic scheme of maneuver for the Saipan attack called for the 23d and 25th Marines, 4th Marine Division, to land on the morning of 15 June over the Blue Beaches off the town of Charan Kanoa and across the Yellow Beaches, which extended southward from that town toward Agingan Point. At the same time, the 6th and 8th Marines, 2d Marine Division, were to land on the Red and Green Beaches just north of Charan Kanoa. To deceive the enemy, General Smith decided to make a feint toward the coastline north of Tanapag Harbor, a maneuver which he assigned to the 2d Marines, including 1/29, and the 24th Marines. (See Map 16.)

Another portion of the plan, one that eventually was canceled, would have sent 1/2 ashore near the east coast village of Laulau on the night of 14-15 June. This reinforced battalion was to have pushed inland to occupy the crest of Mount Tapotchau and hold that position until relieved by troops from the western beachhead. After this part of the plan had been aban-

doned, 1/2 remained ready to land on order at Magicienne Bay, or, if the tactical situation demanded, elsewhere on the island.

Striking inland, the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions were to seize the high ground that stretched southward from Hill 410 through Mount Fina Susu to Agingan Point. Since this high ground dominating the beaches had to be seized as rapidly as possible, the LVTs and their escorting LVT(A)s were to thrust toward the ridge line, bypassing pockets of resistance along the shore. From this terrain feature, General Schmidt's division was to push eastward beyond Aslito Airfield to Nafutan Point, while General Watson's Marines secured the shores of Magicienne Bay and attacked northward toward Marpi Point. Among the intermediate objectives of the 2d Marine Division during this final advance were Mount Tipo Pale, Mount Tapotchau, and the city of Garapan.

The ship-to-shore movement that would trigger the battle for Saipan was patterned after earlier amphibious operations in the Marshalls. Because of the reef that guarded the landing sites, LVTs were required by the attacking Marines. Northern Troops and Landing Force had a total of six amphibian tractor battalions, three of them, the 2d, 4th, and 10th, Marine units and the others, the 534th, 715th, and 773d, Army organizations. The tractors assigned to the assault infantry battalions, as well as those assigned to one reserve battalion in each division, were ferried to Saipan in LSTs. Since the tank landing ships also carried the Marines assigned to land in these LVTs, relatively few assault

²³ BGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins ltr to ACoFS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 4Jan63.

troops would be forced to transfer from one type of craft to another. All reserve infantry elements, except for the two battalions assigned to LSTs, were scheduled to proceed in LCVPs from their transports to a designated area where they would change to LVTs. The organic field artillery regiments of both divisions embarked their battalions in LSTs. The 75mm howitzers and crews were to land in LVTs, and the 105s in DUKWs. Both types of weapons were placed in the appropriate vehicles before the expedition sailed. Tanks once again were preloaded in LCMs, and these craft embarked in LSDs.

The assault on Saipan would be led by rocket-firing LCI gunboats which were followed by armored amphibian tractors. The LVT(A)4s, manned by the Marine 2d Armored Amphibian Tractor Battalion, were modifications of the type used in the Marshalls. Instead of a 37mm gun and three .30 caliber machine guns, the new vehicles boasted a snub-nosed 75mm howitzer mounted in a turret and a .50 caliber machine gun. The other unit assigned to the Saipan operation, the Army's 708th Amphibian Tank Battalion, was equipped with older LVT(A)1s and a few LVT(A)4s.

To control the Saipan landings, Admiral Hill selected officers experienced in amphibious warfare. At the apex of the control pyramid was the force control officer, who had overall responsibility for controlling all landing craft involved in getting two divisions ashore on a frontage of some 6,000 yards.²⁴ A group control officer was assigned each

division, and a transport division control officer was in charge of each regiment in the landing force. On D-Day, the force control officer would, by means of visual signals and radio messages, summon the leading waves to the line of departure and dispatch them toward the island. Transport division control officers had the tasks of sending in the later waves according to a fixed schedule and of landing reserves as requested by the regimental commander or his representatives.

One LCC was stationed on either flank of the first wave formed by each assault regiment. These vessels were to set the pace for the amphibian tractors in addition to keeping those vehicles from wandering from course. When the initial wave crossed the reef, a barrier which the control craft could not cross, the LCCs would take up station seaward of that obstacle to supervise the transfer of reserve units from LCVPs to LVTs. Later assault waves would rely on designated LCVPs to guide them as far as the reef.

Since communications had been the key to control in previous operations, Admiral Turner decided to employ at Saipan 14 communications teams, each one made up of an officer, four radio-men, and two signalmen. In addition to placing these teams where he thought them necessary, the admiral had additional radio equipment installed in the patrol craft, submarine chasers, and LCCs that were serving as control vessels. In this way, adequate radio channels were available to everyone involved in controlling the landings, the supply effort, and the evacuation of casualties.

²⁴ *Hill comments Saipan.*

*AIR AND NAVAL GUNFIRE
SUPPORT*

After Navy pilots based on fast carriers had destroyed Japanese air power in the Marianas, other aviators could begin operations designed to aid the amphibious striking force. Because of its size, Saipan imposed new demands upon supporting aircraft. Pilots assisting an attack against an atoll could concentrate on a relatively small area, but in their strikes against a comparatively large volcanic island, the aviators would have to range far inland to destroy enemy artillery and mortars which could not be reached by naval guns and to thwart efforts to reinforce coastal defense units. The neutralization of the beach fortifications was to follow a flexible schedule, while strikes against defiladed gun positions or road traffic could be launched as required by planes on station over the island.

The first D-Day attack against the beach defenses was a 30-minute bombing raid scheduled to begin 90 minutes before H-Hour. Naval gunfire would be halted while the planes made their runs. This strike was intended to demoralize enemy troops posted along the beaches as well as to destroy particular installations.

To make up for the absence of field artillery support, such as had been enjoyed in the Marshalls, aircraft were ordered to strafe the beaches while the incoming LVTs were between 800 and 100 yards of the island. This aerial attack would coincide in part with the planned bombardment by warships of this same area, for naval gunfire would not be shifted until the troops were 300 yards from the objective. Pilots were

informed of the maximum ordinate of the naval guns, and since their shells followed a rather flat trajectory, the approach of the planes would not be seriously hindered. When the leading wave was 100 yards from its objective, the aviators were to shift their point of aim 100 yards inland and continue strafing until the Marines landed.

Prior to H-Hour, all buildings, suspected weapons emplacements, and possible assembly areas more than 1,000 yards from the coastline were left to the attention of naval airmen. Planes armed with bombs or rockets had the assignment of patrolling specific portions of Saipan to attack both previously located installations and targets of opportunity. After the landings, aircraft would cooperate with naval gunfire and artillery in destroying enemy strongpoints and hindering Japanese road traffic.

The air support plan also provided for the execution of strikes at the request of ground units. A Landing Force Commander Support Aircraft was appointed primarily to insure coordination between artillery and support aviation. A requested strike might be directed by any of four individuals: the Airborne Coordinator, aloft over the battlefield; the leader of the flight on station over the target area; the Landing Force Commander Support Aircraft with headquarters ashore; or the Commander Support Aircraft, located in the command ship and aware of the naval gunfire plan.

The decision whether to handle the strike himself or delegate it to another was left to the Commander Support Aircraft. He would select the person best informed on the ground situation

to direct a particular attack. He also had the responsibility of insuring that his subordinates were fully informed concerning troop dispositions and any plans to employ other supporting weapons.

The preliminary naval bombardment of Saipan was to begin on D minus 2 with the arrival off the objective of fast battleships and destroyers from Task Force 58. The seven battleships, directed to remain beyond the range of shore batteries and away from possible minefields, would fire from distances in excess of 10,000 yards. The nocturnal harassment of the enemy was left to the destroyers. On the following day, the fire support ships, cruiser, destroyers, and old battleships were scheduled to begin hammering Saipan from close range.

The plan for D-Day called for the main batteries of the supporting battleships and cruisers to pound the beaches until the first wave was about 1,000 yards from shore. The big guns would then shift to targets beyond the

0-1 Line, which stretched from the northern extremity of Red 1 through Hill 410 and Mount Fina Susu to the vicinity of Agingan Point. Five-inch guns, however, were to continue slamming shells into the beaches until the troops were 300 yards from shore, when these weapons also would shift to other targets. The final neutralization of the coastal defenses was left to the low-flying planes which had begun their strafing runs when the LVTs were 800 yards out to sea.

During the fighting ashore, on-call naval gunfire was planned for infantry units. To speed the response to calls for fire support, each shore fire control party was assigned the same radio frequency as the ship scheduled to deliver the fires and the plane that observed the fall of the salvos. A Landing Force Naval Gunfire Officer was selected to go ashore and work with the Landing Force Commander Support Aircraft and the Corps Artillery Officer in guaranteeing cooperation among the supporting arms.

American and Japanese Preparations¹

As the tactical plans were taking shape, the divisions slated for the Saipan operation began training for the impending battle. Ships were summoned to Hawaii to carry the invasion force to its destination. While the Americans gathered strength for the massive effort to seize the Marianas, the enemy looked to the defenses of the Central Pacific. In Hawaii, Marines and Army infantrymen practiced landing from LVTs in preparation for the Saipan assault. At the objective, Japanese troops were working just as hard to perfect their defenses.

TRAINING AND REHEARSALS

The Marine and Army units selected to conquer Saipan underwent training in the Hawaiian Islands designed to prepare them for combat in the jungle, cane fields, and mountains of the Mariana Islands. The scope of training matched the evolution of tactical plans, as individual and small unit training gave way to battalion exercises, and

these, in turn, were followed by regimental and division maneuvers. The 2d Marine Division, encamped on the island of Hawaii, did its training in an area that closely resembled volcanic Saipan. After its conquest of northern Kwajalein, the 4th Marine Division arrived at the island of Maui to begin building its living quarters and ranges—tasks which coincided with training for FORAGER. Both construction and tactical exercises were hampered by the nature of the soil, a clay which varied in color and texture from red dust to red mud. The 27th Infantry Division, on the island of Oahu, emphasized tank-infantry teamwork and the proper employment of JASCO units during amphibious operations. The XXIV Corps Artillery was in the meantime integrating into its ranks the coast artillerymen needed to bring the battalions to authorized strength, conducting firing exercises, and learning amphibious techniques.

Amphibious training got underway in March, when the 2d Marine Division landed on the shores of Maalaea Bay, Maui. The 4th Marine Division, Corps Troops, and the 27th Infantry Division received their practical instruction during the following month. The climax to the indoctrination scheduled by General Watson for his 2d Marine Division was a “walk through” rehearsal held on dry land. An outline of Saipan was drawn to scale on the ground, the various phase lines and unit boundaries

¹Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 OpRpt*; *TF 56 OpRpt*; *TG 52.2 OpRpt*; *NRLF OpRpt*; *2d MarDiv OpRpt Phase I, FORAGER* (incl a six-part narrative, four-part SAR, and SplCmts), dtd 11Sep44, hereafter *2d MarDiv OpRpt*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; *27th InfDiv OpRpt*; *CominCh, The Marianas*; *Crowl, The Marianas*; *Hoffman, Saipan*; *Morison, New Guinea and the Marianas*. A complete file of CinCPac-CinCPOA and JICPOA translations is available from OAB, NHD.

were marked, thereby enabling the Marines to see for themselves how the plan would be executed. "Yet," the commanding general recalled, "only a few commanders and staff officers of the thousands of men who participated in this rehearsal knew the real name of the target."²

On 17 and 19 May, the two Marine divisions took part in the final rehearsals of Northern Troops and Landing Force. The first exercise, conducted at Maalaea Bay, saw the Marines land on the beaches and advance inland, following the general scheme of maneuver for the Saipan operation. The second rehearsal was held at Kahoolawe Island, site of a naval gunfire target range. Although the roar of naval guns added realism to the exercise, the assault troops did not go ashore. After the landing craft had turned back, shore fire control parties landed to call for naval salvos against the already shell-scarred island. The 27th Infantry Division completed its rehearsals between 18 and 24 May. The independent 1/2 and its reinforcing elements climaxed the training cycle with landings at Hanalei Bay.

The rehearsals were marred by a series of accidents en route to Maui that killed 2 Marines, injured 16, and caused 17 others to be reported as missing. In the early morning darkness of 14 May, heavy seas caused the cables securing three Landing Craft, Tank (LCTs) to part, and the craft plummeted from the decks of their pa-

² LtGen Thomas E. Watson ltr to Dir Div PubInfo, dtd 9Jun49, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 31. No copy of this letter has been found.

rent LSTs. Only one of the boats lost overboard remained afloat. The LCTs mounted 4.2-inch mortars, weapons which would have been used to interdict the road between Garapan and Charan-Kanoa and protect the flank of the 2d Marine Division.³

Since there was not enough time to obtain replacements for the lost mortars, Admiral Turner decided to rely on the scheduled rocket barrage by LCI(G)s for neutralization of beach defenses. He ordered those LSTs and the LCT that carried the heavy mortars and their supply of ammunition to unload upon their return to Pearl Harbor. As the mortar shells were being put ashore, tragedy struck again.

On 21 May, one of the 4.2-inch rounds exploded while it was being unloaded, touching off a conflagration that enveloped six landing ships. Navy fire-fighting craft tried valiantly to smother the flames, but, though they prevented the further spread of the blaze, they could not save the six LSTs from destruction. The gutted ships had carried assault troops as well as weapons and equipment, so losses were severe. The explosion and fire inflicted 95 casualties on the 2d Marine Division and 112 on the 4th Marine Division. Replacements were rushed to the units involved in the tragedy, but the new

³ The arming and employment of these mortar craft was a project jointly developed by Admiral Hill and the CinCPac gunnery staff. Their intended mission was "cruising back and forth along a lighted buoy line close to the beach between Charan-Kanoa and Garapan and maintaining a constant barrage on the road connecting those two points throughout the first two or three nights after the landing." *Hill comments Saipan*.

men "were not trained to carry out the functions of those lost."⁴ The destroyed ships, equipment, and supplies were replaced in time for the LST convoy to sail on 25 May, just one day behind schedule. The lost time was made up en route to the objective.

ONWARD TO SAIPAN

The movement of Northern Troops and Landing Force plus the Expeditionary Troops reserve from Hawaii to Saipan was an undertaking that required a total of 110 transports. Involved in the operation were 37 troop transports of various types, 11 cargo ships, 5 LSDs, 47 LSTs, and 10 converted destroyers.⁵ Navy-manned Liberty ships, vessels that lacked adequate troop accommodations, were pressed into service as transports for a portion of the 27th Infantry Division. LSTs carrying assault troops, LVTs, and artillery from both Marine divisions set sail on 25 May. Two days later, transports bearing the remainder of the 4th Marine Division and Headquarters, Expeditionary Troops departed, to be followed on 30 May by elements of the 2d Marine Division. Because of the shortage of shipping, portions of XXIV Corps Artillery were

⁴ MajGen Louis R. Jones ltr to HistBr, HQMC, dtd 8Feb50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 34. No copy of this letter has been found.

⁵ The concentration of such an armada was a tribute to Navy planners, for the movement toward Saipan coincided with or immediately followed landings at Biak in the Schouten Islands, the sailing of the convoy that would carry Southern Troops and Landing Force to Guam, and the invasion of France.

assigned to the transports carrying the assault divisions. Garrison units and Expeditionary Troops reserve were the last units to steam westward.

The transports carrying the Marines sailed to Eniwetok Atoll where they joined the LST convoy. Here additional assault units were transferred from the troop ships to the already crowded landing ships for the final portion of the voyage. One observer, writing of the journey from Eniwetok to Saipan, has claimed that because of the overcrowding, "aggressiveness was perhaps increased," for "after six crowded days aboard an LST, many Marines were ready to fight anybody."⁶ By 11 June, the last of the ships assigned to stage through Eniwetok had weighed anchor to begin the final approach to the objective. Meanwhile, the vessels carrying the 27th Infantry Division had completed their last-minute regrouping at Kwajalein Atoll.

While the vessels bearing General Holland Smith's 71,034 Marine and Army troops were advancing toward Saipan, the preparatory bombardment of the island got underway. The 16 carriers of Task Force 58 struck first, launching their planes on 11 June to begin a 3 1/2-day aerial campaign against Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Rota, and Pagan—the principal islands in the Marianas group. These attacks were originally to have started on the morning of the 12th, but Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, the task force commander, obtained permission to strike one-half day earlier. Mitscher felt that the enemy had become accustomed to early morning raids, so he planned

⁶ Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 34n.

to attack in the afternoon. A fighter sweep conducted by 225 planes accounted for an estimated 150 Japanese aircraft on the first day, this insuring American control of the skies over the Marianas.

After the Grumman Hellcats departed, a member of the Saipan garrison noted in his diary that: "For two hours the enemy planes ran amuck and finally left leisurely amidst the unparalleled inaccuracy of anti-aircraft fire. All we could do was watch helplessly."⁷

On 12 and 13 June, bombers struck with impunity at the various islands and at shipping in the area. The only opposition was from anti-aircraft guns like those on Tinian which "spread black smoke where the enemy planes weren't." One of Tinian's defenders glumly observed: "Now begins our cave life."⁸

Admiral Mitscher's fast battleships opened fire on 13 June, but their long-range bombardment proved comparatively ineffective. With the exception of the USS *North Carolina*, which a naval gunfire officer of Northern Troops and Landing Force called "one of the best-shooting ships I ever fired,"⁹ the new battleships tended to fire into areas or at obvious if unimportant targets, rather than at carefully camouflaged weapons positions. Neither crews of the ships nor aerial observers who adjusted the salvos had been trained in the systematic bom-

bardment of shore emplacements. Although these battleships did not seriously damage the Japanese defenses, Admiral Spruance nonetheless believed that their contribution was valuable. The shelling by fast battleships, he later pointed out, "was never intended to take the place of the close-in fire of the [old battleships] to which it was a useful preliminary."¹⁰

Seven old battleships with 11 attendant cruisers and 23 destroyers relieved the fast battleships on 14 June to begin blasting Saipan and Tinian. The quality of the bombardment improved, but all did not go according to plan, for the neutralization of Afetna and Nafutan Points proved difficult to attain. Although aircraft assisted the surface units by attacking targets in the rugged interior, the preliminary bombardment was not a complete success. The size of the island, the lack of time for a truly methodical bombardment, the large number of point targets, Japanese camouflage, and the enemy's use of mobile weapons all hampered the American attempt to shatter the Saipan defenses.

On the morning of 14 June, underwater demolition teams swam toward Beaches Red, Green, Yellow, and Blue, as well as toward the Scarlet Beaches, an alternate landing area north of Tanapag Harbor. This daylight reconnaissance was a difficult mission. Lieutenant Commander Draper L. Kauffman, leader of one of the demolition teams, had told Admiral Turner that "You don't swim in to somebody's

⁷ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 10,238, Diary of Tokuzo Matsuya.

⁸ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 11,405, Diary of an Unidentified Japanese NCO.

⁹ LtCol Joseph L. Stewart ltr to CMC, dtd 9Jan50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 36. No copy of this letter has been found.

¹⁰ Adm Raymond A. Spruance ltr to CMC, dtd 17Jan50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 37. No copy of this letter has been found.

beaches in broad daylight," but swim they did—in spite of Kauffman's prediction of 50 percent casualties.¹¹ Despite a screen of naval gunfire, which had difficulty in silencing the weapons sited to cover the waters of the Blue and Yellow Beaches, the teams lost two men killed and seven wounded, approximately 13 percent of their total strength. The swimmers reported the absence of artificial obstacles, the condition of the reef, and the depth of water off the beaches. On D-Day, members of these reconnaissance units would board control vessels to help guide the assault waves along the prescribed boat lanes. (See Map 16.)

The heavy naval and air bombardment directed against the Marianas were only a part of the preparations decided upon for FORAGER. Wake and Marcus Islands had been bombed during May in order to protect the movement of Admiral Turner's warships and transports. Bombs thudded into enemy bases from the Marshalls to the Kuriles in an effort to maintain pressure on the Japanese. Finally, on 14 June, two carrier groups cut loose from Task Force 58 to attack Iwo Jima, Haha Jima, and Chichi Jima in the Volcano-Bonin Islands. These strikes were designed to prevent the enemy from making good his aerial losses by transferring planes from the home islands to the Marianas by way of the Bonins.

Like the attacking Americans, the Japanese defenders were completing their preparations for the Saipan land-

ings. Fully alerted by the air and naval bombardment, the Saipan garrison realized that it soon would be called upon to fight to the death. Lieutenant General Hideyoshi Obata and Vice Admiral Chiuchi Nagumo awaited the arrival of the Marines so that they could execute their portion of the *A-GO* plan, which called for the destruction of the invaders on the beaches of Saipan.

*THE DEFENSE OF SAIPAN*¹²

Saipan had long figured in Japanese military plans. As early as 1934, the year before her withdrawal from the League of Nations, Japan had begun work on an airfield at the southern end of Saipan. By 1944, this installation, Aslito airfield, had become an important cog in the aerial defense mechanism devised to guard the Marianas. A seaplane base at Tanapag Harbor was completed in 1935, and during 1940-1941 money was appropriated for gun emplacements, storage bunkers, and other military structures.

On the eve of World War II, the *Fourth Fleet*, with headquarters at

¹² Additional sources for this section include: CinCPac-CinCPOA Items Nos, 9,159, Organization of CenPac AreaFlt, n.d., 10,145, Thirty-first Army Stf, TransRpt, dtd 18Mar44, 10,638, O/B for Thirty-first Army, 1942-1944, n.d., 10,740, Location and Strength of Naval Land Units, c. Apr44; HqFECOMd, MilHist Sec, Japanese Research Div, Monograph no. 45, *Imperial General Headquarters Army Section, mid-1941-Aug45*; HistSec, G-2, GHQ, FECOMd, Japanese Studies in WW II Monograph no. 55, *Central Pacific Operations Record, Apr-Nov44*; Northern Marianas GruO A-4 (with maps), dtd 24May44 in 4th MarDiv RepTranslations made on Saipan, hereafter *4th MarDiv Translations*.

¹¹ Cdr Francis D. Fane and Don Moore, *The Naked Warriors* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), p. 88.

Truk, had responsibility for the defense of the Marianas. The work of building, improving, and maintaining the island fortifications was the task of the *5th Base Force* and its attached units, the *5th Communications Unit* and *5th Defense Force*. Logistical support of the Marianas garrison was turned over to the *Fourth Fleet Naval Stores Department* and the *4th Naval Air Depot*, both located at Saipan. Originally the Marianas forces were to strengthen the defenses of the area and ready themselves for a possible war, but once Japan had begun preparing to strike at Pearl Harbor, the *5th Base Force* received orders to lay plans for the capture of Guam.

War came, Guam surrendered, and the Marianas became a rear area as Japanese troops steadily advanced. Since Saipan served primarily as a staging area, a sizeable garrison force was not needed. In May 1943, when the Gilberts marked the eastern limits of the Japanese empire, only 919 troops and 220 civilians were stationed on Saipan. As American forces thrust westward, reinforcements were rushed into the Marianas area.

During February 1944, Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls, both important bases, were seized by American amphibious forces. Within the space of three weeks, Saipan became a frontline outpost rather than a peaceful staging area. That portion of the *5th Special Base Force*¹³ located at Saipan, a con-

¹³ On 10 April 1942, the *5th Base Force* was reorganized and redesignated the *5th Special Base Force*. Chief, WarHistOff, DefAgency of Japan, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 9Mar63.

tingent which now numbered 1,437 men, was too weak to hold the island against a determined assault.

After the collapse of the Marshalls defenses and the withdrawal of fleet units from Truk, the Japanese established the *Central Pacific Area Fleet* under the command of Vice Admiral Chiuchi Nagumo, who had led the Pearl Harbor raid, the successful foray into the Indian Ocean, and still later the ill-fated expedition against Midway. Nagumo's headquarters, charged with the defense of the Marianas, Bonins, and Palaus, was subordinate to Admiral Toyoda's *Combined Fleet*, now based at Tawi Tawi in the Philippines. The *Fourth Fleet*, relieved of overall responsibility for the Mandated Islands, retained control over Truk and the other eastern Carolines, as well as the isolated Marshalls outposts. (See Map I, Map Section.)

Nagumo's command, however, was an administrative organization unable to exert effective tactical control over the *Thirty-first Army*, the land force assigned to defend the various islands in the Marianas, Bonins, and Palaus. Initially, Nagumo was appointed supreme commander throughout this sector, but *Headquarters, Thirty-first Army* objected to being subordinated to a naval officer. By mid-March, Nagumo and Lieutenant General Hideyoshi Obata, the army commander, had sidestepped the issue, each one pledging himself to refrain from exercising complete authority over the other.

Instead of regarding the various island groups as an integrated theater under a unified command, the two officers, in keeping with an Army-Navy

agreement worked out by *Imperial General Headquarters*,¹⁴ chose to treat each island as an individual outpost, to be commanded by the senior Army or Navy officer present. At Saipan, for example, Rear Admiral Sugimura in command of the *5th Special Base Force*¹⁵ was originally given control over the defense of the island, but Obata reserved the right, in case of an American attack, of either commanding in person or designating a land commander of his own choice. Thus, the compromise left the general free to assume complete charge of the ground defense of any island in immediate danger of being stormed by Americans. Obata could assume overall responsibility for troop dispositions, coastal defense batteries, antiaircraft defenses, beach defenses, and communications. The employment of aircraft and the use of radar, however, would remain beyond his jurisdiction.¹⁶

This revision of the Central Pacific command structure reflected the increasing concern with which the Japanese high command regarded the defenses of Saipan and the other islands which lay in the path of the American offensive. Between February and May, two divisions, two independent brigades, two independent regiments, and three expeditionary units were rushed to the Marianas to form the *Marianas Sector Army Group* of Obata's *Thirty-first Army*. Naval strength in the islands was augmented by the arrival of the *55th* and *56th*

*Guard Forces*¹⁷ as well as antiaircraft and aviation units.

Prowling American submarines preyed upon the convoys that carried these reinforcements westward. One regiment of the *29th Division*, destined for Guam by way of Saipan, lost about half its men when a transport was torpedoed. Submarines also destroyed a vessel carrying some 1,000 reinforcements to the *54th Guard Force*, the unit which had garrisoned Guam since the capture of that island in December 1941. Five of the seven transports carrying elements of Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saito's *43d Division* to Saipan went down en route to the Marianas, but the ships that stayed afloat managed to rescue most of the survivors. Units in this convoy lost about one-fifth of their total complement, most of these casualties from a single regiment. Also destroyed were numerous weapons and a great deal of equipment. These successful under-sea operations, strange to relate, resulted in the arrival at Saipan of some unscheduled reinforcements. About 1,500 troops, originally headed for Yap, were rescued when their transports were torpedoed and were added to the garrison of the Marianas bastion instead. Other survivors, members of units bound for the *Palau Sector Army Group*, also were put ashore at Saipan. In addition to these men, approximately 3,000 troops destined for garrisons on other islands of the Marianas and Carolines, were present on Saipan.¹⁸

Work on additional fortifications in the Marianas was handicapped by the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 12,058, *Thirty-first Army Stf Diary*, 25Feb44-31Mar44.

¹⁷ Japanese comments Saipan, *op cit.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

deadly submarines which destroyed vital cargos as efficiently as they claimed Japanese lives. Obata's chief of staff acknowledged the double effect of the underwater attacks. "The special point of differentiation in the Saipan battle," he observed late in the campaign, "is that units sunk late in May [the troops intended for Yap and the Palaus] and the 8,000 men who landed on 7 June [members of the *43d Division*] eventually landed not up to full combat strength. . . Moreover, as they were still in the process of reorganization at the time of attack, our fighting strength on Saipan was in the process of flux."¹⁹ Could these ill-equipped troops be put to work building obstacles and gun emplacements? The answer was an emphatic "No." As the chief of staff pointed out, "unless the units are supplied with cement, steel reinforcements for cement, barbed wire, lumber, etc., which cannot be obtained in these islands, no matter how many soldiers there are, they can do nothing in regard to fortification but sit around with their arms folded, and the situation is unbearable."²⁰

The submarine campaign did not reach peak intensity in time to prevent the Japanese from building airfields throughout the Marianas. By June 1944, Guam boasted two operational fields and two others not yet completed, Tinian had three airfields with work underway on a fourth, and both Rota and Pagan were the sites of still other

flight strips. At Saipan, the old Aslito airfield, now less important than the new Tinian bases, was capable of handling extensive aerial traffic. One emergency strip was built near Charan Kanoa, but another such field, begun at Marpi Point, was as yet unfinished. Work on land defenses, however, was not as far advanced as airfield construction.

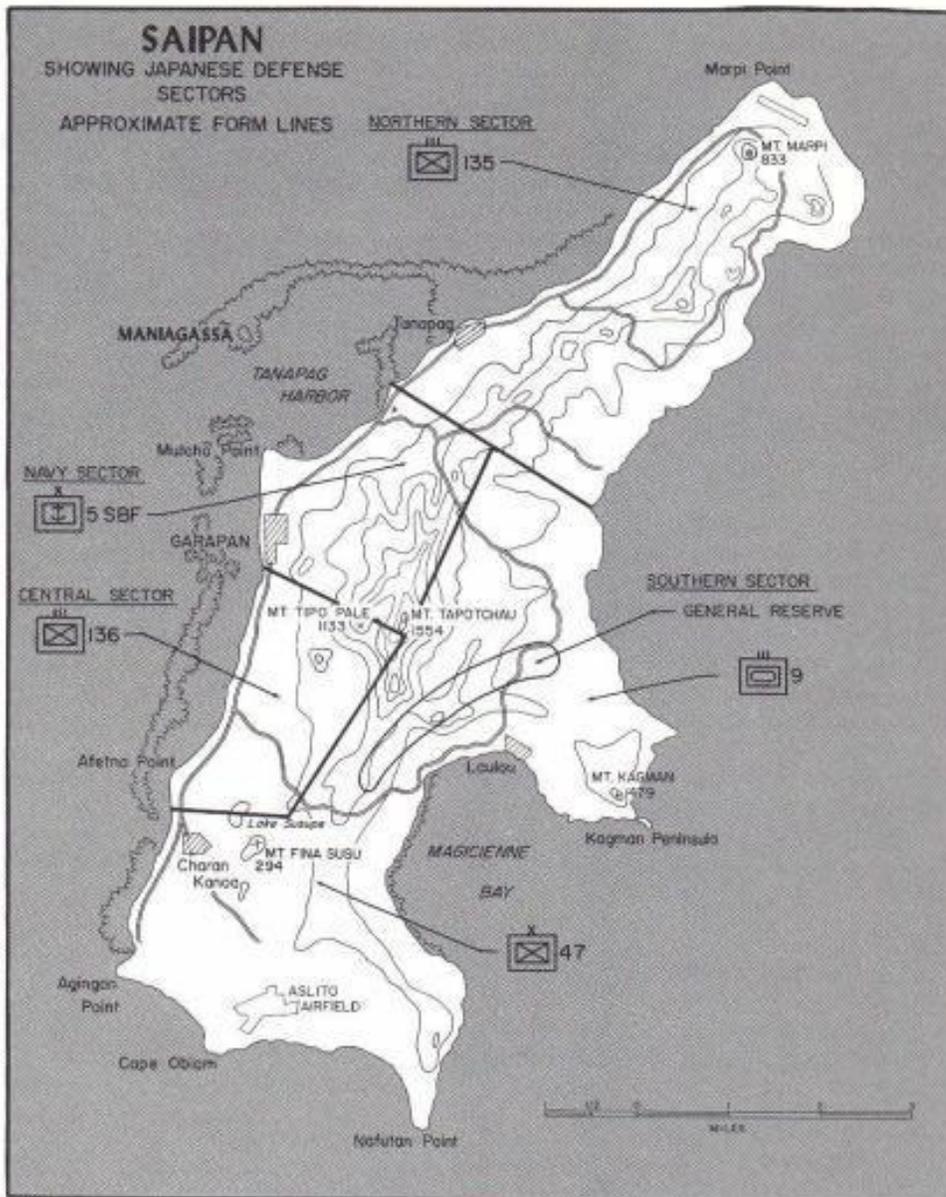
The defenders of Saipan planned to defeat the invaders on the beaches, but General Obata also hoped to prepare "positions in depth, converting actually the island into an invulnerable fortress."²¹ The coastal defenses sited to cover probable avenues of approach were completed. Five Navy coastal defense batteries on Saipan and one at outlying Maniagassa Island guarded the approaches lying between Agingan and Marpi Points. Two of these batteries, one armed with a 120mm and the other with a 150mm gun, could join twin-mounted 150mm pieces near Tanapag in engaging targets off the northwest coast. A 40mm battery of three guns protected Marpi Point, while Magicienne Bay was blanketed by the fires of four batteries, two of them mounting 200mm weapons. A lone battery of two 150mm guns guarded Nafutan Point. Army and Navy dual-purpose antiaircraft weapons reinforced the fires of these batteries, as did the Army artillery units located in southern Saipan.²²

¹⁹ NTLF G-2 Rpt, p. 65, in *NTLF OpRpt*.

²⁰ CofS, Thirty-first Ar, Rpt of Defenses of Various islands, dtd 31May44, in *NTLF Translations of Captured Documents (FMFPac File, HistBr, HQMC)*.

²¹ Japanese Monograph No. 55, *op. cit.*

²² CinCPac-CinCPOA Items Nos. 12,250, Army and Navy AA, Dual Purpose, and Coastal DefBtrys on Saipan, n.d., 12,251, Order of Change of Location of Army AA Btrys on Saipan, dtd 10May44, and 12,252, Disposi-



MAP 15

R.F. STIBIL

Those beaches judged best suited for amphibious landings were guarded by powerful forces backed by comparatively feeble local reserves. A short distance inland, the enemy had prepared a second line designed to contain penetrations of the coastal perimeter until a counterattack could be organized. A tank regiment shouldered the main burden of eradicating any American salient, but Obata also held out four rifle companies and two shipping companies as a general reserve to join in counterthrusts. When the Japanese commander turned his attention to the rugged interior of Saipan, he discovered himself to be short of critical building materials, vital time, and necessary engineer units. The invulnerable fortress depicted by Obata was not fully realized, but he nevertheless selected certain redoubts, most of them in forbidding terrain. If the Americans smashed the first two lines, caves, gorges, and dense thickets would have to serve as pillboxes, antitank barriers, and barbed wire.

The Japanese plan of deployment divided Saipan into four sectors, three under Army command and one nominally entrusted to the Navy. Since 25,469 soldiers and only 6,160 sailors²³ were serving on the island, the division of responsibility seems equitable, but many of the naval units specialized in supply or administration, so Army troops were stationed in all areas. The northern sector, which lay beyond a

line drawn across the island just south of Tanapag, was protected by two battalions of the *135th Infantry Regiment* plus reinforcing elements. South of this zone, bounded on the east by a line drawn down the axis of the island and on the south by another line that stretched inland from just south of Garapan to include Mount Tapotchau, was the Navy sector, manned by a reinforced battalion from the *136th Infantry Regiment* and the *5th Special Base Force*. The naval unit included the recently arrived *55th Guard Force* as well as the *Yokosuka 1st Special Naval Landing Force*, which had served at Saipan since the autumn of 1943. The central sector, defended by elements of the *136th Infantry Regiment*, included that portion of Saipan that lay west of the spine of the island and north of a line drawn below Afetna Point. The remainder of the island was organized as the southern sector. Here Obata concentrated the bulk of his artillery and antiaircraft units, the *47th Independent Mixed Brigade*, the *9th Tank Regiment*, and the remainder of his *43d Division*, which included a general reserve, certain shipping companies, and stragglers from several miscellaneous units. (See Map 15.)

Although Saipan and her neighboring islands were heavily reinforced, Japanese planners felt that the Palaus rather than the Marianas would be Nimitz' next objective. According to Admiral Toyoda, commander of the *Combined Fleet*, "while the possibility of your offensive against the Marianas was not ignored or belittled, we thought the probability would be that your attack would be directed against Palau, and that was the reason for our adop-

tions of Navy Dual Purpose and Coastal Def Btrys on Saipan and Tinian, dtd 15May44.

²³ Crowl, *The Marianas*, p. 454. These revised figures will be used in preference to the estimates made by NTLF during the Saipan battle.

tion of the A-GO operation plan, which was to our advantage because of the shorter distance involved and would eliminate the need of tankers to some extent. . . .”²⁴

General MacArthur's sudden descent upon Biak in the Schouten Islands off New Guinea, an operation that began on 27 May, diverted attention from both the Palau chain and the Marianas. Since Biak possessed airfields from which planes could attack American ships moving northward into the Palaus, the Japanese prepared the *KON* plan, a scheme for reinforcing the threatened island. The first attempts to aid the embattled garrison ended in frustration, so Toyoda decided to commit the modern battleships *Yamato* and *Musashi*, the most powerful surface units of the Japanese fleet. As this strengthened *KON* task force was assembling, American carriers hit the Marianas, so the enemy admiral left the reinforcement of Biak to destroyers, barges, and other small craft and ordered his forces to execute A-GO.

On 13 June, Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa led his *Mobile Fleet*, the A-GO striking force, from Tawi Tawi toward the Marianas. The *Yamato* and *Musashi*, with their attendant warships, steamed northward to a refueling rendezvous in the Philippine Sea, where they would join Ozawa's armada. Nimitz' blow at the Marianas caught the enemy somewhat off balance, for the ships dispatched toward Biak and the planes massed in the Palaus and eastern Carolines would have to be redeployed if they were to take part in the scheduled

annihilation of the American expedition. The shifting of the A-GO battlefield from the Palaus northward also forced Ozawa to steam a greater distance, pausing en route to refuel at sea. Yet, an American attack on the Marianas was not unexpected. A-GO could succeed, provided the Saipan garrison held firm and the 500 land-based planes promised to augment Ozawa's carrier squadrons actually arrived in the Marianas.

When American battleships arrived off Saipan, General Obata was absent from his headquarters on a tour of inspection of the Palaus. When he realized that Saipan was in peril, Obata tried to return, but he got only as far as Guam. Tactical command passed to General Saito of the *43d Division*. The savage pounding by naval guns and carrier planes battered the defenders but did not destroy their will to resist. One Japanese admitted that the naval bombardment was “too terrible for words,” but he nevertheless was “pleased to think” that he would “die in true Samurai style.”²⁵ A naval officer found momentary respite from his worries when he and a few of his men paused amid the ruins to bolster their spirits with five bottles of beer.²⁶

On 14 June, in the midst of the holocaust, Admiral Nagumo issued a warning that “the enemy is at this moment en route to attack us.” He went on to predict that American amphibious forces would land no later than July.

²⁴ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 10,051, Extracts from the Diary of an Unidentified Soldier.

²⁵ CinCPac-CinCPOA Translations and Interrogations, No. 29, Item B-1938, Diary of a Naval Officer, Jun-Jul44.

²⁶ *USSBS Interrogation* Nav No. 75, Adm Soemu Toyoda, IJN, II, p. 316.

After pointing out that the Marianas were the Japanese first line of defense, he directed each man to "mobilize his full powers to annihilate the enemy on the beach, to destroy his plan, and to hold our country's ramparts."²⁷ Along the western beaches of Saipan, members of frontline units were better informed than the admiral, for they could see the buoys which were being set out to aid in controlling the next day's assault.

The Saipan garrison had suffered

²⁷ ComCenPacFlt memo, dtd 14Jun44, in *NTLF Translations*.

from the preliminary bombardment, but the defenders were willing to fight. If humanly possible, they would defeat the Marines on the beaches. In the meantime, Ozawa's ships were beginning their voyage toward the Marianas. The portion of *A-GO* that called for aerial surface, and submarine attacks on the advancing American convoy had already gone awry. Possibly, the attackers could be wiped out before a beachhead was established. If not, merely by holding for a comparatively brief time, Saito's men might nevertheless set the stage for a decisive sea battle.

Saipan: The First Day¹

The final reports from underwater demolition teams were encouraging, for Kauffman's men had found the reef free of mines and the boat lanes clear of obstacles. As dawn approached, the Americans noted that flags, probably planted after the underwater reconnaissance, dotted the area between the reef and the invasion beaches. These markers, intended to assist Japanese gunners in shattering the assault, were probably helpful to the troops manning the beach defenses, but the artillery batteries, firing from the island interior, were so thoroughly registered and boasted such accurate

data that the pennants were unnecessary.² Whatever their tactical value, the flags served as a portent of the fierce battle that would begin on the morning of 15 June.

FORMING FOR THE ASSAULT

The transport groups carrying those members of the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions who had not been crammed into the LSTs took station off Saipan at 0520. Two transport divisions steamed toward Tanapag Harbor to prepare for the demonstration to be conducted by the 2d and 24th Marines along with the orphaned battalion, 1/29. The other vessels, however, waited some 18,000 yards off Charan Kanoa. At 0542, Admiral Turner flashed the signal to land the landing force at 0830, but he later postponed H-Hour by 10 minutes.

The preparatory bombardment continued in all its fury as the LSTs approached Saipan and began disgorging their LVTs. Smoke billowed upward from the verdant island, but a short distance seaward, the morning sun, its rays occasionally blocked by scattered clouds, illuminated a gentle sea. Neither wind, waves, nor unforeseen currents impeded the launching of the tractors or the lowering of landing craft.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material for this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 OpRpt*; *TF 56 OpRpt*; *NTLF OpRpt*; *2d MarDiv Op Rpt*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; 2d Mar SAR, Saipan, hereafter *2d Mar SAR*; 6th Mar SAR (Saipan), dtd 18Jul44, hereafter *6th Mar SAR*; 8th Mar SAR, dtd 20Jul44, hereafter *8th Mar SAR*; 23d Mar Final AR, Saipan, dtd 6Sep44, hereafter *23d Mar AR*; 24th Mar Final Rpt on Saipan Op, dtd 28Aug44, hereafter *24th Mar Rpt*; 24th Mar Small URpts, dtd 5May45; 25th Mar Final Rpt, Saipan Op, dtd 18Aug44, hereafter *25th Mar Rpt*; 1/8 Rpt on Ops, Saipan, dtd 17Jul44, hereafter *1/8 OpRpt*; 2/23 Final Rpt (Saipan), n.d., hereafter *2/23 Rpt*; 3/23 Rpt of Saipan Op, dtd 10Jul44, hereafter *3/23 OpRpt*; 2/24 Narrative of Battle of Saipan, 15Jun-9Jul44, n.d., hereafter *2/24 Narrative*; 1/25 Rpt on Saipan, dtd 19Aug44, hereafter *1/25 Rpt*; 3/25 Cbt Narrative of Saipan Op, n.d., hereafter *3/25 Narrative*; 3/25 Saipan Saga, n.d., hereafter *3/25 Saga*; Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*; Hoffman, *Saipan*; Morison, *New Guinea and the Marianas*.

² LtCol Wendell H. Best ltr to CMC, dtd 8Jan50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 45. No copy of this letter has been found.

Nearest the beaches that morning were the two battleships, two cruisers, and six destroyers charged with the final battering of the defenses which the Marines would have to penetrate. Beyond these warships, some 5,500 yards from shore, the LSTs carrying the assault elements of both divisions paused to set free their amphibian tractors. Control craft marked by identifying flags promptly took charge of the LVTs and began guiding them into formation. Farthest out to sea were the landing ships that carried field artillery and antiaircraft units and the LSDs that had ferried to Saipan the tank battalions of both divisions.

As the landing craft swarmed toward the line of departure, their movement was screened by salvos from certain of the fire-support units. Other warships lashed out at those areas from which the enemy might fire into the flanks of the landing force. Agingan Point and Afetna Point shuddered under the impact of 14-inch shells, while to the north, the *Maryland* hurled 16-inch projectiles into Mutcho Point and Maniagassa Island. The naval bombardment halted as scheduled at 0700 for a 30-minute aerial attack. When the planes departed, Admiral Hill, the designated commander of the landing phase, assumed control of the fire support ships blasting the invasion beaches. The naval guns then resumed firing, raising a pall of dust and smoke that made aerial observation of the southwestern corner of Saipan almost impossible.³

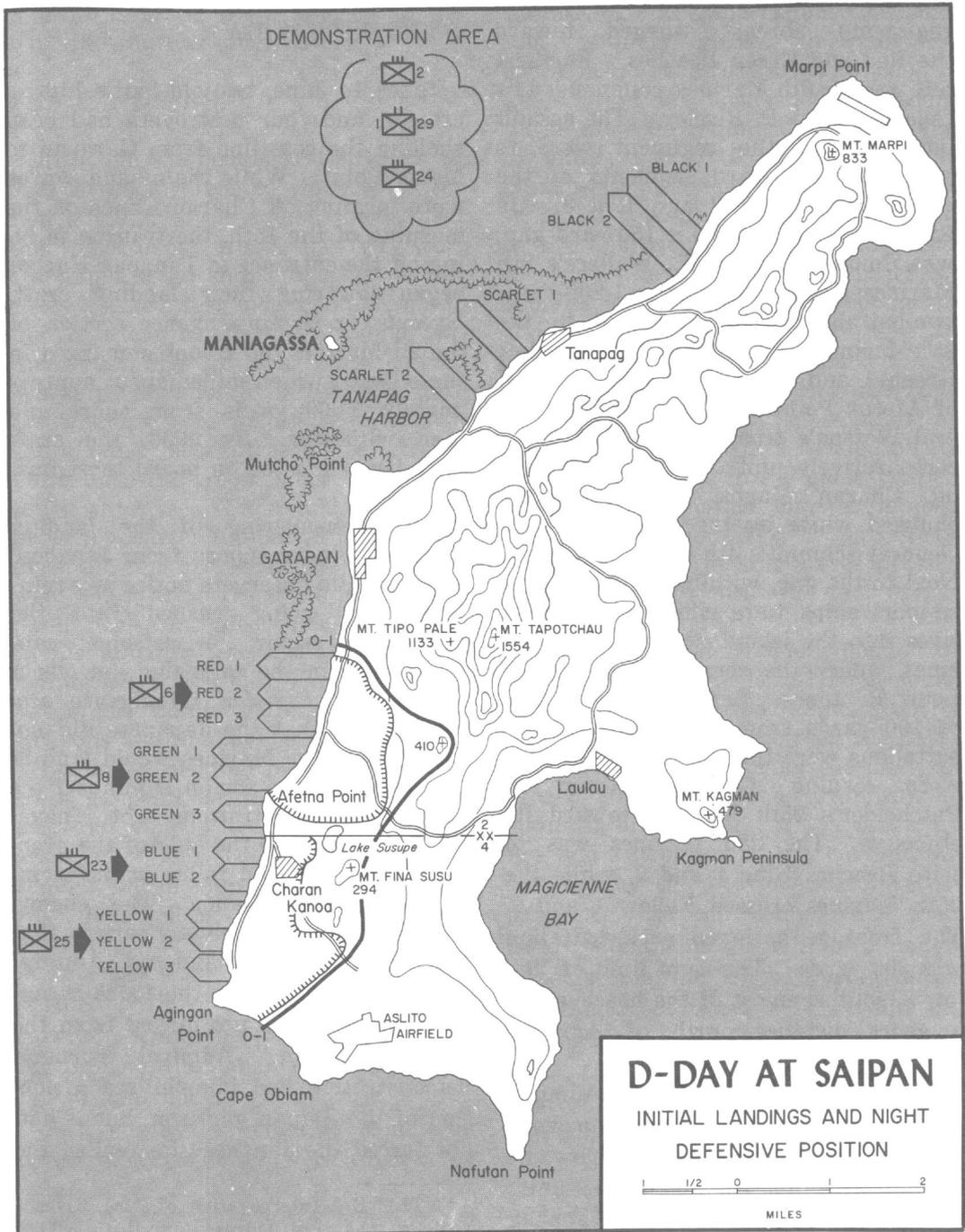
³“Control of the fire support ships reverted to Adm Turner at 0910, following the termination of the ‘landing phase.’ Thereafter, the

At the line of departure, 4,000 yards from the smoke-shrouded beaches, 96 LVTs, 68 armored amphibian tractors, and a dozen control vessels were forming the first wave. These craft were posted to the rear of a line of 24 LCI gunboats. The remaining waves formed seaward of the line of departure to await the signal to advance toward the dangerous shores. Beyond the lines of tractors, the boats carrying reserve units maneuvered into position for their journey to the transfer area just outside the reef, where they would be met by tractors returning from the beaches. The LSTs assigned to the artillery units prepared to launch their DUKWs and LVTs, while the tank-carrying LCMs got ready to wallow forth from the LSDs. The control boats organizing these final waves rode herd on their charges to insure that the beachhead, once gained, could be rapidly reinforced.

At 0812, the first wave was allowed to slip the leash and lunge, motors roaring, toward shore. Ahead of these LVTs were the LCI(G)s which would pass through the line of supporting warships to take up the hammering of the beaches. Within the wave itself, armored amphibians stood ready to thunder across the reef and then begin their own flailing of the beaches. Overhead were the aircraft selected to make the final strike against the shoreline.

To the left of Afetna Point, looking inland from the line of departure, Gen-

control of fire support remained with Adm Turner except during periods of darkness when Adm Turner retired to the eastward of Saipan with ships not actually being unloaded.” *Hill comments Saipan.*



MAP 16

R. F. STIBIL

eral Watson's 2d Marine Division, two regiments abreast, surged toward the Red and Green Beaches. Farthest left was the 6th Marines, commanded by Colonel James P. Riseley. The assault battalions of the regiment were to storm two 600-yard segments of the coast labeled Red 2 and Red 3. On Riseley's flank, beyond a 150-yard gap, was Colonel Clarence R. Wallace's 8th Marines, also landing on a 1,200-yard, two-battalion front. Included in the 8th Marines zone, divided into Beaches Green 1 and 2, was the northern half of Afetna Point. To the right of General Watson's troops lay 800 yards of comparatively untroubled ocean, but off Charan Kanoa the seas were churned white by the LVTs carrying General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division. Next to the gap, within which two fire-support ships were rifling high explosives into the island, was the 23d Marines, under the command of Colonel Louis R. Jones. Separated by a lane of 100 yards from Jones' two assault battalions were the two battalions that were leading Colonel Merton J. Batchelder's 25th Marines toward its objective. The 23d Marines was to seize Beaches Blue 1 and 2, while the 25th Marines crossed Yellow 1 and 2. The frontage assigned each battalion was 600 yards. The right limit of Yellow 3, southernmost of the beaches, lay a short distance north of Agingan Point. (See Map 16.)

These two divisions were Admiral Turner's right hand, his knockout punch. As he delivered this blow, he feinted with his left hand, the units that had been sent toward Tanapag Harbor.

THE TANAPAG DEMONSTRATION

Since 14 June, two old battleships, a cruiser, and four destroyers had been shelling the coastline from Garapan to Marpi Point. While the assault waves were forming off Charan Kanoa on the morning of the 15th, the transports lying off the entrance to Tanapag Harbor began lowering their landing craft. Except for the intelligence section of the 2d Marines, no troops embarked in these boats, which milled about approximately 5,000 yards from shore and then withdrew. By 0930, the craft were being hoisted on board the transports.

The maneuvering of the landing craft drew no response from Japanese guns, nor did observers notice any reinforcements being rushed into the threatened sector. A prisoner captured later in the campaign, an officer of the *43d Division* intelligence section, stated that the Japanese did not believe that the Marines would land at Tanapag Harbor, for on D minus 1 the heaviest concentrations of naval gunfire, as well as the bulk of the propaganda leaflets, had fallen in the vicinity of Charan Kanoa. The enemy, though, was not absolutely certain that he had correctly diagnosed Admiral Turner's intentions, so the *135th Infantry Regiment* was not moved from the northern sector.⁴ Admiral Turner's demonstration had immobilized a portion of the Saipan garrison, but it had not forced the Japanese to weaken the

⁴ NTLF Spl Interrogation of Maj Kiyoshi Yoshida, IJA, dtd 11Jul44, app I to NTLF G-2 Rpt, pt II, in *NTLF OpRpt*.

concentration of troops poised to defend the southwestern beaches.

THE LANDINGS

Although the demonstration drew no fire, the enemy reacted violently to the real landing. A few shells burst near the line of departure as the LVTs were starting toward shore, but this enemy effort seemed feeble in comparison to the American bombardment which was then reaching its deafening climax. Warships hammered the beaches until the tractors were within 300 yards of shore, and concentrated on Afetna Point until the troops were even closer to the objective. Carrier planes joined in with rockets, 100-pound bombs, and machine gun fire when the first wave was 800 yards from its goal. The pilots, who continued their attacks until the Marines were ashore, carefully maintained a 100-yard safety zone between the point of impact of their weapons and the advancing LVTs.

Bombs, shells, and rockets splintered trees, gouged holes in Saipan's volcanic soil, and veiled the beaches in smoke and dust. The scene was impressive enough, but one newspaper correspondent nonetheless scrawled in his notebook: "I fear all this smoke and noise does not mean many Japs killed."⁵ The newspaperman was correct. From the midst of the seeming inferno, the Japanese were preparing to fight back.

As soon as the tractors thundered across the reef, they were greeted by

the fires of automatic cannon, antiboat guns, artillery pieces, and mortars. To the men of the 2d Marine Division it seemed that the shells were bursting "in an almost rhythmical patter, every 25 yards, every 15 seconds . . ."⁶ Japanese artillery units had planned to lavish 15 percent of their ammunition on the approaching landing craft and an equal amount on the beaches.⁷ Some of these projectiles were bound to find their mark. Here and there an LVT became a casualty. Such a victim "suddenly stood on end and then sank quivering under a smother of smoke. Bloody Marines twisted on its cramped deck, and in the glass-hatched driver's cabin another Marine slumped among the stained levers."⁸ In spite of their losses, the assault waves pressed forward, and by 0843 the first of the troops were ashore.

The 2d Marine Division, bound for the beaches on the left, landed somewhat out of position. Since control craft could not cross the reef, the LVTs were on their own during the final approach. Drivers found it difficult to maintain direction in the face of deadly fire, and a strong northerly current, undetected by the previous day's reconnaissance, further complicated their task. Commander Kauffman's underwater scouts had landed during different tidal conditions, so they did not encounter the treacherous current. Thus, the drift of sea, the inability of control vessels to surmount the reef, and the Japanese fusillade combined to

⁵ Robert Sherrod, *On to Westward: War in the Central Pacific* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1945), p. 47.

⁶ Johnston, *Follow Me!*, p. 179.

⁷ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 9,604, Saipan ArtyPlan, n.d.

⁸ Johnston, *Follow Me!*, p. 179.

force the division to land too far to the left.

The 6th Marines was scheduled to cross Red 2 and 3, but 2/6, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Murray, and Lieutenant Colonel John W. Easley's 3/6 came ashore some 400 yards north of their goals, arriving on Red 1 and 2 respectively. In the zone of the 8th Marines, the situation was more serious. Lieutenant Colonel Henry P. Crowe's 2/8 and 3/8, under Lieutenant Colonel John C. Miller, Jr., landed on Green 1, some 600 yards from the regimental right boundary. Since the enemy had dropped a curtain of fire over the beaches, this accidental massing of troops contributed to the severe losses suffered during the day.

The 4th Marine Division landed as planned, with 3/23, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Cosgrove, and 2/23, under Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Dillon, seizing footholds on Blue 1 and 2, while Lieutenant Colonel Lewis C. Hudson's 2/25 and Lieutenant Colonel Hollis U. Mustain's 1/25 landed on Yellow 1 and 2. Once ashore, the attached LVTs and armored amphibians were to have fanned out to overrun Agingan Point, Charan Kanoa, and the ridge line some 2,000 yards inland of the coast. Enemy fire, however, prevented the coordinated thrust upon which General Schmidt had counted. Portions of the division advanced as far as the ridges, but other units were forced to abandon their tractors at the beaches.⁹ All along

⁹ An LVT battalion commander attributed the lack of success of this use of tractors as combat vehicles ashore not so much to Japan-

the western beaches, the attack was losing its momentum. The next few hours could prove critical.

THE FIGHT FOR THE RED BEACHES.

During the planning of the Saipan operation, General Watson had expressed doubts concerning the soundness of the Northern Troops and Landing Force scheme of maneuver. The Commanding General, 2d Marine Division, did not believe that the LVTs could scale the embankments, thread their way through the rocks, or penetrate the swamps that in many places barred the exits from the beaches. Instead of having the tractors advance to the 0-1 Line, he wanted the LVT(A)s to move a short distance inland and keep the defenders pinned down while the first wave of LVTs cleared the beaches and discharged their troops. Succeeding waves would halt on the beaches, unload, and return to the transfer area. Watson was convinced that the tractors should not attempt to advance beyond the railroad line running northward from Charan Kanoa. General Holland Smith accepted these suggestions and permitted the 2d Marine Division to attack on foot from the railroad to 0-1. General Schmidt, however, chose to rely on his LVTs to execute the original scheme of maneuver in his division zone.

ese resistance but rather "to our inexperience in this type of assault, compounded by inadequate preparations, particularly in ensuring the coordinated movement of troop-carrying LVTs with the supporting LVT(A)s." Col Victor A. Croizat ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 5Mar63.

That General Watson obtained a modification of the plan was fortunate, for intense enemy fire and forbidding terrain halted the tractors near the beaches. On Red 1 and 2, the initial thrust of the 6th Marines stalled about 100 yards inland. The captured strip of sand was littered with the hulks of disabled tractors. Here the wounded lay amid the bursting shells to await evacuation, while their comrades plunged into the thicket along the coastal highway.

For the most part, the Marines were fighting an unseen enemy. A Japanese tank, apparently abandoned, lay quiet until the assault waves had passed by and then opened fire on Lieutenant Colonel William K. Jones' 1/6, the regimental reserve, as that unit was coming ashore. Rounds from a rocket launcher and rifle grenades permanently silenced the tank and killed its occupants. From the smoke-obscured ground to the front of 3/6, a machine gun poured grazing fire into the battalion lines. Equally impersonal, and perhaps more deadly, were the mortar and artillery rounds called down upon the advancing Marines by observers posted along the Japanese-held ridges that formed the 0-1 Line.

Occasionally, small groups of Japanese from the *136th Infantry Regiment* suddenly emerged from the smoke, but the enemy preferred mortar, artillery, and machine gun fires to headlong charges. A few minutes after 1000, as Colonel Riseley was establishing his regimental command post on Red 2, between 15 and 25 Japanese suddenly materialized and began attacking southward along the beach. The bold thrust accomplished nothing, for the

enemy soldiers were promptly cut down.

Light armor from Colonel Takashi Goto's *9th Tank Regiment* made two feeble counterattacks against the 6th Marines. At noon, two tanks rumbled forth from their camouflaged positions to the front of 2/8 and started southward along the coastal road. Evidently the tank commanders were bewildered by the smoke, for they halted their vehicles within Marine lines. The hatch of the lead tank popped open, and a Japanese thrust out his head to look for some familiar landmark. Before the enemy could orient himself, Marine rocket launcher teams and grenadiers opened fire, promptly destroying both tanks. An hour later, three tanks attempted to thrust along the boundary between the 1st and 2d Battalions. Two of the vehicles were stopped short of the Marine positions, but the third penetrated to within 75 yards of Colonel Riseley's command post before it was destroyed.

The first few hours had been costly for Riseley's 6th Marines. By 1300, an estimated 35 percent of the regiment had been wounded or killed. Lieutenant Colonel Easley, though wounded, retained command over 3/6 for a time. Lieutenant Colonel Murray, whose injuries were more serious, turned 2/6 over to Major Howard J. Rice. Rice, in turn, was put out of the fight when, for the second time within five hours, a mortar round struck the battalion command post. Lieutenant Colonel William A. Kengla, who was accompanying the unit as an observer, took over until Major LeRoy P. Hunt, Jr., could come ashore.

In spite of the losses among troops and

leaders alike, the attack plunged onward. By 1105, the shallow initial beachhead had been expanded to a maximum depth of 400 yards. Twenty minutes later, Lieutenant Colonel Jones' 1/6 was ordered to pass through 3/6, which had been severely scourged by machine gun fire, and attack to the 0-1 Line, where it would revert to reserve by exchanging places with the units it had just relieved. This planned maneuver could not be carried out. The 1st Battalion could not gain the ridge line, and as the 6th Marines moved forward, the regimental frontage increased until all three battalions were needed on line.

During the day's fighting, a gap opened between the 6th and 8th Marines. Colonel Riseley's troops, manning a dangerously thin line and weary from their efforts, could extend their right flank no farther. Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines, which had undergone a similar ordeal, was in much the same condition.

THE GREEN BEACHES AND AFETNA POINT

The key terrain feature in the zone of the 8th Marines was Afetna Point which straddled the boundary between the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions. Since the company charged with capturing Afetna Point would have to attack toward the flank of General Schmidt's division, about half the unit was issued shotguns. These short-range weapons would not be as dangerous as M1s to friendly troops, and their wide patterns of dispersion would make up for their comparative inaccuracy. The attackers, Marines of Company G,

also carried their regularly assigned weapons for use after the point had been secured.

While coming ashore, Wallace's command had suffered "miraculously few LVT casualties"¹⁰ in spite of the ponderous barrage falling on and near the beaches. Both assault battalions, Crowe's 2/8 and Miller's 3/8, landed on the same beach, Green 1, and their component units became intermingled. In the judgment of the regimental commander, "If it had not been for the splendid discipline of the men and junior officers, there would have been utter confusion."¹¹ The various commanders, however, could not be certain of the exact location and composition of their organizations.

After a brief pause to orient themselves, the companies began fanning out for the attack. On the right, Company G of Crowe's battalion, its flank resting upon the Charan Kanoa airstrip, pushed southward along Green 2 toward Afetna Point. The advance was bitterly opposed. Japanese riflemen fired across the narrow runway into the exposed flank of the company until they were killed or driven off by Marine mortars and machine guns. On the opposite flank were emplaced nine antiboat guns. Fortunately for Company G, the Japanese gunners doggedly followed their orders to destroy the incoming landing craft, so the Marines were able to attack these emplacements from the rear. By darkness, when the company dug in for the night, all but two of the gun positions had been overrun, and all of Green

¹⁰ *8th Mar SAR*, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

2, including the northern half of Afetna Point, was in American hands. In his report of the Saipan operation, Colonel Wallace expressed his belief that because of the confused landing, the capture of the point was delayed by 24 hours.

While one company was battling to join forces with the 4th Marine Division and secure use of the boat channel that led to Green 3, the rest of 2/8 was advancing toward the marsh extending northward from Lake Susupe. Elements of the battalion crossed the swamp, only to discover they were isolated, and had to fall back to establish a line along the firm ground to the west. On the left, 3/8 pushed directly inland from Green 1.

The regimental reserve, 1/8, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence C. Hays, Jr., was ordered ashore at 0950. One of Hays' companies was sent toward the airstrip to protect the left flank of the unit attacking Afetna Point. The two remaining rifle companies were committed along the boundary between the 2d and 3d battalions.

The next landing team to reach the Green Beaches was Lieutenant Colonel Guy E. Tannyhill's 1/29, the division reserve. Lieutenant Colonel Tannyhill's Marines, who had taken part in the feint off Tanapag, came ashore early in the afternoon and were attached to the 8th Marines. Company B was ordered to seal a gap in the lines of 2/8, but the reinforcing unit became lost, and Company A was sent forward in its place. This second attempt was thwarted by Japanese forward observers who promptly called for artillery concentrations which

halted the Marines short of the front lines. While the men of Company A were seeking cover from the deadly shells, Company B found its way into position to close the opening.

The 8th Marines had battled its way as far inland as the swamps. On the left, the opening between Wallace's regiment and the 6th Marines was covered by fire. The actual lines of the 8th Marines began in the vicinity of the enemy radio station near the regimental left boundary, continued along the western edge of the swamp, and then curved sharply toward Afetna Point. In carving out this beachhead, the regiment had suffered about the same percentage of casualties as had the 6th Marines. Because of the intermingling of the assault battalions, Colonel Wallace could not at the time make an accurate estimate of his losses. The problem of reorganizing 2/8 and 3/8 was complicated by the grim resistance and the loss of both battalion commanders. Lieutenant Colonels Crowe and Miller had been wounded seriously enough to require evacuation from the island. Command of 2/8 passed to Major William C. Chamberlain, while Major Stanley E. Larson took the reins of the 3d Battalion.

CHARAN KANOVA AND BEYOND

South of Afetna Point and Charan Kanoa pier lay the beaches assigned to Colonel Jones' 23d Marines. At Blue 1, eight LVTs, escorted by three armored amphibians and carrying members of Lieutenant Colonel Cosgrove's 3/23, bolted forward along the only road leading beyond Charan Kanoa. The column exchanged shots with Japanese



FIRE TEAM member dashes across fire-swept open ground past a dud naval shell as Marines advance inland from Saipan beaches. (USMC 83010)



JAPANESE MEDIUM TANKS knocked out during the night counterattack on 17 June at Saipan. (USN 80-G-287376)

snipers who were firing from the ditches over which the highway passed, but it encountered no serious resistance in reaching Mount Fina Susu astride the 0-1 Line. The troops dismounted and established a perimeter atop the hill, a position exposed to direct fire from Japanese cannon and machine guns as well as to mortar barrages. The LVT(A)s, which mounted flat-trajectory weapons that might have aided the unit mortars in silencing enemy machine guns, halted at the base of the hill. No friendly units were within supporting distance on either flank, but the Marines managed to foil periodic attempts to infiltrate behind them. After dark, the defenders of Fina Susu were ordered to abandon their perimeter and withdraw to the battalion lines.

A similar breakthrough occurred at Blue 2, where five LVT(A)s and a trio of troop-carrying tractors followed the Aslito road all the way to 0-1. Again, the remainder of the battalion, in this case Lieutenant Colonel Dillon's 2/23, was stalled a short distance inland. The advanced outpost had to be recalled that evening.

The 23d Marines was unable to make a coordinated drive to the 0-1 Line. In the north, the Lake Susupe swamps stalled forward progress, and to the south a steep incline, rising between four and five feet from the level beaches but undetected by aerial cameras, halted the tractors. Because of the gap between divisions, the regimental reserve came ashore early in the day to fill out the line as the beachhead was enlarged. At 1055, 1/23, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Haas, landed and moved into an assembly area 300 yards inland of Blue 1. The

beachhead, however, did not expand as rapidly as anticipated, so the battalion spent the morning standing by to protect the left flank or reinforce the front. After sundown, Haas' troops were ordered to relieve Cosgrove's 3d Battalion.

Although few men actually gained the 0-1 Line, the 23d Marines nevertheless managed to gain a firm hold on the Blue Beaches, in spite of the violent fire and formidable natural obstacles which it encountered. Japanese mortar crews and cannoneers created havoc among the amphibian tractors which were attempting to find routes through either the swamp or the embankment. Yet, the Marines cleared the beaches to battle their way toward the ridges beyond. The ruins of Charan Kanoa were overrun and cleared of snipers. A consolidated beachhead some 800 yards in depth was wrested from a determined enemy. The 23d Marines was ashore to stay.

ACTION ON THE RIGHT FLANK

Agingan Point, south of the beaches upon which Colonel Batchelder's 25th Marines landed, was a thorn in the regimental flank throughout the morning of D-Day. On Yellow 1, the beach farthest from the point, Lieutenant Colonel Hudson's 2/25 landed amid a barrage of high explosives. Approximately half of the LVTs reached the railroad embankment, which at this point ran diagonally inland between 500 and 700 yards from the coastline. LVT(A)s from the Army's 708th Amphibian Tank Battalion spearheaded the drive, pushing steadily forward in spite of small arms fire from the eastern side

of the rail line. These Japanese riflemen fell back, but artillery pieces and dual-purpose antiaircraft guns kept pumping shells into the advanced position. A bypassed pair of enemy mortars now joined in the bombardment. Since no friendly troops were nearby, Navy planes were called in to destroy the weapons.

To the south, the assault waves of Lieutenant Colonel Mustain's 1/25 were stopped a dozen yards past the beach. Enfilade fire from Agingan Point inflicted many casualties and prevented the survivors from moving forward. LVTs of the Army's 773d Amphibian Tractor Battalion barely had room to land the succeeding waves. Since bursting shells were churning the narrow strip of sand, the tractor drivers retreated as quickly as they could, sometimes departing before communications gear and crew-served weapons and their ammunition could be completely unloaded.

Focal point of enemy resistance was Agingan Point, a maze of weapons positions, and the patch of woods adjacent to that promontory. About 800 yards to Mustain's front, four or more artillery pieces slammed shells directly into the crowded beachhead. Gradually, however, the Marines worked their way forward, finally reaching 0-1 late in the afternoon.

At 0930, the Japanese made their first attempt to hurl 1/25 into the sea. While troops advanced across the ridge that marked the 0-1 Line, another enemy force attacked from Agingan Point in an effort to roll up the narrow beachhead. The battalion commander called for air strikes and naval gunfire concentrations which ended the threat

for the time being. The defenders, however, persisted in their efforts. Early in the afternoon, tanks from the 4th Tank Battalion joined Mustain's infantrymen in wiping out two Japanese companies, thus crushing the strongest counterattack of the day against the division flank.

Immediately upon landing, Lieutenant Colonel Justice M. Chambers' 3/25, the regimental reserve, sent reinforcements to Mustain. In the confusion of landing, portions of two rifle companies, instead of one complete company, were directed toward Agingan Point. The remainder of the reserve moved forward, mopping up in the wake of the advancing assault battalions. About 700 yards inland, Chambers' men took cover along the railroad embankment. From the comparative safety of this position additional reinforcements were despatched to Agingan Point, where 1/25 had by now seized the initiative from the elements of the *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* that had been posted there.

Progress on the southern flank was slow, for a powerful enemy contingent occupied the point. Like the Eniwetok Island garrison, these soldiers had dug and carefully camouflaged numerous spider holes. The defenders waited until a fire team had passed them, then emerged from concealment to take aim at the backs of the Marines. One of the companies detached from Chambers' battalion reported killing 150 Japanese during the afternoon.

In spite of the battering it had received from artillery located in the island's interior, the 25th Marines made the deepest penetration, over 2,000 yards, of the day's fighting. Its

battalions had reached the 0-1 Line throughout the regimental zone, but an enemy pocket, completely isolated from the main body, continued to cling to the tip of Agingan Point. Both divisions had gained firm holds on the western beaches.

*SUPPORTING WEAPONS AND LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS*¹²

After the preliminary bombardment had ended, ships and aircraft continued to support both divisions. Planes remained on station throughout the day. Once the liaison parties ashore had established radio contact with the agencies responsible for coordinating and controlling their missions, the pilots began attacking mortar and artillery positions as well as reported troop concentrations.

Warships played an equally important role in supporting the Marines. From the end of the preparatory shelling until the establishment of contact with the battalions they were to support, the fire-support units blasted targets of opportunity. Subsequent requests from shore fire control parties were checked against calls for air strikes to avoid duplication of effort and the possible destruction of low-flying planes. Perhaps the most strik-

ing demonstration of the effectiveness of naval gunfire in support of the day's operations ashore was the work of the battleship *Tennessee* and three destroyers in helping to halt the first counter-attack against Mustain's troops.

The 2d Tank Battalion, commanded by Major Charles W. McCoy, and the 4th Tank Battalion, under Major Richard K. Schmidt, also assisted the riflemen in their drive eastward. Armor from McCoy's battalion crawled from the LCMs, plunged into the water at the reef edge, and passed through the curtain of shellfire that barred the way to Green 1. Since the enemy still held Afetna Point, the boat channel leading to Green 3 could not be used as planned. The last tank lumbered ashore at 1530, 2½ hours after the first of the vehicles had nosed into the surf. One company of 14 Sherman medium tanks helped shatter the positions blocking the approaches to Afetna Point. A total of eight tanks were damaged during the day, but seven of these were later repaired.

Heavy swells, which mounted during the afternoon, helped complicate the landing of the 4th Tank Battalion. Company A started toward Blue 2, but en route the electrical systems of two tanks were short-circuited by seawater. Another was damaged after landing. Four of the 14 Shermans of Company B survived shells and spray to claw their way onto the sands of Blue 1. Six tanks of the company were misdirected to Green 2, but only one actually reached its destination, the rest drowned out in deep water; the sole survivor was promptly commandeered by the 2d Tank Battalion. Company C, which landed on Yellow 2 without

¹² Additional sources for this section include: 10th Mar SAR (incl Bn SARs), dtd 22Jul44, hereafter *10th Mar SAR*; 14th Mar Final Rpt, Saipan Op, dtd 31Aug44, hereafter *14th Mar Rpt*; 20th Mar Final Rpt, n.d., hereafter *20th Mar Rpt*; 1/13 Observer's Rpt, Saipan, dtd 13Jul44; 2/18 Narrative Account of Saipan Op, dtd 21Jul44, hereafter *2/18 Narrative*; 4th TkBn CbtRpt (incl CoRpts), dtd 20Aug44.

losing a single tank, supported the advance of Dillon's 2/23. Company D landed 10 of its 18 flame-throwing light tanks, but these machines were held in an assembly area. As far as the 4th Division tankers were concerned, the crucial action of the day was the smashing of the afternoon counterthrust against 1/25.

Two 75mm pack howitzer battalions landed on D-Day to support General Watson's division. Lieutenant Colonel Presley M. Rixey's 1/10 went into position to the rear of the 6th Marines, while the 2d Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel George R. E. Shell, crossed the airstrip in order to aid the 8th Marines. In crossing the runway, Shell's men were spotted by the enemy, but the ensuing counterbattery fire did not destroy any of their howitzers. Colonel Raphael Griffin established his regimental command post before dark, but none of the 105mm battalions were landed.

South of the 2d Marine Division beachhead, all five battalions of Colonel Louis G. DeHaven's 14th Marines landed on the Blue and Yellow beaches. The 2d Battalion had the greatest difficulty in getting ashore, for its elements were scattered along three different beaches. During reorganization on Blue 2, casualties and losses of equipment to both the sea and hostile fire forced the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel George B. Wilson, Jr., to merge his three 75mm batteries into two units. The other pack howitzer battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Harry J. Zimmer's 1/14, was forced to disassemble its weapons and land from LVTs, as the DUKWs that were scheduled to carry the unit failed to return as plan-

ned after landing a 105mm battalion. The only firing position available to 1/14 on Yellow 1 was a scant 100 yards from the water. Firing from Yellow 2 was 3/14, a 105mm battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. MacFarlane, the first element of the 14th Marines to go into action on Saipan. Immediately after landing on Blue 2, Lieutenant Colonel Carl A. Youngdale's 4th Battalion lost four 105s to Japanese mortar fire, but the artillerymen managed to repair the damaged weapons. From its positions on Blue 2, 5/14, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Douglas E. Reeve, temporarily silenced a Japanese gun that was pounding the beachhead from a range of 1,500 yards.

Supplying the landing force did not prove as difficult at Saipan as it had at Tarawa. By having certain of the LVTs dump boxes of rations and medical supplies, cases of ammunition, and cans of water onto the beaches as the later waves were landing, supply officers were able to sustain the assault troops. Unlike the cargo handlers at Betio, the Saipan shore parties soon had sufficient room to carry out their tasks. Early in the afternoon, supplies began flowing from the transports, across the beaches, and to the advancing battalions. Japanese fire and a lack of vehicles, however, did handicap the D-Day supply effort.

Enemy artillery and mortar concentrations also endangered the lives of the wounded Marines who were waiting on the beaches for the tractors that would carry them out to sea. About 60 percent of the wounded were taken directly to the transports. Although no accurate accounting was made until 17

June, as many as 2,000 men may have been killed or wounded on D-Day.

THE SITUATION ASHORE: THE EVENING OF D-DAY

By darkness on D-Day, the two Marine divisions had succeeded in establishing themselves on the western coast of Saipan. Approximately half of the planned beachhead had been won, but the enemy still held the ridges that dominated captured segments of the coastal plain. The 2d Marine Division manned a line that stretched from the coast about one mile south of Garapan to the middle of Afetna Point. The maximum depth of the division beachhead was about 1,300 yards. Before dark, Colonel Walter J. Stuart had landed one battalion and part of another from his 2d Marines. These reserves provided added strength in the event of a counterattack. Also ashore was General Watson, who now commanded operations from a captured munitions dump inland of the coastal road on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2. The cached explosives were removed during the night and following morning. (See Map 16.)

In the 4th Marine Division zone, those elements of the 23d Marines that had reached the 0-1 Line fell back some 800 yards during the night. After this adjustment, the front moved from the coastline 800 yards inland along the division boundary, turned south past Charan Kanoa, and then bulged eastward to 0-1. In the right half of General Schmidt's zone of action, a band of Japanese entrenched on Aginagan Point prevented the Marines from occupying all the territory west of the

critical ridge line. Colonel Franklin A. Hart's 24th Marines was ashore, with elements of its 1st Battalion committed between 2/23 and 2/25, while the rest of the regiment occupied assembly areas. General Schmidt had moved into a command post on Yellow 2.¹³

THE JAPANESE STRIKE BACK

As soon as American carrier planes had begun to hammer the Marianas in earnest, Admiral Toyada signaled the execution of *A-GO*. On 13 June, as it was starting northward from Tawi Tawi, Ozawa's task force encountered the submarine USS *Redfin*, which reported its strength, course, and speed. Another submarine, the USS *Flying Fish*, sighted Ozawa's ships on 15 June, as they were emerging from San Bernardino Strait between Samar and Luzon. The Japanese were by this time shaping an eastward course. On this day, the submarine USS *Seahorse* observed the approach of the warships diverted from Biak, but the enemy jammed her radio, and she was unable to report the sighting until 16 June.

Admiral Spruance was now aware that enemy carriers were closing on the Marianas. Japanese land-based planes also were active, as was proved by an unsuccessful attack upon a group of

¹³ General Schmidt recalled that several of his staff officers went ashore with him after dark and "after getting dug in, it was suddenly discovered that we were in a supply dump of bangalore torpedoes. We decided to get out quick. An armored vehicle was sent us and we arrived shortly in the temporary CP." Gen Harry Schmidt cmts on draft MS, dtd 4Jun63.

American escort carriers on the night of 15 June. After evaluation of the latest intelligence, Spruance decided on the following morning to postpone the Guam landings, tentatively set for 18 June, until the enemy carrier force had either retreated or been destroyed.

While Ozawa was steaming nearer, the Japanese on Saipan were preparing to carry out their portion of *A-GO*. As one member of the *9th Tank Regiment* confided to his diary, "Our plan would seem to be to annihilate the enemy by morning."¹⁴ First would come probing attacks to locate weaknesses in the Marine lines, then the massive counter-stroke designed to overwhelm the beachhead.

The heaviest blows delivered against General Watson's division were aimed at the 6th Marines. Large numbers of Japanese, their formations dispersed, eased down from the hills without feeling the lash of Marine artillery. The two howitzer battalions, all that the division then had ashore, were firing urgent missions elsewhere along the front and could not cover the avenue by which the enemy was approaching. The *California* received word of the movement and opened fire in time to help crush the attack. Before midnight, the Japanese formed a column behind their tanks in an effort to overwhelm the outposts of 2/6 and penetrate the battalion main line of resistance. Star shells blossomed overhead to illuminate the onrushing horde. Riflemen and machine gunners broke the attack, and the *California* secondary batteries caught the survivors as

¹⁴ JICPOA Item No. 10,238, Diary of Tokuzo Matsuya.

they were reeling back. Although this first blow had been parried, the Japanese continued to jab at the perimeter.

At 0300, regimental headquarters received word that an attack had slashed through the lines of 3/6, but the company sent to block this penetration found the front intact. A similar report received some three hours later also proved false. The enemy, however, maintained his pressure until a platoon of medium tanks arrived to rout what remained of the battalion which the *136th Infantry Regiment* had hurled against the beachhead. In eight hours of intense fighting, the 6th Marines had killed 700 Japanese soldiers.

The 8th Marines was harassed throughout the night by attacks that originated in the swamps to its front. These blows, weak and uncoordinated, were repulsed with the help of fires from 2/10. The enemy did not employ more than a platoon in any of these ill-fated thrusts.

Throughout the sector held by General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division, the Japanese made persistent efforts to shatter the American perimeter. Approximately 200 of the enemy advanced from the shores of Lake Susupe, entered the gap between the divisions, and attempted to overwhelm 3/23. The battalion aided by Marine and Army shore party troops, held firm.

The 25th Marines stopped one frontal attack at 0330, but an hour later the Japanese, advancing behind a screen of civilians, almost breached the lines of the 1st Battalion. As soon as the Marines discovered riflemen lurking behind the refugees, they called 1/14 for artillery support. This unit, out of

ammunition, passed the request to 3/14, which smothered the attack under a blanket of 105mm shells. The only withdrawal in the 25th Marines sector occurred when a Japanese shell set fire to a 75mm self-propelled gun. Since the flames not only attracted Japanese artillery but also touched off the ammunition carried by the burning vehicle, the Marines in the immediate area had to fall back about 200 yards.

The Japanese had been unable to destroy the Saipan beachhead, but the battle was just beginning. The *Thirty-first Army* chief of staff admitted on the morning of 16 June that

“the counterattack which has been carried out since the afternoon of the 15th has failed because of the enemy tanks and fire power.” Yet, he remained undaunted. “We are reorganizing,” his report continued, “and will attack again.”¹⁵ While the battle raged ashore, an enemy fleet was bearing down on the Marianas. If all went as planned, Admiral Ozawa and General Saito might yet trap the American forces.

¹⁵ NTLF G-2, Tgs Sent and Received by Thirty-first Army Hq on Saipan, dtd 25Jul44, p. 4.