Securing the North: 23-30 September[1]

REINFORCEMENT FOR PELELIU[2]

Major General William H. Rupertus, commanding the 1st Marine Division, initially envisioned the Peleliu operation as a tough but short campaign. The landings took place on 15 September under weather conditions that were ideal except for excessive heat. Despite fanatical Japanese resistance, the Marines secured a firm foothold on the island. The 5th Marines seized the prime objective of the operation, the vital Peleliu airfield, on the second day of the assault, while the 7th Marines accomplished the mission of driving the Japanese from the southern part of the island. The 1st Marines had already encountered the fringes of the vast enemy defense system in the central ridges of Peleliu, and early optimistic reports soon gave way to a more somber perspective of the situation. During the first week of operations the 1st Marines had borne the brunt of the assault. There was little likelihood that the campaign would become easier or less costly as it progressed.

Even the most pessimistic predictions of the difficulties that the Marines were to encounter proved conservative when the full extent of the Japanese defensive system was revealed to the assault troops. By evening of 20 September, having made only minor gains, the 1st Marines found progress blocked by ridges honeycombed with elaborate Japanese defenses consisting of layers of caves, dugouts, and cleverly concealed emplacements. Worse still, in five days of incessant fighting, the regiment had sustained nearly 1,700 casualties or more than half its original strength. The 5th and 7th Marines had suffered fewer casualties, but their advance was also stymied by the heavily fortified ridges. To most division personnel, there appeared the sobering realization that the attack had bogged down in the incredibly tough and skillfully defended terrain. The division paid an extremely heavy price of nearly 4,000 casualties for the ground that had been seized. The heavy losses in personnel resulted in a corresponding reduction in the combat efficiency of the division, which as early as 18 September had dropped from "excellent" to "very good." By evening of 19 September, continued casualties and fatigue further reduced the efficiency of the 1st Marine Division.

On 21 September, General Geiger, accompanied by members of his staff, vis-

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *IIIAC Palaus Rpt; 1st MarDiv SAR; 1st MarDiv WarD*, Sep44; *1st MarDiv D–2 Jnl; 1st MarDiv D–3 Periodic Rpt; Peleliu Comment File; Japanese CenPac Ops*; Smith, *Narrative*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu;* Morison, *Leyte;* Smith, *Approach to the Philippines;* McMillan, *The Old Breed.*

[2] Additional sources used for this section are: *IIIAC C–3 Rpts; 3/1 WarD; Vandegrift Letters.*

ited the CP of the 1st Marines to obtain a clearer picture of the situation.

> It became rapidly apparent that the regimental commander was very tired, he was unable to give a very clear picture of what his situation was and when asked by the Corps Commander what he needed in the way of help he stated that he was doing all right with what he had.[3]

General Geiger and staff then proceeded to the division CP. After a look at the casualty reports, General Geiger told the division commander that, in his estimation, "the First Marines were finished."[4] In the course of the ensuing discussion with General Rupertus, General Geiger expressed the view that the 1st Marines should be relieved and replaced by an Army regiment. The division commander attempted to forestall such action by asserting that the island could be secured in another day or two without the employment of Army troops, a patently impossible solution in view of the overall tactical situation. In the end, General Geiger ordered preparations made for the evacuation of the 1st Marines to the Russells and for the immediate attachment of a regiment of the 81st Infantry Division to the 1st Marine Division.

Reluctance on the part of the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, to use Army units was not limited to this instance. It may have been rooted in earlier experiences, which did not always result in harmonious relations with Army commanders.[5] On the other hand, General Rupertus may have distrusted a division that was new to combat and felt that the battle-hardened 1st Marine Division was capable of finishing the job it had undertaken without any help.

Prior to this latter incident [involving attachment of an infantry regiment to the 1st Marine Division], "the Corps Commander was disinclined to impose any particular line of action upon the division commander although more than once he had felt the urge to do so. Just what induced this reluctance on the part of General Rupertus was never understood by Corps. . . ." It is probable that he felt, like most Marines, that he and his troops could and would handle any task assigned to them without asking for outside help.[6]

At 1625, 21 September, IIIAC asked the Commanding General, 81st Infantry Division, if he could make a regimental combat team available for immediate movement to Peleliu to assist the 1st Marine Division in completing the seizure of the island. Within the hour General Mueller replied that the 321st Infantry Regiment was available as soon as it could complete its re-supply. Shortly thereafter, a group consisting of Rear Admiral George H. Fort, commander of the Western Attack Force, and Major Generals Julian C. Smith and Geiger arrived at division headquarters to confer with General Mueller. These four discussed the situation on Peleliu in detail and agreed on a general plan of movement for the 321st Infantry Regiment. Shortly before midnight, 21

[3] Col William F. Coleman ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Coleman ltr.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] MajGen William H. Rupertus ltrs to LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift (CMC), dtd 7Dec43, 4Feb44, 18Feb44, and 24Mar44, in *Vandegrift Letters.*

[6] *Wachtler ltr.*

September, the reinforced regiment received orders directing its loading and movement to Peleliu.

The Assistant Division Commander of the 81st Infantry Division, Brigadier General Marcus B. Bell, was designated liaison representative to IIIAC, to coordinate details of the movement from Angaur to Peleliu and attachment of RCT 321 to the 1st Marine Division. On 22 September an advance detachment of the regiment arrived at Headquarters, 1st Marine Division, near the airfield, to complete the necessary arrangements for the reception and disposition of troops. On the same date, the Commanding Officer, 321st Infantry Regiment, Colonel Robert F. Dark, reported to General Geiger on board the USS *Mt. McKinley* and then proceeded to the 1st Marine Division command post on Peleliu.

The main body of the 321st Infantry Regiment embarked early on 22 September. Embarkation of all troops and loading of equipment, except for amphibian tractors, continued throughout the day and was finally completed by 1630. The ships stood off Angaur during the night of 22-23 September. Shortly after daybreak the amphibian tractors were loaded into LSTs. The force departed from Angaur at 1000 and two hours later reached Orange Beach, Peleliu. Attached to the regiment were an engineer battalion less one company, two medical companies less two platoons, an amphibian tractor company, and Company A, 710th Tank Battalion, an 81mm Provisional Mortar Platoon, and several detachments of service troops. Upon landing at Peleliu, the first elements of RCT 321 to reach the island proceeded to the western shore, where 2/321 relieved remnants of 3/1 between 1400 and 1500.

No advance for the 1st Marines had been ordered for 23 September. Patrols pushed 1,000 yards northward along the west coast without encountering serious opposition. The areas directly behind the Marine lines were harassed by mortar and sniper fire from the high ridges to the east. In a last skirmish prior to its relief, Company L, 3d Battalion, was able to inflict heavy casualties on a large body of Japanese moving up a draw across the front towards Company I. The enemy force was wiped out by combined artillery and mortar fire.[7]

The relief of the remainder of the 1st Marines was effected quickly. All maps, overlays, and other information pertaining to the terrain and enemy positions were turned over to the Army unit, which had no maps of the area.[8] The exhausted and depleted Marine regiment then moved out on foot or with such transportation as was available to a rest area on Purple Beach. There the units were reorganized and assigned defense sectors, which included the eastern coast of Peleliu and three islands offshore.

The men had hardly settled along Purple Beach before Colonel Puller informed them that they would go back into action after a three-day rest.[9] This was not the intention of the division, however, and the regiment retained its defensive mission until departure from Peleliu on the last day of September. Since coming ashore, the 1st Marines

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[7] *1st MarHist,* 23Sep44.
[8] *3/1 WarD,* 23Sep44.
[9] McMillan, *The Old Breed,* p. 319.

MEN AND SUPPLIES *arrive across 500-yard reef off Peleliu. (USMC 95606)*

81st INFANTRY DIVISION *troops join the battle of Peleliu. (USMC A96738)*

had suffered 1,672 casualties. In the 1st Battalion 71 percent of total strength had become casualties. Similarly, the casualty rate reached 56 percent in the 2d, 55 percent in the 3d, and 32 percent of authorized strength in regimental headquarters and Weapons Company.[10]

During the remainder of its stay on Peleliu, the depleted 1st Marines in its rest area was able to account for a few snipers and a number of Japanese stragglers attempting to flee through the shallow water from the large peninsula across the bay. In this manner the regiment remained in action against the enemy until the very last day of its stay on the island.

In relieving the 1st Marines near Ngarekeukl on the West Road, the 3d Battalion, 321st Infantry Regiment, moved into positions directly south of the 2d Battalion, which had occupied the lines previously held by 3/1. The 1st Battalion occupied an assembly area to the rear, where it was kept in regimental reserve.

CHANGE OF MAIN EFFORT[11]

The arrival of an additional regiment on Peleliu ushered in a new phase in the bitter contest for the island. Even though, in the estimate of the 1st Marine Division, about two thirds of the original Japanese garrison had been put out of action, organized resistance was far from over. Driving the Japanese defenders from the Umurbrogol ridges, as well as the remainder of the central ridge system, promised to be a costly and time-consuming task. From their positions in and on the hills, the Japanese were able to interdict all movement along the East and West Roads, which generally paralleled the island coastlines north of the airfield. Just north of Peleliu, the island of Ngesebus and its fighter strip were still in Japanese hands. Enemy strength in the remaining Palau islands still exceeded 25,000. As a result, the possibility of an enemy counterlanding was ever present. It had become abundantly clear that failure of the 1st Marine Division to score a breakthrough had resulted in a loss of momentum, which would have to be recovered before the Japanese hold on the island could be eliminated.

General Rupertus had for some time considered the possibility of launching a drive up the west coast of Peleliu to outflank the main Japanese defenses on the island. If successful, such an operation would open the dual possibility of attacking the Japanese center of resistance simultaneously from the north and south, and of crossing over a narrow body of water to Ngesebus to seize that island and its fighter strip.

In the minds of General Rupertus and his staff uncertainty prevailed as to Japanese intentions of sending reinforcements and materiel to Peleliu. Evidence on that score was conflicting. As early as 18 September two Japanese barges and one sampan had been observed unloading on the northwest coast of Peleliu. On the other hand, during the first week following the landing of the 1st Marine Division on Peleliu, repeated air searches of the islands to the north had shown no evidence of enemy movements to reinforce Peleliu.

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[10] *1st MarHist*, 26Aug–10Oct44.

[11] Additional sources used for this section are: *IIIAC C–2 Rpts;* 1st MarDiv FO 3–44.

There was no uncertainty on Babelthuap, for the Japanese were ready to reinforce their hard-pressed garrison on Peleliu. This mission fell to the *2d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment.* From a military standpoint, General Inoue was not enthusiastic about sending this unit, because he believed that the Americans would attack Koror and Babelthuap once the operation on Peleliu had been concluded. His reason for reinforcing Peleliu was "for the sake of the garrison at Peleliu and to bolster the morale of the troops there."[12]

An advance detachment of the Japanese battalion left Babelthuap during the night of 22-23 September and stealthily headed for the northern tip of Peleliu. The Japanese felt that chances of detection were slight, for the first sustained rain since the beginning of the Peleliu operation fell throughout the night. The Marines on Peleliu likewise welcomed the rain:

> During our first days on Peleliu rain proved an aid to fighting troops rather than a hindrance; the sandy ground absorbing the water readily and preventing any problem of mud. Rainfall increased the available water supply and provided a welcome break in the energy-sapping heat.[13]

The Japanese were not to reach their destination undetected. At 0535, the destroyer *H. L. Edwards* spotted seven enemy barges about 1,000 yards northeast of Akarakoro Point at the northern tip of Peleliu, obviously headed for the island. The destroyer opened fire, sinking one barge before the remainder reached the beach. A combination of bombing and strafing, naval gunfire, and artillery hit the barges on the beach, and by 0845 the cruiser *Louisville* reported all barges destroyed.

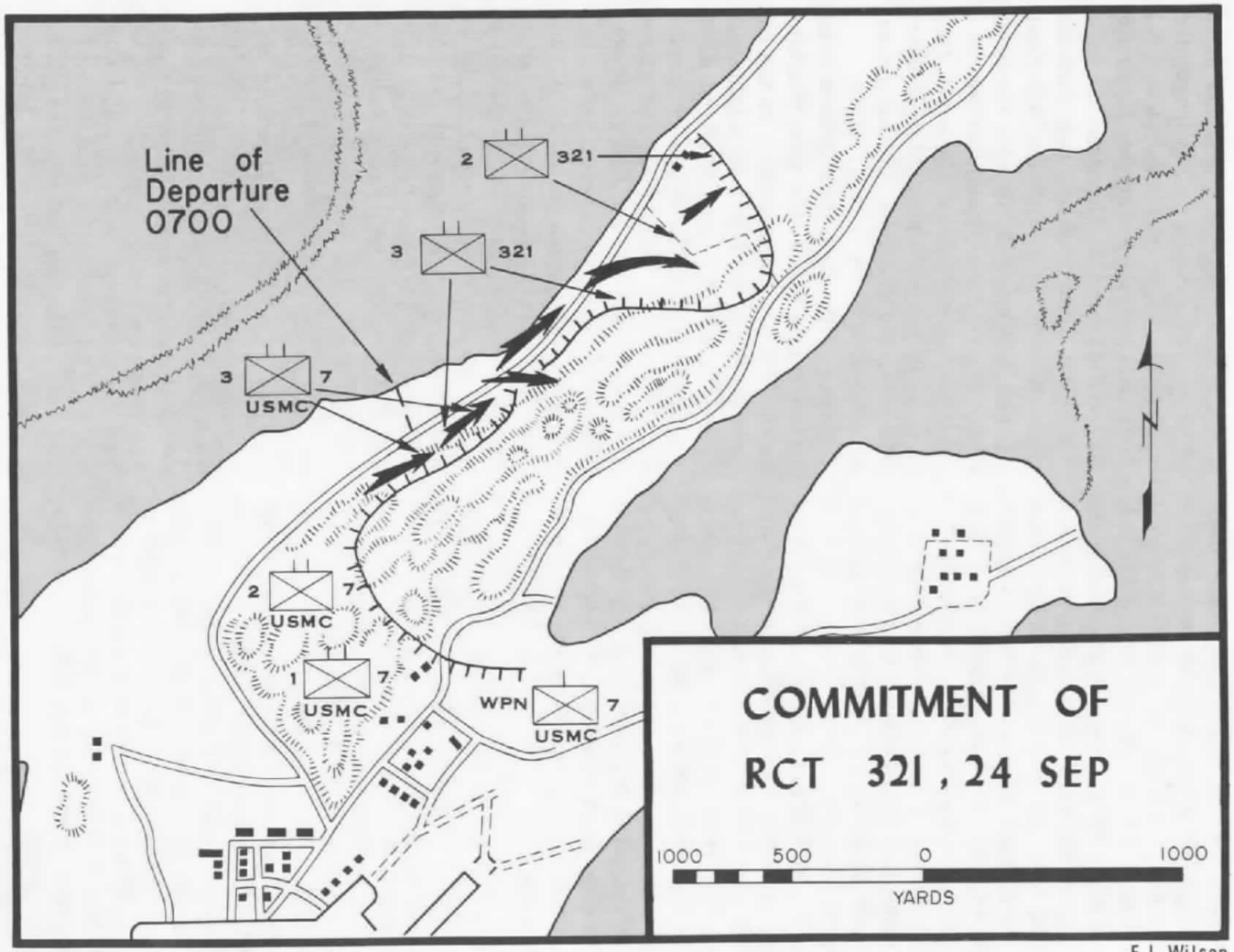
The enemy version of this incident agrees only in part with the American account, adding that "despite receiving severe enemy air and artillery fire at a point two kilometers off the coast, they made a successful landing at 0520 hours under the command of 1st Lieutenant Murahori".[14]

Aware of the fact that at least some Japanese reinforcements were reaching Peleliu and still uncertain as to the extent to which the Japanese might support their garrison on the island, General Rupertus on 23 September faced a difficult tactical decision. If the enemy had any weak spot on Peleliu, it was bound to be situated between the central ridges and the western shore. It was here that General Rupertus decided to commit the 321st Infantry Regiment in a drive up the western coast of the island. Such an advance would take the regiment northward from Phase Line O-3 to O-4 (See Map 8). The line of departure for the attack was located about 1,000 yards north of Ngarekeukl. The drive was to continue until a point north of the village of Garekoru was reached. During the advance, the left flank of the regiment was to remain anchored on the beach, while the right was to extend about 250 yards east of the West Road into the ridges of the Umurbrogol. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 7th Marines, were to support the Army drive by pressing against the Japanese

[12] LtGen Sadae Inoue, IJA, interview with LtCol Waite W. Worden, in *Worden ltr.*

[13] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Ph II, Anx A, p. 7.

[14] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 109.



Map 8

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positions from the south and center, while 3/7 would advance to the right rear of RCT 321 over the high ground to cover the advance of the soldiers. If the situation called for bypassing the central Japanese defenses, the troops advancing northward were to remain on the lookout for any route that would permit the isolation of the Umurbrogol region from the north. The attack was to jump off at 0700, 24 September.[15]

The narrow coastal plain of western Peleliu, where RCT 321 was to operate during the drive to the north, varied in width between 50 and 750 yards. At the southern end of the West Road, where the soldiers relieved the 1st Marines, the coastal plain was about 500 yards wide. About halfway up the western coast of the island at a point where the coastal plain attained a width of 750 yards, was the village of Garekoru. Just south of the village an unimproved trail led eastward through the hills until it connected with the East Road. From its widest point near Garekoru the plain narrowed down to the north until its width near the northern tip of Peleliu was only about 50 yards.

Vegetation varied considerably on the west side of the island. To the south of Garekoru exposed coral was covered with dense tropical underbrush and trees. To the north of the village the soil and vegetation changed in character. The coral was gradually replaced by sand, and the tropical jungle gave way to coconut palms. From the point where the attack was to jump off on the morning of 24 September, slightly more than 6,000 yards separated the 321st Infantry Regiment from the northern tip of Peleliu. The broken, jagged coral cliffs dominating the western plain were honeycombed with Japanese defenses, which consisted of dugouts and caves extending from the very base to the tops of ridges, varying in elevation between 50 and 200 feet. Clearly, all the advantages of cover and concealment accrued to the defenders.

For the soldiers and men of the 7th Marines, the drive to northern Peleliu promised to be an arduous undertaking. Once again the stamina, aggressiveness, and raw courage of the men in the assault were to be pitched against the fanatical determination of a well provisioned foe who preferred death to surrender.

ISOLATING THE UMURBROGOL POCKET[16]

During the afternoon of 23 September, the 2d Battalion, 321st Infantry Regiment, occupied positions about 700 yards north of the airfield along the West Road. The 3d Battalion was echeloned closely behind it for immediate support. The 1st Battalion, designated as regimental reserve, was located in the vicinity of the regimental command post.

To obtain a more detailed picture of the tactical situation in his zone of attack, Colonel Dark dispatched patrols northward between the West Road and the seashore. Other patrols from 3/1 had previously reconnoitered this

[15] 1st MarDiv FO 3-44.

[16] Additional sources used for this section are: *IIIAC C-2 Rpts; 81st InfDiv OpRpts; 7thMar R-2 Jnl; VMF(N)-541 Hist; 2/11 SAR; 3/7 Rec of Events.*

ground, having advanced to Garekoru without meeting any heavy resistance. Nevertheless, the movements were observed by the Japanese occupying the ridges to the east of the road, whose fire on the patrols was without noticeable effect. At Garekoru the patrols encountered numerous land mines, aerial bombs emplaced as land mines, and a few defensive positions which were not being held in strength. At 1700, the patrols reported the entire area from Phase Line 0-3 to Garekoru free of Japanese.

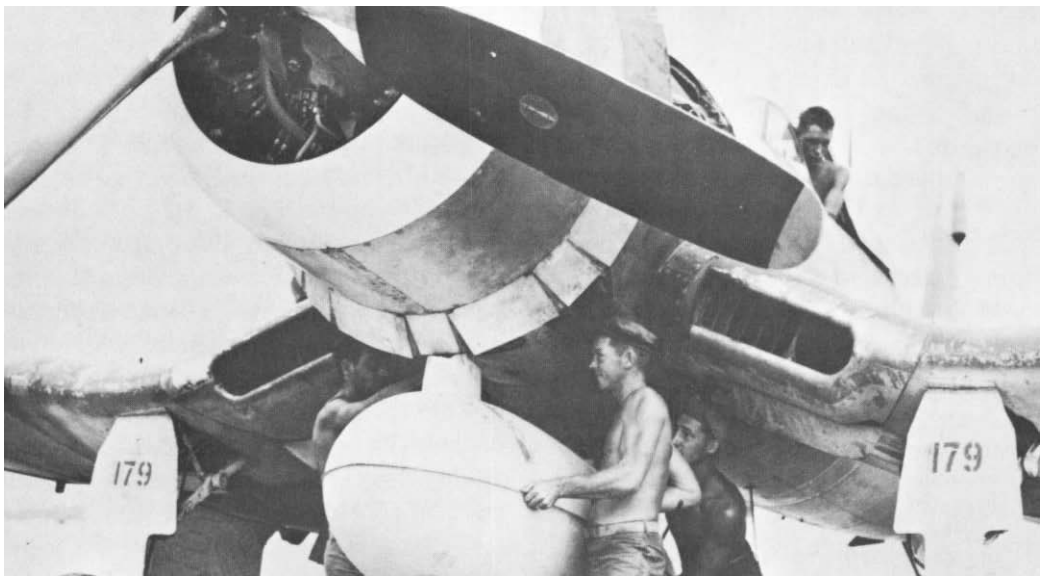
The receipt of such an optimistic report impelled General Rupertus to advance his timetable for the drive, scheduled to get under way on the morning of 24 September. RCT 321 received orders to send one battalion forward at once with the mission to advance to Phase Line 0-4 and dig in for the night. The task was assigned to 2/321, which began to move north at 1730. One company, moving forward between the West Road and the coast, was able to advance unopposed under the cover of a low ridge. The Japanese on the central ridges promptly spotted the company advancing east of the road as it attempted to move over open ground. The unit drew such a heavy volume of rifle and machine gun fire that the advance promptly ground to a halt before it had made much headway. Even though it had not as yet drawn any enemy fire, the company on the left halted after an advance of 100 yards to maintain contact with the unit on its right. The fading hours of daylight found both companies withdrawing to their starting points, where they dug in for the night, after establishing a continuous line of defense.

Aside from the combat action along the western coast of Peleliu, several other developments had taken place on the island in the course of the day. On the beaches and at the airfield the combat engineers had continued the removal of bombs, mines, and duds. They cleared the main beach for about 1,000 yards, laid out perimeter roads around the airstrip, and constructed a road from the south end of the airfield to Scarlet Beach. Temporary repairs on the fighter strip were completed, as was a dispersal area for 9 night fighters and 24 day-fighter aircraft. Work had begun on the southwest half of the bomber strip and a temporary control tower was half finished. The urgency of work on the airfield was emphasized during the afternoon when a B-24, the first plane larger than a TBF to land on the Peleliu strip, made an emergency landing.

The relative quiet that settled over the island with the approach of darkness on 23 September was shattered by alerts that were sounded at 1823 and 1900. No enemy aircraft appeared, however, and no bombs were dropped. During an otherwise quiet night, an enemy mortar shell landed in the CP of 3/7, causing one casualty.

For the Japanese on Babelthuap the arrival of nightfall marked the time when the main body of the *2d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment* could begin its embarkation for Peleliu. Versions of what transpired as the Japanese approached the northern tip of Peleliu differ. According to the Japanese:

> The main body of our reinforcement force [*2d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment*] left the Palau Proper Islands on the



CORSAIR BEING READIED *for napalm attack on enemy positions in the Umurbrogol. (USMC 100375)*

JAPANESE RIDGE POSITIONS *on Peleliu under air attack. (USMC 98401)*

> night of the 23d. Nine of our landing barges arrived safely, but six of them were shelled and burned when taking the wrong landing route. However, most of the personnel in those six barges were able to land by walking in the shallows.[17]

According to the American account of the action:

> . . . during the night from 23–24 September, there was again considerable enemy barge activity to the north, with seven craft sighted in that area, attempting to reinforce the island. They were sighted at approximately 0330 on the morning of 24 September and were brought under our naval and artillery fire. LVT(A)s also were active in the northern waters, taking the barges under close-range fire. All the enemy craft were reported sunk.[18]

One of the units playing a major role in combatting the Japanese barges was 2/11, which at 0500 commenced firing on enemy barges approaching from the north and apparently heading for the northeastern tip of Peleliu. Destroyers also opened fire on the craft and kept them illuminated with star shells. An observer reported that the effect of the fire was excellent. He counted 8 or 10 barges sunk or damaged and saw many people swimming about the debris. Throughout the morning of 24 September, fire was placed on survivors who were attempting to wade ashore on Peleliu. The Japanese tendency to bunch up increased the effectiveness of the artillery fire. Final reports were that 11 barges had either been sunk or disabled.[19]

A prisoner of war, identified as a member of the engineer unit of the *2d Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment*, shed further light on the incident. According to him, the barges intercepted off Peleliu the previous morning had carried most of the supplies of the *2d Battalion*, whereas the second echelon carried mostly troops. This prisoner estimated that 600 Japanese had gone ashore either on northeastern Peleliu or on small islands in the area.

Shortly before 0600, 24 September, an air, naval, and field artillery preparation was directed against the west side of the central ridges and suspected Japanese positions near Garekoru. At 0700, the 2d Battalion, 321st Infantry Regiment, jumped off in an attack designed to seize the area west of the central ridges to a line about 500 yards north of Garekoru. The 3d Battalion followed the attacking 2d in column. The beginning of the attack saw 3/7 echeloned to the right rear of the 2d Battalion, RCT 321, with the mission of screening the right flank of the advancing infantry.

This advance initially progressed on schedule as far as those elements moving through the coastal plain were concerned. Despite moderate small arms and mortar fire, the leading elements of 2/321 reached the junction of the West Road and a trail leading eastward by noon. (See Map 9). Fully aware of the importance of this juncture, the Japanese had established positions here that were more formidable than anything the infantrymen had encountered during the morning's advance. In a brief but violent action, the 2d Battalion overcame the Japanese at the road-trail

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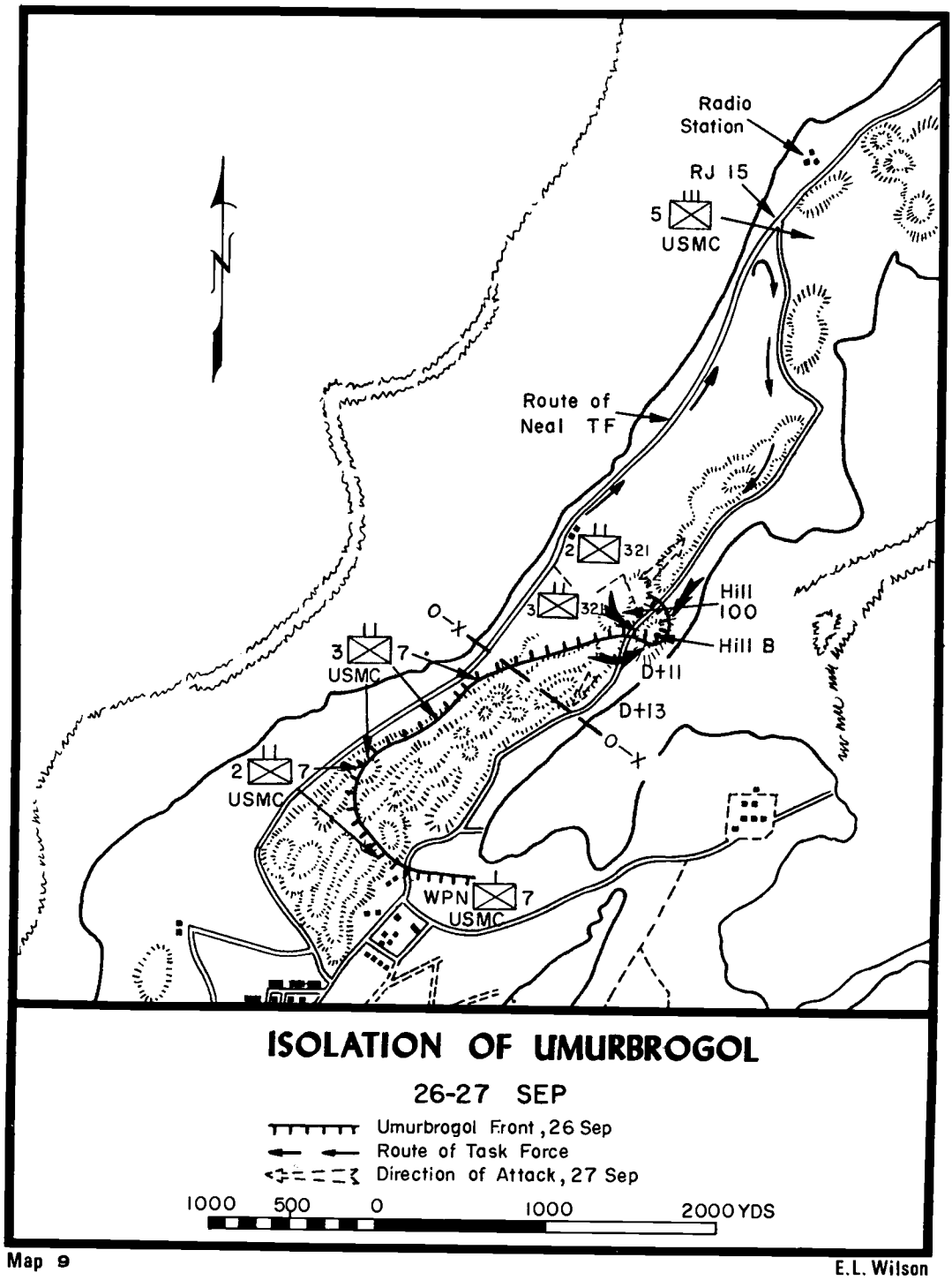
[17] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 109.
[18] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx A, p. 7.
[19] *2/11 AR*, 24Sep44.



Map 9

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junction. Ejection of the defenders from this strongpoint resulted in the capture of an antitank gun, three machine guns, and a naval gun. The 2d Battalion continued its advance up the road to Garekoru, leaving rear elements to explore the trail, which later was to assume major significance. In its rapid northward advance, the battalion reached Phase Line 0-4 to the north of Garekoru in midafternoon, when it halted, having reached the day's objective.

Elsewhere and particularly along the right flank, the advance did not proceed as envisioned. The rapid progress of 2/321 over the road had caused 3/7, moving over the ridges on the right, to fall behind. As a result, elements of 3/321 were sent up to the ridges to fill the gap. Soon, these elements ran into strong opposition along the low ridge that paralleled and dominated the road from a distance of 50 yards. In the face of strong opposition from this elevation, the infantry later pulled its right flank off the ridge and advanced up the coastal road. According to the Army version of the incident, withdrawal from the ridge occurred because the troops there wanted to maintain contact with the rest of the battalion.[20]

Regardless of the reasons leading to the withdrawal of troops from this vital terrain feature, it appeared likely that the Japanese might take advantage of the situation and reoccupy the ridge, a possibility that was glaringly apparent to the commanding officer of 3/7, who was anxiously watching this development.

> It was perfectly obvious to anyone who stood on that ridge that its control by the Japs could have been disastrous to the whole effort. We had been ordered to maintain contact with them [RCT 321] by trailing their right flank in column along the crest of the ridge from the point where we had earlier tied in with 3/1. I myself was at this boundary when the movement by 3/321 commenced and I personally saw the whole thing. They moved forward along the ridge a few yards until they encountered the first enemy positions, then gave it all up as a bad idea, and bore sharply to their left front to the coastal road below. It was certainly not our mission to maintain the contact with them on the flat coastal road and turn the ridge over to the Japs. I therefore reported what I had seen immediately to CO, CT–7, as well as CO 3/321. The latter officer . . . promised that he would do everything within his power to get them back on the high ground. I watched several abortive efforts to do so before finally becoming convinced that if friendly troops were going to control the ridge that night it would have to be our I Company.[21]

At 1310, 3/7 informed regiment that Company K had been committed on the right of the battalion, while Company I had been committed on the left. In his report to the regiment Major Hurst emphasized that 3/321 had withdrawn from the hills towards the road, leaving an undefended gap on the left flank of 3/7, that the Japanese had occupied the hills, and that 3/7 was fighting to retake them.[22]

Five minutes later, while Company I was reoccupying the ridge, Captain Fer-

[20] Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 537.

[21] LtCol Edward H. Hurst ltr to CMC, dtd 15Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Hurst ltr II*.

[22] *7th Mar R–2 Jnl*, 24Sep44.

guson, CO of the company, was killed.[23] Shortly before 1500, 3/7 reestablished contact with the Army units on the West Road. As a result of their taking the initiative to recapture the vacated ridge, the Marines eliminated a serious threat to the flank of the advancing Army units at a cost of 17 casualties.

In the course of the afternoon, the leading elements of 3/321 probed the central ridges north of the Marines in an attempt to discover a route leading eastward. One company of infantry was finally able to gain a foothold on the first ridge line east of the road and about 600 yards south of Phase Line 0-4. The main body of the battalion remained in the proximity of West Road during the night. At 1700, Company L, 3/7, relieved Company I, which went into bivouac as battalion reserve. At 1800, 3/7 dug in for the night on a 400-yard front with Company L on the left and Company K on the right.[24]

The 2d Battalion, RCT 321, reached Phase Line 0-4 by midafternoon of 24 September. For the remainder of the day, the battalion pushed aggressive patrols up the West Road. A strong combat patrol, supported by Marine and Army tanks, moved northward against negligible opposition for nearly 2,000 yards. At this point, the patrol had nearly reached Phase Line 0-5. From their vantage point the soldiers saw the extensive Japanese radio installations, which were situated about 600 yards north of Phase Line 0-5, and numerous Japanese pillboxes, caves, and other defenses along West Road. Before dark the patrol withdrew to Garekoru without having encountered serious enemy resistance.

In the meantime, Company G, the leading unit of the 2d Battalion, began organizing for defense to protect the north flank of the regiment. Hardly had this defense been established when, at 1700, the enemy counterattacked and forced the 2d Battalion to withdraw about 200 yards. The infantrymen promptly retook this ground. A second enemy counterattack shortly after 1800 disintegrated before it ever got started when effective artillery concentrations were placed on the assembly area.[25]

Aside from the activity which took place along West Road, the most far-reaching action on 24 September was destined to occur to the east of the road, and just south of the village of Garekoru, where the advancing infantry had earlier in the day discovered a poorly defined trail leading eastward into the enemy-held ridges. For lack of a better name, and because elements of RCT 321 had been the first to encounter it, the route was designated the "321st Infantry Trail."[26]

Since this trail could represent the only lateral link between the West and East Roads on Peleliu, its tactical importance was immediately apparent. From the point where it branched off from the West Road, the trail led through a stretch of swampland before ascending into the enemy-held ridges. Patrols cautiously followed the trail as it meandered into the high ground, encountering only negligible resistance. In

[23] *3/7 Rec of Events*, 24Sep44.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, 24Sep44.
[26] Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 139.

order to take advantage of what could prove a weak spot in the Japanese defenses, Colonel Dark dispatched an infantry company of 2/321 along the trail.

As the company advanced into the ridges, Japanese resistance stiffened, particularly on Hill 100, which dominated the route of advance and blocked the progress of the company to the east. Since this hill, which formed the northern bastion of the Japanese pocket in the Umurbrogol ridges, dominated not only the 321st Infantry Trail but also the East Road, its capture assumed major importance. In a brief but bitter engagement, the infantrymen seized the hill and then grimly held on against all Japanese attempts to retake it. Fully aware of the decisive importance of holding the hill and, if possible, of gaining further ground to the south, Colonel Dark diverted most of the 3d Battalion to the east. Soon three additional infantry companies were attacking eastward along the trail into the area south of Hill 100. Before nightfall, the 3d Battalion had seized an escarpment south of Hill 100 and established contact with 3/7 farther to the southeast.

By evening of 24 September, it appeared that the lack of momentum which had forestalled practically all forward movement for several days, had ended. From his new division command post in the former Japanese administration building at the northern edge of the airstrip, General Rupertus pondered his next move.[27] The advances made during the day had surpassed his expectations, and the tactical situation had radically changed for the better since morning. In addition, the sweep up the coast had brought a new high in the number of enemy prisoners, three being taken during the day.[28]

On the other hand, the successes achieved during the day were accompanied by difficult problems of evacuation and supply. Army engineers, already fully occupied in clearing Garekoru of mines and boobytraps, had to improve both the narrow West Road and the 321st Infantry Trail, a job that continued after darkness during the night of 24-25 September. The men on the escarpment south of Hill 100 faced an even greater predicament, since they had to manhandle all supplies going to their exposed positions. During the return trip the supply party encountered staggering difficulties in evacuating the wounded over the inhospitable terrain. Yet the advantages gained by the day's advance far surpassed all resulting problems.

Elsewhere on Peleliu, extensive work on the airstrip had progressed to the point where the short southeast-northwest runway was fully restored. Even though heavy fighting still was in progress about two thousand yards to the north, a large number of aircraft were able to land, including two C-46s, one C-47, four PBYs, and the first echelon of VMF(N)-541, consisting of eight Hellcats. Henceforth the night fighters would be available for night operations.[29]

For the continued operations the following day, 3/7 shifted Company I from

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[27] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx A, p. 8.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *VMF(N)-541 Hist*, Feb44–Apr46.

battalion reserve to the left of Company L, a maneuver designed to extend the line held on the ridges an additional 250 yards to the north. The 1st Battalion was ordered to move up on the West Road, where it was to remain in Support of 3/321 until an opportunity arose to shift direction and advance southward into the central ridges.

There were no reports of night activity in any sector of the 1st Marine Division.[30] Lest an erroneous impression be created that everything on Peleliu was entirely quiet, some action continued intermittently throughout the night. At 2200, Japanese threw hand grenades in front of the 3/7 sector.[31] Also during the night, Japanese with demolitions fastened to their bodies, tried to infiltrate the 7th Marines lines. One Japanese, killed 10 feet in front of a half-track, was found in the morning, a Molotov cocktail tied to one leg, explosives fastened to his back, and grenades stored in his pockets.[32]

The plan of operations for 25 September was to cut across the island near the 321st Infantry Trail. This maneuver would complete the isolation of Japanese forces in the Umurbrogol ridges. At 0700 elements of 2/321 jumped off from Hill 100 and in midmorning reached the edge of the East Road. Enemy resistance during this advance remained moderate and consisted primarily of rifle and machine gun fire from a key height across the East Road known as Hill B. The infantrymen paused in order to await the arrival of 3/321 for a combined drive across the road. When it attempted to expand the hold on the escarpment occupied the previous afternoon and to move onto East Road, the latter battalion ran into heavy fire from pillboxes and emplacements protected by steep walls and sheer cliffs guarding the northern approaches to the Umurbrogol defense system. There the drive of 3/321 bogged down and for the remainder of 25 September that battalion made no further gains. Any hope of a two-battalion assault against Hill B, which the Japanese were evidently holding in strength, had to be abandoned. For the remainder of 25 September, the Army troops near East Road remained in place.[33]

Despite the disappointing turn of events along the 321st Infantry Trail, progress appeared vastly more promising along the western coast of Peleliu. This applied primarily to developments along the West Road, where, at 0700, a strong Army combat patrol composed of infantry, tanks, and flamethrowers moved north from Garekoru village. The mission of this force was to destroy enemy installations that reconnaissance on the previous day had identified. This combat patrol advanced 1,200 yards, killing 30 Japanese and destroying four pillboxes and two large supply dumps before it reached Phase Line 0-5. The patrol arrived at its objective without sustaining any casualties.

Such weak resistance along the West Road indicated to General Rupertus that the enemy had concentrated his main strength in the central ridges of Peleliu. A swift drive to the north over

[30] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx A, p. 8.
[31] *7th Mar R–2 Jnl*, 24Sep44.
[32] *IIIAC C–2 Rpt*, 25Sep44.
[33] *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, 24Sep44.

West Road, coupled with a continuation of the RCT 321 drive to bisect the island, would result in the complete isolation of the Japanese in the central ridges while eliminating all enemy resistance in northern Peleliu. The possibilities that were now open to the division commander were greatly expanded, and General Rupertus decided that swift action was indicated. At 0945, division headquarters orally ordered the 1st Marines to take over the sector of the 5th in addition to its own. The 5th Marines was to pass through the lines held by 2/321 and attack towards the northern tip of Peleliu. Elements of the 321st Infantry Regiment engaged near East Road were to continue their attack eastward, but bypass the hard core of enemy resistance until movement up East Road became feasible. Then, in conjunction with the 5th Marines, they would launch a drive to the northern tip of the island.[34]

For the first time since the Marines had stormed ashore on Peleliu, all initiative had passed into the hands of the attacking force. The Japanese, holed up in their caves and dugouts, could still kill and maim; they were to inflict many more casualties before the fight for the island was over; but the road to the tip of the island was now open. Marines were moving up to eliminate any resistance that the enemy might still offer. Japanese hopes of receiving reinforcements were fading as more and more of the coastline in their hands had to be relinquished. The momentum of the American drive had been restored. At long last the beginning of the end of the costly and arduous operation was in sight.

DRIVE TO THE NORTH[35]

Orders to move to the western portion of Peleliu found the 5th Marines in static positions on Eastern Peleliu, where the regimental mission had been to prevent enemy counterlandings. The 1st Battalion was deployed in the vicinity of the radio direction finding station near Ngardololok, the 2d Battalion was holding the islands north of the northeastern peninsula, while the 3d Battalion, less one company, occupied defensive positions along Purple Beach. The 1st Marines completed the relief of the 5th shortly after noon and assumed command of the 5th Marines sector at that time. In order to expedite movement of the regiment to the West Road, the battalions moved out on trucks at 1300, with 1/5 in the lead, followed by 3/5 and 2/5.[36]

By 1600, the 5th Marines had executed the passage of the lines, and the regiment passed through Phase Line 0-4 near Garekoru. As 1/5 continued its advance up the West Road, it encountered erratic resistance from what appeared to be Japanese holdouts. The level terrain was devoid of the dense jungle growth abounding elsewhere on Peleliu and offered ideal conditions for the movement of tanks and LVT flamethrowers accompanying the advance battalion. Aside from occasional Japanese sniper and mortar fire, the advance

[34] *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, 25Sep44.

[35] Additional sources used for this section are: *81st InfDiv OpRpt; 5th Mar URpts; 7th Mar War Jnl; 1/5 B–3 Jnl; 2/5 OpRpt; 2/11 SAR;* 4/11 WarD, Aug–Nov44.

[36] *5th Mar URpts*, 26Sep44.

continued for about 500 yards without interruption to Road Junction 15, where the West and East Roads met. This vital point was defended by a small Japanese force, which had installed itself on a ridge dominating the road forks.

Around 1700, as the Marines approached this point, the enemy opened fire, which served only to delay the Marines. When the firefight ended the Japanese had lost 20 killed. The battalion continued its advance for another 100 yards and seized the Japanese radio station, whose towers the forward elements of RCT 321 had spotted on the previous day. Having secured this objective, the battalion established night defenses north of the radio station from the beach to the high ground east of the West Road (See Map 10). For the remainder of the evening and throughout the night, the forward elements at the radio station were continuously and heavily engaged with the enemy. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, was the recipient of direct fire from two 70mm guns firing out of caves less than 300 yards away. The Marines drew additional fire from enemy artillery and mortars located on the northern tip of Peleliu, as well as from two 37mm guns on Ngesebus Island. Small arms fire from three directions converged on the battalion.[37]

To reduce the enemy artillery and mortar fire that was proving so troublesome to 1/5, the 11th Marines massed its batteries against suspected enemy artillery and mortar positions. Since direct observation was impossible, the regiment used a target list, firing on areas that looked promising on the basis of a chart and photographic inspection. Whenever such fire resulted in reduced enemy activity, continuous shelling at a slow, irregular rate was employed on the target throughout the night. This counterbattery fire proved very effective and helped the exposed battalion to maintain its forward positions.[38]

Nor was heavy mortar and artillery fire all that 1/5 had to contend with during the night of 25-26 September. The Japanese launched three counterattacks in the course of the evening against the hard-pressed Marines, but each of these attacks was repelled. At 0200, 26 September, a platoon of Company C took the initiative by launching a surprise counterattack, which resulted in the destruction of two particularly troublesome machine guns.[39]

Upon reaching Road Junction 15 in the wake of the advance of 1/5, the 3d Battalion pivoted to the southeast and headed down East Road, where it established night defenses on the road and along the western slopes of Hill 80. The latter hill, in itself an isolated terrain feature, owed its importance to its location, for it was the only link separating the Kamilianlul ridges to the south from the Amiangal ridges, which formed the northernmost hill mass on Peleliu.

Unlike the effective resistance that 1/5 had encountered near the radio station, the enemy that 3/5 came upon was either disorganized or unaware of the Marines' presence on the East Road. According to an eyewitness:

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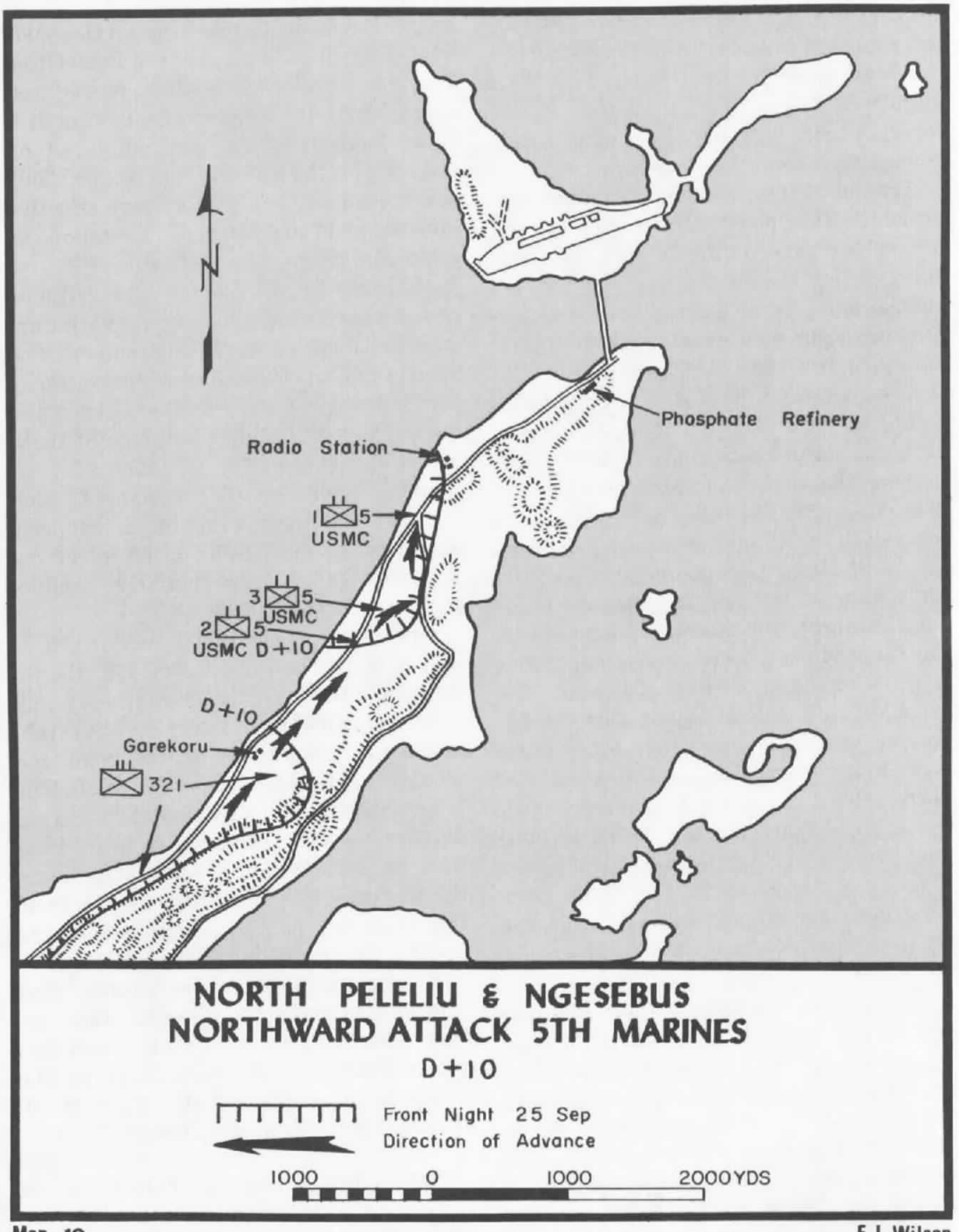
[37] Smith, *Narrative*, p. 83.

[38] Maj David R. Griffin ltr to CMC, dtd 13Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Griffin ltr.*

[39] *1/5 B–3 Jnl*, 25Sep44.



Map 10 E. L. Wilson

> . . . darkness had fallen and I was engaged in tying in I Company with the adjoining Second Battalion Unit under the command of Capt. Albert J. Doherty. Captain Doherty and I were standing on the road with a small group around us discussing our situation when the word was passed from my outpost that enemy troops were approaching. We immediately took cover, not knowing how large a force it was or whether it was cognizant of our presence. The enemy was obviously unaware of the 5th Marines advance because they approached making a great deal of noise. When they reached the approximate position where Captain Doherty and I had been my men opened fire killing all of the enemy and sustaining no casualties. The enemy group consisted of about 12 Japanese Marines.[40]

Once again, on the evening of the second day of continuous forward movement, General Rupertus had cause to be pleased with the progress that had been made during the day. Even though the effort of the Army troops to isolate the central Japanese defenses had been temporarily halted, this lack of progress had been more than compensated for by the rapid advance of the 5th Marines up the West Road. Except for a critical shortage of hydrogen for flamethrowers, the flow of supplies was moving smoothly.[41]

Behind the front lines, the engineers were keeping pace with the advance of the combat troops. By evening of 25 September, 500 men of a naval construction battalion were engaged in shore party work. Improvement of roads by the engineers was continuing. This work helped largely to offset the complaint voiced by RCT 321 "that the presence of the 5th Marine Regiment on the west coast further complicated the traffic control problem."[42]

Work on the airstrip was also making good progress. The Engineer Group, consisting of elements of the 1st Engineer Battalion and the 33d and 73d Naval Construction Battalions, had dug out and refilled most soft spots and graded, rolled, and watered the entire strip. Radar units and control equipment were in operation. The airstrip tower had been readied for around the clock operation.

After a night of incessant harassment by the Japanese, 1/5 spent the early hours of 26 September in consolidating its positions around the radio station and preparing for continuation of its attack later in the day to the northern tip of Peleliu. Shortly after 0600, 3/5 jumped off for an attack against Hill 80 with Company K on the left and Company I on the right. The attack carried the hill and by 0830 the assault force reached a swamp bordering the east coast of Peleliu. This advance of the 3d Battalion was of major importance because it effectively cut the island in two.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, ran into stiff opposition from the Amiangal ridges dominating northern Peleliu. The northern portion of the L-shaped hill system consisted of ridges running generally from northeast to southwest for about 1,000 yards; the southern leg extended from northwest to southeast. The southern leg of the ridges was not

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[40] Maj John A. Crown ltr to CMC, dtd 13 Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Crown ltr.*

[41] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx A, p. 10.

[42] *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, 25Sep44.

continuous but broken into four separate hills or knobs, designated from northwest to southeast as Hill 1, Hill 2, Hill 3, and Radar Hill, so named because it had at one time served as an enemy radar installation. These four knobs were to gain ill repute as Hill Row. The entire Amiangal ridge system was held in strength by the Japanese, particularly the portion paralleling the route of advance of 1/5. This part contained some of the most elaborate caves and tunnels on Peleliu.

The battalion had barely started out along the West Road when the enemy in and on Hill 1 opened up on the Marines with 37mm and 75mm guns as well as automatic weapons and mortars. This curtain of fire from the Amiangal ridges was reinforced by heavy fire from Ngesebus Island. All forward movement soon halted. Attacking eastward from the West Road, Company B assaulted the second knob, Hill 2, but also encountered opposition. Through sheer determination the company was able to gain a firm foothold on the hill by early afternoon. This accomplishment in effect served to outflank the Japanese on Hill 1, but Japanese resistance on the last mentioned hill continued throughout the day. An attempt by Company C to seize all of Hill 1 during the remaining hours of daylight was unsuccessful, and continuation of the assault had to await the following day.

During the bitter fighting in which 1/5 engaged during the night of 25-26 September and for most of the following day, 2/5 remained stationary on the southern flank of the regiment. At 1600 on 26 September, when it had become apparent that 1/5 could make no further progress, 2/5 was ordered to attack. The battalion advanced northward through the left wing of 1/5, carefully bypassing embattled Hill 1. In the course of its advance, the battalion drew heavy fire from Japanese emplacements in the plain, from the ridges on its right, as well as from Ngesebus. Enemy mortars proved especially troublesome. As a result of the heavy fire, Company F lost four of its supporting tanks before it had advanced very far beyond Hill 1.[43] Attempts by the artillery to give all possible support to the battalion were largely ineffectual. "We fired frequent missions throughout the day on these mortars; the reported effect was that the mortars were neutralized while we fired but that they were not destroyed. The enemy apparently withdrew into the caves during the period of our fire."[44]

As evening approached, the 5th Marines occupied a jagged front line. The 1st Battalion, though out of contact with the 2d, was tied in with the 3d on the right. The mission of the 3d Battalion was to support either the 1st or 2d Battalion in the event of a major Japanese counterattack. Further progress of the 2d Battalion was impeded by a large antitank ditch, which blocked the approach to the remnants of the Peleliu phosphate plant. The Japanese had converted the reinforced concrete foundation of the otherwise demolished structure into a major defensive installation. Exposed to the enemy fire from Ngesebus Island and plunging fire from caves and defensive positions from the hills,

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[43] *2/5 OpRpt*, 26Sep44.
[44] *2/11 AR*, 26Sep44.

2/5 found itself in a very unenviable situation.

Further south on the island, at the juncture of the 321st Infantry Trail and the East Road, 26 September was to bring additional gains, though not without great difficulty. On the previous day, 2/321 had seized Hill 100 and advanced to the foot of Hill B, which dominated East Road and formed the last obstacle in the path of RCT 321's advance to the east coast. The mission of capturing this vital hill had been given to 3/321, which had been scheduled to launch the attack at 0700, with 2/321 in support. Even before 3/321 could get into its attack position along East Road it drew such furious fire from small arms, mortars, and automatic weapons in the northern strongpoints of the Umurbrogol Pocket that the movement bogged down.

When it became apparent around noon that the 3d Battalion would be unable to reach Hill B, the mission of seizing the hill was assigned to 2/321. To ensure the success of the attack, it was decided to launch a two-pronged assault against the hill. During the time that the 2d Battalion was organizing for the attack, a special task force composed of 7 medium tanks, 6 LVTs, 1 LVT flamethrower, and 45 riflemen, advanced northward over the West Road to its junction with East Road. There the column pivoted to the south, followed the East Road, and by 1500 had reached a point within 150 yards north of Hill B. Such a bold maneuver could not fail to attract enemy attention, and the column suddenly found itself under frenzied attack by 15 Japanese who, vastly outnumbered and outgunned, were promptly killed in the skirmish.

At 1600, when both attack forces had reached their jumpoff positions, the attack against Hill B commenced. White phosphorus mortar shells shrouded the hill in smoke, obscuring visibility of the defending force. The task force attacked from the north, while two companies of 2/321 attacked from the west and south. At the outset both attack forces encountered strong resistance, but in less than an hour the hill had changed hands and the entire Japanese force was wiped out. A number of Korean laborers, evidently less inspired than their taskmasters, preferred to surrender.

Despite the loss of Hill B, the Japanese took the initiative at least once during the day by attacking the command post of RCT 321 in force, after infiltrating the widely spaced Army and Marine lines. This surprise attack was launched by enemy troops armed with rifles and machine guns. The force created havoc momentarily but could not match the soldiers' fire. The Japanese then retreated, leaving 35 dead around the command post area.

Earlier that day, General Rupertus had felt that time for the capture of Ngesebus Island was ripe. "Improvement in our tactical situation led to the making of plans for an attack on Ngesebus to the north to be carried out the following day, but developments failed to warrant the pursuit of this action."[45]

Instead, an additional day was set aside for preparations for the assault on

[45] 1st MarDiv WarD, Sep44.

Ngesebus as well as consolidation of the hold the 5th Marines had gained on the northern portion of Peleliu. Despite heavy resistance, elements of RCT 321 in the center of the island and the 5th Marines in the north had reached the eastern coast. The Japanese on Peleliu, though still capable of prolonged resistance, were now divided into two distinct pockets whose elimination was merely a matter of time.

Also on 26 September, "a new high in the number of prisoners for a single day was obtained when six POWs were brought in, doubling our total for the operation."[46]

The night of 26-27 September was to be typical. The 11th Marines directed harassing fires against Japanese positions on the northern tip of Peleliu throughout the night.[47] The Japanese, in turn, shelled the area occupied by 3/321. Fighting also flared up in the center of the island where several Japanese were killed as they attempted to infiltrate the positions of 2/321 in the vicinity of Hill 100 and Hill B. The 7th Marines spent a generally quiet night, marked only by an exchange of hand grenades in the sector of 2/7. Weapons Company killed three Japanese during the night, one of them equipped with a machine gun. One of the Japanese dead carried the following message.

> American Brave Soldiers: We think you are much pity since landing on this island. In spite of your pitiful battle, we are sorry that we can present only fire, not even good water. We soon will attack strongly your army. You had done bravely your duty; now abandon your guns, and come in Japanese military with a white flag (or handkerchief) so we will be glad to see you and welcome you comfortably as we can well.[48]

The above Japanese offer found no takers among the soldiers and Marines on Peleliu. In fact, plans for the assault on Ngesebus were already completed. Naval demolition teams were busy offshore clearing the waters between Peleliu and Ngesebus in preparation for the coming assault.

At 0800, 27 September, another milestone in the Peleliu operation was reached when, in a simple ceremony, the American flag was raised in front of the division command post. Even while this ceremony was in progress, the 5th Marines was once again embroiled in fighting of the utmost severity, in which a battalion command post was just as exposed to enemy fire as any other forward position. This applied to the CP of 2/5, which on the morning of 27 September was located in the radio station near the northern tip of Peleliu. This building was very well constructed, but had been thoroughly worked over by artillery and air bombardment.

> The framework was still intact, however, and after clearing the dead Japs out, there were some rooms that were very suitable for a good CP. During the morning of the 27th several rounds of mortar fire were laid on the building with such accuracy that two of them went through the second story windows. Casualties were light but just knowing the Japs had the range on us wasn't so pleasant. Earlier that morning mortars were laid around

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] 4/11 WarD, Sep44.

[48] *7th Mar R–2 Jnl*, 27Sep44, also *1st Mar Div SAR*, Anx B, pp. 37–38.

> the CP, with devastating effect, and caused light casualties. Major Gayle, for example, had men killed all around him but he was lucky and never got a scratch, just sand blown in his eyes, and the helmet blown full of holes. Lucky he didn't have the helmet on.[49]

The 2d Battalion was to find progress extremely rough for the remainder of the day. First, the erstwhile phosphate plant, which the Japanese had turned into a blockhouse, had to be secured in an area that bristled with snipers. The problem confronting Colonel Harris was a formidable one. The blockhouse in front of 2/5 could not be taken until the antitank ditch blocking the approaches to it had been seized. This was a job that the infantry could not tackle without armored support. The regimental commander decided to utilize all arms available in reducing these obstacles. First of all, Colonel Harris called naval gunfire and artillery in on Ngesebus and any other targets suspected of harboring artillery or mortar positions.

A medium tank, equipped with a bulldozer blade, was pressed into service to level the antitank ditch, and filled it by 0830. A LVT flamethrower then was able to come within effective range of the Japanese fortification. Moments later, when the flame and smoke had cleared, all resistance from this stronghold had ceased and more than 60 dead Japanese remained in the rubble. While this action was in progress, patrols from Company E seized a small, weakly defended ridge abutting the road from the east. The 2d Battalion thereafter resumed its advance northward along the road as well as over the adjacent ridge. Company F, at the head of the column, soon found itself embroiled in some of the most bitter and frustrating action of the entire campaign. Aside from receiving heavy Japanese artillery and mortar fire, the company faced a series of pillboxes and field fortifications on level ground, and layer upon layer of caves in the hillsides.

Even though they were not aware of it at the time, the men of the 5th Marines had come upon the most skillfully constructed defenses on Peleliu. The Japanese Army had utilized all of the many natural caves possessing tactical value, adapting them for the emplacement of heavier weapons with great ingenuity. On the other hand, Japanese naval troops had preferred to construct their own caves with the help of the *214th Naval Construction Battalion*, composed of men who had been professional miners and tunnel workers in civilian life. Since most of these Navy caves were located near the northern end of Peleliu, they proved a serious obstacle to the advance of the 5th Marines.

Sheer courage and heroism in themselves proved inadequate for the task. In the course of the morning of 27 September, Company F seized the two ridges forming the northwestern anchor of the Amiangal system and established observation posts on the crests. But this did not solve the problem of what to do about the Japanese occupying the caves about half way up the hill. Marine casualties mounted steadily, and evacuation of the wounded became more and more difficult. The assault on the ridges soon turned into a nightmare:

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[49] *2/5 OpRpt*, 27Sep44.

> The hill we were taking was honeycombed with caves, and we used everything in the book in closing them. (Hand grenades, five gallon cans of gas, composition C wrapped around 81mm WP mortar shells, flame throwers, and finally a 155mm gun). . . . During the assault the Japs still fired out of the caves, even throwing our own grenades out at us. It was hard to believe that a 70 lb. compo charge wrapped around a 81mm mortar shell, which when set off fairly rocked the OP on top of the hill, did not kill the Nips in the caves.[50]

Since the cave openings completely dominated the road leading past the northernmost ridge of Peleliu, the advance of the entire 2d Battalion ground to a halt. The first tank attempting to squeeze through the narrow gap between the hill and the northwestern shore was hit, and the Marines occupying the crest of the hill were powerless to cope with the caves underneath.

This seemingly insurmountable problem was solved late in the afternoon when the troublesome bottleneck was eliminated by means of an expedient involving a combination of arms. The solution was complicated but proved effective. First, artillery placed a continuous barrage on Ngesebus, while naval guns shelled Kongauru, an island northeast of Ngesebus and connected to the latter by a causeway. Joining the shoot were nine tanks which placed smoke shells on the closest Ngesebus beach from positions on the West Road. Every fourth artillery projectile fired against Ngesebus was a smoke shell. Five LVT(A)s, equipped with 75mm guns, then pushed out into the channel and fired point-blank into the mouth of the cave. Under this covering fire, the tanks, supported by Company G, moved up the road and beyond the cave. An LVT flamethrower was then employed against the cave. The lines of the 2d Battalion consolidated this gain and dug in for the night.[51]

The 1st Battalion also made important gains on 27 September. Most of the action for the day centered around Hill 1, which Companies B and C attacked at 0930. Once again the Marines were exposed to heavy fire from Japanese small arms and antitank guns emplaced in caves at the foot of the hill and on the slopes. After approaches for the supporting armor had been cleared, the rate of progress increased. In the course of the afternoon, 1/5 destroyed four 75mm and four 37mm guns, and a large number of automatic weapons. By 1700, having established a firm foothold on the hill, the Marines prepared to set up positions for the night. During the remaining hours of daylight, engineer demolition teams systematically eradicated every cave and each hollow even remotely resembling an enemy position.

In the course of 27 September, 84 Koreans and 7 Japanese were taken prisoner, a considerable increase over the previous total of 12 captured since the beginning of the operation.[52]

According to division intelligence estimates a total of 7,975 Japanese had been killed in 12 days of bitter fighting. Casualties for the 1st Marine Division were 768 killed, 3,693 wounded, and 273 missing in action, a total of 4,734.[53] Similarly, casualties for RCT 321 during the first week of its commitment on

[50] *2/5 Op Rpt*, 27Sep44.

[51] *5th Mar URpts*, 28Sep44.

[52] 1st MarDiv WarD, Sep44.

[53] *Ibid.*

Peleliu were 46 men killed, 226 wounded, and 7 missing, a total of 279.[54]

Even though a major portion of Peleliu was now in American hands, tenacious resistance could be expected to continue from the remaining enemy pockets. Aggressive action was needed, not only for the elimination of these pockets, but also to remove from the adjacent islands those Japanese still capable of rendering effective support to their compatriots on Peleliu.

SEIZURE ON NGESEBUS[55]

General Rupertus decided that Ngesebus Island was to be seized on 28 September, in a shore-to-shore operation executed with the assistance of all available supporting arms. The assault on the island was to be supported by a battleship, a cruiser, two destroyers, division and corps artillery, a tank company, a company of LVT(A)s, and a company of LVTs.

The mission of seizing Ngesebus was assigned to 3/5 about 1600, 27 September, when General Rupertus issued verbal orders to this effect to Lieutenant Colonel Lewis W. Walt, Executive Officer of the 5th Marines. Within the hour, members of 3/5 arrived at the 5th Marines command post to receive the attack order. Representatives of 1/7, held in reserve for the operation, also attended the meeting. The general plan of attack called for one hour of naval gunfire, air, and artillery preparation commencing at 0800. While the assault wave was covering the last 200 yards to the beach, Marine aircraft from the newly arrived VMF-114 would work the beach over. Sherman tanks were to form part of the first assault wave, flanked on either side by LVT(A)s and followed by LVTs loaded with the assault troops. The entire battalion was to embark in LVTs, and the waves were to land successively at two-minute intervals.[56]

H-Hour for the operation had been set to coincide with the lowest ebb of the tide to avoid water that would be too deep for the tanks, which could not be completely waterproofed.[57]

During the hours of daylight remaining on 27 September, 3/5, which had been held in reserve near Road Junction 15, relinquished its positions to 1/321 and assembled in preparation for the assault on Ngesebus. The Army battalion held a line extending from the junction in the north to Kamilianlul mountain, which was an extension of the Umurbrogol ridges north of the Wildcat Trail.

The curtain on the drama of Ngesebus opened on the morning of 28 September, when the massed fire of five artillery battalions from Peleliu, as well as heavy fire from warships and aircraft, blanketed the island. Near the northwestern shore of Peleliu, an impressive gathering of high-ranking officers had assembled to witness the operation. The group included such notables

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[54] 321st RCT Unit Rpt 7, 30Sep44, Peleliu, as quoted in Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 549.

[55] Additional sources used for this section are: *5th Mar URpts;* VMF–114 WarD, Sep44; *2/11 SAR; 3/5 Rec of Events; Coleman ltr; Stuart ltr;* Smith, *Narrative.*

[56] LtCol Lewis W. Walt ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Walt ltr.*

[57] LtCol Arthur J. Stuart ltr to CMC, dtd 25Apr50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Stuart ltr.*

as Admiral Fort, and Generals Julian C. Smith, Geiger, Rupertus, Mueller, Oliver P. Smith, and Bell. The weather was cool and cloudy and interspersed with frequent rain squalls.[58]

For the Corsair pilots of VMF-114, air support for the Ngesebus landings represented a very interesting and original assignment. The operation marked the beginning of combat work for the squadron, which had reached Peleliu only two days earlier. At 0630, the Corsairs hit the airstrip on Ngesebus with 500-pound bombs and strafed the entire island as well as Kongauru to the northeast. "Strafing runs were made just a few feet off the deck and a hail of lead laid all over the island."[59] At 0840, 20 Corsairs preceded the landing craft and gave the island another heavy strafing. In the course of this attack, Japanese mortar positions were spotted and one specially prominent square blockhouse with an iron door was fired on and neutralized.

Whenever aircraft were not directly over the island, the artillery on Peleliu and naval guns offshore gave Ngesebus a heavy going over, starting at 0700 and concluding at 0905. Both quick and delay fuzes were used. Observers reported that the island was completely covered with fire.[60] In the course of the preliminary bombardment, naval gunfire ships pounded the northern portion of Ngesebus and continued to fire on that part of the island throughout the landing.

The 600-yard trip from Peleliu to Ngesebus proved generally uneventful, and the landing force proceeded as planned. Nevertheless, a few unforeseen contingencies arose that changed the sequence of events. Of the 16 tanks taking part in the operation, 3 failed to reach their destination after stalling and flooding in about three feet of water. The remaining tanks continued the crossing so cautiously that they could not keep up with the LVTs. In the end the infantry hit the beach long before the armor had completed the crossing. Another complication arose while the assault troops were en route to Ngesebus. Shortly after 0900, just as the assault waves departed Peleliu, spectators to the operation noticed that the naval gunfire had lifted and air attacks were slackening:

> Upon investigation as to why the naval gunfire did not support the attack, it developed that a great deal of confusion existed as to what the location of the troops would be at H-hour. The troops had planned this attack in the manner of land warfare and to them H-hour was the time of crossing the line of departure—in this case, the shore line of Peleliu. The Navy, planning as for an amphibious assault, considered H-hour to be the time the troops hit the beach on Ngesebus. Consequently, when H-hour arrived, the fire support ships assumed the troops were hitting the Ngesebus beach and lifted their fires, when actually the troops were just moving off Peleliu.[61]

This temporary lapse in preparatory fire did not result in any serious disadvantage to the men of 3/5, particularly since Marine aircraft, quickly sizing up the situation, jumped into the breach and resumed the relentless strafing of the southern beaches on Ngesebus. The planes halted their assault runs

[58] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 11.
[59] VMF–114 WarD, Sep44.
[60] *2/11 AR*, 28Sep44.
[61] *Coleman ltr.*

only when the assault force approached within 200 yards of the island.

The first wave hit the beach at 0911. Company K landed on the left, Company I on the right, and Company L followed in the rear as 3/5 reserve. The troops moved inland quickly and secured a beachhead against light resistance. Supporting LVT(A)s made short work of several pillboxes on the beaches. Companies I and K advanced to the northwest and linked up after crossing the airfield. To expedite the operation, the battalion commander committed Company L, which pivoted to the right and attacked towards the eastern shore of the island, encountering very little opposition in the process. The assault units suffered no casualties in the landing, while 50 of the enemy were killed or captured on or near the beaches.[62]

Within 12 minutes after the first assault wave had gone ashore on Ngesebus, the first tank lumbered across the beach. By 0930, all tanks and troop carriers except for three Shermans, had reached the island. Initial progress continued to be rapid, particularly in the zone of attack of Company L, which completed its mission of seizing the eastern part of Ngesebus within an hour and a half after going ashore. At 1300, a patrol of two tanks, three LVT(A)s, and one platoon of Company L landed on Kongauru Island off the northeastern tip of Ngesebus and secured the island against light resistance.

Companies I and K, attacking to the northwest, found the going considerably tougher in their zone of advance, particularly along the battalion left, where a series of ridges flanked the western shore of the island. There, the Japanese were offering determined resistance from caves and dugouts. Once again it became the unenviable task of the Marines to root the enemy out of these defensive positions, a job that was accomplished with the assistance of armor. In the midst of this operation, an enemy shell landed in the center of the battalion CP, wounding the battalion commander, Major John H. Gustafson, and a number of his men.[63]

By 1700, almost all of Ngesebus, except for a few hundred yards at the extreme northwestern tip of the island, was in American hands, though a few caves in the ridges still remained to be reduced. Because of the rapid progress made throughout the day, the presence of 1/7 was not required. The battalion reverted to division control as of 1500.[64]

The otherwise deadly serious business of seizing an enemy-held island was destined to feature at least one lighter episode. This was supplied by an aide to Major General James T. Moore, Commanding General of the 2d MAW. The aide, who also doubled as pilot, flew General Moore over Ngesebus Island in an L-5 observation airplane. In the course of this reconnaissance, the pilot observed a Japanese officer, equipped with sword and white gloves, directing the emplacement of a mortar. Upon completion of the flight and discharge of his passenger, the enterprising aide obtained several hand grenades and promptly headed back for a "bombing run" on the mortar position. The grenades were dropped with unobserved

[62] *3/5 Rec of Events*, 28Sep44.

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] *5th Mar URpts*, 29Sep44.

ASSAULT ON NGESEBUS ISLAND *as viewed from amphibious tank in third wave. (USMC 97006)*

MARINE ASSAULT TROOPS *advance into Ngesebus as oil dump burns in background. (USMC 102051)*

results, but the Japanese opened up on the L-5 with a machine gun. The pilot received a bullet in the leg, which was to put him out of action for the remainder of the Peleliu campaign.[65]

The 3d Battalion spent a relatively quiet night on Ngesebus. On the morning of 29 September, Companies I and K resumed the attack. Progress was normal until the two companies had nearly reached the northern tip of Ngesebus, when a 75mm gun opened up at point blank range. The Marines quickly destroyed this weapon and went on to overcome the rest of the resistance on the island. At 1500, 29 September, Ngesebus was declared secure.

An hour later, 2/321 relieved the Marines and completed mopping up. Having accomplished the mission on the island, 3/5 returned to Peleliu. The battalion had secured the island at a cost of 15 killed and 33 wounded.[66] In return, the Marines killed or captured 470 Japanese. Infantrymen of 2/321 were to account for another hundred of the enemy during the ensuing mop-up.[67]

After the capture of Ngesebus it became evident that the airstrip on the island was surfaced with sand so soft that the labor required to make the field operational was out of proportion to the benefits to be derived from it. As a result, no improvements were made to the airstrip, and the main advantage gained by the capture of the island was the final elimination of the bothersome fire from Ngesebus into the flanks and rear of the Marines advancing to the northern tip of Peleliu. At the same time, capture of the island deprived the Japanese of another possible staging area if they made another attempt to reinforce the Peleliu garrison.

MOPPING UP THE NORTH[68]

Throughout 28 September, the spectacular operation of 3/5 against Ngesebus held the limelight. For the two battalions of the 5th Marines remaining on Peleliu, it was business as usual as the drive continued to dislodge the Japanese from their elaborate defenses on the northern tip of the island.

On the morning of 28 September, the Japanese in the northern part of Peleliu still held a pocket slightly longer than 2,000 yards on fairly level ground, except for Hill 3 and Radar Hill, and some of the tunnels in the northern leg of the Amiangal ridges, where they still resisted in strength despite the fact that the Marines were firmly established on the crests (See Map 11).

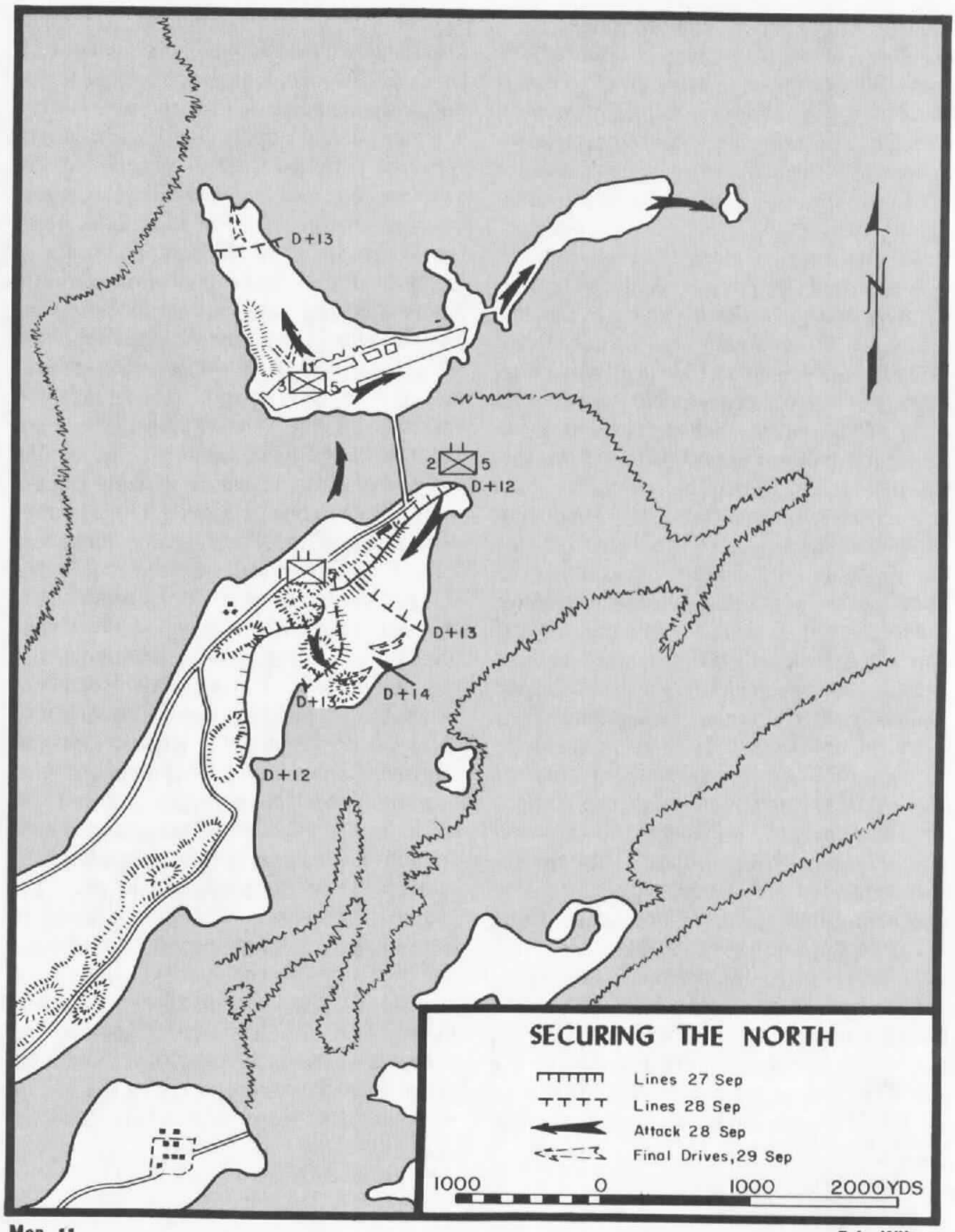
The attack of 1/5 against Hill 3 was preceded by a mortar preparation lasting over an hour. At 0845, Company C jumped off. Approaching the hill from the north and west, bazooka and demolition teams crept forward and eliminated dugouts and caves one after the other. A Sherman tank rendered valuable support by firing directly into the cave openings. In this manner the tank knocked out a particularly annoying machine gun, which had been firing on the advancing Marines from the southeastern slope of Hill 3. Before noon, 1/5 had secured a foothold on the crest

[65] Smith, *Narrative*, p. 90.

[66] *3/5 Rec of Events*, 29Sep44.

[67] Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 548.

[68] Additional sources used for this section are: 1st MarDiv WarD, Sep44; *1st MarDiv SAR; 5th Mar URpts; 1/5 B-3 Jnl; 2/5 OpRpt;* Smith, *Narrative.*



Map 11

E. L. Wilson

of the hill, though the Japanese still resisted in the caves below. Shortly before 1300, the enemy attempted to counterattack but was driven off by mortar fire. For the remainder of the afternoon Company C continued to consolidate its gains on the hill, capturing 15 Koreans in the process.[69]

At the very northern tip of Peleliu, 2/5 resumed its drive with the objective of seizing the flat ground to the north and east of the Amiangal ridges. Company G jumped off at 0700 and advanced through coconut groves near the eastern base of the ridges, where the Japanese had established elaborate fortifications. Despite heavy fire, the company continued its advance and by 1000 had killed 150 Japanese in the assault.[70] For the first time on Peleliu it was observed that some of the Japanese remained completely apathetic in the face of the Marine attack and did nothing either to attack the Americans or to defend themselves. Company G continued its advance southward until it was able to bring small arms fire to bear against Radar Hill, the last ridge of the Amiangal system still entirely in Japanese hands. Here the company halted the advance.

Throughout the day Companies E and F of 2/5 worked with the demolition men trying to neutralize the caves, which honeycombed the hills. When the caves became untenable, some of the Japanese decided to make a break for it. A chase ensued when a group of about 70 Japanese suddenly poured out of the hillside and headed for the reef. Marines of Company F gave chase with three LVTs, overtook the fleeing enemy, and killed those refusing to surrender.[71]

Since on 28 September the Japanese retained only two small islands of resistance on Peleliu, naval air support was secured as of 1800 that date. During the night of 28–29 September, fighting flared up in the center of Peleliu. There the Japanese launched what the 1st Marine Division designated "the first in a series of desperation raids" out of the Umurbrogol pocket against the lines of the 7th Marines. The regiment suffered light casualties in repulsing these assaults which at times closed to within bayonet range.[72] The Marines also drew mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire throughout the night.

The attack against the Japanese in the north of Peleliu reached its climax during 29 September, which also marked the end of large-scale operations in that part of the island. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, launched its assault against Radar Hill with flamethrowers, bazookas, and demolition charges. As anticipated, capture of the strongly defended hill could not be completed in one day. Even though the Marines reached the crest of Radar Hill on 29 September, a large cave underneath remained to be reduced.

East of the Amiangal ridges, Company G of 2/5 continued to mop up enemy remnants in this area. The company drew fire from caves in the ridges east of the phosphate plant. An ap-

[69] *1/5 B–3 Jnl*, 28Sep44.
[70] *2/5 OpRpt*, 28Sep44.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] 1st MarDiv WarD, 28Sep44.

proach to these ridges from the east did not appear feasible because a swamp separated the Marines from these hills. Tanks stationed in the coconut grove fired point blank with their 75mm guns at the mouth of one of the most troublesome caves, temporarily sealing it. On the western side, the Japanese had blasted from the inside and cleared openings to two caves that the Marines had sealed. As a result, the enemy was able to fire on both the east and west beaches.[73] Atop the ridges, Company F sealed four caves only to have the Japanese blast them open from the inside. To add to the vexation and frustration of the Marines operating near the northern tip of Peleliu, the Japanese suddenly fired into the rear of Company G from caves that had been sealed on the previous day. Company E finally assaulted these positions and chased some of the Japanese onto the reef, where riflemen on LVTs annihilated them in short order. Nevertheless, in these caves an undetermined number of Japanese remained, capable of causing additional trouble when it suited them.

For all practical purposes, organized enemy resistance on northern Peleliu, except for the grimly defended pocket in the high ground north of the airfield, came to a virtual end on 29 September.[74] The Japanese situation report for 29 September failed to indicate any great concern about events on northern Peleliu, mentioning only that ". . . on the front line, where our main forces are facing the enemy's main force, all is quiet; in fact, even some of our forces there are helping us out in the battle taking place in the north area of Peleliu."[75] Twenty-four hours later, the tenor of the Japanese report changed, for in reference to northern Peleliu, Colonel Nakagawa reported that ". . . after a fierce battle, the enemy was finally successful in occupying the area. Our surviving forces are attempting to dash southward, cutting through the enemy in order to join the main force."[76]

On the morning of 30 September, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 5th Marines, continued to mop up the northern leg of the Amiangal ridges and Radar Hill. At 1000, both battalions were ordered to withdraw to the vicinity of the radio station prior to being relieved by elements of the 321st Infantry Regiment.

This relief took place during the afternoon of 30 September. While the Marines, somber and weary after their prolonged struggle for northern Peleliu, were en route to Ngardololok for a well-deserved rest, few imagined that more than a sprinkling of Japanese had remained in the Amiangal ridges. As it turned out, those Japanese remaining on northern Peleliu dug their way out of previously sealed caves, reoccupied new positions, and in a number of instances forced the bewildered Wildcats to retake positions that the 5th Marines had previosuly secured.[77] At least two more days were required to end such resistance as remained in northern Peleliu, and even then isolated Japanese

[73] *2/5 OpRpt*, 29Sep44.

[74] 1st MarDiv WarD, 29Sep44.

[75] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 113.

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, pp. 546–547.

continued to exist in dugouts whose entrances were partially blocked by debris.

During the struggle for northern Peleliu, the 5th Marines had killed and captured over 1,170 Japanese. Elements of RCT 321 accounted for another 175 following their relief of the Marines.[78] The campaign for Peleliu during the last half of September had resulted in an estimated total of 9,076 enemy dead and 180 prisoners of war. During the same period of time, the 1st Marine Division had lost 843 killed, 3,845 wounded, and 356 missing, a total of 5,044 casualties.[79] Except for the Umurbrogol pocket the entire island of Peleliu was in American hands. The last phase of the bitter struggle for Peleliu was about to begin.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 548.

[79] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 13.

The Umurbrogol Pocket: 29 September-15 October[1]

PROBLEM AND SOLUTION[2]

The imminent conclusion of operations on northern Peleliu and the island of Ngesebus once again shifted the focus of attention to the center of Peleliu, where Colonel Nakagawa still held out in his final strongpoint, the Umurbrogol ridges. In this area, nature and the Japanese appeared to have conspired to block access to any force intent on seizing the fortress. The terrain was such that it was practically impossible to make an accurate measurement of the dimensions of the pocket, though the closest estimate described it as 1,900 yards north to south on its eastern side, approximately 1,200 yards long in the west, and, on the average, 550 yards wide from east to west. (See Map 12).

A scrutiny of the terrain in which the final operations on Peleliu took place clearly indicates the difficulties inherent in assessing the size of this relatively small pocket. The ridges of the Umurbrogol system were higher, longer, and more densely compressed than the hills occupying the northern portion of the island. Even though the highest elevation among the coral ridges was only about 300 feet, the sides of such hills were, as a rule, extremely steep and fissured. Many had razor-back summits devoid of any cover or concealment. Deep draws and gullies, the floors of which were often interspersed with coral boulders and outcroppings, were commonplace. The "chaotic jumble of steep coral ridges."[3] defies accurate description, though it has been said that:

> The exotic-sounding name Umurbrogol Mountain became associated with some of the most unpleasantly exotic terrain on the face of creation. . . . But words are inadequate, photographs not much better. One has to see it fully to believe it.[4]

A participant in the battle was to recall many years later:

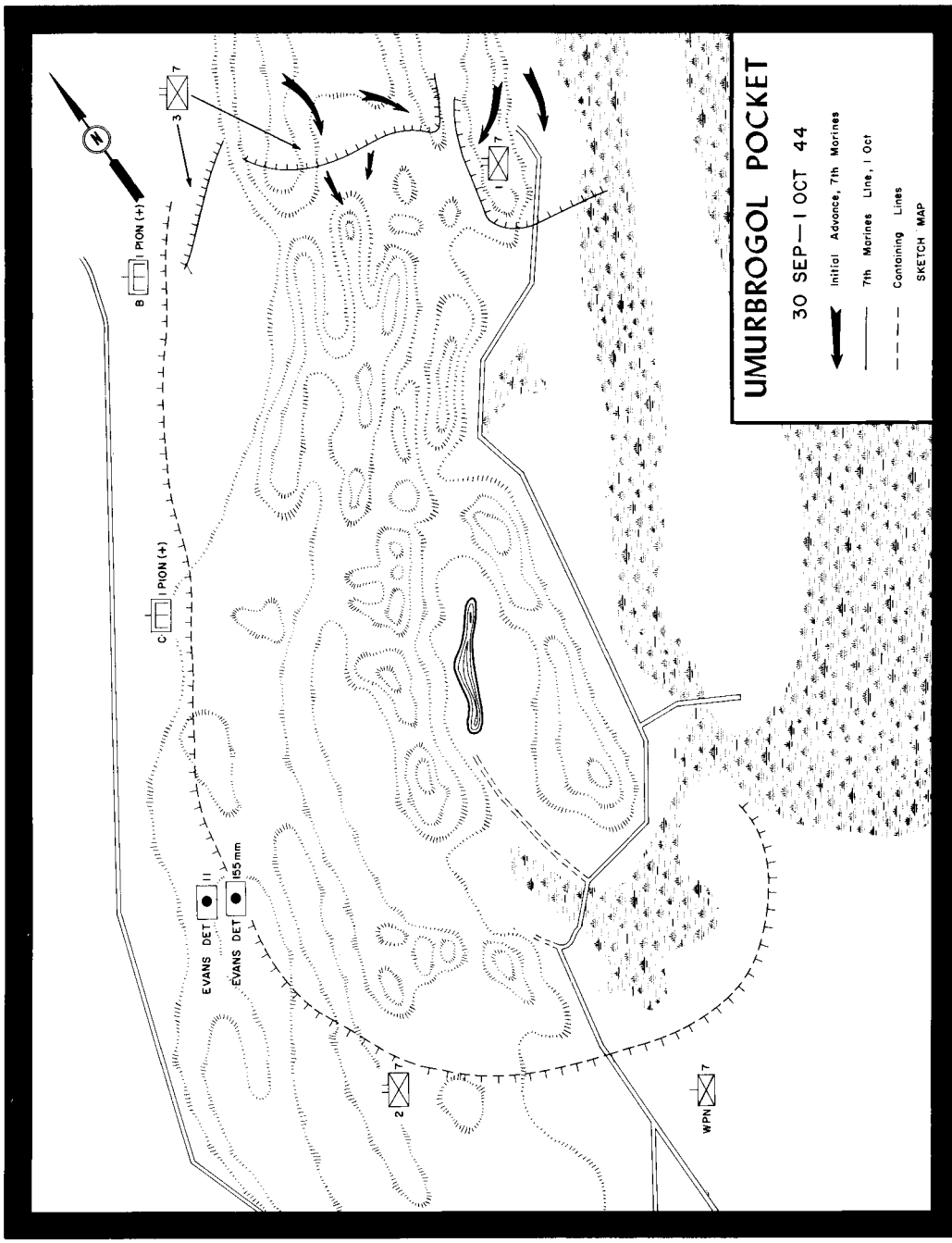
> Our language just does not contain words that can adequately describe the horrible inaccessibility of the central ridge line on Peleliu. It was a nightmare's nightmare if there ever was one. Unfortunately, during the planning stage of the campaign we did not fully realize the nature of the ground so it caught us pretty much by surprise when we actually came upon it. Nothing in our planning studies and subsequent development of plans led us to realize how terrible it was. The maps

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *IIIAC Palaus Rpt; 1st MarDiv SAR;* 1st MarDiv WarD, Sep-Oct 44; *81st InfDiv OpRpt; 1st MarDiv D–2 Jnl; 1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl; Peleliu Comment File; Japanese CenPacOps;* Smith, *Narrative;* Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Morison, *Leyte;* Smith, *Approach to the Philippines;* McMillan, *The Old Breed;* Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division.*

[2] Additional sources used for this section include: *CTF 32 AR; 1st MarDiv D–2 Rpts.*

[3] Smith, *Approach to the Philippines,* p. 551.

[4] Hough, *Assault on Peleliu,* p. 136.


UMURBROGOL POCKET
30 SEP—1 OCT 44
Initial Advance, 7th Marines
7th Marines Line, 1 Oct
Containing Lines
SKETCH MAP
E.L. Wilson
B
I PION (+)
C
I PION (+)
EVANS DET
II
155 mm
EVANS DET
WPN
1
2
3

Map 12

> we had were lacking badly in accurate terrain configurations, and the relatively few aerial photos we at Corps Headquarters were permitted to receive did not give us much of a clue, probably because the vegetation hid the exact nature of the ground from our photo interpreters and the rest of us. So, we were somewhat unprepared for what actually existed. I think this led both naval and ground force commanders to make overly-optimistic predictions of the effectiveness of fires and capabilities of troops. The fact that the Marines and Army troops were able to capture the Umurbrogol Pocket at all is a tribute to sheer guts, tenacity, and unmatched bravery.[5]

This, then, was the ground that the Japanese had pledged to defend to the death. Nature had done its share to aid the defending force, for the numerous hills in the pocket contained an undetermined number of caves, which the Japanese had skillfully exploited for the defense. These caves, mostly natural formations, lacked the size and sophistication of defenses on northern Peleliu, which had borne witness to the ingenuity and skill of Japanese naval engineers and miners. In contrast to the Navy, the Japanese Army had been primarily interested in adapting the terrain to defensive combat. As a result, the Army caves were constructed as covering or mutually supporting positions. Most of the Army caves were small; however, the few larger ones were ingeniously employed for the emplacement of heavy weapons. Out of the almost perpendicular coral ridges the Japanese had blasted a series of interconnecting caves, whose destruction was to prove by far the most difficult feature of the entire operation. The caves varied in size from simple holes, large enough to accommodate two men, to large tunnels with passageways on either side which were large enough to contain artillery, 150mm mortars, and ammunition. Some of the latter caves were equipped with doors that had been camouflaged.

All of the Japanese defensive positions, carefully chosen and well camouflaged, had excellent fields of fire. For all practical purposes they were immune to naval gunfire, bombardment by artillery and mortars, or bombing and strafing. Enemy small arms fire was particularly accurate, indicating thorough training in rifle marksmanship. Marines frequently were killed or wounded by enemy fire from positions 200–400 yards away.

The most outstanding landmarks and prominent elevations within the Umurbrogol Pocket were: Walt Ridge, occupying and dominating the southeast corner of the pocket, parallel to the East Road. Boyd Ridge, north of Walt, and separated from it by a depression which was 70 yards wide; an unnamed ridge which ran between Boyd Ridge and the 321st Infantry Trail; the Horseshoe or Horseshoe Valley, also known as Five Brothers Ridge. West of the Five Brothers was another valley, known variously as Main Valley, Little Slot, and finally as Wildcat Bowl. This depression was enclosed to the west by the China Wall, to the southeast by a jagged ridge known as Five Sisters. Another narrow depression, ominously designated as Death Valley, separated the Five Sisters and China Wall from

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[5] BGen William F. Coleman ltr to HistBr, dtd 9Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

the coral ridges dominating the West Road. Except for slight variations, all of the Umurbrogol ridges extended from northeast to southwest or from north to south.

While the situation of the Japanese in the pocket was serious, it was by no means desperate. Colonel Nakagawa was able to report on 28 September that his *Peleliu Area Unit* main force was about the size of two and a half battalions.[6] The Japanese garrison was not running short of food or ammunition, though individual prisoners occasionally reported a shortage of water. Such a lack of water was eliminated when heavy rains came to Peleliu on and after 28 September, in advance of far more severe weather that was shortly to hit the island. For the Japanese this rain was a godsend, and they trapped enough water in underground cisterns to last for months. Nor was the Umurbrogol Pocket as isolated as appeared at first hand, for unknown to the Marines, Colonel Nakagawa's command post maintained constant telephone communication over a sub-oceanic cable with General Inoue on Babelthuap. Throughout the prolonged operation on Peleliu, the existence of this cable was never suspected by the Americans.[7]

Though the Japanese in the pocket undoubtedly were aware that their annihilation was merely a matter of time, such realization did not affect an obviously high state of morale. During the last days of September, the 7th Marines attempted on several occasions to bring about the surrender of the enemy through leaflets and broadcasts over a public address system. In each instance, no positive results were attained, and the regiment was forced to report that the effect of propaganda leaflets had been absolutely nil. As a final resort, a prisoner was dispatched into the pocket to entice his compatriots to give themselves up. This maneuver produced mixed results. The first cave visited by this emissary, who was armed only with rations and cigarettes, was occupied by Japanese Army personnel who not only refused outright to consider his request but threw a hand grenade at him. Undaunted by such a discouraging reaction, the emissary visited a second cave, occupied by nine laborers. There a more friendly reception awaited him. The laborers listened and, emerging from the cave unarmed, surrendered to the Marines.

During the period from 22–27 September, the Japanese defending the Umurbrogol ridges had escaped the full wrath of the American assault, which at that time was directed against the northern portion of Peleliu and Ngesebus. In fact, no offensive operations were launched against the pocket during this period. The Japanese, on their part, remained generally quiet in the daytime and launched sporadic sorties against the American lines only under cover of darkness. During the lull in the fighting in this sector, elements of RCT 321 remained deployed along the northern fringes of the pocket near the 321st Infantry Trail, and the 7th Marines held the ridges adjacent to the West Road between the airfield and the trail. Korean laborers surrendering at the northeastern tip of the pocket near Hill

[6] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 112.
[7] Inoue interview, dtd Mar 50, in *Worden ltr.*

B on 27 September estimated that 3,000 Japanese remained in the Umurbrogol ridges.

In spite of the large number of Japanese remaining in a compact but extremely well-defended bastion the 1st Marine Division estimated on 29 September that:

> enemy resistance, except for the grimly-defined pocket in the high ground north of the airfield, came to a virtual end.... Despite continuing resistance, for all practical purposes, Palau Operation was completed![8]

On the following day, CTF 32 reported that Peleliu, Angaur, Ngesebus, and Kongauru had been captured and occupied, and that base development had been initiated and could proceed without enemy interference.

All hopes to the contrary, the bloodletting that marked the battle of Peleliu was far from over. Once again, tattered and grimy Marines would have to assault cave after cave with rifles, bayonets, and flamethrowers before the finish to one of the bloodiest operations of the war could be written. Conquest of the unyielding fortress could be achieved only through relentless and aggressive force applied against the weakest part of the pocket. Once this weak spot had been uncovered, aggressive action on the part of the Marines would do the rest.

THE 7TH MARINES ON THE OFFENSIVE[9]

Nearly a week had passed since the 1st Marines battered itself against Bloody Nose Ridge and the 7th Marines failed in the attempt to penetrate into the Umurbrogol from the southeast. As September drew to a close, the 1st Marines was preparing to leave Peleliu, handing to the 7th Marines and Army troops the task of overcoming whatever resistance remained on the island. The only gains made in the central area of Peleliu during the last week of September were in the north. There, men of the 321st Infantry Regiment had made a small advance southward from the trail bordering the pocket to the north. The Japanese still retained control of the dominating hills.

Even while operations on Ngesebus Island and in northern Peleliu were progressing in high gear, General Rupertus orally ordered 2/321 to move to Ngesebus to relieve elements of the 5th Marines on that island. On 29 September, 1/7 relieved the remainder of RCT 321 along the northern perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket. The men of the 321st proceeded to the northern tip of Peleliu to assist the 5th Marines in subduing that portion of the island. The 7th Marines assumed responsibility for operations throughout the Umurbrogol pocket as of 29 September. The movement of troops took place while heavy rains and winds were buffeting the entire island, and roads turned into quagmires which impeded all movement. In fact, throughout 28 September and part of the following two days, the weather remained foul, and heavy rain squalls with strong westerly winds stopped unloading on the western

[8] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, pp. 12–13.

[9] Additional sources used for this section are: *CTF 32 AR; 7th Mar R–2 Jnl; 1/7 Hist Rpt; 2/7 URpt; 3/7 WarD*, Sep-Oct44; *3/7 Rec of Events.*

beaches and retarded unloading on the eastern beaches.

On 29 September, the northern perimeter of the Umurbrogol Pocket ran slightly south of the 321st Infantry Trail, which it paralleled for about 400 yards. This line, designated as Phase Line X, passed through West and East Roads and angled southeastward from the 321st Infantry Trail to skirt Boyd Ridge in the northeastern tip of the pocket. Passing through extremely broken terrain, it was not a solid front line but a series of outposts deployed on the more elevated ridges. The most prominent terrain features directly south of this line were two hills known as Wattie and Baldy Ridges, which formed the northern anchor of the Japanese pocket. To the east of Walt Ridge, the extensive swamp bordering the pocket was considered so inaccessible to friend and foe alike that the Americans committed no troops in this area. Consequently, the ring of encirclement was manned only from the north, west, and south. In order to make as many men of the infantry battalions available for the assault as could be mustered, elements of the supporting arms helped hold the containing line.

Initially, the southern perimeter of the pocket was assigned to the 7th Marines Weapons Company, which moved into positions facing the mouth of the Horseshoe across the swamp. The company left flank skirted the base of Hill 300 and the Five Sisters. Along the west side of the pocket, a variety of units consisting of Marine artillerymen, engineers and pioneers, and personnel from amphibian tractor battalions manned a containing line, which extended for about 750 yards between the western terminus of Phase Line X and Bloody Nose Ridge. At night these lines were strongly reinforced by personnel from division headquarters. Along the northwestern edge of the pocket, 2/7 occupied containing lines, which had remained substantially unchanged since 21 September, when the battalion had first moved into these positions.

General Rupertus assigned the mission of reducing the Umurbrogol Pocket to 1/7 and 3/7. Both battalions were to attack southward from Phase Line X at 0800, 30 September. On the left, 1/7 was to attack along the East Road, secure the ridges dominating the road, and maintain contact with 3/7. While these preparations were being made, a company of the 710th Tank Battalion, together with units of the 1st Marines were readying for departure from Peleliu on 29 September.

An air strike against the pocket was scheduled for 1530, 29 September, aimed at shattering the complacency of the Japanese in the Umurbrogol. Because of inclement weather and poor visibility, it first appeared that the strike would have to be called off, but then it was decided to attack as scheduled, despite the weather. In a way, the strike, the first of many, was unique because the Corsairs were able to make the run from the airfield to Bloody Nose Ridge in only 15 seconds. Frequently the planes never even bothered to raise their wheels.[10] Over the pocket the aircraft released napalm bombs. Shortly thereafter, heavy explosions and a pall of smoke obscured the pocket, while

[10] Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 257.

fires on the hillsides and in the depressions raged unchecked. This is how aerial warfare looked to the Marine aviators on Peleliu:

> After an observation hop to ascertain the facts about this incomparable cave country Major Stout's division was briefed at the division CP and took off at 1515 with 1,000 lb. bombs. The whole show could be seen right from our ready tent and from the tower top you could see right into the draw. Smoke bombs were used on the deck for a reference circle and Stout's flight laid them in without difficulty. It was a bit ticklish, but none landed or riccocheted outside the 400 yards area or the caves. . . . Sixteen planes returning from a bombing mission against Babelthuap took a good look at the damage done by Major Stout's flight in the horseshoe next to Bloody Nose Ridge and reported it was considerable.[11]

Regrettably, this impressive display of low-level bombing, though it must have rocked the Japanese in their caves, failed to diminish their capacity to resist. Prisoners captured later said that the only effect of the bombs was to make a big noise.[12] On the subject of air attacks, Colonel Nakagawa had only this laconic comment to make: "The enemy plan seems to be to burn down the central hills posts to ashes by dropping gasoline from airplanes."[13]

The disappointing results of this napalm strike and those that were to follow were probably due to the fact that the division concept of the proper employment of this weapon was in error. Based on incomplete reports of the Saipan operation, the 1st Marine Division felt that napalm would prove to be an excellent area weapon, highly effective in burning out areas of heavy foliage. There was no evidence to support this theory, and when used in this fashion, napalm was not effective.[14]

The night of 29–30 September was marked by numerous Japanese attempts to infiltrate the positions held by the 7th Marines. At approximately 2300, small enemy raiding parties, using hand grenades as their principal weapon, attacked company and battalion command posts, causing much confusion and a number of casualties. This infiltration was aided by a heavy rain which fell throughout the night. By 0100, four of the infiltrators had been killed in the 1/7 sector and quiet returned. At 0600, a Japanese occupying a foxhole within the battalion CP, was captured.[15] The 2d Battalion, in anticipation of enemy infiltration attempts during the night, had strengthened the perimeter with 85 men from the 1st Pioneer Battalion and stretcher bearers from the 16th Field Depot, but the enemy limited himself to harassing the Marine lines with mortar fire. Japanese infiltration attempts against 3/7 resulted in the death of one Marine, the wounding of three others, and the killing of four Japanese.[16]

That these were not haphazard or random attempts at infiltration is illustrated by a Japanese view of the raids, expressed by Colonel Nakagawa on 30 September:

> We are attempting to defeat the enemy by using our close-quarter combat tactics to the utmost. Last night two close-quarter combat units from the 15th Infantry Regi-

[11] VMF–114 WarD, Sep44.
[12] *2/7 WarD*, Sep44.
[13] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 131.
[14] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx L, p. 6.
[15] *1/7 HistRpt*, 30Sep44.
[16] *3/7 WarD*, Sep44.

> ment, 2d Battalion, put 70 enemy personnel on the casualty list. The enemy's total loss for last night's attack was one hundred and scores of casualties, and a great deal of provisions and ammunition was captured. Besides this, enemy losses may be greater for 10 close-quarter combat parties are still hidden in enemy territory.[17]

Company B of 1/7 jumped off at 0800 on 30 September and in little more than two hours accomplished its assigned mission to seize a ridge just west of the East Road, at the northeastern tip of the pocket. From this vantage point, the company was to support the attack by Company A as it headed down East Road for the next ridge 100 yards to the south. The heavy rain, which already had forced cancellation of an air strike earlier that morning, also interfered with the jumpoff of Company A, whose attack did not get under way until 1245. The intervening time was used to good advantage by an engineer demolition team, which sealed all of the caves in the area seized that morning. When visibility improved, Company A attacked down the East Road, supported by three tanks and a LVT flamethrower. Following a mortar barrage against the second hill, Company A was able to continue the advance down the East Road, even though it drew machine gun fire from enemy positions further south. One of the tanks and the LVT eliminated the enemy machine guns and the forward movement continued. As a result, an advance of 300 yards to the south was achieved. Company C, previously held in reserve, was committed to occupy the newly seized territory. At 1530, the 7th Marines halted the advance and set up a defensive perimeter for the night. In addition to the ground captured, the Marines had destroyed an enemy mountain gun[18] and a number of machine gun positions during the advance.

While 1/7 was pressing the attack down the East Road, 3/7 extended its line eastward in order to reduce the front of 1/7. Shortly before 1100, 3/7 received orders dividing it into two separate task organizations, one for the defense of the ridge line along the West Road and the other for support of the attack of 1/7 against the northern perimeter of the pocket. The commander of 3/7, Major Edward H. Hurst, took direct charge of a force consisting of Company L, one platoon of Company K, and part of Headquarters Company. The battalion executive officer, Major Victor H. Streit, was to employ the remainder of the battalion for the defense of the ridge line. During the afternoon, Company L aggressively patrolled forward of its lines, particularly against the hill designated as Baldy, but rain and fog made it necessary to withdraw the patrols for the night.[19]

In stationary positions parallel to the West Road, 2/7 occupied a ringside seat when at 0700, 30 September, VMF–114 carried out an air strike against the draws to the front of the 2d Battalion. The strike, conducted by 19 aircraft, attacked the horseshoe called "Death Valley," and dropped 20 half-ton bombs into an area only about 100 yards square. In the words of the aviators:

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[17] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 114.

[18] *1/7 HistRpt*, 30Sep44.

[19] *3/7 WarD*, Sep44.

> Again we were to bomb targets less than 1,100 yards from the airplane line. The Japs attempted to confuse our men by putting up white smoke against our colored smoke lines. However, it all went off well and 14 perfect hits were scored in an area skittishly small even for dive bombing with releases as low as 500 or 600 feet. Two bombs were duds and two bursts were made in the air after ricocheting off the ridge. Plenty of margin of safety and our bomb pattern adjudged satisfactory. After half the runs had been completed we got direct information from the regimental CP as to the exact position of each hit which made the balance of the bombing that much safer and more effective. A rain squall coming in from the north almost upset the show, but finally only delayed it for 10 minutes.[20]

Despite the accuracy of the air bombardment, the strike failed to achieve any conclusive results. Japanese resistance continued undiminished, and even before noon the 7th Marines Weapons Company reported that it was receiving rifle and machine gunfire from the area bombed earlier in the day.[21] Bombardment from the air was followed by a mortar barrage against the Japanese, who for the remainder of the day retaliated by subjecting 2/7 to heavy sniper fire. Snipers to the rear of the battalion, presumably members of the raiding parties that had infiltrated during the previous night, also harassed the supply lines of the battalion.[22]

Even though the gains made by the 7th Marines during 30 September appeared promising, there was increasing evidence that the battalions could not sustain the pace of the attack for long. On the last day of September, for instance, the effective strength of 1/7 was only 90 men. Dysentery, as much as enemy action, was responsible for this reduction in combat strength. The men blamed the intestinal disorders on the presence of an excessive number of large flies, which allegedly had been drawn to the area by the presence of a large number of unburied Japanese dead.[23] To some extent, progress of 1st Division troops was slowed by growing combat fatigue and the shortage of personnel, the result of heavy casualties.[24] The combat efficiency of 3/7 also was estimated to be below 50 percent for the first time, the decrease being attributed in part to an increase in the sick rate.[25] The situation on Peleliu was perhaps best summed up by the division itself:

> The early days of October brought with them a change in the complexion of the combat activity that had occurred during the previous month on Peleliu. The campaign had now become a battle of attrition —a slow, slugging yard by yard struggle to blast the enemy from his last remaining stronghold in the high ground to the north of the airfield. This drive constituted within itself almost a separate operation, the rugged, almost impassable terrain requiring more time to clean out than previously had been spent in clearing all the southern Palaus.[26]

The morning of 1 October dawned inauspiciously with continuing unabated rain and high winds. Once again the 7th Marines prepared to advance into the Umurbrogol pocket from the north. The zone of action consisted of a series

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[20] VMF–114 WarD, Sep44.
[21] *7th Mar R–2 Jnl*, 30Sep44.
[22] *2/7 WarD*, Sep44.
[23] *1/7 HistRpt*, 30Sep44.
[24] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 14.
[25] *3/7 Rec of Events*, p. 14.
[26] 1st MarDiv WarD, Oct44.

of precipitous coral ridges concealing an undetermined number of enemy well armed, adequately supplied, and with no apparent intention of surrendering. The seizure of Baldy Ridge was an essential step towards the further exploitation of the surrounding ridges.

At 0720 the left flank of Company L, 3/7, began to advance in an attempt to straighten the lines prior to a general attack on Baldy. The company gained about 75 yards during the first hour of the advance, but at this point the Marines were halted by heavy machine gun and small arms fire. Because of the precipitous slope and the strength of the enemy position on the peak, it was considered unwise to assault Baldy Ridge from the front, and 3/7 made no further progress for the remainder of the day.[27]

The 1st Battalion fared little better in attempting to link up with 3/7, though Company B reported visual contact at 1034. A friendly 155mm barrage against enemy positions on Baldy Ridge during the afternoon had to be lifted because shell fragments were landing in friendly lines.[28]

Aside from the limited advance of the 7th Marines on 1 October, the main activity for the day was the reorganization and movement of units. In the course of the morning, the 710th Tank Battalion relieved the Marine 1st Tank Battalion. The latter, together with the 1st Marines and 2/11, completed loading and stood by for departure. The next day the 1st Marines sailed for Pavuvu, the first echelon of troops to depart from Peleliu.[29]

At 0800, 1 October, 3/5 relieved 2/7 in the containing line along the southwestern perimeter of the Umurbrogol. In driving rain Companies E and G, 2/7 moved down to the West Road, where they were loaded into DUKWs and driven to the battalion bivouac area north of the airfield. Battalion headquarters and Company F returned via the trail running down Bloody Nose Ridge. After two continuous weeks in the line, the battalion was scheduled for a brief rest and hot food.[30] On the same day an additional squadron of Corsair fighters, VMF–122, landed on the island. Despite heavy rain and poor overall visibility, the American troop movements did not escape Japanese detection. Shortly before 2000, two enemy float planes approached Peleliu, dropped two bombs in the vicinity of Purple Beach and departed, causing neither damage nor casualties.[31]

In order to forestall a stalemate similar to the one that had previously checked the advance of the Marines into the Umurbrogol and because of the dwindling strength of his battalions, General Rupertus decided to launch a massive attack against the pocket on 3 October. Instead of continuing the lagging advance from the difficult terrain in the north of the pocket, the division commander planned to shift his main effort to the southeast and seize the remainder of the East Road and adjacent

[27] *3/7 Rec of Events*, p. 14.
[28] *1/7 HistRpt*, 1Oct44.
[29] 1st MarDiv WarD, Oct44.
[30] *2/7 WarD*, Oct44.
[31] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, pp. 14–15.

ridges in the southeastern part of the pocket. Once the initial objective had been achieved, the enemy strongholds in the pocket were vulnerable to attack from the flanks.

On the basis of earlier observations, it was strongly suspected that Colonel Nakagawa maintained a highly flexible reserve which could be rushed at very short notice to any threatened point within the perimeter of the pocket. As a result, the attack of 3 October called for a coordinated series of efforts from different directions. The 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, attacking northward, was to seize Walt Ridge. Attacking southward, 3/7 had the mission of taking Boyd Ridge. Once having captured their objectives, both battalions were to shift their advance westward into the center of the pocket. To forestall a head-on collision between the two battalions, different jumpoff times were assigned. The 3d Battalion was to remain in position until 2/7 had seized the objective and could indicate its position with smoke.

While the Japanese were preoccupied with this new threat, 3/5 was to extend its front to the east and attack the Five Sisters in the southern portion of the pocket. The 5th Marines Weapons Company, supported by armor of the 710th Tank Battalion, was to move into Horseshoe Valley and up East Road in order to support the attack of 3/5. The depleted 1/7 was to relieve the regimental weapons company in the containing line during the morning of 3 October. The ranks of 3/7 were reinforced with an engineer company, a platoon of the regimental weapons company, and a detachment of 52 men from the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion. Two tanks and one LVT flamethrower were also attached to the battalion.[32]

During the remainder of 2 October, the units to take part in the attack on the following morning regrouped as scheduled. The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines relieved 1/7 along the northeastern perimeter of the pocket. To make additional manpower available for the attack, detachments of artillerymen took over the line previously held by 3/7.

Before effecting the relief of 1/7, Major Hurst, commanding 3/7, conducted a physical reconnaissance of the 1st Battalion lines. The relief commenced shortly after 1500 in driving rain and was not completed until 1845.[33] Major Hurst established his command post on a ridge adjacent to East Road about 300 yards behind the lines. At the CP of 2/7, preparations for the attack were also under way. Mindful of the heavy casualties that the Japanese had inflicted on 2/1 and 1/7 on 19 and 20 September in the same area, Lieutenant Colonel Spencer S. Berger, 2/7 commander, was taking every precaution to keep history from repeating. Initially, Berger conducted an aerial reconnaissance of the area, after which he and his staff carried out a ground reconnaissance. The intelligence officer reconnoitered the swamp to the east of East Road to ascertain whether a covered route of approach could be found. He soon discovered that it was not feasible to move a battalion through the mo-

[32] *3/7 Rec of Events*, p. 14.
[33] *1/7 HistRpt*, 2Oct44.

rass;[34] the approach would have to be made in single file over a narrow trail, which was fully exposed to observation and fire from the enemy in positions on the high ground. During the evening of 2 October, the battalion commander held a pre-attack conference at his command post, where he directed that all requests for mortar fire would go through a central fire direction center. For this attack a provisional rifle company was to be formed from the regimental weapons company and attached to 2/7.

Throughout the day, hostile eyes had observed unusual movements outside the pocket, and Colonel Nakagawa duly reported: "It seems that the enemy acted as if preparing for an attack on our surrounded garrison units in the central hills."[35] The Japanese did not have long to wait. At 0630 an intensive barrage by the 155mm guns and the massed fire of 81mm mortars of five battalions rocked the pocket, causing Colonel Nakagawa to report that "all through the night of the 2nd, the enemy fired 40,000 artillery shells from their positions on land and ships at our defense posts."[36] During the closing phase of the bombardment, the mortars fired smoke shells in order to screen the advance of 2/7.

Less than half an hour after it started, the preparatory fire ceased and Company G moved out in a single file across the swamp leading towards Walt Ridge. By 0730, having advanced under cover of the smoke, the first platoon had secured a foothold on the southern end of the ridge and was making good progress. Up to this point Japanese resistance had been negligible, but once the Marines gained the ridge, they began to draw heavy fire not only from their front but also from the Five Brothers to the west, across the Horseshoe. Company E was ordered to advance through the right of Company G and continue the attack. Both companies became pinned down by heavy enemy fire and when casualties mounted, tanks and halftracks attached to the weapons company moved into the Horseshoe to cope with the Japanese on the Five Brothers and the western slope of Walt Ridge. At the same time, LVT flamethrowers proceeded up the East Road to neutralize Walt Ridge from the east. At 0900, the advance bogged down when the Marines drew murderous crossfire upon reaching the top of a high vertical cliff, which was separated from the adjacent hilltop by a saddle. Two out of every four men attempting to get across were hit, including the commander of Company G. At this point, the supporting tanks discovered a large cave with a concrete front at the foot of one of the Five Brothers. The cave was promptly neutralized, and its 60 Japanese occupants were killed.

While the two companies held on to their precarious hold atop the southernmost slope of Walt Ridge, Company F, bypassing the scene of the most bitter fighting, advanced northward on the East Road and prepared to assault Walt Ridge at a point north of the saddle where the advance of the two remaining companies had bogged down. The leading elements of Company F had barely begun the climb when the company was ordered to pull back from the ridge and await further orders.

[34] *2/7 WarD*, Oct44.
[35] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 128.
[36] *Ibid.*

By this time, the tanks and halftracks supporting the infantry action in the Horseshoe were beginning to draw heavy mortar, artillery, and small arms fire. One halftrack was hit. Casualties mounted and it became increasingly difficult to evacuate the wounded. The tanks on the right flank along the crest reported that they were out of ammunition. The advance of the 2d Battalion had reached its limits. Having seized the southernmost crest of Walt Ridge, the 2d Battalion decided to consolidate, marking the northernmost positions with purple smoke, which signalled the 3d Battalion to begin the advance from the north.[37]

The attack by 3/7 began at 1020, when Companies K, I, and L moved out in that order. After crossing a ravine, which was covered by enemy small arms fire, a squad of Company K advanced 100 yards by 1130 and was halfway up a ridge paralleling the East Road. The rear half of the lead platoon was unable to get across the ravine because the enemy had stepped up his rate of fire. The remainder of the platoon detoured around the swamp to the east of the road and approached the ridge from that direction. By 1500, the entire company had gained the crest of Boyd Ridge. Accordingly, the battalion commander decided to send Company I through the swamp to effect a juncture with Company F of 2/7 and to build up a solid line on the left of Company K. Within the hour Company I established contact with Company F, but had to break it in order to stay tied in with Company K. In the end, Company I had to refuse its left flank, retaining only visual contact with Company F but remaining tied in with Company K on Boyd Ridge.

Following the successful capture of Boyd Ridge on 3 October by elements of the 3d Battalion, 2/7 continued its advance over the crest of Walt Ridge. At 1350 Company E moved through the right flank of Company G over a newly blasted trail, which the engineers had completed, while Company F advanced northward over the East Road. In mid-afternoon, Company F received the cheering news that elements of 3/7 were only 75 yards to their front. Shortly after 1600, the company tied in with 3/7 on the right and Company E of 2/7 to the left. At this point, elements of 1/7 relieved the exhausted men of Company G on top of Walt Ridge, and the company went into battalion reserve. Evening of 3 October found Companies B, E, and F on the crest of Walt Ridge, with Company F echeloned down the slope, where it tied in with the left of 3/7. Shortly before 1900, the attack was halted for the night. The provisional rifle company to the left of 2/7 was relieved by 1/7, which withdrew from positions forward of the causeway to the line previously held by the weapons company.[38]

In an action entirely separate from the operation taking place along the eastern perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket, 3/5 attacked during the morning of 3 October from the south towards the Five Sisters with the objective of distracting the attention of the Japanese from the activities of the 7th Marines. Companies I and L ascended four out of the Five Sisters, while Company K,

[37] *2/7 WarD*, p. 18.

[38] *Ibid.*

supported by a tank, moved into Death Valley. There the difficult terrain, combined with increasing enemy resistance, prevented any further advance. In the course of the afternoon, 3/5 drew such heavy small arms fire from undetermined sources that the battalion withdrew and set up a line of defense about 100 yards from where it had jumped off in the morning.[39]

The multiple attacks of 3 October had resulted in the capture of Boyd and Walt Ridges as well as the opening of the East Road. Even then the road could not be considered safe for traffic as at least two sections of it remained under enemy fire. The 2d Battalion made these gains at a cost of 24 killed and 60 wounded against approximately 130 Japanese killed.[40] The 3d Battalion lost 4 killed and 25 wounded against 22 enemy dead.[41]

On 3 October the Japanese were not the only enemy that the Marines had to contend with, for the weather had also taken a turn for the worse. The onset of unfavorable weather was particularly detrimental to Marine aviation on Peleliu, as VMF-114 reported:

> No flights today of any kind. Two divisions stood by in the ready tent which nearly blew away in a 45 knot wind. Half of our maps were torn to shreds and the skipper came around with a dozen men to stake down the tent, before it was completely ruined. Huge breakers were pounding the beaches. Two LSTs tied up to what was once our pier on Orange Beach were pounding the coral and most of the shipping had been retired to Kossol Passage to ride out the storm. Most units ashore were put on two meals a day to stretch the food a little further. The water situation was not critical, but gasoline, bombs, and food were running short as nothing was being unloaded anywhere on the beaches.[42]

The discomfiture, which the inclement weather imposed on the Marines, promised to be a great boon for the Japanese on Babelthuap. Never slow to exploit an advantage, General Inoue and his staff felt that the time was ripe for another attempt to reinforce the Peleliu garrison.

> We prepared to move the three battalions remaining at Babelthuap and the one battalion at Koror, together with group headquarters, to Peleliu around 2–3 October. We learned through a report that a typhoon was headed in the direction of Palau and planned to move during the storm which we knew would neutralize the American carrier-based planes. However, the typhoon did not approach the Palaus, and we did not have an adequate number of barges, so we cancelled this plan.[43]

Not all of the 1st Marine Division casualties occurred at the perimeter of the pocket. Death also stalked the quiet sectors of Peleliu. A case in point was the West Road, which represented the more vital artery between northern and southern Peleliu. For several days prior to 3 October, a stretch of the road known as Dead Man's Curve had come under intermittent sniper fire from the ridges dominating the road from the east. The snipers had filtered out of the pocket

[39] *3/5 Rec of Events*, 3Oct44.
[40] *2/7 WarD*, Oct44.
[41] *3/7 Rec of Events*, p. 15.
[42] VMF–114 WarD, Oct44.
[43] Interrogation of Col Tokechi Tada, IJA, by 2d Lt James J. Wickel, AUS, 24May47, attachment to ltr, MajGen Paul J. Mueller, USA, to Director of Marine Corps History, dtd 9Aug50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Tada Interrogation*.

into the caves along the jungle-covered bluffs adjoining the road in the vicinity of Wattie Ridge. The 1st Division Military Police Company, responsible for traffic control on the West Road, was so depleted that it was unable to eliminate this menace.

During the afternoon of 3 October, Colonel Joseph F. Hankins, who occupied the dual position of Provost Marshal and commander of Headquarters Battalion, decided to take a personal look at the situation. Armed with an M-1 rifle, the colonel drove up the West Road in his jeep. Eye witnesses have testified as to what happened next:

> Colonel Hankins appeared at the curve in the road where the Military Police were regulating the one-way traffic. An LVT had become immobilized across the road directly in the open and two or three trucks were jammed up in the near proximity of this LVT. The men, under the heavy fire of small arms from the nearby cliff had deserted their vehicles and taken refuge on the reverse slope of the road. Colonel Hankins proceeded to the middle of the road in order to restore traffic to normal condition and had actually gotten the crews back on the vehicles when he was struck by a sniper's bullet and killed instantly.[44]

Colonel Hankins was the highest ranking Marine casualty sustained on Peleliu. Upon learning of the death of his provost marshal, General Rupertus pulled a company of 2/5 out of division reserve and ordered it into the high ground dominating Dead Man's Curve to eliminate the troublesome snipers once and for all. The company advanced for about 75 yards, supported by elements of the 11th Marines, and eliminated the snipers temporarily. It later became necessary to station three medium tanks at the curve with orders to fire in the general direction of the cliffs whenever sniper fire recurred.[45]

Colonel Nakagawa appeared generally unimpressed by the converging attacks of 3 October. He acknowledged receiving the heavy artillery preparation against the pocket but claimed that his garrison unit, by accurate firing and close quarter combat, had inflicted sufficient losses upon the Marines to force their withdrawal.[46]

On the morning of 4 October, strong winds and high seas continued unabated and nearly reached typhoon proportions.[47] Two LSTs, tied up at the Seabee-built causeway off Beach Orange 3, were driven ashore and no other craft was able to reach the beach from the supply ships. For American personnel on Peleliu, "the rains had a glooming effect. The lightless sky turned the whole island gray. Dust-coated dungarees turned stiff, hard and unpliable when they dried out, and when they were wet they were very heavy."[48]

Owing to the unfavorable weather and the extreme exertion of the previous day, the 7th Marines limited operations on 4 October to consolidating and expanding its positions. For the first time the East Road was open for supply and evacuation, though the Japanese still interfered with traffic from positions in the Horseshoe, in the draw between Walt and Boyd Ridges, and in a very

[44] Maj George J. DeBell ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *DeBell ltr.*

[45] Smith, *Narrative*, p. 96.

[46] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 129.

[47] 1st MarDiv WarD, Oct44.

[48] McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 335.

narrow draw between Boyd Ridge and the adjacent ridge to the north.

Company I, supported by Company F of 2/7, mopped up in the draw separating Walt and Boyd Ridges, using tank support to good advantage. This movement resulted in a physical linkup of the 2d and 3d Battalions. The three knobs and a ridge to the right front still separated Company K atop Boyd Ridge from Baldy. The seizure of the three knobs and the adjacent ridge would permit an attack against enemy positions on Baldy from the rear.

Up to this point, the operations of 3/7 had followed a normal course. Yet a tragedy similar to the one that had befallen Captain Pope's men on 19 September was about to strike the 7th Marines. Once again all the necessary ingredients were present: fanatical Japanese silently lurking in caves, awaiting their opportunity to strike; eager Marines, determined to advance and wrest yet another ridge from the grasp of the defenders. The first act of the drama opened routinely enough, when at 1430 Company L prepared to seize the three knobs, a mission that was accomplished in less than an hour with unaccustomed ease. Instead of halting the attack for the day, Major Hurst, sensing a weak spot in the Japanese defenses, decided to press the advantage by seizing also Hill 120, which represented an ideal jumpoff position for an attack against Baldy Ridge from the flank and rear. A company of engineers relieved Company L on the three knobs. The latter company prepared to resume the assault.

At 1530 the company began the advance up the long axis of the ridge, paralleling the lines of Company K on Boyd Ridge barely 100 yards across the draw. Once again progress was uneventful. Shortly after 1600 the lead element, one platoon, reached the top of Hill 120, where it discovered and eliminated several Japanese positions.[49] Just when it appeared that capture of Hill 120 had been accomplished, the platoon on the ridge began to draw fire from Baldy Ridge and suffered several casualties. The men sought cover on the eastern slope of the crest, only to run into a hail of automatic weapons fire from enemy positions on the lower slopes of Boyd Ridge. As men were hit and fell, it became apparent that the platoon was caught in a merciless cross fire from which there was no cover or concealment. Neither was there any route of retreat, for Japanese along the lower reaches of Hill 120 and the three knobs contributed to the massacre. Enemy cannon and mortars joined in the cacophony of death.

For the men trapped on the ridge, the only way out was down the face of the cliffs and out through the draw, but even then they would have to run the gauntlet of enemy fire. One of the first to be killed was the senior noncommissioned officer, a gunnery sergeant. Other Marines quickly shared his fate as Japanese bullets found their mark. In a matter of minutes, dead and wounded dotted the ridge and only a few men remained unhurt. The ferocity of the enemy fire did not spare the three corpsmen that had accompanied the platoon, for only one left the ridge alive. While searching for a way out, the pla-

[49] *3/7 WarD*, Oct44.

toon leader was hit and fell to his death in the gorge below.

Without any visible means of escape, the trapped men reacted instinctively. Unable to see their well-camouflaged assailants, the Marines fought back as best they could. Their predicament had not gone unnoticed. From the adjacent draw, Captain James V. Shanley, commanding Company L, known by the nickname "Jamo," was desperately seeking a means of rescuing his men. He ordered a tank up the narrow valley, but the terrain precluded the effective employment of armor. The tank eventually became a precarious shelter behind which some of the wounded could find cover. It could not take an effective part in the fighting and was helpless to stem the slaughter. From the crest of Boyd Ridge, men from Company K watched in silent rage the carnage taking place before their eyes. In desperation they began to hurl white phosphorus grenades into the gorge. Dense smoke mercifully began to obscure the scene of death and violence.

On the crest, the few men still able to maneuver did what they could to get the wounded off the ridge. There was no easy way out, and despite the smoke, Japanese bullets were still finding their marks. This is the picture that presented itself to an observer of the action:

> The wounded crawled behind rocks or just lay motionless, bullets hitting them again and again. Others cried pitifully for help and begged their comrades not to leave them there. Medical corpsmen worked bravely and efficiently, each of them dragging men to the ledge. One of them stood up to cry: "Take it easy! Bandage each other. Get out a few at a time...." He was shot and killed. Those men who could move threw away their weapons because they couldn't climb down the cliff speedily without using both hands. And as they climbed down, some were hit and fell to the ravine floor. Others slipped and fell, suffering severe cuts from the jagged and sharp coral.... One of the wounded who lay on the floor of the ravine tried to help another across the open draw to the safety of the tank. The lesser wounded put his arms around the other and the two hobbled across the open draw. They could not make it. They dropped helpless there in the open draw, and the Japanese opened fire on them.
>
> This was more than Shanley could stand. Although a lieutenant tried to hold him, Jamo ran out from under cover into the draw, swept one of the men into his arms, carried him back to the tank, laid him down tenderly and ran out into the fire-swept open ground again for the other. He did not reach him. A mortar shell fell before Captain Shanley got there. Shrapnel tore through Shanley, wounding him mortally. When he saw Shanley fall, a second lieutenant, Shanley's exec, rushed out. He had just reached Jamo when the chug-chug of an antitank gun was heard. He fell at Jamo's side, dead.[50]

Only a few of the men made it across the draw. By 1820 it was all over. There were 11 men left out of the 48 that had ascended the ridge, and of these, only five from the leading platoon of Company L emerged from the draw unscathed.[51] Colonel Nakagawa's comment on the day's happenings was short and to the point:

> The enemy's plan seemed to be to attack Kansokuyama (main post of the southeastern part) with flame throwers as well as Suifuzan Hill (main post of the northern part). Our garrison unit by accurate firing and close quarter combat inflicted

[50] TSgt Jeremiah A. O'Leary, Jr., as quoted in McMillan, *The Old Breed*, pp. 329–331.

[51] *3/7 WarD*, Oct44

losses upon the enemy who then withdrew.[52]

The disaster that had befallen Company L was to have further consequences, for it resulted in the evacuation of the summits of the three knobs and the withdrawal of Company I. At the end of 4 October, Companies I and L, 7th Marines, were down from an authorized strength of 470 Marines for the two units combined to a total of 80. The 1st Battalion could barely muster more than 100 men fit for duty; and the 2d Battalion reported in at 30 percent efficiency.[53] Clearly, the 7th Marines, owing to the heavy losses it had sustained, was no longer able to function as an effective combat unit on the regimental level. General Rupertus therefore ordered the 5th Marines to relieve the 7th on 5 October.[54]

Since D-Day, the 1st Marine Division had sustained a total of 1,027 Marines killed, 4,304 wounded, and 249 missing, a total of 5,580. The division estimated that it had killed slightly more than 10,000 of the enemy and had captured 214 Japanese and Koreans.[55] Both opponents were paying a premium price for possession of the uninspiring Umurbrogol ridges. The next chapter in the contest would be written with the blood of the 5th Marines.

THE 5TH MARINES IN THE FINAL ATTEMPT[56]

The relief of the 7th Marines by the 5th Marines took place during 5 and 6 October. As a result, there was relatively little action on Peleliu during this period. The 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, received orders at noon, 5 October, that it was to proceed aboard trucks to the bivouac area of 1/5 at Purple Beach. The battalion completed the move by 1530, and 1/5 took over the positions of 1/7 at the eastern perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket.[57]

Throughout the remainder of 5 October, 2/7 engaged in continuous combat as the battalion prepared to eliminate additional caves along the East Road. Tanks supporting the infantry in this effort blasted caves on the East Road and in the draws, killing an estimated 50 Japanese in one cave alone. At 1655 the commander of 1/5, Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Boyd, arrived at the 2/7 CP to make arrangements for the relief of the battalion and to look over the positions. The relief of 2/7 was effected on the morning of 6 October. The move did not proceed peacefully. Company F, en route to the West Road where trucks awaited the men, came under heavy fire from the draws on both flanks. Tanks had to be moved up to cover the men as they crossed the draws. While coming down the ridge, Company E drew enemy mortar fire and had several casualties. Once it had reached safety, the 2d Battalion proceeded to a rest area north of the Peleliu airfield.[58]

Relief of 3/7 by 2/5 was accomplished without incident at 0800, and the weary

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[52] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 129.

[53] Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 556.

[54] 1st MarDiv FO 5/44, dtd 5Oct44.

[55] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 16.

[56] Additional sources used for this section are: *IIIAC C–2 Periodic Rpts; 1st MarDiv D–2 Rpts; 2/5 OpRpts; 3/5 Rec of Events; 1/7 HistRpt;* 2/7 WarD, Sep-Oct44; 3/7 WarD, Oct44; *4/11 SAR.*

[57] *1/7 HistRpt*, 5Oct44.

[58] 2/7 WarD, Oct44.

men of 3/7 moved into bivouac about 2,000 yards northeast of the airfield.[59] On the following day the battalion received orders from the regimental commander to provide garrison forces for the islands covering the northeast water approaches to Peleliu.[60]

For the 7th Marines, all heavy combat activity on Peleliu had come to an end. To the 5th Marines, responsibility for the final drive into the Umurbrogol was the continuation of heavy combat, which the regiment had by this time been involved in for more than three weeks. The severe losses, the unfavorable climate, and the primitive conditions that governed the Peleliu fighting had sapped their strength. As noted by a member of the 5th Marines regimental headquarters staff during most of the Peleliu operation, the regiment:

> . . . had been the last outfit to leave New Britain. Many were veterans of Guadalcanal. The division had optimistically said that the 5th would be one of the first outfits to leave Peleliu, and yet after securing the northern end of the island everyone knew that we would be committed again. Now once again the 1st and 7th Regiment were for the most part gone or leaving and the 5th was back at it again. The men and the officers were superb during this last phase but very, very tired.[61]

This weariness was not confined to the Marines on Peleliu, for there is some evidence that the enemy was not entirely happy with conditions on the island. One Japanese sergeant recalled:

> Though we had much jungle training, we did not have the training to cope with the rocky terrain of this island. In addition, we were not used to the climatic conditions. . . .[62]

Colonel Harold D. Harris, Commander, 5th Marines, decided to use a different approach in the conquest of the Umurbrogol ridges. All previous attempts to penetrate the pocket had encompassed an attack from the north, northeast, east, and southeast. Even though both the 7th Marines and RCT 321 had sought an approach from the vicinity of the 321st Infantry Trail, the objective in each instance had been possession and control of the East Road. The idea behind the new drive from the north and northwest was to nibble away at the Japanese positions in a slow but deliberate and inexorable advance, which in due time would achieve the desired result at a minimum cost in personnel and materiel.

Once the relief of the 7th Marines had been completed, 1/5 occupied a line parallel to the East Road. This line was approximately 1,200 yards long and included both Walt and Boyd Ridges. The 2d Battalion was deployed along the northern perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket facing Baldy Ridge. Along the southern perimeter, 3/5 had reverted to regimental control and occupied a bivouac area south of the pocket between sorties against the Five Sisters. Along the western perimeter of the pocket, parallel to the West Road, supporting troops continued to man the containing

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[59] *3/9 WarD*, Oct44.

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] Maj Donald A. Peppard ltr to CMC, dtd 13Nov49, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Peppard ltr.*

[62] SgtMaj Masao Kurihara, IJA, written statement, n.d., attached to ltr, MajGen Paul J. Mueller, USA, to Director of Marine Corps History, dtd 9Aug50, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

line. Many of these men were volunteers that had come forward to lend a hand to their embattled comrades by bringing up supplies and serving as stretcher bearers. Others were noncombatant souvenir hunters who were turning out in such numbers as to become a major nuisance. The situation was quickly brought under control when the souvenir-hunters found themselves abruptly shanghaied into the lines by orders from higher authority.[63]

The first offensive action by the 5th Marines occurred within a half hour following the relief of the 7th Marines on the morning of 6 October. Company E of 2/5 attacked the northeastern perimeter of the pocket in substantially the same area where only two days previously Company L of 3/7 had met such a severe reverse. This time conditions favored the attacking force. The weather had cleared and the island was beginning to dry up after the prolonged drenching. The direction of the push was into the area west of the East Road, but unlike the abortive attempt of the 7th Marines, the efforts of the 5th were based on a firmer foundation and the rear of Company E was secure. The company advanced to the three knobs and seized two of them. (See Map 13.) Once again the Japanese let loose with everything they had. Even though any further advance was impossible in the face of such concentrated fire, the Marines managed to maintain their foothold on the two knobs, while bulldozers carved out an access road for gun and flame tanks once the drive to the south got under way. What amounted to a sheer cliff was thus demolished to facilitate a subsequent attack against a ridge which formed the western spur of Baldy.[64]

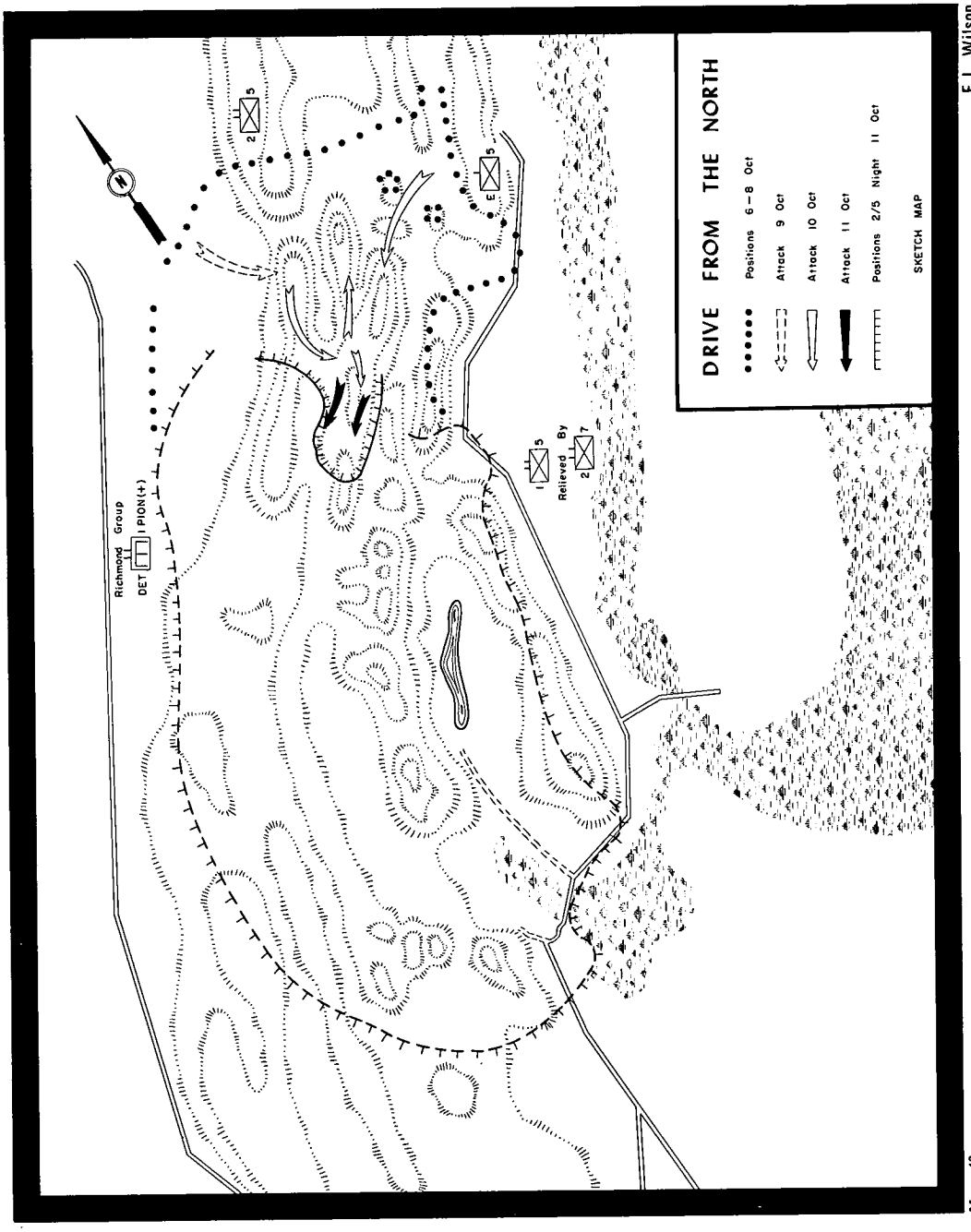
The tactical importance of this spur was twofold. First, as long as it remained in enemy hands the Japanese possessed a clear field of fire to the West Road. Second, at the center the spur connected with Baldy Ridge and thus constituted a direct route to this objective. As a result, capture of this spur was essential as an initial step towards the seizure of Baldy. The task of securing the spur fell to a platoon of Company G, 2/5 commanded by 2d Lieutenant Robert T. Wattie.

On the morning of 9 October Company G launched a frontal assault on Baldy. Lieutenant Wattie's platoon seized the spur which henceforth bore his name and became known as Wattie Ridge.

Lieutenant Wattie led his men southward along the crest of the spur for about 100 yards but drew such heavy fire that the position became untenable. At dusk the platoon was forced to withdraw from Baldy but retained possession of the two knobs that had been seized earlier in the day. The approach of night did not herald the end of the fighting for 2/5. Friendly mortar fire rocked the Japanese positions and covered the entire area from the three knobs to the top of Baldy. The Japanese retaliated by infiltrating. Hand grenades exploded all night long, but the morning of 7 October found the men of

[63] McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 337.

[64] Col Harold D. Harris interview with LtCol Gordon D. Gayle, Head, HistDiv, HQMC, 28–31Oct49, hereafter *Harris interview*.


DRIVE FROM THE NORTH
Positions 6 – 8 Oct
Attack 9 Oct
Attack 10 Oct
Attack 11 Oct
Positions 2/5 Night 11 Oct
SKETCH MAP
Richmond Group
DET
I PION(+)
Relieved By
E.L. Wilson

Map 13

2/5 still in possession of the ground seized the preceding day.[65]

There is evidence that the plan of Colonel Harris to have the 5th Marines move slowly and deliberately did not meet with approval at division headquarters, where the desire for a quick conquest of the island was still paramount.[66] It was not unnatural for the regimental commander to attempt to resist such pressure, of which, in his own words, there was plenty. On the division level the attitude prevailed that:

> ... troops frequently have a feeling that a constant and unreasonable pressure to hurry things up is being applied from above. Sometimes, if a pressure is not exerted a battle (especially an extremely bitter one) may be allowed to deteriorate into a stalemate simply because of the peculiarities of mass inertia....[67]

Any idea that the Japanese contained in the Umurbrogol were the disorganized remnants of the island garrison was dispelled by captured orders which were interpreted to show that, as late as 1 October, the enemy still was well organized and determined to take full advantage of his almost inaccessible positions. To the Japanese, the Marines appeared to be "exhausted" and "fighting less aggressively."[68] The Japanese retained a series of OPs, a mobile reserve of company strength, and close-combat units specializing in night infiltration and combat. These units had been organized specifically to destroy American tanks, LVTs, mortar positions, and other important targets. In addition, each unit within the pocket was charged with gathering and evaluating information, maintaining its own security, and carrying out liaison with higher, adjacent, and lower echelons. Japanese artillery and automatic weapons had standing orders to impede traffic on both the West and East Roads.[69] On 6 October, the 1st Marine Division estimated enemy strength at 300-600.[70]

Throughout 7 October, 3/5 kept the Japanese occupied in the southeastern perimeter of the pocket. Following a heavy preparation by mortars and 105-mm guns, Company I, supported by six tanks of the 710th Tank Battalion, advanced northward and entered the Horseshoe. Both infantry and tanks raked suspected enemy positions with fire, especially those along the lower slopes of Walt Ridge on the right and Five Brothers to the left. The Marines of 1/5 on the crest of Walt Ridge gave fire support to the advance. In the course of the day, a fire team of Marines was assigned to protect each tank. The armor was also supported by two LVT flamethrowers and a platoon of the 1st Engineer Battalion. The total advance of Company I for the day amounted to 200 yards. It represented the furthest inroad into the Umurbrogol pocket from this direction. The attack had successfully reduced Japanese cave positions that had thwarted earlier advances, though their seizure was only temporary. When the tanks ran short of ammunition later in the day and had to withdraw, the infantry also had to pull back. An attempt by Company I to bypass the

[65] *2/5 OpRpt*, 6Oct44.
[66] *Harris interview.*
[67] *Wachtler ltr.*
[68] *IIIAC C-2 Periodic Rpt* No. 22, 6Oct44.
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] *1st MarDiv D-2 Periodic Rpt.* 5-6Oct44.

Horseshoe and penetrate into the valley separating the Five Brothers from the China Wall, in the very heart of the pocket, drew such fierce resistance that the attack never really got off the ground.[71] Towards the end of the day, the battalion returned to its bivouac area north of the airfield.

In the 2/5 sector, the nibbling process continued. Patrols from Company E descended from the knobs and fired bazooka shells at the most prominent Japanese caves, while a 60mm mortar on the ridge north of Boyd Ridge registered on the terrain that the company would soon traverse. Two LVT flamethrowers and three tanks were attached to the battalion. Their effective employment in large measure would depend on the completion of a trail to higher ground where the armor could blast the Japanese positions within the pocket once the attack of 2/5 got under way.[72]

Another two days were to pass before Colonel Harris dispatched the 2d Battalion against the menacing crest of Baldy Ridge. During 8 October, pressure against the pocket was maintained by artillery fire from the north and south. Improvement in the weather enabled Marine aviation on Peleliu to participate once more in the devastation of the Umurbrogol Pocket. A shortage of aviation gasoline still prevailed because the severe storm had curtailed all logistical support. Rough seas and heavy surf precluded the use of landing craft. As a temporary expedient, gasoline in drums was floated over the reef and guided to the shore by swimmers.[73]

Peleliu-based aircraft stepped up their attacks on 8 October. Twenty aircraft of VMF-114 participated in the first strike, which began at 0700. Each Corsair carried a 1,000 pound bomb. The mission was repeated at 1300, and once again the sound of exploding bombs reverberated throughout Peleliu. The pilots of VMF-114 did not limit themselves to inflicting death and destruction on the Japanese; they also dropped leaflets to the cave-dwelling Japanese officers with the following message:

> Officers of the Japanese forces:
>
> As you can see if you look at the planes, the material and the ships, your best efforts are not impeding our work. American planes not only bomb you at will, but they also bomb Babelthuap and the other islands north of here. Perhaps you can see the flames. Your comrades to the north have all they can do to help themselves, so how could they help you?
>
> You honor and respect your men, but how can they honor and respect you if you make them die needlessly? Thousands of brave Japanese soldiers before you have realized the futility of death in such circumstances; they will live to raise families and help build a new Japan.
>
> You still have this choice—raise a white flag and come out unarmed. We will give you water, food, shelter, and medicine for your wounded.[74]

Even though Colonel Harris expressed satisfaction with the results of the two air strikes, the effect remained difficult to estimate "because with each aerial attack the Japs only burrowed deeper into their vast caves."[75] Just as before, the effectiveness of leaflets remained substantially nil. The Japanese did not entertain any thought of surrendering.

[71] *3/5 Rec of Events*, 7Oct44.
[72] *2/5 OpRpt*, 7Oct44.
[73] VMF–114 WarD, Oct44.
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 16.

A sign discovered in a Japanese dugout carried the message: "Defense to the death. We will build a barrier across the Pacific with our bodies."[76]

Along the northern perimeter of the pocket, the preparations for the capture of Baldy Ridge neared completion. Just off the West Road along the northwestern edge of the pocket, heavy weapons were emplaced near the command post of 2/5 to support the battalion attack. Major Gordon D. Gayle, commanding officer of 2/5, directed the fire of a battery of 105s against positions in and around Baldy Ridge and the hills to the south. The heavy shells, fired pointblank into the ridges, pulverized the coral until the very shape of the hills underwent considerable change.

Still worried about the possibility of Japanese counterlandings from Babelthuap, General Rupertus ordered a reinforced company of RCT 321 to seize the island of Garakayo, situated about 7,000 yards north-northeast of Peleliu. The soldiers, reinforced by 10 LVT (A)s from the 3d Armored Amphibian Battalion, were to land and annihilate or capture all enemy forces on Garakayo Island, and destroy enemy defenses.[77] After having seized and occupied the island, the soldiers were to establish an outpost. In addition to denying the use of Garakayo to the Japanese, the garrison was to prevent the movement of enemy forces from the north to reinforce Peleliu and Ngesebus and, at the same time, prevent the enemy from escaping northward from the two islands.

The Army troops landed on Garakayo as scheduled early on 9 October. There was little opposition. By late afternoon the soldiers had patrolled the entire coastline of the island and had reached some of the hills in the interior. The troops encountered numerous caves, observation posts, and machine gun emplacements showing signs of recent occupation but found them unmanned.[78] A total of five Japanese were found on the island and killed.

On Peleliu, the 5th Marines continued to probe the perimeter of the Umurbrogol pocket. There, elements of 2/5 succeeded in seizing a ridge west of Baldy and in knocking out a number of caves. Even though the Marines had to abandon some hard won ground, their artillery did seal some of the caves that had forced the withdrawal. Each Japanese position eliminated in this manner would reduce Marine casualties when the final capture of Baldy Ridge was attempted on the following day. The bulldozer that had started work on a trail into the Umurbrogol two days earlier continued to work until it had gone within the time allotted as far as it could—midway down the ravine between Boyd Ridge and Ridge 3, a semidetached razorback south and slightly east of Baldy Ridge. In preparation for the attack scheduled on the following morning, VMF-114 carried out an additional air strike against the Japanese pocket.[79] The planes dropped twelve

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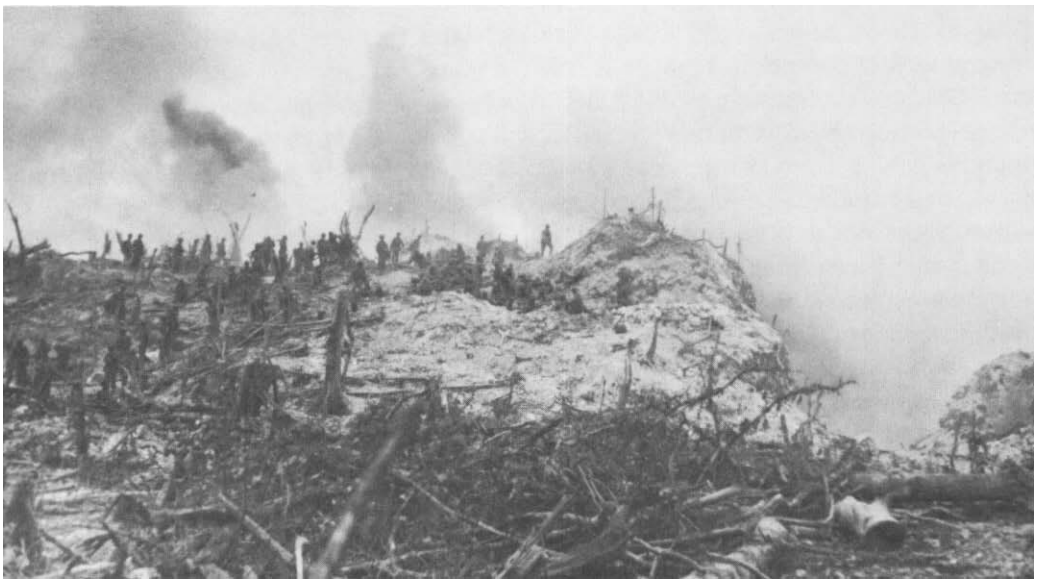
[76] Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Asprey, *Once A Marine: The Memoirs of General A. Vandegrift, United States Marine Corps* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1964), p. 274, hereafter Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once A Marine*, used with permission.

[77] 1st MarDiv FO 8–44, dtd 10Oct44.

[78] *1st MarDiv D–2 Periodic Rpt*, 9–10Oct44.



MARINES OCCUPY RIDGE *in the Umurbrogol shrouded by smoke from aerial bombing and artillery fire. (USMC 95258)*

MARINE TANK-INFANTRY TEAM *advancing into the Peleliu ridges during final phase of the operation. (USMC 97433)*

1,000-pound bombs on target but failed to observe definite results.

The attack of 2/5 against Baldy Ridge jumped off on the morning of 10 October, preceded by an artillery barrage, which began at dawn and continued until shortly before 1100. At this time Company G jumped off with the mission of securing the southern spur of Baldy Ridge and advancing as far north as possible over the ridge. After a sharp skirmish with the Japanese defenders, the Marines carried the crest and swept northward until they had secured the entire ridge. Company E, jumping off shortly after noon, seized Ridge 120 southwest of the three knobs. This time the devastating fire that had cut Captain Shanley's company to ribbons was no longer in evidence, and the Marines were able to consolidate their gains. The importance of the terrain that had been seized was further underscored at approximately 1600, when 50 enemy troops came through the lines of Company G and surrendered.[80] Because Companies E and G were tied in only by fire during the coming night, heavy artillery and mortar fire was maintained throughout the night to cover the gap and discourage any enemy counterattack. A platoon from Company F joined Company G as reserve. The interdictory artillery fire in some instances was laid as close as 25 yards to Marine lines to keep the enemy from moving in and throwing hand grenades. No counterattack materialized.

In the course of 10 October a minor mystery was solved. For several days artillery shells from an unknown source had been landing on the southern tip of Peleliu. These had been reported as enemy shells whose place of origin was the subject of considerable speculation. The solution to the vexing problem turned out to be easier than anticipated: it was definitely established that the shells were our own, that they came from positions on the northern end of Peleliu, and that they had been directed into the Umurbrogol pocket. Apparently, some of the shells had riccocheted off the hills and continued on to the southern part of the island.[81]

The morning of 11 October saw the continuation of the slow, dogged advance that had marked the progress of the previous day. With nearly all of Baldy Ridge and Hill 120 in American hands, the way was open for an attack on Hill 140, which dominated the terrain between Baldy Ridge to the northeast and the Five Brothers to the south. In addition to representing the deepest inroad yet made into the heart of the Umurbrogol pocket, possession of Hill 140 would provide the Marines with a base they could use to fire directly not only on the northernmost of the Five Brothers, but also into the Horseshoe, and down the draw separating Walt and Boyd Ridges.

Preparatory to launching the attack on Hill 140, Company G seized the remainder of Baldy Ridge, though a few strongpoints still remained in enemy hands on the slopes. The advance continued until the Marines came up against a ravine separating Baldy Ridge from Hill 140. Along a parallel line to the east, Company E attacked along the

[79] *2/5 OpRpt*, 90ct44.
[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *1st MarDiv D–2 PerRpt*, 9–100ct44.

eastern slope of Ridge 3 until it encountered heavy small arms fire from enemy holdouts on the slopes of Baldy Ridge and the northern slope of Hill 140. Company G moved downhill, neutralizing one cave after another and thereby easing the situation of Company E, which was still exposed to heavy fire from Hill 140 to the southwest. At this point Colonel Harris committed Company F, which passed through the lines of Company E and attacked towards Hill 140 through a ravine separating Ridge 3 and the objective. The men bypassed the strongly defended northern slope of Hill 140 and attacked the formidable elevation from the west. The attackers made rapid headway, and by 1500 Company F had occupied the objective.

During the remainder of 11 October the Marines of 2/5 consolidated their newly won positions and eliminated many Japanese caves on the hillsides. In the words of the official report: "The enemy was very thick throughout our newly occupied areas, and the mopping up was a bloody procedure, 60 of the enemy killed in a very short time."[82]

The evening of 11 October found 2/5 in full control of the newly seized ground. Company E occupied Ridge 3, Company F remained on top of Hill 140, and Company G was firmly entrenched on Baldy. The drive of the 2d Battalion into the very heart of the Umurbrogol pocket not only achieved its objective but did so at a minimum cost in lives. In fact, the capture of Hill 140, one of the key bastions of the entire Japanese defense system, was attained at the cost of 2 killed and 10 wounded. In commenting on the day's activities, Colonel Nakagawa did not mention the loss of his vital bastion in the northern part of his pocket; instead, he limited himself to the statement that ". . . all through the day there were heavy engagements with the enemy and our armies standing face to face. . . ."[83] Colonel Nakagawa was forced to admit in his report for the following day that the American drive had made progress. In keeping with the Japanese tendency of reporting only the brighter side of things, he added that ". . . the enemy penetrated our front lines but were repelled by night attack. . . ."[84]

To be sure, there was a Japanese counterattack against Hill 140 during the following night, combined with Japanese attempts to infiltrate the American positions. Nevertheless, conditions on Peleliu had undergone a radical change since the men of the 1st Marine Division had first attempted to enter the Umurbrogol. The situation had reversed itself and the Marines were in possession of the dominating heights, at least in the northern perimeter of the pocket. As a result, the Japanese counterattack made no headway, and at no time did it threaten the hold of the 5th Marines on the newly captured heights.

Important changes in the American command structure occurred on Peleliu on 12 October. Indirectly these resulted from the passing of control of operations in the Palaus scheduled for the next day, from the U. S. Third Fleet and Admiral Halsey to the Headquarters, Forward

[82] *2/5 OpRpt*, 11Oct44.

[83] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 141.

[84] *Ibid.*

Area Central Pacific (Task Force 57) under Admiral Hoover, scheduled for 13 October.[85] At 0800, 12 October, General Geiger moved his command post ashore on Peleliu and declared the assault and occupation phases of operations on the island ended.[86] "Its termination was to mark the passage of command from the task force afloat to an area commander. It did not signify that active combat had ceased. The battle on Peleliu was far from being over."[87] In accordance with this order RCT 321 and Garrison Force, consisting of the 16th Field Depot and other supporting units, passed under IIIAC control. RCT 321 assumed responsibility for the eastern arm of Peleliu, and the Island Garrison Force became responsible for the area south of the Umurbrogol pocket.

The capture of Hill 140 during the afternoon of 11 October and the penetration into the Umurbrogol pocket from the north was to mark the last offensive operation of 2/5 on Peleliu. In the course of the morning of 12 October, the weary Marines were relieved by 3/5. It became evident that the Japanese were becoming alert to the foothold that the Americans had gained in the Umurbrogol. The relief of 2/5 took place under heavy sniper fire. Before the movement was completed, 22 Marines had become casualties. The commanding officer of Company K, in attempting to familiarize himself with the company sector, was instantly killed by a Japanese sniper. The enemy exploited the confusion resulting from a relief of line units by reinfiltrating positions from which he had been driven the previous day. Company I drew heavy rifle and machine gun fire when it prepared to relieve Company F in the ridges above West Road (See Map 14).

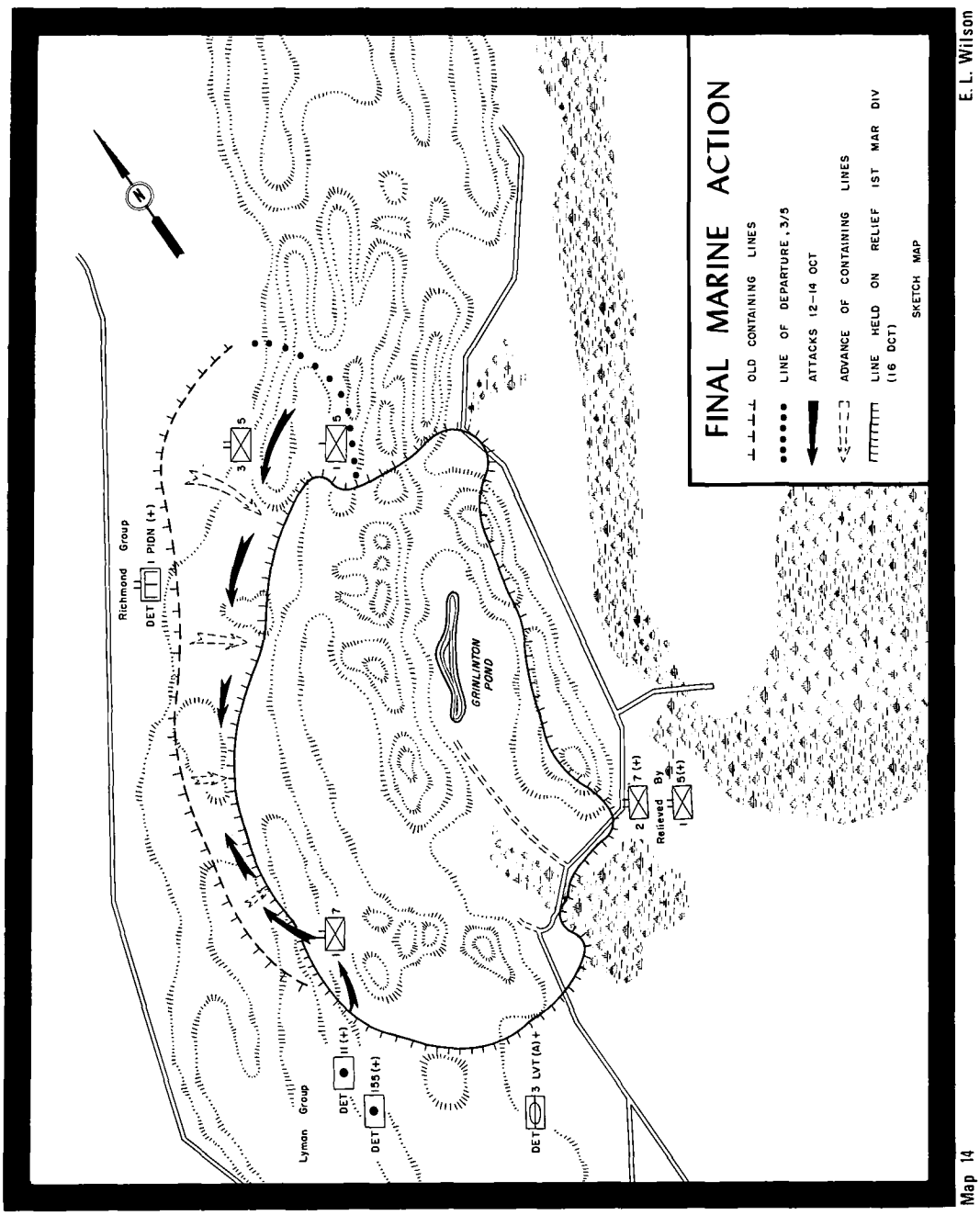
Lest it appear that the initiative on 12 October rested entirely with the Japanese, one incident occurred that showed the Marines were equally adept in taking advantage of a situation and making improvisations when needed. Even prior to the capture of Hill 140, the Marines had speculated about the feasibility of getting a field piece up on this hill or on Wattie Ridge and using it to fire point-blank at Japanese positions on the Five Brothers, in the Horseshoe, and on the western base of Walt Ridge, where the Japanese caves had hitherto been immune to direct artillery fire. This immunity was to come to an end on 12 October. Getting a 75mm howitzer to the top of Hill 140 proved a laborious and time consuming process involving disassembly of the weapon, manhandling it up the hill to the forward position, and then reassembling it behind a protective layer of sandbags, all of which also had to be manhandled to the summit of the ridge. A participant in this action has described the operation as follows:

> The tube of the howitzer was, of course, the most difficult part to manhandle and at one spot I had a rope run through it and held it around a small tree paying it out as the men moved it along. Without this precaution, had either of the men carrying it been hit it would have fallen into the deep round hole that separated the southern end of Wattie's Ridge from Hill 140.

[85] IIIAC OpO 13–44, 13Oct44.

[86] IIIAC OPlan 12–44, dtd 10Oct44.

[87] Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 156.


FINAL MARINE ACTION
OLD CONTAINING LINES
LINE OF DEPARTURE, 3/5
ATTACKS 12-14 OCT
ADVANCE OF CONTAINING LINES
LINE HELD ON RELIEF 1ST MAR DIV (16 OCT)
SKETCH MAP
GRINLINTON POND
Richmond Group
DET
PIDN (+)
Lyman Group
DET
11 (+)
DET
155 (+)
DET
3 LVT (A) +
Relieved By
7 (+)
5 (+)
E. L. Wilson

Map 14

> After we had gained the summit of the hill we reassembled the piece and layed it on the entrance of a cave at the foot of Walt Ridge. However, we found it impossible to dig in the trail, so some rocks were piled around it and we fired our first shot. It took effect on the entrance to the cave but the piece recoiled so badly that one man was injured and a good deal of work had to be done before it could be fired again. When it became apparent that the piece could not be kept in place I communicated with LtCol Louis Reinberg, C.O. of the 4th Battalion, 11th Marines and requested him to send up sandbags the next morning. . . .[88]

Altogether, emplacement of the howitzer required seven hours. Once the difficulties in emplacing the piece had been overcome, the howitzer fired 11 rounds into the cave with good effect.[89]

A second howitzer went into position along the southeastern perimeter of the pocket near Walt Ridge, from where it was able to fire directly at the Five Sisters and the China Wall. The latter target offered interesting possibilities, since it was strongly suspected that Colonel Nakagawa's central hills command post was located there. Once the second howitzer had gone into position, the time had come to put the theory to the test. In the words of an eye witness and participant in the action:

> I spotted with binoculars and our first rounds routed out a covey of Nips around the top. Major Hank Adams reported to me later that about a dozen had been seen jumping and sliding off the east side of this hill to escape the shelling. One man was wounded after the howitzer fired about 40 rounds and it was deemed expedient to secure because of the danger of further casualties from close range sniper fire and because of the approaching darkness. The next morning Friday, October 13, I suffered two killed at daybreak at the banyan tree, both shot through the head by snipers across the canyon (75 yds). Consequently the howitzer was not reemplaced. This reaction further convinced me that we had picked on an important OP. This same point had been noticed earlier from a 155mm gun position near Buckley's old CP area. Nip officers in white gloves were observed several times through a captured high-power AA telescope, apparently examining the situation through binoculars.[90]

The artillery action on 12 October was to have an entirely unexpected effect on the final operations in the Umurbrogol. Intended originally only as a means of protecting the howitzers against small arms fire, the lowly sandbag soon evolved into an important tool of the infantry. The lack of cover and impossibility of digging-in had repeatedly forced the Marines to relinquish hard-won gains. Widespread use of the sandbag in protecting successive positions became a solution to the problem, though not the easiest one, since the interior of Peleliu contained no sand, and heavy sandbags had to be manhandled to the ridges in a cumbersome and laborious operation. During the final phase of operations on Peleliu the sandbag fulfilled a function as useful as that of any other offensive weapon, and in addition, provided the exposed infantrymen with a small sense of security.

[88] Maj George E. Bowdoin ltr to CMC dtd 9Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

[89] 4/11 WarD, Oct44.

[90] Col Edson L. Lyman ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File.*

On the morning of 13 October, 3/5 was the only unit of the regiment in the line with an offensive mission. The battalion was unruffled after a night of Japanese attempts to infiltrate and retake Hill 140. The Marines repulsed the enemy assault with little difficulty and the Japanese were forced to withdraw, leaving 15 dead behind them.[91] At 0915 another napalm air strike was directed against the Umurbrogol pocket. Although air and ground coordination functioned perfectly, no direct observation of the results of the bombing was possible. Following the bombing, Company K dispatched a patrol into the terrain just west of the containing line near the West Road in an effort to straighten the salient formed by Hill 140 and further constrict the pocket from a new direction which had not previously been explored because of the jagged and inaccessible terrain. Under a protective screen of artillery and mortar fire, the patrol advanced for 75 yards without meeting any resistance. Similarly, a patrol from Company I penetrated into the hills to a depth of 150 yards without encountering any Japanese. The absence of opposition in this previously unexplored area resulted in the preparation of plans for an attack into the pocket on the following day.

Puzzling as it was, the lack of Japanese opposition on 13 October did not signify that the Japanese on Peleliu no longer had the resources to put up a serious fight or impede any further advance by the Marines. To the contrary, on the evening of 13 October, Colonel Nakagawa reported his total strength as 1,150 military, including naval personnel. Nor were the Japanese bothered by a lack of arms, for they still possessed an arsenal of 13 machine guns, 500 rifles with 20,000 rounds of ammunition, 12 grenade dischargers with 150 rounds, 1 20mm automatic gun with 50 rounds, 1 antitank gun with 350 rounds, 1 70mm infantry howitzer with 120 rounds, 1,300 hand grenades, and 40 antitank mines.[92] Clearly, the elimination of the final pockets of Japanese resistance promised to be difficult.

At the same time, there were increasing indications that the days of the 1st Marine Division on Peleliu were numbered. Proof of this was a corps order placing the 321st Infantry again under control of the 1st Marine Division in order that comparatively fresh troops might relieve the 5th Marines, which was now quite exhausted, of the task of reducing the enemy pocket on Peleliu. The 5th Marines were to pass to corps control.[93] A division order called for the relief of the 5th Marines effective 0800, 15 October, by RCT 321. Effective 16 October, by which time two battalions of RCT 321 were expected to be in the line, control of all troops in the zone of action of the 5th Marines was to pass to RCT 321, whose mission was to continue the attack in the Umurbrogol pocket.[94]

The last full day of combat for the 5th Marines in the Umurbrogol pocket began with an air strike against the

[91] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 18.

[92] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 142.

[93] IIIAC OpO 13–44, dtd 13Oct44.

[94] 1st MarDiv FO 9–44, dtd 13Oct44.

Five Sisters. Following a heavy mortar preparation, Company I jumped off and attacked the western portion of the pocket, which had been undefended the day before. This time the Japanese were on the alert and subjected the Marines to heavy small arms fire, which slowed but did not halt the methodical advance. By late afternoon, after a gain of about 250 yards, the company had reached a point abreast of the northernmost two of the Five Brothers and roughly 150-200 yards west of the China Wall. Here, the Marines established a perimeter defense for the night.[95]

While Company I, 3/5, was advancing towards the south, Company C of 1/7 launched an attack from the southern containing line after having been attached to the 5th Marines. The company, supported by LVT flamethrowers, advanced west of the Five Sisters along an axis parallel to that portion of the containing line now manned by the 11th Marines. After a gain of approximately 125 yards, the advance came to a halt. As a result of the action on the part of 3/5 and 1/7, the containing line along the western perimeter of the pocket from north to south was shortened by about 400 yards. The Umurbrogol Pocket now had been reduced to an area approximately 400 yards by 500 yards.[96] Except for several small skirmishes with the Japanese elsewhere on Peleliu, the action on 14 October ended the participation of the 1st Marine Division in offensive operations on the island, though the final chapter in the conquest of Umurbrogol still remained to be written.

[95] *3/5 Rec of Events*, 14Oct44.
[96] *1st MarDiv D–2 Per Rpts*, 14–15Oct44.

RELIEF OF THE 1ST MARINE DIVISION[97]

The relief of units of the 1st Marine Division by elements of the 81st Infantry Division got under way on the morning of 15 October, when 2/321 took over the lines of 3/5 along the northern perimeter of the Umurbrogol Pocket. The maneuver of effecting the relief had already been set in motion on the previous day, however, when 2/5 relieved 2/321 on Ngesebus, Kongauru, and Garakayo Islands. The Army battalion, in turn, moved to an assembly area near the 321st Infantry Trail until it could carry out the relief of 3/5. In the course of 14 October, 1/323 had reached Peleliu from Ulithi. Upon arrival at Peleliu, the battalion was placed under the control of Colonel Dark, commanding officer of RCT 321. The mission of this battalion was to relieve the Marine units manning the containing line along the southwestern perimeter of the pocket. As the relief continued on 15 October, one month to the day since the Marines had first stormed ashore on Peleliu, 3/321 relieved 1/5 at the eastern perimeter on Walt and Boyd Ridges.

Until such time as preparations for the departure from Peleliu could be completed, the 5th Marines took up the defense of the northern portions of Peleliu, Ngesebus, and adjacent islands to the north. The 1st Battalion took up positions along the extreme northern portion of Peleliu; the 2d Battalion occupied Ngesebus, Kongauru, and Gara-

[97] Additional sources used for this section are: *1st MarDiv SAR; 81st InfDiv OpRpt;* 1/7 B–2 & B–3 Jnl, 15Sep/17Oct44, hereafter *1/7 B–2/3 Jnl;* 3/7 WarD, Oct44.

kayo; and the 3d Battalion deployed along the East Road, facing eastward toward the sea.

In the course of this major reshuffling of troops within a relatively confined area, it appeared at first glance as if at least one Marine unit had been forgotten. At noon on 16 October, when responsibility for operations against the Umurbrogol Pocket was transferred officially to Colonel Dark, 1/7 was still very much engaged in the northward drive on which it had embarked two days previously. During its last day of action in the Umurbrogol, the 1st Battalion sustained an additional seven casualties before being relieved by elements of 1/323 on the morning of 17 October.[98] Following its relief, 1/7 proceeded to Purple Beach preparatory to its embarkation in the transport *Sea Sturgeon*, which left Peleliu on 22 October and arrived at Pavuvu a week later.

The 2d Battalion, 7th Marines continued its mission of patrolling the islands northeast of Peleliu during the middle of October, and did not begin loading until the 26th. The defensive mission proved generally uneventful, and as a result, the men of the 2d Battalion enjoyed a well deserved rest.

Less fortunate than the other units of the 7th Marines was the 3d Battalion, which became involved in a hard and costly action on Peleliu. The operation began at 1840, 17 October, when General Rupertus committed Company I just south of the pocket in the area of Company E, 1st Medical Battalion, where a number of Japanese had infiltrated and reoccupied caves, from where they engaged in some very bothersome sniping. Company I arrived on the scene and entered into a brief firefight to dislodge him before nightfall. For the remainder of the night the company remained in the area to protect the service troops.[99]

At 0630, 18 October, Company L relieved Company I, which had gone into combat on such short notice the previous evening that it was not fully supplied with ammunition. Shortly after 1100 Company L reported that the enemy was infesting the area in considerably greater strength than had been anticipated and had holed up in 12 cave positions. In response to this information a tank was dispatched to support the attack of the infantry. Shortly before 1400, the tank struck a land mine or some other buried explosive and blew up, killing not only several members of the crew but also the Company L commander, who had been engaged in directing the tank fire on the enemy caves. During the remainder of the afternoon 37mm antitank guns were brought up to knock out the enemy positions, but some of the Japanese still resisted at nightfall. Company L was relieved by Army units on the morning of 19 October and reverted to regimental control.[100]

Even though RCT 321 had assumed responsibility for the continuation of the drive against the Umurbrogol Pocket as of 16 October, the 1st Marine Division retained overall responsibility for operations on Peleliu until the com-

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[98] *1/7 B-2 Jnl*, 16–17Oct44.

[99] 3/7 WarD, Oct44.

[100] *Ibid.*

mander of the 81st Infantry Division arrived on 20 October and took over. At 0800 on that date the responsibility for the ground defense of the southern Palaus and continuation of operations to destroy the remaining enemy forces on Peleliu passed from III Amphibious Corps to the 81st Infantry Division.[101] At 0830 General Geiger and his staff departed by air to Guadalcanal. General Rupertus, together with certain sections of division headquarters, departed Peleliu by plane at 2300.[102]

The 1st and 3d Battalions, 7th Marines, completed embarking on board the S. S. *Sea Sturgeon* on 21 October, left Peleliu the next day, and arrived at Pavuvu eight days later. The men of the 2d Battalion and 4/11 faced a somewhat more complicated situation in making their departure from Peleliu. They began loading on a Dutch merchantman on 26 October, but bad weather and other factors delayed the departure of the ship until "by dint of the Marines manning the winches and booms, we were able to load and depart on the 30th of October. We arrived home in Pavuvu 7 November."[103]

The departure of the 7th Marines left the 5th Marines and reinforcing elements as the last remaining Marine units on Peleliu. When General Mueller assumed command of operations on Peleliu on 20 October, the Marine regiment was organized as a task force under Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, Assistant Division Commander, 1st Marine Division. For the remainder of its stay on Peleliu, the 5th Marines was attached operationally to the 81st Infantry Division, pending availability of transports to return the troops to the Solomons.

The 5th Marines did not see any additional fighting on Peleliu, but remained in its defensive positions until 26 October. The regimental command post was located in the ruins of the former radio station near the northern tip of Peleliu. Embarkation was delayed by the lack of suitable shipping, there were no attack transports available, and most of the freighters doing duty as resupply ships lacked accommodations for the men. Further, none of the ships had booms and winches strong enough to hoist some of the heavy equipment. Eventually the transport *Sea Runner* was able to take most of the 5th Marines on board, though a detail of 13 men with 15 vehicles of the 1st Motor Transport Battalion remained on Peleliu until 13 November. Detachments from the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion and the 3d Armored Amphibian Battalion also remained on Peleliu until then.[104]

For the men of the 1st Marine Division, a campaign had ended, which in the words of General Rupertus, was fought "in terrain which . . . was the worst I have even seen."[105] General Vandegrift described the campaign as "one of the hardest jobs that they have

[101] IIIAC OPln 14–44, dtd 18Oct44.
[102] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 20.
[103] *Berger ltr.*
[104] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 21.
[105] MajGen William H. Rupertus ltr to LtGen A. Vandegrift, dtd 18Oct44, in Vandegrift Letters.

handed them (the First Marine Division)."[106]

According to figures up to 20 October 1944 the 1st Marine Division, in wresting the heavily fortified and defended island from the Japanese, had sustained a total of 6,265 casualties. A total of 1,124 Marines were killed in action and dead from wounds, 5,024 were wounded in action, and 117 were missing. In the course of a sustained operation that lasted for over a month, the Marines had accounted for an estimated 10,695 enemy dead and 301 prisoners of war.[107]

[106] CMC ltr to MajGen William H. Rupertus, n.d., quoted in Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once A Marine*, p. 274.

[107] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 21.

To The Bitter End[1]

Major General Mueller, commanding general of the 81st Infantry Division, took charge of the continuation of operations on Peleliu on 20 October. On this date, in addition to elements of the 1st Marine Division still on Peleliu, General Mueller commanded RCT 321, 1/323, which had recently arrived from Ulithi, the 710th Tank Battalion, and elements of the 154th Engineer Battalion. During the period 23 September to 20 October, RCT 321 had lost 98 men killed and 468 wounded, while killing more than 1,500 Japanese and capturing 108.

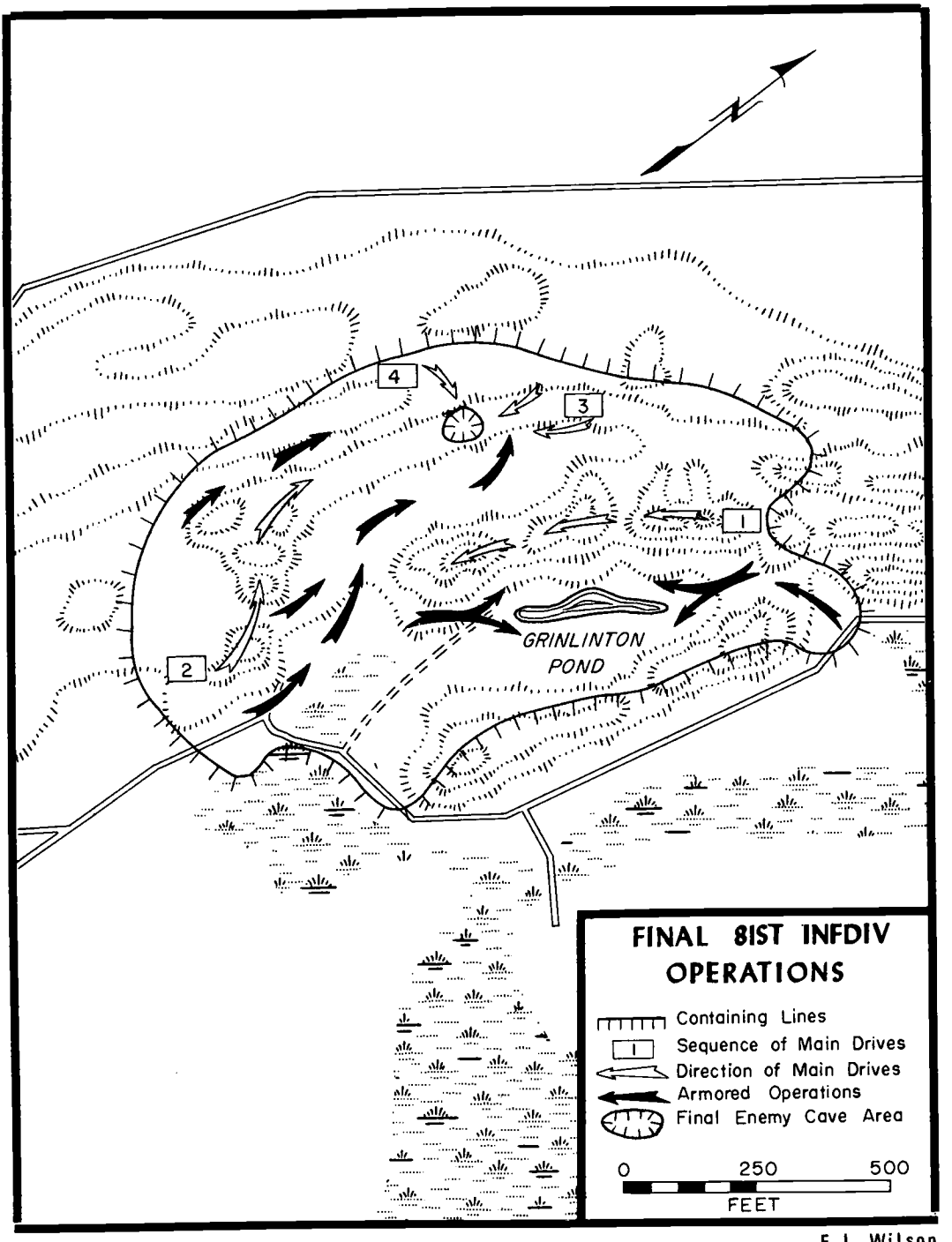
When the 81st Infantry Division assumed responsibility for the Umurbrogol Pocket, 3/321 was deployed at the eastern perimeter along the crests of Walt and Boyd Ridges with positions extending southward to the entrance of the Horseshoe; 2/321 occupied Hill 140 along the northern perimeter. The 1st Battalion was deployed along a line generally paralleling West Road. Manning the ring of encirclement along the southern perimeter of the pocket, in the vicinity of the Five Sisters and Death Valley, was 1/323 (See Map 15).

General Mueller's plan for the reduction of the Umurbrogol Pocket and for the final elimination of all Japanese resistance on Peleliu was to tighten the ring of encirclement slowly and methodically into a relentless vise that would stifle all further resistance at a minimum loss of life to his command. This idea was not an original one. In fact, it closely resembled the tactics that Colonel Harris, commanding officer of the 5th Marines, had advocated several weeks earlier. The latter regiment, now under control of the 81st Infantry Division, spent its final days on Peleliu on the northern portion of the island and on those islands to the north of Peleliu that had previously been garrisoned by RCT 321. The defense of the beaches along the southernmost sector of Peleliu was assigned to the 726th Amphibious Tractor Battalion. The 81st Infantry Division artillery, which also exercised operational control over 4/11, the 3d Field Artillery Battalion, and the 8th Field Artillery Battalion, was assigned the mission of supporting RCT 321 in the defense of Peleliu and adjacent islands.[2]

For the remainder of 20 October, the 81st Infantry Division engaged mainly in reconnaissance for an attack scheduled for the following morning. Following a napalm bomb strike at 0800, 21 October, against Japanese positions in front of 1/321, the battalion jumped off

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *81st InfDiv OpRpt;* Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division;* Smith, *Approach to the Philippines;* Morison, *Leyte;* Hough, *Assault on Peleliu.*

[2] 81st InfDiv FO 22, 20Oct44.



Map 15 E.L. Wilson

from its positions along the northwestern edge of the pocket and advanced almost 100 yards towards the northern end of the China Wall and the northwest corner of the valley separating the China Wall from the Five Brothers. Subsequently, this valley was to become known as the Wildcat Bowl. During the afternoon, elements of the 2d Battalion seized the crest of the northernmost of the Five Brothers (hereafter referred to as Brother No. 1). Despite heavy fire from the enemy on Brother No. 3 and the northern end of the China Wall, the soldiers were able to consolidate their gains with the help of sandbags, which had to be manhandled up the ridge. They offered effective protection from Japanese small arms fire. During the night, the Japanese attempted to drive the soldiers from Brother No. 1, but were repulsed with grenades. A similar attempt, to scale the west wall of Walt Ridge and drive the soldiers from the crest, ended in failure. The Japanese were somewhat more successful in infiltrating a small group into the rear areas of 1/321 and 1/323, but aside from causing considerable excitement and confusion, the infiltrators did little damage and were forced to retreat.

Operations on 21 October began again when Corsairs of VMF-114 dropped napalm on Japanese positions in the vicinity of the Horseshoe. The frequent calls for air support from the Army division came as something of a surprise to the Marine aviators, who as early as 17 October had thought "that no further call would come for Napalm bombs—so short appeared our lines."[3] But in the days that followed, calls for air support increased. The soldiers asked for unfused bombs to be dropped over specifically designated areas of the pocket. The napalm was subsequently fired by mortar shells. These tactics were successful, and machine gunners on the ground were able to destroy a good many Japanese trying to get away from the resulting inferno. In order to assist the aviators in pinpointing targets, the soldiers marked the end of the Horseshoe and its western approaches with smoke pots. Sixteen aircraft participated in this pinpoint bombing in the early morning and 12 more in the late afternoon. In the words of the Marine aviators: "We were using up a goodly supply of belly tanks, but everyone was being satisfied and Japs exterminated without commensurate losses to ourselves."[4]

During the morning of 21 October, 1/321 attacked southward upon completion of their air strike. Japanese automatic weapons from caves on the western slope of Brother No. 3 forced the soldiers to halt their advance after a gain of less than a hundred yards. A patrol from 2/321 attempted to capture Brother No. 1, but the attack faltered because of heavy enemy fire from the eastern slope of the hill. During the afternoon a combat patrol succeeded in seizing the northern part of Brother No. 1 and immediately sandbagged the position in anticipation of an enemy counterattack.

Meanwhile, men of 3/321, supported by tanks and flamethrowers, entered Horseshoe Valley from the south under

[3] *VMF-114 WarD*, Oct44.

[4] *Ibid.*

cover of a smoke screen laid down on the area between Walt Ridge and Brother No. 5. This force attacked Japanese lurking in caves along the base of the Five Brothers and Walt Ridge. Upon completion of their mission, the soldiers withdrew from the valley.

On 22 October, 2/321 seized Brothers No. 1, 2, and 3. The 3d Battalion launched another sortie in Horseshoe Valley supported by 2 tank platoons, 3 tank destroyers, and 2 LVTs equipped with flamethrowers. The combined infantry-armored force swept into the valley through the gap between Walt and Boyd Ridges and blasted caves along the bases of the remainder of the Five Brothers and the northeastern slopes of the Five Sisters. At least 34 Japanese were killed in this action, and others were sealed in caves. At the end of the day, the soldiers established a line of defense along the western base of Walt Ridge and during the night held this position against determined Japanese counterattacks in which an estimated 20 of the enemy were killed.

For the next two days, there was little change in the lines, though on 23 October 2/321 seized Brother No. 4 and fortified it with sandbag emplacements. In an effort to confine the Japanese further, a company of 3/321 blocked the south exit from Horseshoe Valley, while another company occupied positions around Grinlinton Pond to deny the Japanese access to fresh water. The toughest resistance encountered during 23 October was in the zone of attack of 1/321, whose advance towards the very heart of the pocket ran into such heavy defenses that gains had to be measured in feet. The difficulties facing the battalion at this juncture were a combination of extremely unfavorable terrain and determined resistance. The division historian described the situation graphically:

> The limited avenues of approach to the Japanese positions and their strength made it necessary to construct sandbag fortifications along the route of advance as fast as the advance was made. In effect, the sandbags had to be used instead of armor in ground too rough and steep for tanks. Without sandbags the troops, on the sides and tops of ridges and peaks, were completely exposed to accurate enemy rifle fire. At times, it was necessary to push sandbags forward with poles so that a first layer could be placed which would protect the men who crawled forward to finish the work. Advance in this manner was slow and tedious but accomplished with a minimum of casualties.[5]

On 25 October, RCT 323, which had arrived from Ulithi, relieved the 1st and 2d Battalions, RCT 321. Control of operations against the Umurbrogol pocket passed from Colonel Dark to Colonel Arthur P. Watson, commander of RCT 323. The 1st Battalion, RCT 323, occupied positions at the western and southwestern perimeter of the pocket. The 2d Battalion took over the lines south of the Five Sisters. A company of 1/323 took up station on the Five Brothers, while the remaining two companies moved into sandbagged positions along the northwest perimeter of the pocket. The men of 3/321 remained in sandbagged emplacements along the base of Walt Ridge and Horseshoe Valley. Effective 25 October, 3/321 was attached for operations to RCT 323.

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[5] Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, pp. 175–177.

For the continuation of the attack against the Umurbrogol, two field artillery battalions and an engineer battalion would provide the necessary support.

During the remainder of 25 October the men of RCT 323 familiarized themselves with the terrain over which they were to operate. They also hauled supplies and strengthened defensive positions along the perimeter of the pocket. Two prisoners taken after nightfall revealed that 500-600 Japanese still remained in the pocket. Of this number, approximately half were sick or wounded and without medical care; the remainder were under orders to fight to the death.

In the course of 26 October, RCT 323 patrolled along the entire perimeter and blew caves in rear areas to prevent their reoccupation by the enemy. Shortly after noon a company engaged in searching out Japanese-occupied caves along the southern perimeter of the pocket suffered 4 killed and 29 wounded when a Japanese aerial bomb used as a land mine went off. A closer inspection of the area revealed that it was littered with aerial bombs, some of them cleverly booby-trapped by the Japanese. The night of 26-27 October was marked by numerous enemy probing attacks at various points within the perimeter. In a furious engagement at Brother No. 4, which the Japanese seemed determined to recapture, a hand grenade duel ended in the death of 30 Japanese. A party of seven Japanese hauling water from Grinlinton Pond was wiped out when soldiers from RCT 321 suddenly illuminated the area with improvised floodlights and opened fire with machine guns. The quantity of pyrotechnics expended at that time in an effort to foil Japanese attempts at infiltration led at least one observer to make this comment:

> Both day and night there was constant firing. At night the area was kept under constant illumination. I counted as many as three 60mm illuminating shells in the air at a time.[6]

During the period from 26 October to 1 November, operations on Peleliu stagnated because of heavy rain, fog, and poor visibility. The men of the 81st Infantry Division utilized this time to improve their positions further. According to Colonel Nakagawa, "our units were encouraged by the rain which fell all through the day of the 28th."[7] On the following day, the Japanese commander reported the strength of his garrison unit on Peleliu as approximately 590 men.[8] Throughout the period of inclement weather, there was little ground action in the daytime, though the Japanese became aggressive after nightfall. For several nights in succession the Japanese main effort was directed against the Americans on Brother No. 4, but the infantrymen repulsed every attack and held their positions.

Some unusual activity around and over Peleliu developed at the end of the month. During the night of 28-29 October, a Japanese landing craft carrying torpedo tubes was sunk just off Purple Beach, after it had fired a torpedo at the beach without doing any damage. It could not be clearly established what the mission of this craft

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[6] Smith, *Narrative*, p. 117.
[7] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 162.
[8] *Ibid.*

had been. There were reports of additional enemy landing craft in the vicinity, though this information remained unconfirmed.[9]

Other evidence of unusual enemy activity from outside of the pocket persisted for the remainder of October. American surface craft sighted a midget submarine near Peleliu and speculation arose that the submarine, in conjunction with the landing barge sunk during the preceding night, might be attempting to evacuate personnel from the Umurbrogol pocket. Shortly after dark on 29 October and again on 31 October, Japanese float planes dropped parachutes to which were attached baskets and cylinders containing hand grenades and signal equipment. Most of the parachutes fell outside of the perimeter and were recovered by the Americans. When questioned about this incident after the end of World War II, Lieutenant General Sadae Inoue, IJA, commanding Japanese forces in the Palaus, volunteered the following information:

> General Murai had requested that radio batteries be sent because his were almost run down, and complete breakdowns were frequent. We knew his position was somewhere on the ridge running along the west coast of Peleliu but we didn't know the exact location.[10]

At night the interception of enemy aircraft over Peleliu was made difficult because of poor ground radar coverage. Nevertheless, on 31 October Major Norman L. Mitchell, a member of VMF (N)-541 intercepted and destroyed a Japanese floatplane over Peleliu Island. This was the only Japanese aircraft destroyed in the air by Marine aviation squadrons in the Palaus.[11]

Surprise encounters with isolated Japanese outside the Umurbrogol were not rare. In one instance, during the night 28–29 October, two enlisted men of VMF-114 thought that there was a "slant eyed gopher" outside their pup tent. In fact, the flaps were ripped open and buttons torn off. When the Marines reached for their weapons, the visitor became alarmed and fled. Another roving Japanese—or perhaps the same one—was spotted the following night near the airfield and killed when he failed to answer a challenge. A Japanese medical officer decided that continued resistance held little future for him and turned himself in to the Americans. This Japanese was "effusive, wanting to talk and to help—anxious to survive, he said, for the sake of science and research, to which he had always devoted himself. He spoke English fluently, although he had never been in the States."[12]

Because the Japanese were so unpredictable in their actions, General Mueller decided to take no chances. Beach defenses on Peleliu were manned at all times and certain units, including RCT 323 in the central combat zone, were required to furnish mobile reserve forces on call from division headquarters. Field and coast artillery units were prepared to fire antiboat missions

[9] VMF–114 WarD, Oct44.

[10] MajGen Paul J. Mueller, USA, ltr to DirMCHist, dtd 9Aug50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, Encl, 2dLt James J. Wickel, USA, interrogation of LtGen Sadae Inoue, IJA, dtd 23May47, hereafter *Inoue Interrogation.*

[11] *VMF(N)—541 Hist*, p. 7.

[12] *VMF–114 WarD*, Oct44.

and to assist in the beach defense in the event of an enemy landing. Amphibious patrols carried out repeated reconnaissance of the outlying islands. A number of observation posts, surface search radar stations, and searchlights were established on Peleliu and the outlying islands from which all approaches to Peleliu could be kept under constant observation. General Mueller established within the 81st Infantry Division a Ground Defense Headquarters with a mission of coordinating the activities of all organic and attached units in safeguarding Peleliu. The Ground Defense Headquarters received reports from all units charged with the operation of observation posts and radar stations and disseminated intelligence about the enemy and information about friendly ground, air, and naval forces.

When weather conditions improved on 1 November, General Mueller ordered the offensive against the Umurbrogol pocket to be resumed. Before an attack could be launched against the very heart of Japanese resistance, the area encompassing Wildcat Bowl and the China Wall, Hill 300, and the Five Sisters had to be secured.[13] The mission of seizing both objectives was assigned to 2/323. The attack was to begin on 2 November and would be preceded by an air strike and a 25-minute mortar preparation.

The 2d Battalion attacked at 0630. Resistance was surprisingly light and consisted only of sporadic sniper fire. Within two hours after jump-off, the soldiers had seized the top of Hill 300 and all of the Five Sisters. For the remainder of the day and part of the following night, the men consolidated the newly captured positions and erected sandbag fortifications. Japanese reaction remained feeble until shortly after midnight, when the enemy made an attempt to recapture the Five Sisters. The counterattack was repulsed, and 38 Japanese were killed in the action.[14]

Colonel Nakagawa, forced to concede that the situation for the Japanese on Peleliu was becoming more difficult, observed:

> Fifty days have elapsed since the enemy landed on Peleliu. . . . Part of this enemy unit which entered Mt. Kansoku and the southern extremity of Mt. Oyama were observed strengthening their positions

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[13] Army units on Peleliu frequently renamed ridges and valleys on Peleliu from earlier designations by the Marines. Army records refer to Hill 300 as Old Baldy, though the Marines had previously designed a ridge north of the Umurbrogol Pocket as Baldy Ridge. Horseshoe Valley appears as Mortimer Valley in Army records. For the sake of continuity, Marine designations are used in this narrative. Army designations are given only to identify those terrain features not previously named by the Marines. For the sake of simplicity, Japanese designations for terrain features in the Umurbrogol Pocket have been omitted from the narrative whenever possible, though they occasionally appear in quotations from Japanese records. The most frequently named hills were as follows:

Oyama	—northern portion of China Wall harboring Japanese command post on Peleliu
Nakayama	—central and southern portion of China Wall
Tenzan	—Five Sisters
Higashiyama	—Walt Ridge
Suifuyama or Suifuzan	—Boyd Ridge and northern perimeter of pocket
Kansokuyama	—Hill 300

[14] *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, p. 75.

with sandbags and wire entanglements. Our defense unit attacked this enemy unit every night but to no avail.[15]

At approximately noon, 3 November, 2/323 dispatched an infantry-tank patrol into Death Valley. This time the Japanese were prepared for the Americans, and the infantry was caught in the crossfire of enemy snipers hiding in the caves and holes along both sides of the valley wall. The advance halted, and the patrol returned to its starting point.

Lack of progress on the part of the Americans during 3 November did little to relieve the shortage that the Japanese inside the pocket were beginning to feel. Despite the rains of late October, there was an acute shortage of water, aggravated by the alertness of the Americans in preventing Japanese water-carriers from gaining access to Grinlinton Pond. For the first time since the beginning of the campaign, a shortage of ammunition was beginning to make itself felt, causing Colonel Nakagawa to cut the normal allowance of small arms ammunition by half. Even so, the Japanese commander glumly observed, "it was tentative as to whether it would last until 20 November."[16] The attrition in the Japanese ranks also had reached a critical point. Japanese personnel in the pocket still fit for combat numbered approximately 350. This figure included men that had suffered minor wounds. In addition to these, there were 130 heavy casualties incapable of taking part in combat.[17]

During the period 4–9 November, operations on Peleliu once again came to a virtual standstill. Heavy rains inundated the island, beginning on 4 November. Two days later a typhoon struck Peleliu and continued unabated until the morning of 8 November. During this time of enforced idleness, General Mueller ordered pack howitzers emplaced in the vicinity of the Five Sisters to support subsequent operations in Wildcat Bowl and along the eastern slopes of China Wall. Aside from isolated and feeble attempts to infiltrate the American lines, enemy activity within the pocket dropped sharply during this period. During the height of the storm a number of Japanese managed to slip out of the Umurbrogol Pocket and headed north, intent on escaping from the island. Members of RCT 321, stationed on the northern tip of Peleliu, spotted and killed a number of these infiltrators.

The ever-present danger of Japanese counterlandings on and around Peleliu was underscored once again on 9 November when a Japanese force estimated at 100 men stealthily crept ashore on Ngeregong, a small island about 9 miles northeast of the northern tip of Peleliu. A skirmish with a small Army force that was garrisoning the island ensued, following which the American soldiers withdrew under cover of 20mm and 40mm fire. For the remainder of the day, and throughout the following night, American patrol craft and destroyers shelled the island. In addition, a flight of 47 Navy aircraft bombed Ngeregong after dark. Most of the Japanese force had withdrawn to an adjacent island by this time, though one of the attacking aircraft was downed by enemy machine gun fire.

[15] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 181.
[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 181–182.
[17] *Ibid.*

During 10 November, 51 Navy aircraft dropped a total of 3,900 pounds of bombs on Ngeregong. As added insurance against similar Japanese incursions, General Mueller ordered his troops to seize Gorokottan Island, located halfway between northern Peleliu and Ngeregong. Gorokottan Island was seized on 11 November. No Japanese were found on the island. After extensive preparations, elements of the 81st Infantry Division recaptured Ngeregong Island on 15 November. The landing came as an anticlimax. There was no opposition, and the only evidence of recent Japanese occupation of the island consisted of three dead Japanese in an advanced state of decomposition and some enemy ordnance equipment.

The final drive into the Umurbrogol Pocket resumed on 13 November, when 1/323 and 2/323 launched simultaneous attacks into Death Valley. The 1st Battalion, attacking out of the ridges to the west of the valley, made few gains. The advance of 2/323 was somewhat more successful, and the soldiers gained about 75 yards while moving northward along the eastern ridge of the China Wall. Though the enemy was still offering bitter resistance, his time in the Umurbrogol was running out. Colonel Nakagawa gloomily informed his superior on Babelthuap that ammunition, food, water, and radio batteries were running low. In describing the action on 13 November, the Japanese commander reported:

> The enemy began attacking our defense line at Mt. Oyama. A part of the enemy force attacking from the west and south, the main force from the east. Our Defense Unit put up a stubborn resistance but the enemy force successfully penetrated the defense line. This enemy force attacked the men of our Defense Unit hidden in shelters with flamethrowers and guns.[18]

The Americans advanced slowly and steadily between 14 and 21 November, compressing the Umurbrogol Pocket. As a means of reducing the last Japanese defenses on Peleliu, ingenious soldiers set up fuel tanks in covered positions about 300 yards from the Japanese caves, then hooked up a hose to the tanks and poured oil into the most prominent enemy caves. This oil was ignited by white phosphorus hand grenades lobbed into the caves after the spraying. This method yielded good results and henceforth became an effective improvisation. As the drive through the Wildcat Bowl and Death Valley continued, flamethrowers, demolition teams, and armored bulldozers followed by tanks and LVTs, eliminated as many enemy caves as could be reached. Colonel Nakagawa, watching the Americans gradually approach his command post, reached some valid conclusions, observing:

> . . . It is our guess that the enemy in the northern part of Mt. Oyama are planning to capture our Defense Unit Headquarters. . . . The enemy on the east side of Oyama Mountain penetrated our defense line and advanced towards the Defense Unit Headquarters, at the same time attacking our men, who were hidden in shelters, with flamethrowers. In this attack the casualties of our Defense Unit were heavy. . . . The men of our Defense Unit still capable of fighting number approximately 150. This includes light casualties.[19]

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[18] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 197.

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 197–198.

Up to this point, Major General Kenjiro Murai, advisor to Colonel Nakagawa, had remained completely in the background, though on occasion he acted as liaison between Colonel Nakagawa and General Inoue. In fact, General Murai remained so inconspicuous throughout the fighting that many Japanese were unaware of his presence on Peleliu. Once before, in early November, General Murai had attempted to obtain General Inoue's permission to launch an all-out attack against the Peleliu airfield. At the time, General Inoue had issued the following order:

> It is easy to die but difficult to live on. We must select the difficult course, and continue to fight because of the influence on the morale of the Japanese people. Saipan was lost in a very short time because of vain Banzai attacks, with the result that the people at home suffered a drop in morale.[20]

Now that the end for the Japanese on Peleliu was approaching, General Murai informed General Inoue that he was going to make a final, all-out attack against the Americans. Once again General Inoue dissuaded Murai from this course of action, pointing out that such an attack would only waste his men. Instead, General Murai was to hole up, play it safe, wait for the Americans to approach more closely, and then kill off as many as possible.[21]

Attrition of the Japanese remaining in the pocket increased at a rapid rate. During the night of 17-18 November the enemy made widespread attempts to escape from the pocket, and 33 were killed. By 20 November, Japanese resistance stiffened, and American combat patrols drew heavy fire from enemy snipers and machine guns in caves that had not been destroyed in previous attacks. Throughout the night and during the early part of the next day, the Wildcats attacked these caves. As a result, by noon of 21 November, patrols were able to operate without opposition throughout Wildcat Bowl and in the southern portion of Death Valley. On 22 November a company of infantry succeeded in scaling the north end of the China Wall; another company approached the Japanese command post from the west-northwest and gained 75 yards; a third company advanced 25–50 yards at the southern end of the China Wall. By the end of 22 November, the Japanese pocket had been reduced to an area approximately 285 yards in length from north to south and 125 yards wide. To enable tanks and LVT flamethrowers to bring their fire to bear on the last Japanese defenses in the center of the China Wall, engineers began the construction of a ramp up the east wall at the northern terminus of the Wildcat Bowl.

The battle for the last Japanese redoubt on Peleliu began in earnest on 22 November. Colonel Nakagawa reported that an enemy force was attacking the main point of the Japanese line with flamethrowers, and that his men were on the verge of collapse. The Japanese held on during 23 November, but by the next day the end had become imminent. As the Americans closed in

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[20] MajGen Paul J. Mueller, USA, ltr to Dir, MarCorpsHist dtd 9Aug50, Encl, 2dLt James J. Wickel, USA, interrogation of Col Tokechi Tada, IJA, dtd 24May47, hereafter *Tada Interrogation.*

[21] Inoue interview, dtd Mar50, in *Worden ltr.*

on his command post, Colonel Nakagawa made his last report to Babelthuap, saying:

> Our Defense Units were on the verge of being completely annihilated. Therefore the unit destroyed the 2d Infantry regimental colors which they had in their possession. . . . All documents were burned. . . . Since 1800 the personnel left in this Defense Unit were Captain Nemoto and 56 men. This number split into 17 teams and decided to put on a last raid. . . . Splitting of men into 17 teams was completed at 1700 hours of the 24th. Following the Commander's wishes, we will attack the enemy everywhere. This will be the last message we will be able to send or receive.[22]

During the night 24-25 November both General Murai and Colonel Nakagawa committed suicide. The attempts of the remaining Japanese to break out of the tight ring of encirclement were doomed to failure, and the Wildcats killed 45 Japanese, including two officers. Additional Japanese were killed during the following days, though the men of RCT 323 noticed as early as the afternoon of 24 November that resistance had vanished almost completely. On 26 November, tanks and LVT flamethrowers moved up the newly finished ramp and began to fire on caves and other defenses along the center of the China Wall. On the morning of 27 November, eight rifle companies gingerly converged on the center of the China Wall. There was no resistance and only silence greeted the advancing soldiers. At 1100, Colonel Watson, commander of RCT 323, reported to General Mueller that organized resistance on Peleliu had come to an end. The enemy had fulfilled his determination to fight unto death.

Even the end of organized resistance on Peleliu did not mean that peace had finally returned to the island. During the weeks and months that followed, individual Japanese that had previously escaped annihilation were either captured or killed. There were bizarre overtones to an unusual operation. Both General Murai and Colonel Nakagawa were posthumously promoted to the rank of lieutenant general effective 31 December 1944.[23] On 13 January 1945, Major General Mueller turned over responsibility for ground defense of Peleliu to the Island Command. Five days later Japanese landing craft discharged troops at Purple and White Beaches. Mission of the Japanese landing force was to destroy aircraft, ammunition dumps, and the American headquarters on Peleliu. Even though the attackers succeeded in making their way inland, the attempt failed.[24] In a series of skirmishes reminiscent of the heavy fighting of the past months, the enemy had to be routed once again from caves by infantrymen of the Peleliu Ground Defense Force, supported by flamethrowers.

The Ground Defense Force, composed of elements of the 81st Infantry Di-

[22] *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 200.

[23] Ltr, Japanese Demobilization Bureau, Repatriation Relief Agency to Headquarters, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, dtd 14Apr50.

[24] "This force failed to reach our planes, but was armed with spears and plenty of fire producing grenades." BGen M. B. Bell, USA, ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC, dtd 24Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

vision and the 12th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, was under the command of Marine Brigadier General Harold D. Campbell, the Island Commander. The action ended in the death of 71 and the capture of 2 Japanese.[25] Barely eight months later, Lieutenant General Inoue, Commanding the Japanese Forces in the Palaus, surrendered unconditionally to General Campbell's successor, Marine Brigadier General Ford O. Rogers. At the time of the Japanese surrender in the northern Palaus, 39,997 persons came under American control. This number consisted of 18,473 Japanese soldiers, 6,404 Navy personnel, 9,750 civilians, and 5,350 natives.[26] Following the Japanese surrender, personnel of the Peleliu Island Command assumed responsibility for the evacuation and repatriation of Japanese military and civilian personnel from the Palau Islands, though as late as February 1946 a thorough search of Babelthuap Island had to be carried out in order to apprehend and return all Japanese recalcitrants and stragglers attempting to avoid repatriation.[27]

It was thought that peace had finally returned to Peleliu on 21 April 1947, when a Japanese lieutenant and 26 men formally gave up in one of the last surrender ceremonies of World War II.[28] Around 1949 or 1950 a group of Peleliu natives went to hunt wild pigeons and wild chicken with .22 rifles and U.S. carbines on one of the islands three miles north of Peleliu. What they flushed out, in addition to birds, has been described by the principal of the Peleliu Elementary School:

> During this hunting there was a Japanese Army man who was at the time hiding in a cave of Ngercheu Island, who became frightened by the explosions of rifles and carbines. He then ran out from the cave to the seashore where an old Peleliu man by the name of Sisior was fishing nearby in his canoe. The Japanese ran up to him and asked him to save him from the enemy who were firing their guns in the forests and mountains. After the Japanese man came out his clothings were made out of rice sacks of Manila fiber. His beards have grown and hanged down to his hips. This man was captured and turned over to the District Administration to be sent to Japan.[29]

Five years later, a cave-dwelling Korean was seized on Peleliu by natives who had occasionally found food missing from their gardens. The Korean, a former civilian employee of the Japanese Navy, was likewise turned over to the authorities.[30] At the time of this writing, one can only guess that these were the last survivors of the Japanese garrison on Peleliu. Twenty years after the end of World War II, the debris of battle still litters the island, and a few Japanese may still be hiding in the Umurbrogol ridges, awaiting the command of the Emperor to fight their way to total extinction.

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[25] Peleliu Island Command WarD, Feb45.
[26] *Ibid.*, Sep45.
[27] *Ibid.*, Feb46.
[28] McMillan, *The Old Breed*, pp. 340–341.
[29] Kulas Sengebau ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC, dtd 28Sep65, in *Peleliu Comment File.*
[30] *Ibid.*

CAMPAIGN LESSONS LEARNED[31]

A number of factors combined to set the Peleliu operation apart from the others that had preceded it and those that were to follow. First, there was a poorly developed staging area on Pavuvu with all the inherent disadvantages of muddy roads and inadequate water supply and camp facilities. Nevertheless, the 1st Marine Division did not recommend staging to another area from Pavuvu because the time required would have cut deeply into the training period. Another factor of great concern to General Rupertus was the shortage of materiel, which persisted during the division's stay on Pavuvu. Critical equipment, such as armored amphibians, amphibian tractors, flamethrowers, demolitions, BARs, bazookas, engineering equipment, tank and tractor spare parts, signal equipment, and waterproofing equipment did not reach the division until the last stages of the training schedule, and, in some instances, upon completion of loading.

At the time it embarked for the Peleliu Operation, the 1st Marine Division consisted of 843 Marine officers and 15,616 enlisted Marines, not including the rear echelon of 103 officers and 1,668 enlisted, which remained on Pavuvu. The division departed from the staging area with a five percent personnel overage, the first time that this Marine division embarked overstrength for an operation.[32] Prior to embarkation, changes were made in the assignment of medical personnel by increasing the number of hospital corpsmen organic to the infantry battalions from 32 to 40, which made it possible to attach two corpsmen to each platoon. Each infantry battalion assigned 32 men as stretcher bearers. These Marines were trained in casualty evacuation and first aid procedures. Normally, division bandsmen acted as stretcher bearers in combat. On Peleliu and later on Okinawa, however, the 1st Division band was trained to man part of the division CP defense perimeter and to serve as stretcher bearers. These assignments were expected to raise the efficiency of the combat troops and improve the morale of the fighting forces.[33]

Even during the planning phase of Operation STALEMATE, it was apparent that the 1st Marine Division was embarking on a campaign that differed from previous operations in the jungles of Guadalcanal and New Britain. The division initially would have to cross a 600–700 yard reef all along the prospective beachhead, a process that the 2d Marine Division had found costly in earlier Central Pacific operations. The division on Peleliu could expect to operate in terrain that was completely at variance with anything previously encountered, for Peleliu contained some of the most rugged and easily defended ground yet seen by American forces in the Pacific. Beyond the rugged terrain, the 1st Marine Division faced a determined enemy, who exploited almost

[31] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IIIAC OpRpt; 1st MarDiv SAR;* VMF–114 WarD, Sep44; Smith, *Narrative;* Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War;* Sherrod, Marine Corps *Aviation in World War II.*

[32] *1st MarDiv SAR,* Phase I, Anx A, p. 2.

[33] *Ibid.,* Anx D, p. 2.

impregnable defenses to the utmost. In contrast to earlier campaigns, the Japanese on Peleliu conserved manpower and materiel. The traditional, reckless *banzai* charge, the final symbol of defiance in the face of certain death in earlier operations, had gone out of style. The enemy, well trained and dug in, no longer expended men and equipment in such heroic but useless gestures.[34]

The Japanese had prepared themselves thoroughly to repel a landing on the beaches. Careful planning of the static beach defenses was evident not only from their effectiveness but also from detailed sketches, which fell into American hands as the campaign progressed. Colonel Nakagawa made and rehearsed several plans for counterattacking assumed landings. He also reorganized several Japanese companies into special counterattack units. The Japanese commander further improvised a company trained to swim out to the landing craft and sink them with mines or destroy their occupants with hand grenades. One platoon of infantry had been trained to ride tanks into battle. Several teams of two or three men were taught to infiltrate and attempt to blow up American tanks or amphibian tractors. Among new Japanese weapons, a 150mm mortar was found on Peleliu. The Japanese had stored four of these mortars behind a hastily constructed position. In appearance, the weapon was an oversized 81mm mortar, similar to the American version. Fifty rounds of amunition were found.

There was no evidence that the Japanese ever made use of the new 150mm mortars on Peleliu. On the other hand, a new development in Japanese weaponry was observed with the capture of a 200mm rocket, which was eight inches in diameter and 43 inches in length. At least four of these new rockets were fired from an unknown position. Three of them exploded with minor effect. The fourth was a dud because the enemy failed to replace the shipping plug with the fuze. The rocket closely resembled an obsolete German type. It was fired electrically, probably from a simple launching platform or cage. The head consisted of 8 by 25–inch thin–walled explosive container filled with picric acid and flaked TNT, and an 18-inch propellant case closed by a tube plate. The propellant charge probably was black powder. There was no evidence of fins or of a gyro–stabilizing device. The rocket was easily observed as it wobbled in flight like a poor football pass. Its velocity was slow and its range was estimated to be less than 1,500 yards.[35]

The Japanese on Peleliu were adequately clothed, and scattered clothing dumps were found in the southern and extreme northern part of the island. Food, particularly canned fish, canned meat, and rice was abundant. Ammunition was plentiful for all weapons except the 200mm short–barreled naval gun and the 150mm mortar. Enemy supply dumps were small and well-dispersed. As on Saipan, the dispersal of supply dumps became a major disadvantage for the Japanese, for once they had been pushed back into small pockets, they

[34] *Ibid.*, Anx A, p. 1.

[35] *Ibid.*, Anx B, p. 24.

were effectively cut off from most of these dumps.

The enemy defensive plan for Peleliu was one of defense in depth in all sectors. All pillboxes and casemates were in logical commanding positions, and all were linked in a system of mutual support. When driven from his coastal positions along White and Orange Beaches, the enemy was able to fall back to prepared positions on the high ground to the north. Coastal installations on some of the beaches were protected by pillboxes and casemates, whose firing ports were sited for fire on the Americans attempting to wheel northward from the landing beaches. Even after the Marines had overrun the Japanese secondary lines and seized commanding ground, the enemy was able to withdraw to positions, both natural and prepared, that enabled him to continue organized resistance.

On the high ground separating White and Orange beaches, two casemates and a large number of pillboxes had been established in such a way that they provided a field of fire covering both beaches. Most of the Japanese defensive installations were in defilade from the sea, particularly the two casemates, which were 30 yards apart and sited to fire south on Orange Beach and north on White Beach. Inland from Purple Beach, the Japanese had dug into the coral and echeloned three casemates containing respectively one 75mm mountain gun, one 37mm gun, and one 25mm ground-mount automatic antiaircraft cannon depressed for horizontal fire. There were at least one casemate and six well-constructed pillboxes on the southern peninsula of Purple Beach. The casemate was equipped with a 37mm gun to cover the entrance to the southern mangrove swamp.

To further impede progress of the American landing force, the Japanese had buried numerous aircraft bombs on all paths leading inland from Purple Beach, as well as elsewhere on the island. The island also abounded in antitank ditches and obstacles. In the vicinity of the airfield, the Japanese used some scarecrows. They were made of fronds from coconut palms, with a coconut stuck on the top. The dummies were so constructed that the coconut was just visible over the parapet of the trench.

In view of their defensive preparations and high state of morale, it is not surprising that the Japanese felt that they had an excellent chance to beat off any American attack. For the Marines, Peleliu offered an opportunity to prove again the soundness of the amphibious doctrine developed over a period of many years. The very fact that an amphibious force was able to establish a beachhead in full view of the enemy on a heavily defended island in an operation lacking the element of surprise speaks for itself.

Preparations for the operation were thorough and extensive as every supporting arm and staff section applied the lessons previously learned at Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester. Prior to D-Day, no amphibious scout patrols or reconnaissance landing parties went ashore on Peleliu. In their place, underwater demolition teams, attached to the naval task force, reconnoitered the reef and offshore waters near the landing beaches and destroyed obstacles and

mines. Data pertaining to the reefs, water depths, tides, currents, and surf, location and nature of mines, obstacles, and barriers was promptly forwarded via radio dispatch to all ship and troop commanders in the 1st Marine Division convoy.

Few American offensive actions in the Pacific Theater were as dependent on the use of amphibian vehicles in assault and supply as was the operation at Peleliu. The crossing of the wide barrier reef surrounding the island was accomplished entirely by these vehicles. LVTs were practically the only means of getting American troops, equipment, and ammunition ashore during the initial landing. They continued to be the primary means of supply even after portions of the island had been secured. They were of great value in evacuating the wounded and performed excellent service in carrying water and ammunition to the front lines from beach supply dumps. DUKWs provided the primary transport for artillery, in addition to carrying 37mm guns, radio jeeps, and other equipment required for the assault. Even though 26 LVTs were knocked out by enemy fire on D-Day, the value of this amphibian to the landing force was inestimable. LVT(A)s saw extensive night patrol work in the waters to the north of Peleliu and were prepared to engage any barges or similar surface craft that might attempt to reinforce the enemy or evacuate him from the island.

Two types of LVTs, the LVT(2) and the LVT(4), were used at Peleliu. Of the two vehicles, the latter proved to be much more versatile and useful. No mechanical failures of the ramp were experienced; the position of the engine in the LVT(4) facilitated its maintenance, and the vehicle afforded more protection for the assault troops who disembarked from the rear. The only disadvantage observed in the LVT(4) was an inadequate cooling system which caused the engine to overheat.[35] From observations made during the Peleliu landings it became apparent that DUKWs should not be employed as assault vehicles unless they were provided with some armament. The DUKWs proved more vulnerable to enemy fire than the amphibian tractors and required ideal terrain to operate at peak efficiency. They were unsatisfactory as prime movers for amphibian trailers, but could be used to advantage in carrying small rolling stock, artillery, and in ship to shore movement where the reef was not too rugged or the enemy fire too heavy.

The landing of artillery on Peleliu was delayed by heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire on the beaches, which seriously depleted the number of LVTs available. As a result of the holdup, the firing batteries came ashore in a piecemeal fashion, though all 75mm batteries were in position by H plus 7. Reconnaissance for the 105mm howitzer battalions proved difficult because their prearranged position areas were still in enemy hands. On D-Day, the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, was able to land only one battery, which fired southward in direct support of the 7th Marines. The remaining two batteries came ashore, but remained in DUKWs. Both batteries were dispatched to sea to re-

[35] *Ibid.*, Anx F, p. 4.

embark on LSTs for the night. During these two trips across the reefs, three DUKWs sank during the night, along with the 105mm howitzers and other material aboard. For the remainder of the Peleliu operation, 1st Marine Division artillery performed very satisfactorily, subject to a temporary shortage of ammunition and limitations imposed by the terrain. During the later stages of the campaign, high angle fire was out of the question because of the restricted area in which the Japanese were trapped.

During this period, batteries and single guns of all calibers were employed so that they could fire in several directions. These weapons were used for sniping at individuals and small groups of Japanese, as well as for closing caves, obstructing paths and roads, and interdicting the waterholes. It became evident during the very first day of the Peleliu operation that a need existed for a short-range, high-angle weapon that could be employed as artillery. Subsequently, wherever action was limited to a small pocket, this need became critical. The 60mm and 81mm infantry mortars proved inadequate. Furthermore, the latter was too unreliable to furnish the volume of controlled fire required under the circumstances. On the other hand, illuminating shells, fired from 60mm mortars, were called for by all units in unexpectedly great quantities. A new type of ammunition, it furnished needed illumination and appeared to provide a feeling of confidence and security to the troops of the using units.[36]

During the final reduction of the Umurbrogol Pocket, Army 4.2-inch mortars were used with great success; a 60mm shoulder mortar employed for the first time by the 1st Marine Division on Peleliu was not so well received. Despite its effectiveness in reducing caves and pillboxes, the latter weapon proved too heavy, and certain of its components exhibited structural weaknesses. The recoil of the mortar was so great that it became necessary to replace the gunner after two to four rounds had been fired.[37]

Difficulties were encountered with the offensive hand grenade, whose very name was considered a misnomer because of its relative ineffectiveness. The grenade was constructed to detonate on impact, but since it had no fragmentation effect, it was ineffective against materiel and useful against personnel only to a very limited extent. It was dangerous to handle, and two men of 1/1 had their hands blown off in the act of throwing a grenade of this type. Since fuzes for the grenade were supplied separately, it proved difficult to keep grenades and fuzes together in equal numbers.[38]

In contrast to the dubious performance of the shoulder mortar, another new weapon, the Navy Mk 1 flamethrower, proved vastly superior to anything of this type the 1st Marine Division had used on previous occasions. The weapon, modelled after the Canadian Ronson flamethrower, had been modified at the Navy Yard, Pearl Harbor, to

[36] *IIIAC OpRpt*, Encl H, p. 5.

[37] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 4.

[38] *IIIAC OpRpt*, Encl H, p. 6.

eliminate mechanical and technical difficulties. Prior to the Peleliu operation, the 1st Marine Division received three of these flamethrowers, together with four LVT(4)s for mounting the weapons. A fourth LVT(4) was used as a supply carrier for the flamethrowers. The new weapons were assigned to the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion. Initial tests indicated that the range of the flamethrower was 75 yards with gasoline and oil mixture, 150 yards with napalm. Duration of fire was 55 seconds for gasoline and oil mixture, and 80 seconds for napalm.[39] Because of the shortage and late arrival of pack-type or portable flamethrowers, no distribution of them was prescribed for the regiments. One method was to retain 19 portable flamethrowers and three bazookas under battalion control. To these were added a heavy demolitions unit. This group, called in some cases Battalion Weapons Platoon, was composed of 60 men drawn from the rifle companies. This left the companies 10 or 15 men understrength, but the rifle platoons were generally unimpaired in strength.

Flamethrowers were used tactically in pairs, operated by 5-man flamethrower groups. Two men were assigned to each flamethrower and the fifth man was group leader. Each group had a machine gun cart on which it mounted and transported two flamethrowers and refilling equipment consisting of two cylinders and two expeditionary water cans. Flamethrowers were waterproofed and rigged so that they could be dragged through surf and put into action in a few seconds. Assault companies each had a flamethrower group to start with and received additional flamethrowers from the battalion. During the operational phase on Peleliu, flamethrowers, both portable and vehicle-mounted, played an extremely important part in eliminating troublesome caves, pillboxes, and other enemy obstacles.

Combat engineer units landed with the assault waves and proceeded under the control of combat team commanders. All organizational equipment was landed during the assault phase, though some difficulty was experienced in landing priority items, such as water purification and distillation units. Combat engineer companies performed demolition tasks as well as other normal functions. On occasion, regimental commanders used engineers as infantry.

Prior to the Peleliu landings, intelligence reports had indicated that water supply would be the greatest engineer problem and that there was no source of fresh water. On the basis of this information, additional distillation units were carried ashore and only five purification units. Subsequent to the landings, it became apparent that wells left by the enemy and those dug by the engineers were sufficient to provide for the needs of the 1st Marine Division. Water loaded in drums by the division quartermaster on Pavuvu was unpalatable because drums and cans previously had been used to store petroleum and had not been thoroughly cleansed before being filled with water. The condition of these containers, combined with condensation and rust, resulted in much misery to the Marines ashore during the first two days of the campaign. Heavy engineer equipment arrived on

[39] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx A, p. 6.

Peleliu on D plus 4, though unloading was not completed for an additional six days. The 33d Naval Construction Battalion immediately began work on the existing fighter strip and by D plus 20 had also completed work on a bomber strip.

Armor played an important part on Peleliu, and its presence afforded considerable support to the Marines even in terrain that normally did not favor armored operations. Prior to the departure of the division from Pavuvu, .30 caliber machine guns were substituted for the .50 caliber guns on all tanks. As a result, the tank antiaircraft machine gun could be dismounted and used on the ground, while the .30 caliber regular ammunition was handy in an emergency. All tanks landed had been waterproofed by installation of standard deep water fording kits. As installation of these kits was an innovation unfamiliar to tank maintenance personnel, one tank was first waterproofed and tested. After two unsuccessful attempts, a correct procedure was established. During the third test the pilot tank remained in seven feet of water for 20 minutes with no leakage.

Another improvisation was made when it was found that the LCT ramp would frequently fly up as the tank ran off the LCT. In doing so, it ripped off the exhaust waterproofing on the rear of the tank. Two tongue-like metal extensions, each four feet long, 18 inches wide, and made of one-half inch steel plating were welded on the LCT ramp. These extensions were so placed that as the tank ran off the ramp, the vehicle tracks ran over the extensions. Thus the ramp was held down until the rear waterproofing was clear of the ramp. The commander of LCT Flotilla 6 effected this improvisation on all LCTs employed in the operation. Tank-infantry telephone extensions were improvised and mounted on the right rear bustle of all tanks. The telephone and cord were carried in a .30 caliber machine gun ammunition box welded on the rear armor face. The telephones were generally unsatisfactory in combat. Most of them soon became inoperative due to water damage, enemy fire, and lack of any self–winding feature necessary to retract the telephone extension.[40]

The 1st Tank Battalion resorted to an innovation during the assault on Peleliu. Each of the six LCTs, in addition to carrying five tanks, also had an LVT loaded on the rampway. The guide LVTs disembarked first, with a tank NCO aboard equipped with a portable radio for communication with the tanks. Each LVT led its tank platoon in column formation to the shore, detouring underwater potholes, shell craters, and coral obstacles. This innovation proved highly successful since no tanks were lost in crossing the reef due to underwater hazards, and the tank landing was accomplished without delay. Guide LVTs for tanks, as pioneered at Peleliu, were used in subsequent operations.[41]

Throughout the reef crossing, all tanks drew heavy artillery and mortar fire. Over half of the tanks received from one to four hits during the 10–minute reef crossing, though none was put out of commission. The fact that

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[40] *Ibid.*, Anx J, p. 2.
[41] *Stuart ltr.*

the suspension systems and lower hulls were under water and therefore protected at this time no doubt prevented the loss of several tanks. All tanks were landed by H plus 18. This was much earlier than in any previous Marine operation. The early tank landing proved most wise, because tanks lent early impetus to the assault inland. The timely landing of tanks gave infantry commanders the means to destroy many direct fire weapons on the beaches, including gun emplacements and numerous beach machine guns.[42]

The 1st Marine Division had initially requested ships to land all of its tanks for the seizure of Peleliu, but the shipping made available permitted employment of only 30 tanks. Sixteen had to be left with the rear echelon. In the course of the Peleliu operation these tanks were badly needed, and the division was handicapped by their absence during the early phase of the operation, when a particular requirement for armor existed. The insufficient number of tanks that went ashore delayed complete seizure of the airfield. Tanks could have prevented additional casualties during the early days of the campaign.

For the fighting on Peleliu and Ngesebus tanks were used to support the general advance and destroy pillboxes, bunkers, and automatic weapons directly impeding the advance of the infantry. Tank-dozers proved valuable in filling antitank ditches and clearing logs and debris. Of the three tank-dozers landed, only one remained in operation throughout the campaign. A modified light tank, the E4–5 Mechanized Flamethrower, proved a good small-capacity weapon, but its use was limited. The tank was required to expose itself at a time when it was least able to protect itself because of the displacement of the bow machine gun. As a result, little use was made of the tank-mounted flamethrower in the reduction of bunkers and pillboxes, because its range was too short and its capacity too low to be really effective.

Tank supply and maintenance was a sore point during the Peleliu operation. The only tank supplies landed on D–Day were those that accompanied the tanks in the six guide LVTs. Additional ammunition and fuel, which was to have been landed by the second and third trip amphibians assigned to regimental combat teams, never arrived. Ammunition supply for tanks at the end of D–Day was critical, and only the salvaging of shells and bullets from 10 disabled tanks enabled the armor to resume the attack on the following day. An overly optimistic logistic concept of the Peleliu operation resulted in an entirely inadequate amount of spare parts and maintenance equipment being taken forward. As a result, the chief supply of spare parts were those that could be salvaged from completely knocked out tanks. Maintenance personnel suffered considerable casualties in stripping tanks in exposed positions. Maintenance was also handicapped by the fact that only one tank retriever was taken forward.

Of the 30 tanks that went ashore on Peleliu, only one remained completely unscathed; each of the remainder was put out of action at one time or another.

[42] *Ibid.*

The number of operational tanks never fell below 18 and averaged 20. All operational tanks were used continuously for 16 consecutive days of heavy combat. Only nine were a total loss. Tank reconnaissance personnel were landed with each assault infantry battalion headquarters, in advance of the tanks, and were intended to meet the tank unit commander and guide him to the landing team command posts. The tank reconaissance teams did not function in this manner. They either became casualties or were pinned down by the heavy fire falling on the beaches at that time. The tanks moved inland to positions offering maximum protection. Crews then dismounted long enough to remove waterproofing while tank officers oriented themselves to locate their infantry units. Time required to locate landing team command posts, become oriented, receive orders, and move up to join in the attack varied greatly between landing teams and ranged from five minutes to two hours.

On the whole, the medical planning for the Peleliu operation proved its worth. Medical companies varied from three to five percent above authorized strength in hospital corps personnel and medical officers. Organic medical units accompanied the 81st Infantry Division to Peleliu. Hospitalization for the soldiers was provided by 1st Marine Division medical companies. There were sufficient ambulances to carry the average daily number of casualties. On occasions when more transportation was required, cargo trucks were used. DUKWs proved invaluable for evacuating patients from inland medical facilities directly to ships.

In less than an hour from the time the first troops landed on Peleliu, casualties were being received aboard APAs from the beaches. The beach and shore party medical sections worked in close coordination. The latter remained on the beaches as aid and evacuation stations. They were consolidated when evacuation was discontinued on White Beach. When evacuation was begun on Purple Beach, a shore party medical section was established on the latter beach for evacuation.

Each Marine combat team had 96 men assigned as stretcher bearers. These personnel had previously received instruction in first aid and actual practice in the handling of litter cases in the staging area. Although this number was not sufficient to handle all litter cases, these men formed a trained nucleus to which additional personnel could be assigned. As far as the 1st Marine Division was concerned, before the operation was concluded, stretcher bearers were detailed from all supporting and garrison units—artillery, aviation, amphibian tractor, construction battalions, special CBs, and Navy communications units.[43]

On Peleliu there was practically no illness that could be directly attributed to flies or mosquitoes, though there was more than a lingering suspicion that their presence endangered the health of the troops. Mosquitoes were prevalent in the swamps adjacent to and north and northwest of the airfield, but were of the pest variety only. At the time the Marines went ashore on Peleliu,

[43] Col Harold O. Deakin ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

there were few flies present. Three weeks later the fly population had reached proportions that made strenuous control methods essential. About two weeks after the initial landings, mild cases of gastro-intestinal disease appeared among frontline troops. Gradually the disorder spread to the rear echelon Marines. Even though the exact cause of this outbreak was never definitely established, the superabundance of flies on the island, caused by breeding in bodies, waste food, Japanese dumps, deposits of uncovered human feces, and non-flyproof latrines pointed to the source of the infection.

Maladies peculiar to the tropical climate causing acute discomfort were prickly heat and heat rash. Since water was scarce and dirt prevalent, scratching caused infection which spread rapidly. There were also numerous cases of multiple open sores, about the size of a dime which formed under the arms, around the belt, and on the inner parts of the legs.[44]

Prior to the actual landings, photographic intelligence was inadequate and until the end of August the photographs available were insufficient for beach defense study. Good photographs taken a week before the landing reached the task force while it was en route to the objective, but they were not made available to the troop commanders. Because of inadequate photography, maps were deficient, particularly insofar as the configuration of terrain was concerned. As an official Army Air Forces report was to put it later:

> Whether or not more frequent and more careful photographic coverage of an island prior to the time of attack would reveal appreciably more than we now find is questionable. Certainly the number of suitable targets on the islands which have been located and listed for destruction were very few compared to the total which existed. Many of those which were undiscovered would have been effectively dealt with by the Navy's guns or by aerial bombardment. It is true, however, that photographic coverage, while complete, has been spasmodic. It is possible that had photographs been taken at more frequent intervals some of the defensive work would have been spotted in progress before work trails could have been covered and piles of spoil from the diggings had been dispersed.[45]

The Marines enjoyed certain advantages, however, in evaluating the enemy situation. American troops on Saipan had reaped a windfall with the capture of documents indicating that the total number of enemy troops on Peleliu exceeded 10,000 men.[46] The close similarity between the estimated figure of between 10,320 and 10,700 Japanese and the actual figure of about 10,900 was so striking that the IIIAC intelligence officer subsequently remarked "that the documents captured on Saipan provided a source of information which may be unparalleled in future operations."[47]

Unlike the campaign at Cape Gloucester, the 1st Marine Division

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[44] LtCol Spencer S. Berger ltr to CMC, dtd 19Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

[45] Report No. 2, AAF Evaluation Board, Pacific Ocean Areas, (USAF Historical Archives File 138.6-2), p. 6, as cited in official USAF HistDiv comments, dtd 22Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

[46] Expeditionary Trps, ThirdFlt, Encl B to Palau Rpt; IIIAC, Encl C to Palau Rpt.

[47] *Ibid.*

captured few documents on Peleliu that were of immediate tactical value. Whether the dearth of captured documentary material was due to the fact that the Japanese had holed up in elaborate caves, many of which were sealed shut, or whether the enemy was becoming more security conscious was open to speculation. Nevertheless, a number of maps showing defensive sectors, the location of mine fields, and gun positions were captured. In one instance, the 7th Marines found a sketch showing the number and location of mines on a peninsula still in enemy hands. Subsequently, the same regiment turned in a captured ration statement for Japanese Army and Navy personnel stationed on Peleliu and Ngesebus. Since the document was dated 1 September, it provided excellent information about the strength of various Japanese units on Peleliu, which closely paralleled the intelligence previously obtained from documents seized on Saipan.[48]

Enemy materiel seized was not limited to documentary sources. Capture of the Peleliu airfield, for instance, yielded 130 aircraft, including spare parts and equipment. Even though these aircraft were not operational, an analysis of this materiel provided information of new developments, especially the discovery of a new model of the Type I medium bomber "Betty" and a model of another new medium bomber dubbed "Frances."[49]

American propaganda on Peleliu was generally ineffective because the Japanese maintained a high state of morale throughout the operation. A breakdown of enemy personnel captured on Peleliu up to 20 October showed that of the total of 302 captured, 92 were Japanese, including 7 Army, 12 Navy, and 73 laborers. The remainder of the prisoners was composed of non-Japanese laborers, including one Chinese, one Formosan, 206 Koreans, one prisoner who died before identification could be made, and two others whose physical and mental condition precluded identification.[50]

It was evident that most of the non-Japanese laborers, and in fact, some of the laborers of Japanese nationality, did not share an overpowering sense of loyalty to Japan and its military traditions. Many laborers stated that even though, as a rule, the American leaflets gave a time and place for surrendering, they felt that they could not get there safely and obtained better protection by remaining in their caves. One more reason has been advanced for the enemy's reluctance to surrender:

> . . . the understandable but extreme bitterness of Marines in not wishing to take any prisoners but to kill every Jap sighted was just as much a factor in the prolonged resistance of the defenders as any fanatical, suicidal last ditch stand by the Japanese.[51]

That the above is not the isolated speculation of one individual was emphasized in an official report echoing the same sentiment:

> The lack of prisoners during the first several days was probably due as much to the bitterness of the fighting as to the ap-

[48] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx B, p. 9.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[51] Capt Clyde L. Bozarth, MC, USN, ltr to CMC, dtd 13Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

> parent reluctance of both troops and unit commanders to effect captures. It is believed that a more serious and sustained attempt to indoctrinate all personnel with the value and importance of taking prisoners would pay increasingly larger dividends as the war progresses.[52]

In one respect at least, the 1st Marine Division on Peleliu did not encounter the problems faced by other divisions on Guam, Saipan, and subsequently on Okinawa. This was in the field of civil affairs, where prior evacuation of natives from Peleliu by the Japanese proved advantageous to the Americans also. The Marines thus were relieved of the responsibility of controlling and caring for members of a civilian populace whose presence would have constituted a liability far in excess of any assistance they might have been able to render to the invasion force.

Signal communications on Peleliu did not present any undue problems, and the performance of radio and other signal equipment did not differ materially from that of other campaigns. During the first two days of the campaign, radio remained the primary means of communication, and both the SCR–300 and the SCR–610 performed excellently in corps and division nets. Two radio-equipped DUKWs were landed and operated moderately well until moisture affected the equipment and its performance became marginal. An experimental armored amphibian equipped with various types of communications gear was landed at H plus 90 minutes with the advance division message center. It was discovered at that time that the battery charging circuits were inoperative, and, as a result, no use of this equipment was made until D plus 10.[53]

One of the innovations in the field of communications on Peleliu was to encourage officers to talk directly over voice radio circuits, since this speeded communications and relieved crowded telephone circuits. Visual communication by blinker lamp was not used during the operation, nor were telegraph or teletype employed. In maintaining radio contact with tanks, frequency modulation equipment proved most rugged, reliable, and flexible. The only defect found in this equipment appeared to be its limited range. It became necessary to set up a relay station for transmissions from northern Peleliu to the vicinity of the airfield. When peaks intervened, the effective range dropped to as low as two miles.[54]

In connection with communications on Peleliu, the activities of the 4th Joint Assault Signal Company are of special interest. Upon arriving at the staging area at Pavuvu, the 10 communications teams, 9 shore fire control parties, and 13 air liaison parties were at once attached to battalions and regiments with which they were to operate. The greatest difficulty was experienced in the control of the communications teams which were attached to each battalion. The teams themselves worked well, although difficulty was experienced in coordinating them since they were not landed as a tactical unit. Air liaison parties and shore fire control parties worked very well, even though in many instances these teams went ashore too

[52] *IIIAC OpRpt*, Encl B, p. 2.

[53] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx E, p. 2.

[54] *Ibid.*, Anx J, p. 10.

soon on beaches where assault troops were pinned down by fire.[55]

The quantity, quality, and thoroughness of naval gunfire are an extremely important factor in any amphibious assault. This held particularly true for a heavily fortified and strongly defended island like Peleliu. Because this particular phase of the Peleliu operation has since become the object of considerable controversy, a detailed discussion of naval gunfire support during the prelanding phase appears in order.

The pre–bombardment of Peleliu had a threefold objective: to knock out enemy aircraft and artillery installations; to destroy as many enemy strongpoints as possible and to eliminate all enemy ships, barges, and small craft capable of reinforcing the enemy garrison from the north. To achieve these objectives, fires were scheduled not only against known enemy positions but also against areas that a study of the terrain and a knowledge of Japanese tactics would indicate enemy use for fortified positions, assembly areas, communications centers, or ammunition dumps.

The importance attached by the Navy to the STALEMATE operation was underscored by the personnages in attendance, whose presence has been described as follows by a naval historian:

> Peleliu was honored by the participation of a large number of flag and general officers. Vice Admiral Wilkinson and Major Generals Julian Smith and William Rupertus were on board Rear Admiral Fort's amphibious command ship *Mount McKinley*. General Geiger was on board *Mount Olympus*, to which Wilkinson shifted at Eniwetok. Rear Admiral Blandy and General Mueller were in *Fremont*. Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf in *Louisville* commanded a formidable fire support group of five battleships, five heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, and fourteen destroyers; and they had two more flag officers, Rear Admirals Ainsworth and Kingman, embarked. Rear Admiral Ralph Ofstie commanded between seven and eleven escort carriers to provide combat air and antisubmarine patrol, and Rear Admiral William D. Sample had a carrier division under him. Admiral Halsey dropped in on Peleliu 17 September; in the entire chain of command, only Admiral Nimitz stayed away.[56]

Surely, with such a large number of critical observers present, there was a great opportunity to show what preliminary bombardment could accomplish in support of an amphibious operation. Based on experience in similar operations, the Navy conducted the customary preliminary aerial and naval bombardment before the landing. As early as 6 September, fast carriers of Halsey's Third Fleet took the islands under aerial bombardment. After three days of bombing it was determined that the B–24 attacks had already inflicted serious damage on many of the enemy

[55] *Ibid.*, Anx E, p. 1.

[56] Morison, *Leyte*, p. 34. There appears to be some controversy as to who boarded what ship. According to other sources, Admiral Fort and Generals Geiger and Julian Smith, with the staffs of the higher echelons, were embarked in USS *Mount McKinley*, while General Rupertus and the bulk of the division staff embarked in USS *DuPage;* General O. P. Smith and the remainder of the staff were on the USS *Elmore*. Hough, *Peleliu Monograph*, pp. 21-22. This version is concurred in by the former chief of staff of IIIAC, LtGen Merwin H. Silverthorn (Ret) ltr to Head, HistBr, dtd 26Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

installations, and the carriers moved off towards the Philippines.

With the arrival of the task force off Peleliu on 12 September, the pre-bombardment of Peleliu began in earnest:

> The original plan had called for only two days of preparatory naval bombardment. Geiger objected that this was too little and asked for four. He finally got three for Peleliu and five for Angaur . . . Five old battleships, eight cruisers, and fourteen destroyers, most of them veterans of shore bombardment and under the command of Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf, USN . . . arrived off Palau on September 12. Oldendorf was handicapped in the execution of his mission both in the facilities he had on hand and in the size of his staff. His flag was an old battleship, not one of the new headquarters ships whose superior communications equipment had been one of the reasons for the increased effectiveness of naval gunfire support in the Marshalls and on Guam. Also he was short on staff personnel. In spite of many previous recommendations to the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington he had only a cruiser division staff, consisting of four officers. To add to his difficulties all of these but one were on the sick list during the preliminary bombardment.[57]

The ammunition expenditure in the tactical employment of naval gunfire amounted to 3,490 tons prior to H-Hour and 2,359 tons thereafter.[58] The naval bombardment obliterated much of the dense vegetation on the ridge immediately north of the airfield, subsequently to become known as Bloody Nose Ridge. What this naval gunfire could not and did not eliminate were the numerous Japanese defenses in caves and underground shelters, which enabled the enemy to remain safely underground until the bombardment lifted.

The Japanese on Peleliu did not at any time disclose their presence prior to the amphibious landing of the Marines. The total absence of Japanese counterbattery fire during the preliminary bombardment and the dense pall of smoke that soon hung over Peleliu like a shroud, combined to embue Admiral Oldendorf with a deceptive sense of optimism. In contacting Admiral Fort on the evening of 14 September, Admiral Oldendorf made the unfortunate remark that he had run out of targets. This statement, followed shortly by a rash prediction by General Rupertus of a short but tough campaign, subsequently cast a pall of disappointment, consternation, and bitterness that has at times tended to obscure the planning, effort, valor, and heroism which far surpassed interservice or interarm quibbling and reproach.

The bitterness of the Marines who had reason to assume that the landing would not be an extremely difficult one is understandable when it became apparent that some of the most important enemy defenses were still functioning during the amphibious assault. Typical of this feeling is the following comment, made long after the guns had become silent, though still filled with passionate reproach:

> There was never any question of the importance of the southwestern promon-

[57] Col Donald M. Weller ltr to Philip A. Crowl, dtd 22Mar50, as quoted in Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 402. RAdm Jesse B. Oldendorf ltr to Dir, MarCorpsHist, dtd 25Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Oldendorf ltr.*

[58] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx K, p. 4.

> tory, the unnamed island, the left flank of the 1st Marines and the high ground to the north of the airfield, nor was there any question as to the necessity of knocking out enemy positions in those areas and the provisions for continuous support to be delivered. This fact was impressed upon the staff of RAdm Fort on many occasions.
>
> Preliminary bombardment plans, air and naval gunfire, were made with the above consideration. Before the Advance Force sailed, great emphasis was placed on the necessity of thoroughly covering these areas. In this connection . . . the dispatch sent by Admiral Oldendorf was not only a surprise but was not understood by any of us on the Division Staff in view of the study, and requirements we had submitted, and the plans which had been so carefully prepared and agreed to as essential and necessary for the accomplishment of the Division mission. . . .
>
> What happened on D-Day is a matter of history. . . . I have asked of the unit commanders many times for an explanation of just what happened. No one is certain of anything except that the enemy was not knocked out.[59]

In this connection, Rear Admiral Oldendorf's comments may be of interest, for they reflect the problems and difficulties which beset him at the time:

> My Gunfire Support Plan called for all known or suspected enemy strong points to be destroyed. . . . The preliminary bombardment was, I thought at the time, one of the most thorough that could be devised considering the lack of intelligence concerning enemy strong points. The prelanding gunfire support was, I thought, superior to anything which had been put on heretofore. My surprise and chagrin when concealed batteries opened up on the LVTs can be imagined. . . . Under these circumstances, no matter how many shells you fire or their caliber, you cannot destroy enemy gun emplacements on an island the size of Peleliu, unless the enemy will oblige by disclosing the position of his guns. . . . The best that can be done is to blast away at suspected positions and hope for the best.[60]

In commenting on naval gunfire at Peleliu, Rear Admiral George H. Fort deplored a tendency on the part of the Marines to set up the naval gunfire at Guam as the standard and to judge other operations by it. Instead, the "de luxe" bombardment of Guam, which had not been originally planned when the Marianas operation was first plotted, in the long run increased the difficulties of the Peleliu operation. Rear Admiral Fort expressed his views on this subject as follows:

> I think it is a grave error to set up the Guam operation as the standard for the future. It is erroneous to lead the Marines or other troops to expect any such support prior to landing. It never happened anywhere else and probably never will again. . . . The original plan was for two days' bombardment at Peleliu which was subsequently increased to three. Whereas this increase permitted somewhat more deliberate bombardment, it did not increase the weight of metal in the slightest. The same amount of ammunition was to have been used in the originally scheduled two days as was subsequently used in three. If Admiral Oldendorf broke off fire before he had used up his allowed ammunition on the grounds that there were no more targets, he was entirely correct. The idea which some people seem to have of just firing at an island is an inexcusable waste of ammunition.[61]

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[59] LtCol Lewis J. Fields ltr to CMC, dtd 17Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

[60] *Oldendorf ltr.*

[61] RAdm George H. Fort ltr to BGen Clayton C. Jerome, dtd 20Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Fort ltr.*

Many accounts of the Peleliu operation have dwelled so extensively on what was wrong with the prelanding bombardment that little has been said of naval gunfire support after the landings. Of this support in the hours following the landing on Peleliu, the following was noted:

> Naval gunfire support, by now an essential feature of amphibious assaults, was very little used on D-Day at Peleliu because of the confused nature of the fighting. Cruisers *Louisville*, *Portland* and *Indianapolis* were idle most of the day. But Admiral Ofstie's eleven escort carriers flew 382 sorties on D-Day in support of the troops, besides making interdiction strikes on the airfield at Babelthuap and bombing enemy ships in Malakal and Koror harbors. No Japanese aircraft appeared in opposition.[62]

For the remainder of the Peleliu operation, naval gunfire provided close and deep support fire as well as harassing, interdiction, and night illumination fire. The lack of suitable observation points precluded the use of close supporting fires in many instances, so that they were not used as extensively as in other operations. Air spotting for deep supporting fire was used extensively in neutralizing enemy reserves, gun positions, supply and ammunition dumps, and observation and communication points. Air spotting proved to be one of the best and most effective means of fire control.

Harassing fire was used rather extensively. It was employed principally at night and was delivered in areas well clear of the front line. Ships firing night harassing fire also doubled for emergency call fire or illumination. Interdiction fire was employed in the areas at the north end of Peleliu and on the nearby island of Ngesebus to prevent enemy reinforcements from being brought up. Star shell illumination was used extensively. It was regulated, as were other fires, so that it would not illuminate friendly units and produce casualties among friendly troops. The rate of fire varied from 1 round per minute to 10 or 15 rounds per hour.[63]

One lesson that could be learned on Peleliu was that tanks could survive a pre-landing bombardment, and that naval gunfire and air could not prevent hostile tanks from closing on the landing force. "What the enemy achieved with thin-skinned, obsolete tankettes, a potential enemy possessing powerful tanks in great numbers might presumably also accomplish, thus posing a grave potential threat against a landing force."[64] On the other hand, no two tactical situations are exactly alike. During the Sicily operation, for instance, naval gunners were the major factor in breaking up a tank attack on the beaches near Gela.[65]

The 1st Marine Division did not have a Marine naval gunfire officer, and no officers in the division had been trained for such an assignment. As a result of its experiences on Peleliu, the 1st Marine Division recommended the selection of artillery officers for naval

[62] Morison, *Leyte*, p. 39.

[63] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx K, p. 6.

[64] *Stuart ltr.*

[65] For a detailed account of this incident, see Samuel Eliot Morison, *Sicily-Salerno-Anzio (January 1943–June 1944)—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, v. IX, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), pp. 103-104.

gunfire training. Another recommendation was the addition of a division naval liaison officer with a team, and three regimental naval gunfire liaison teams to the JASCO. Naval gunfire was stopped during practically every air strike. The 1st Marine Division felt that this practice should be the exception rather than the general rule, if in the opinion of the commanding officer such fire did not endanger friendly aircraft.[66]

Aside from a temporary halt to the unloading of supplies during periods of stormy weather, the Peleliu operation was not beset by any major supply difficulties. The pioneer battalion, using one company of engineers, formed the framework for the division shore party. The commanding officer of the pioneer battalion was the division shore party commander. The shore party was responsible for handling supplies on and behind the beach and for processing casualties recovered from division units.

Initially, the operation of the shore party was decentralized, *i.e.* a detachment of the regimental shore party went in with each assault battalion. When the infantry regimental headquarters landed, the regimental shore party commander took over and consolidated battalion shore party operations for the regimental beach. In turn, the division shore party commander took over shore party operations on all beaches and determined what beaches were to continue as supply beaches. Operations of the shore party were closely coordinated with those of the naval beach parties. By the time that all assault troops, equipment, and supplies had gone ashore, the 16th Field Depot, a supply agency of the Island Command, took over the supply dumps. Subsequently, the field depot also supplied those components of the 81st Infantry Division operating on Peleliu.

The distribution and forwarding of supplies caused little difficulty, because distances were extremely short and amphibian tractors and DUKWs, in many instances, were able to move directly from the water to regimental dumps. During the last days of September, bad weather caused unloading difficulties. When the ration level reached four days' supply, the troops were put on two meals per day, and MAG–11 flew in 42,000 Ten-in-One Rations.[67] The rugged ground in which the troops had to operate caused excessive wear and tear on clothing. When organizational supplies became exhausted, a total of 1,000 suits of utilities, 5,000 pairs of socks, and 1,000 pairs of shoes were flown in from Guam.[68]

The attachment of a field depot unit to the 1st Marine Division was an innovation that worked extremely well. As expressed by the Commanding Officer, 1st Service Battalion:

> . . . this subjected the depot to the direct orders of the Division Commander and resulted in excellent assistance and cooperation without the necessity of dealing with them through a Corps Headquarters. All the difference between ordering and asking.[69]

All air strikes immediately preceding D-Day and for 13 days thereafter were

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[67] Smith, *Narrative*, p. 77.

[68] *Ibid.* p. 78.

[69] Col John Kaluf ltr to CMC, datd 7Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File.*

flown by Navy pilots from fast and escort carriers. The 1st Marine Division was able to make certain recommendations and requests for air strikes against specific and important targets to Commander Support Air after the arrival of the Western Attack Force in the staging area. These requests and recommendations were followed as closely as possible within the limitations of the already existent air plan. This was the only opportunity offered the division to participate in or make recommendations regarding planning for air support.[70]

As a result of planned missions and call missions requested by battalion, regimental, and division air teams, over 300 missions were flown from D-Day through 28 September. During this period of time, carrier-based aircraft dropped 620 tons of bombs of all types including napalm. After D plus 13 it was felt that carrier-based air could no longer be profitably employed, so naval air support was secured at the end of 28 September.[71]

The efficiency of naval air support was readily apparent while fighting was in progress in the level terrain on the southern portion of Peleliu, where it was relatively easy to spot targets and mark and distinguish front lines. When the fighting moved into the rugged hills on the northern half of the island, the effectiveness of air support diminished greatly. This decrease was due to the difficulty in marking friendly and enemy terrain, inaccuracy of available maps, and the control of all missions directly from the headquarters ship. In no instance was any battalion air liaison party permitted to control or direct missions, even though by reason of its forward location, the party was in possession of the latest information. On the basis of these experiences, the 1st Marine Division recommended that in subsequent operations, the battalion and regimental air liaison teams be allowed to control aircraft directly from the ground. The advantage of this was obvious, since the man on the spot would be able to coach the strike on the target better than an air control officer on board the headquarters ship.[72]

In contrast with the more effective aerial bombing, the strafing missions carried out by support air were considered to have little or no value. Naval aircraft began and completed strafing runs at too high an altitude: they seldom made pullouts under 1,800 feet.[73]

The ineffectiveness of such procedure was particularly apparent during the pre-landing attacks on the Peleliu beaches and subsequent strafing runs in the hills. On the basis of this experience, the 1st Marine Division felt that at most, such strafing could result in keeping the enemy pinned down for the duration of the strafing run.

The employment of VMF–114 on Peleliu on and after 28 September put an end to the deficiencies of the avail-

[70] According to Navy sources, the selection of Pavuvu as a camp for the 1st Marine Division was an important factor in impeding close joint planning for air support. The stepped-up time schedule was also involved. *Eller ltr.*

[71] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx L, p. 1.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[73] Some Navy squadrons, such as VC-21 based on Marcus Island, reported pullouts from strafing runs ranging from 300 and 1,000 feet. See *Eller ltr.*

able air support. The close support given by the Corsairs flown by Marine aviators proved extremely effective during the landing on Ngesebus. The effectiveness of subsequent bombing missions against the Umurbrogol Pocket was limited only by the difficult terrain and the relative invulnerability of underground Japanese defenses to aerial attack. General Rupertus, often reticent and sparing in praise, found the close air support furnished by VMF-114 to be "executed in a manner leaving little to be desired."[74]

The Peleliu operation was unique in that it featured the first Marine aviation support of a Marine landing since Bougainville. It was also the first time since Guadalcanal that the 1st Marine Division had received close air support by Marines. Peleliu, in addition, had the distinction of featuring the very first Marine air support of a Marine amphibious operation in the Central Pacific.

Results of the napalm strikes carried out during the Peleliu operation were generally disappointing, probably because of an erroneous concept about the proper employment of this weapon. This lack of understanding of the capabilities and limitations of napalm is best illustrated by the following account:

> A few days before D-Day, while we were at sea, our regimental intelligence officer spoke at a conference of all officers of BLT 1/7. We had been told that a certain aircraft carrier, loaded with napalm bombs, was to plaster the southwestern peninsula (our battalion objective) to burn out the Japs with this sticky, inflammable substance. But until the date of this conference, the report had come in that the fuses for these bombs had not arrived. At the conference, however, we were told that the fuses had finally arrived, had been delivered to the carrier by air, and at that very moment were being affixed to these wondrous bombs. The Intelligence Officer announced with some excitement and eloquence, and with sincere belief in what he was saying, that these remarkable bombs, even though they may not splatter each Jap, gave such intense, prolonged heat that they would literally suffocate any holed-up Jap because of their huge appetite for oxygen. Furthermore, this peninsula would be denuded of vegetation. Now, what infantryman would not relish an objective stripped of concealing vegetation and devoid of live enemy soldiers? Incredible as it may sound now, it was generally believed to be quite truthful. We had not seen these bombs. Napalm was a war wonder. And there is the human tendency to enfold any and all optimism at a time like this. This information . . . was quickly disseminated to the troops and was received with cheers.[75]

The capture of Peleliu and Angaur was very costly in American lives. At the end of the Peleliu operation the 1st Marine Division (Reinforced) listed its casualties sustained on Peleliu as 1,121 officers and men killed in action, 5,142 wounded in action, and 73 missing in action.[76] For the period of 23 September to 27 November 1944, the 81st Infantry Division listed its casualties on Peleliu as 277 killed in action or dead of wounds and 1,008 wounded or injured in action.[77] Casualties of the 81st Infantry Division on Angaur for the period of 17 September-30 October 1944, were 260 killed or died of wounds and 1,354 wounded or injured in action.[78]

[74] Quoted in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 257.

[75] *Worden ltr.*

[76] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx G, p. 2.

[77] *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, Peleliu, Anx F, p. 109.

[78] *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, Angaur, Anx P, p. 112.

Subsequent tallies show certain revisions and deviations from the earlier findings. A later figure for Marine casualties on Peleliu lists 1,252 as dead (killed in action, died of wounds, and missing presumed dead) and 5,274 wounded.[79] In a later compilation, casualties of the 81st Infantry Division on Peleliu, Angaur, and the smaller islands off Peleliu totalled 542 killed and 2,736 wounded or injured in action.[80] The subsequent revisions of figures contained in the earlier official after-action reports are the result of additional information not included in earlier reports. This would include a number of wounded who subsequently died of wounds sustained in the operation.[81]

The exact number of Japanese killed on Peleliu will presumably never be known, though a reasonably close figure can be obtained through the process of deduction. Even prior to the landings on Peleliu, Japanese strength on that island had been estimated at between 10,320 and 10,700. If the 302 Japanese captured are deducted from a median of 10,500, it follows that at least 10,200 of the enemy must have died on the island, even when allowance is made for a small number that may have escaped to Japanese-held islands to the north. Since an additional 600 Japanese went ashore on Peleliu while operations there were in progress, a total of 10,900 could be considered a reasonably conservative figure, which is generally supported elsewhere.[82]

PELELIU IN RETROSPECT[83]

More than two decades have passed since the 1st Marine Division assaulted Peleliu. From those that had participated in the campaign, there has been no lack of superlatives in its description. A former Commandant of the Marine Corps has called it ". . . one of the least publicized and most difficult campaigns of World War II." [84] The official U.S. Army history calls the Palaus operation ". . . one of the bloodiest battles of the war." [85] In commenting on the Peleliu campaign, Admiral Fort expressed himself as follows:

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[79] Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 183.

[80] Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 573.

[81] Differences in casualty reporting and accounting systems have resulted in a further variance. Based on the most recent official Marine Corps statistics available at the time of this writing, 1,794 Americans died on Peleliu and adjacent islands during the Peleliu Campaign and approximately 7,800 were wounded or injured in action.

[82] The Army version of the Peleliu Operation lists over 11,000 Japanese killed on Peleliu, and 2,600 more on Angaur and the smaller islands off Peleliu. Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 572. Morison, in *Leyte*, p. 46, cites the same total of 13,600 Japanese killed on Peleliu and vicinity. Speaking of Peleliu Island alone, Isely and Crowl estimate a total of 10,695 enemy dead up to 20 October 1944, in *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 411. In the light of the documentary material available and other evidence, the figure of 7,000 personnel on Peleliu (Army and Navy combined) advanced by General Inoue in a postwar interview appears far too low to be credible. Inoue interview in *Worden ltr.*

[83] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Smith, *Narrative;* Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once A Marine;* Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines.*

[84] Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once A Marine*, p. 274.

[85] Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 573.

> I think those who have taken the trouble to investigate are in general agreement that the capture of Peleliu was the most difficult amphibious operation in the Pacific War. . . . I believe that the Palaus operation has been underestimated. Were it not for the untimely deaths of Generals Geiger and Rupertus so soon afterwards, I feel sure that they would have helped to clarify the situation. Iwo Jima was done by the so-called Central Pacific "First Team" and received widespread publicity and acclaim. As General Geiger once said, "The only difference between Iwo Jima and Peleliu was that at Iwo Jima there were twice as many Japs on an island twice as large, and they had three Marine Divisions to take it while we had one Marine Division to take Peleliu."[86]

The above statement, made by the commander in direct tactical control at Peleliu and Angaur, bears closer scrutiny. It not only lends emphasis to what others have said about the severity of the fighting on Peleliu, but also adds a new note with respect to the numerical adequacy of the force committed. General Geiger's comment, as quoted by Admiral Fort, leaves little doubt that he was referring to a failure to provide an adequate reserve for the 1st Marine Division. Of three regiments employed to assault Peleliu, only one battalion remained in division and another in regimental reserve. Had the 81st Infantry Division been committed on Peleliu when it became apparent that Japanese resistance there did not permit the speedy conquest of the island, the landing on Angaur could have been postponed until completion of operations on Peleliu. This conclusion is supported by General Inoue, who subsequently stated ". . . it was estimated that at least three American divisions would land on either the southern or the eastern beaches. . . ."[87]

In view of the heavy American casualties on Peleliu, opinion has been divided whether the gains derived from the capture of the island were worth the heavy cost in American lives. Comments from historians and military leaders alike question whether the results were worth the effort. In the words of one historian:

> . . . doubts are easily raised in the light of the fact that eleventh-hour changes in plans for subsequent operations—notably the invasion of the Philippines—made it impossible to fit the Palaus into the operational role originally planned for them. . . . Nevertheless, with the information available to them in the summer and early fall of 1944, Admiral Nimitz, General MacArthur, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff all believed that only by securing the Palaus could the Allies dominate Japanese bases in the western Pacific and insure the safety of forces moving toward the Philippines.[88]

Among the military leaders who felt strongly that Peleliu should not have been invaded, Admiral Halsey perhaps is best qualified to voice his opinion, for it was he who opposed the operation from the very outset. In commenting on Peleliu, Admiral Halsey had this to say:

> I had been weighing this operation ever since it had been broached to me, early in May, at a conference with King and Nimitz in San Francisco, and the more I weighed it, the less I liked it. Ulithi had a useful anchorage, but I saw no need for any of the other islands. Yap's only value was as a minor staging

[86] *Fort ltr.*

[87] *Inoue Interrogation.*

[88] Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, pp. 573-575.

> point for aircraft. The Palaus threatened the route between New Guinea and the Philippines, but although they also offered an anchorage—Kossol Roads—and several sites for airfields, I felt that they would have to be bought at a prohibitive price in casualties. In short, I feared another Tarawa—and I was right.[89]

By far the most outspoken comment comes from another naval officer who was deeply involved in the Peleliu Operation. In reviewing the campaign he forthrightly came to the conclusion that:

> . . . if military leaders (including naval) were gifted with the same accuracy of foresight that they are with hindsight, undoubtedly the assault and capture of the Palaus would never have been attempted.[90]

On the surface, the above comments carry considerable weight, the more so if it is considered that the airfields on Peleliu and Angaur, the primary objectives of the assault, ultimately played only a minor part in the liberation of the Philippines. The airfield on Angaur was not ready for use by bombers until 21 October, the day after American forces had landed on Leyte, and it was 17 November before the first bomber mission was flown against a target in the Philippines from a field in the Palaus.[91]

What, then, were the advantages, if any, that accrued to the United States through the capture of Peleliu and Angaur? First, the seizure of these islands prevented their use as bases by enemy aircraft and submarines. By late November, Angaur-based bombers rendered vital support to American forces on Luzon. Beyond that, some 43,000 Japanese were effectively neutralized in the northern Palau islands, where they remained until their unconditional surrender at the end of the war, of no more use to the Empire or the beleaguered Japanese forces in the Philippines than if they had been stationed at the North Pole. Ulithi Atoll in American hands provided an excellent fleet anchorage and assumed major importance during subsequent operations in the Pacific Theater, particularly as a staging area for forces destined for Okinawa.

In retrospect, it appears idle conjecture whether an invasion of the Philippines could have been successful had there been no invasion of the Palau Islands. Military planning is based on a sound appraisal of strategic and tactical factors. It is a logical process of reasoning by which a commander considers all the circumstances affecting the military situation and arrives at a decision which determines the course of action he should take to accomplish his mission. On the basis of the information available to the planners of STALEMATE II during the spring and summer of 1944, the situation called for an operation against Peleliu, Angaur, and adjacent islands. Changes in the basic plan were instituted as necessary to conform to changes in the overall situation.

Peleliu vindicated the amphibious doctrines developed by the Marine Corps in many years of careful study and analysis. The operation proved once again that an amphibious assault on a

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[89] Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, pp. 194-195.

[90] *Oldendorf ltr.*

[91] Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, p. 372.

heavily fortified island was feasible. In a way it closely resembled previous landings in the Gilberts and Marshalls and gave a preview of things to come on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. At least one source has commented that ". . . the most valuable contribution to victory of this costly operation was to prepare the Army and Marine Corps for what they would experience at Okinawa."[92]

The operation against Peleliu had one more similarity with the Battle of Tarawa. At the conclusion of both campaigns, the Marine Corps received considerable criticism because of the high number of casualties. The truth applying to the cost of such operations has been set forth so aptly by a former Commandant of the Marine Corps that his reply to similar criticism after Tarawa bears repeating in this context:

> . . . A landing attack is recognized by all military experts as being the most difficult and costly of all forms of attack. Losses at Tarawa were heavy, and losses will be heavy in future attacks of this nature. . . .
>
> . . . In the case of a heavily defended small island such as Tarawa . . . the defender can concentrate his forces against any landing attempt. . . . The attacker attempts to "soften" resistance by naval gunfire and aerial bombardment. Where the defenses are very strongly constructed, as at Tarawa, the gunfire and aerial bombardment have only partial effect. Many of the hostile installations will remain operative and fire from them must be faced.
>
> No one regrets the losses in such an attack more than does the Marine Corps itself. No one realizes more than does the Marine Corps that there is no royal road to Tokyo. We must steel our people to the same realization.[93]

In the overall picture of a global conflict, Peleliu was merely a stepping stone towards the ultimate objective, a battle not slated for fame in the outside world, yet an event that left its permanent mark on the men who fought it. In conclusion, it seems fitting to quote an echo from the past; words uttered long ago in a different war, and on another battlefield, yet singularly appropriate in this context. Let it be said of the once cruel and inhospitable soil of Peleliu that ". . . the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add and detract. . . ."

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[92] Morison, *Leyte*, p. 47.

[93] Statement by General Alexander A. Vandegrift to Senator Walsh, 15Dec44, as quoted in Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*, pp. 235–236.

PART IV

Marines in the Philippines

Background and Planning [1]

Even though relatively few Marines participated in the liberation of the Philippines, the support they furnished and the services they performed were out of proportion to their small numbers. Marine artillerymen under the command of Brigadier General Thomas E. Bourke supported Army troops on Leyte; Marine pilots commanded by Colonel Clayton C. Jerome bombed and strafed assigned targets and flew fighter missions throughout the campaign, under the overall direction of General MacArthur's air commander, Lieutenant General George C. Kenney. Even more important were the accomplishments of the pilots who developed, crystallized, and refined the doctrine and techniques for the close air support of ground troops. On Leyte, Luzon, Mindanao, and other islands, Marine pilots convinced skeptical Army ground commanders that aviation was capable of rendering valuable and effective support to the frontline troops. These pilots proved their worth by assisting in the capture of objectives and helping to meet the operational timetable. It was here, in the rain, mud, and jungle of the Philippines, that Marine aviation put the new doctrine of close air support to the test.

No individual can be more closely identified with the liberation of the Philippines than General Douglas MacArthur. During the darkest days of the war the general had pledged his return to the Philippines. From the time that General MacArthur left Corregidor in 1942 to take over the new Allied command formed in Australia, the liberation of the Philippines dominated his thoughts. Only a short time after establishing General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), in Brisbane the general initiated planning for that return. More than two years were to pass before these plans were fulfilled.

During this period of time, the command setup in the Pacific Theater underwent several changes. As early as the Guadalcanal campaign, General MacArthur had wielded strategic control over most of the Solomons. Inasmuch as the SWPA commander at the time was preoccupied with operations in eastern New Guinea, Admiral Halsey

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Maj Charles W. Boggs, Jr., *Marine Aviation in the Philippines* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1951), hereafter Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines;* Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War; The War Reports of General of the Army George C. Marshall, General of the Army Henry H. Arnold, and Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1947), hereafter *War Reports* with appropriate originator; USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns;* Morison, *Leyte.* Where location citations for documentary sources for this part are missing, the material is in the files of the Reference Branch, Historical Division, HQMC.

was given control over the entire Solomons chain in addition to the operational command he already exercised at Guadalcanal.[2]

Initially, the JCS viewed the importance of liberating the Philippines with skepticism. A compromise between the JCS and General MacArthur resulted in a two-pronged campaign in the Pacific during 1943 and 1944. Admiral Nimitz' forces in the Central Pacific received priority in their drive through the Marshalls, the Marianas, and the Carolines while General MacArthur's forces moved northward along the New Guinea coast.

A JCS directive of 12 March 1944[3] guided operations in the Pacific Theater for the remainder of the year. As it became apparent that the Japanese power in the Pacific was waning and the two-pronged advance continued, the Joint Chiefs decided that the entire Pacific timetable should be advanced. This revision was based on a sound premise. The campaign in the Marshalls, in February 1944, had brought speedy results. Carrier strikes, in mid-February 1944, against the fortress of Truk proved that Japanese air and naval strength was far weaker than had been assumed. In the end, General MacArthur had been able to advance the target date for the Admiralties operation by a full month.

The 12 March directive was of crucial importance to General MacArthur. Even though it fell short of his expectations by not giving him full priority for his return to the Philippines, the directive did authorize the capture of supporting bases and provided for the movement of MacArthur's forces into Mindanao, the southernmost of the Philippine islands. General MacArthur's air commander, General Kenney, was "dumbfounded" to learn that the Joint Chiefs seemed to attach more importance to Nimitz' Central Pacific drive than to any other campaign in the Pacific Theater.[4] Despite the limitations imposed on further operations in the Southwest Pacific by this change in strategy, the SWPA staff continued to plan for the most ambitious action possible under the circumstances.

In late March 1944, Admiral Nimitz visited General MacArthur in Brisbane for a planning conference. The immediate subject under discussion was the Hollandia operation, though it was inevitable that the two military leaders would also bring up the invasion of the Philippines.[5] As a result of this conference, MacArthur and Nimitz set up, subject to JCS approval, an operations schedule which called for SWPA forces to land on Mindanao on 15 November 1944.

The Joint Chiefs in March 1944 did not make any provisions for operations in the Philippines following the invasion of Mindanao. Strategy in the Pacific for 1944 called for SWPA forces to move gradually northwest along the New Guinea coast, occupy the islands northwest of the Vogelkop Peninsula,

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[2] JCS 238/5D, 28Mar43 had placed operations in the Solomons under Halsey's direct control subject to MacArthur's "general directions," as cited in Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 1.

[3] JCS 713/4, 12Mar44. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[4] Kenney, *Reports*.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 377.

and seize a foothold on Mindanao. American forces in the Central Pacific were to advance towards Japan by way of the Marianas and westward towards the Philippines by way of the Palaus.[6]

While MacArthur's and Nimitz' forces were drafting plans to implement the 12 March directive, the Joint Chiefs conducted a complete reappraisal of the situation in the Pacific and concluded that operations there could be further accelerated. As a result of these deliberations, the Joint Chiefs sent American commanders in the Pacific three alternate proposals for consideration and comment. One of these was revolutionary in that it suggested bypassing the Philippines in favor of Formosa. The other two dealt with advancing target dates and bypassing presently selected objectives. Neither MacArthur nor Nimitz favored the new proposals, and both commanders insisted that the operations as proposed by MacArthur in RENO V were sound.[7] Nimitz considered it important to take reasonable shortcuts and exploit favorable situations as they arose. He felt that complete control over sea and air was absolutely essential in major assault operations. Naval superiority was assured, but an invasion of Formosa could succeed only if Japanese airfields on Luzon were first neutralized by land-based aircraft. CinCPac felt that aircraft carriers should not be used to support prolonged operations ashore but should be utilized to carry out strategic missions.[8]

General MacArthur strongly opposed any direct operations against Japan unless air bases were first secured on Luzon. Admiral King, on the other hand, insisted that Formosa should be seized before the Japanese had a chance to reinforce it. In the end General MacArthur won his point, but not until the President had intervened. A new operations schedule called for Southwest Pacific forces to occupy Morotai on 15 September, followed by the invasion of Mindanao on 20 December. Once these two objectives had been secured, the forces of the Southwest Pacific and Central Pacific commands would jointly assault either Luzon or Formosa and Amoy off the China coast.

On 15 June 1944 General MacArthur, as Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area, reassumed control of the area west of 159 degrees East Longitude and south of the Equator. This reacquisition included most of the Solomon Islands west of Guadalcanal. Admiral Halsey relinquished the title of Commander, South Pacific (ComSoPac) to Vice Admiral John H. Newton and returned to sea as Commander, Third Fleet. Due to this change in boundaries, MacArthur regained not only the area he had previously controlled but all units located there.

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[6] For a detailed account of the roles of Admirals Nimitz and Halsey and Generals MacArthur and Sutherland in altering these plans, see Morison, *Leyte*, pp. 13–15.

[7] The RENO plans provided for the approach to and recapture of the Philippines. They had originated within General MacArthur's SWPA headquarters.

[8] USSBS, Military Analysis Division, *Employment of Forces Under the Southwest Pacific Command* (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 36.

TARGET: PHILIPPINES[9]

The Philippines consist of more than 7,000 islands of varying size with a land area of roughly 115,000 square miles. Located only 500 miles off the mainland of Asia, the Philippines occupy a strategic position in the Pacific in relation to southeast Asia, China, and Japan. The islands extend from the vicinity of Formosa in the north to Borneo and Celebes in the south, a distance of 1,150 miles. Astride the trade routes from Japan and China to southeast Asia and the former East Indies, now known as Indonesia, the islands are centrally located within 700 miles of Formosa and Hong Kong and 1,500 miles from Singapore; only 1,800 miles separate Tokyo from Manila, the capital of the Philippines.

Among the islands within the archipelago, Luzon ranks foremost in size and population. Next in size is Mindanao, followed by a large group of islands in the center of the archipelago commonly known as the Visayas, consisting of Samar, Panay, Cebu, Leyte, Negros, and a number of unnamed smaller islands. (See Map 16).

A tropical climate prevails throughout the Philippines, with alternating wet and dry seasons, though these are not so pronounced on Mindanao and southern Luzon as in other areas of the archipelago. Monsoon winds hit the islands from the southwest between June and September; northeasterly winds prevail from October through April. Mountains with elevations up to 10,000 feet are common in the Philippines; these ranges are often surrounded by narrow coastal plains culminating in sand beaches at the shoreline.

In 1941 the population of the Philippines numbered 17,000,000. Manila had 684,000 inhabitants and was the largest city in the archipelago. The people of the Philippines are predominantly of Malayan origin, though about 30,000 Japanese and 117,000 Chinese also resided in the islands. A peculiar language problem exists throughout the archipelago in that no less than 65 dialects are spoken there, and even though certain similarities exist, natives from different parts of the Philippines frequently find it difficult to communicate with each other.

Spain had gained a foothold on the islands in 1565, when Spaniards established their first permanent settlement in the Philippines on Cebu. Spanish possession of the archipelago continued until 1898, when the United States wrested the islands from Spain. As a result of lengthy foreign domination, a curious mixture of Oriental and Occidental cultures blended, resulting in the adoption of Islamic religion and Moslem customs in the south; Christianity and European culture were predominant in the remainder of the islands. When the United States gained possession of the Philippines, a small percentage of the population spoke Spanish. By the outbreak of World War II, it was

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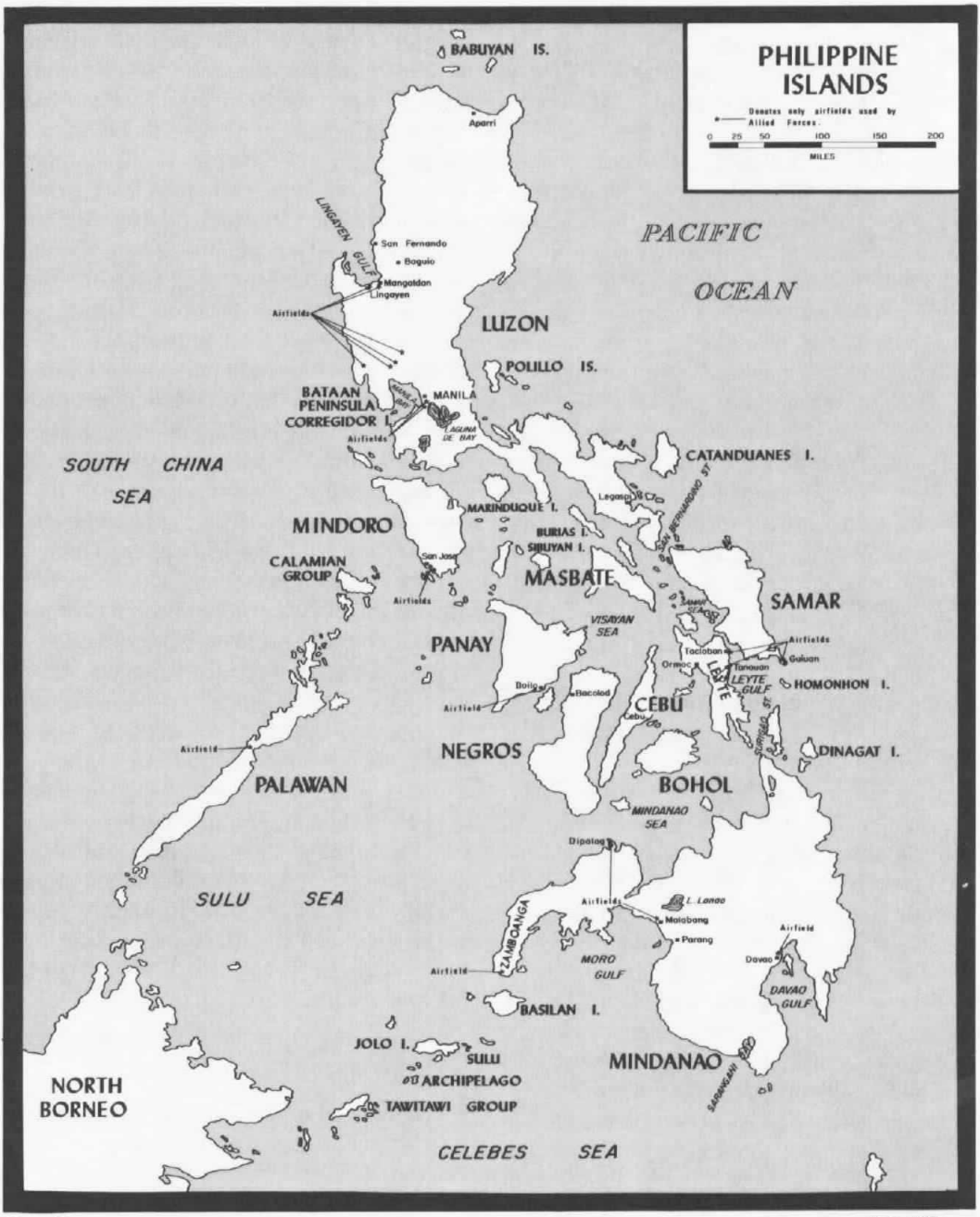
[9] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), hereafter Morton, *Fall of the Philippines;* LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. I (Washington: HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC, 1958), hereafter Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal.*



Map 16 E.L. Wilson

estimated that about one quarter of the population spoke English.

The Philippines were predominantly devoted to agriculture; principal crops were rice, sugar, corn, hemp, and tobacco. Mining for gold, silver, and other metals was carried on in mountain areas but never achieved major importance before the outbreak of the war.

The dispersal of the islands over a large area and the resulting decentralization reduced the need for roads and railroads; inter-island commerce depended primarily on coastal shipping. The only exception to the sparse rail and road net was Luzon, where routes of communication were somewhat more adequate to support military operations. Prior to World War II there were only 50,000 motor vehicles in the Philippines. Principal towns and cities in the archipelago are linked by telephone, telegraph, and radio. Transcontinental telephone and telegraph lines radiate from Manila to provide communications with the remainder of the globe.

Manila owed its importance as capital of the Philippines to its proximity to Manila Bay, one of the best natural harbors in the Far East. Several small islands at the approach to the bay split it into two channels. The largest and most strategically located island is Corregidor, whose defense in World War II was to become a classic of heroic efforts.

Following the acquisition of the Philippines and the pacification of the islands, the United States maintained a permanent garrison in the archipelago. This force numbered about 10,000 men in the mid-thirties, when a Commonwealth Government was established. Up to this time the defense of the Philippines had been a purely American responsibility. Even though the 10,000-man force was a U.S. Army unit, half of the garrison consisted of Filipinos. Except for this force and a Philippine Constabulary organized at the turn of the century, the Filipinos did not have any military tradition that could serve as a basis for a national army.

During the summer of 1935, General Douglas MacArthur, then Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, became military advisor to the new Philippine government at the request of the first President of the Philippines, Manuel L. Quezon. General MacArthur's mission was to establish a national army to consist of 10,000 regulars and a reserve of 400,000. Since these figures were to be reached in 1946, at the time that the Philippines were to gain independence, progress in setting up the Army was slow. When war suddenly came to the archipelago, the combined American and Filipino forces were unable to stem the determined Japanese onslaught; the fall of the islands became inevitable despite the solidarity and heroism of Americans and Filipinos fighting side by side. As the fortunes of war changed and Japanese power in the Pacific receded, the Philippines once again figured prominently as another milestone on the long, hard road to Tokyo in Allied planning for the conquest of Japan.

ENEMY SITUATION, DISPOSITION, AND PLANS[10]

By the end of June 1944, the Japanese military situation had greatly deterio-

[10] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns;* Military History Section, FEC, Japanese Monograph No. 50, Central Pacific Air Operations Record, 1953, (OCMH), here-

rated. Serious Allied interference with Japanese sea commerce, and piercing of the outer circle of the defenses ringing Japan had underscored the seriousness of the situation. Far from slackening, Allied operations in the Pacific were still gaining momentum, and Japan was faced with the threat of becoming separated from those islands in the South and Southwestern Pacific that constituted a major source of oil. According to Admiral Soemu Toyoda, Commander in Chief of the Japanese *Combined Fleet:*

> . . . the biggest cause of fall in production, especially in aircraft and air material, was the effect of your bombing on the plants—factories—in Japan proper; but as regards the effects on our war strength on the whole, I think the greatest effect was felt after all by the lack of ships and consequent inability to bring material from the south.[11]

United States control of the Central Pacific forced the Japanese to establish a line of defense extending from Japan proper through the Ryukyu Islands, Formosa, the Philippines, and finally to Timor, Java, and Sumatra. Since the Japanese expected the decisive battles of the war to be fought near the Japanese homeland, *Imperial Japanese Headquarters* initiated four contingency plans in anticipation of decisive operations. These plans, designated *Sho* or *Sho-Go* Operations,[12] visualized four possible Allied operations during the summer and autumn of 1944. *Sho*-1 envisioned a decisive battle in the Philippine Islands by the end of August; *Sho*-2, a decisive campaign in the Formosa area and Ryukyus at about the same time; *Sho*-3 and 4, decisive battles in various parts of Japan proper by late October.

Since *Sho*-1 and -2 were considered the most imminent, the Japanese gave full priority to strengthening their defenses in these areas. The Army and Navy agreed that an all-out land defense in the Philippines would be made only if Luzon was invaded. In the event of an American invasion of the Central or Southern Philippines, only air and naval forces would seek decisive action.

The defense of the Philippines from American attack received priority in the minds of the Japanese high command. Reinforcements were dispatched to the northern part of the archipelago by the Japanese Army, which harbored a distrust of the capabilities of the Navy in stemming the American tide of victory. Once the Americans had committed themselves to a specific objective in the Philippines, a mobile counterlanding force was to throw back or at least delay the invader.

By summer of 1944, the Japanese Fleet was hopelessly outnumbered and outclassed, yet ready to fight wherever American forces were landing. The Japanese were fully aware that land-based forces in the Philippines did not stand a chance at success unless they were backed up by the *Combined Fleet.* For

after *Japanese CenPac Air Ops Rec;* James A. Field, Jr., *The Japanese at Leyte Gulf* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1947), hereafter Field, *Japanese at Leyte.*

[11] USSBS, NavAnalysisDiv, *Interrogation of Japanese Officials,* 2 vols. (Washington: GPO 1946), Interrogation No. 378, Adm Soemu Toyoda, IJN, II, p. 313, hereafter *Toyoda Interrogation.*

[12] The Japanese word "*Sho-Go*" stands for "Conquest" or "Victory Operation."

this reason, there was no choice but to gamble the entire fleet. In the words of Admiral Toyoda:

> If things went well we might obtain unexpectedly good results; but if the worst should happen, there was a chance that we would lose the entire fleet; but I felt that that chance had to be taken.... There would be no sense in saving the fleet at the expense of the loss of the Philippines.[13]

During the late summer of 1944, the *Fourteenth Japanese Area Army* under the command of Lieutenant General Shigenori Kuroda was charged with the ground defense of the Philippines. This army consisted of about 260,000 men stationed throughout the archipelago. (See Chart 2). Under the overall command of the *Fourteenth Area Army*, the *Thirty-Fifth Army* was to defend the Visayas and Mindanao. The Japanese *Combined Fleet*, under Admiral Toyoda, consisted of a *Striking Force*, the *First Mobile Fleet*, as well as the *Second, Third, Fifth*, and *Sixth Fleets*. Japanese air defense of the Philippines was furnished by the *First Air Fleet* of the Imperial Navy and the *Fourth Air Army*. Subsequently, the *Second Air Fleet* was moved from Formosa to the Philippines and joined with the *First Air Fleet* and the *Fourth Air Army* to form the *First Combined Air Force* under Vice Admiral Shigeru Fukudome. At that time Japanese air strength in the Philippines consisted of 400 aircraft, two-thirds of which were operational.[14]

The plan evolved by *Imperial General Headquarters* for the defense of the Philippines called for the commitment of 10 divisions and 5 brigades. The main force, consisting of 5 divisions and 2 brigades, was to be stationed on Luzon. Four divisions and two brigades were to defend the southern Philippines. One division and one brigade stood by in China and Formosa, ready for immediate movement to the Philippines once an American landing became imminent.

In the end, lack of cooperation between the Japanese armed services resulted in a compromise, which really failed to please any of the Japanese commanders involved.[15] The *Fourth Air Army*, in loose cooperation with the Army and Navy, planned to annihilate the Americans when the invasion force hit the Philippines. Army and Navy aviation units were to destroy American landing fields and carrier-based

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 280-281.

[14] Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, p. 346.

[15] "Small manpower and large area to defend, that is how we planned to wage the fight on Luzon Island alone, but if we gave the American Air Force a chance to gain a foothold on islands other than Luzon, these would seriously interfere with Japanese operations on land, sea, and air. So the Japanese decided to fight for any part of the Philippines. If Americans landed in Central or Southern Philippines or North, then the Japanese air and sea forces would have to bear the brunt of battle in an entirely different kind of fighting from ground operations on Luzon. This is something that the armed forces could not understand, that they had to have coordination. About air defense, Navy aviation wanted to fight American carriers and part of the Army air power would be used for this purpose. Army aviation was to concentrate on convoys and when Americans had landed and constructed air bases on land, then the Japanese were to attack there." Official Japanese comment, War History Office, Defense Agency of Japan, Mr. Susumu Nishiura ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3Div, HQMC dtd 16Dec66, in *Philippines Comment File*.

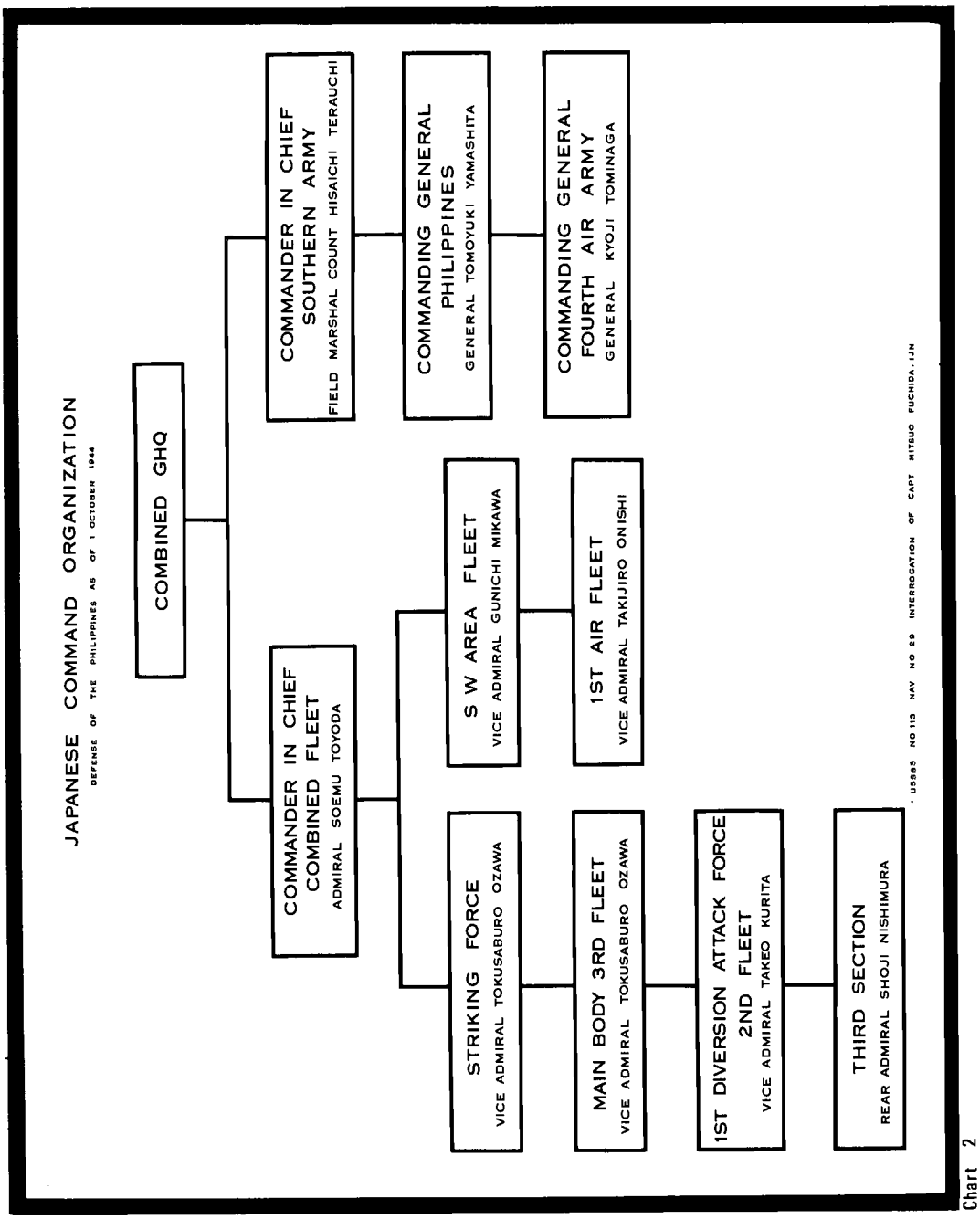

JAPANESE COMMAND ORGANIZATION
DEFENSE OF THE PHILIPPINES AS OF 1 OCTOBER 1944
COMBINED GHQ
COMMANDER IN CHIEF COMBINED FLEET
ADMIRAL SOEMU TOYODA
COMMANDER IN CHIEF SOUTHERN ARMY
FIELD MARSHAL COUNT HISAICHI TERAUCHI
COMMANDING GENERAL PHILIPPINES
GENERAL TOMOYUKI YAMASHITA
COMMANDING GENERAL FOURTH AIR ARMY
GENERAL KYOJI TOMINAGA
S W AREA FLEET
VICE ADMIRAL GUNICHI MIKAWA
1ST AIR FLEET
VICE ADMIRAL TAKIJIRO ONISHI
STRIKING FORCE
VICE ADMIRAL TOKUSABURO OZAWA
MAIN BODY 3RD FLEET
VICE ADMIRAL TOKUSABURO OZAWA
1ST DIVERSION ATTACK FORCE 2ND FLEET
VICE ADMIRAL TAKEO KURITA
THIRD SECTION
REAR ADMIRAL SHOJI NISHIMURA
USSBS NO 113 NAV NO 29 INTERROGATION OF CAPT MITSUO FUCHIDA, IJN

Chart 2

aircraft. Fighter units, based in the central and southern Philippines, were to be committed against the American main force. Japanese heavy bombers were to attack the American convoys; the fighters could be alternately employed against American aircraft or shipping.

A study of batttle lessons learned in previous campaigns had led the Japanese planners to conclude that a fight for annihilation at the beachhead did not hold much promise, and for this reason a resistance in depth similar to the one on Peleliu was projected. On 9 October, General Tomoyuki Yamashita assumed command over the *Fourteenth Area Army*, in place of General Kuroda, who was not deemed sufficiently aggressive to cope with the defense of the Philippines.

In preparation for the American invasion of the Philippines, the Japanese Navy planned to concentrate its strength for a decisive action in defense of Japan proper and of the chain of islands linking Japan with the southern islands. Once the Americans struck at any of these vital areas, the Japanese Navy was to fight a decisive battle with all the strength it could muster. The overall mission was to intercept and destroy the Americans within the operational sphere of Japanese land-based aircraft.

Even before the American invasion of the Philippines got under way, however, the Japanese suffered heavy losses in Army aircraft, carriers, and carrier-based planes. As a result, land-based Japanese aircraft would have to bear the brunt of the American attack. The timing of the American invasion of the Philippines also was a factor that caused concern to the Japanese. Admiral Toyoda expressed his sentiments in the following words:

> I expected your offensive against the Philippines would commence around August or September; that is not to say that we were prepared at the time to meet that offensive, for the reason that our forces, both Army and Navy, had lost practically all their supporting aircraft at the various operations and it took anywhere from four to five months to replenish the lost aircraft.[16]

When the Allied invasion came on 20 October 1944, uncertainty paralyzed the enemy and prevented him from taking immediate counteraction at the time when troops were en route to the shore and American shipping was extremely vulnerable to air attack. Admiral Toyoda delayed alerting his forces until American warships were actually observed entering Leyte Gulf. Several days were to pass before the Japanese Navy could pit its still formidable might against the U.S. Third and Seventh Fleets.

PLANNING TO RETURN[17]

The only Marines to participate in ground action in the Philippines were approximately 1,500 Marine artillerymen under the command of Brigadier General Thomas E. Bourke. The attachment of this Marine force, which consisted of the corps artillery of the V Amphibious Corps (hereafter VAC) to the Army XXIV Corps had a strange

[16] *Toyoda Interrogation*, p. 316.

[17] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II;* Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story.*

background. During the campaign in the Marianas (Operation FORAGER), most of the corps artillery of XXIV Corps had been detached to VAC.

In view of the circumstance, CinCPOA decided to attach elements of VAC artillery to the XXIV Corps for the Yap operation. Initially, Headquarters Battery, VAC artillery, three 155-mm gun battalions, two 155mm howitzer battalions, and one Army field artillery observation battalion were to support the assault on Yap. The three gun battalions were to include one Army and two Marine battalions; the two 155mm howitzer battalions were to consist of one Marine and one Army battalion each. Subsequently, because of a shortage of shipping, one Marine gun battalion was deleted.

While planning for the Yap operation was still in progress, the VAC units slated for attachment to the XXIV Corps were stationed in Hawaii, as was Headquarters, XXIV Corps. When the invasion of Yap was cancelled and planning for the recapture of Leyte got underway, the VAC artillerymen, still under the command of General Bourke, remained attached to the XXIV Corps.

The revamping of the command structure in the Southwest Pacific did not fail to leave an imprint on the organization of aviation units in the theater. Under the overall control of SWPA, Lieutenant General George C. Kenney had been commanding Allied Air Forces and the U.S. Fifth Air Force. Transfer of the U.S. Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and other Allied aviation units to SWPA made a revision of the air command structure necessary. General Kenney exercised a dual command over Allied Air Forces and the next lower echelon, the Far East Air Forces. (See Chart 3). The latter command consisted of the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces; units of the Royal Australian and the Royal New Zealand Air Forces, Aircraft Seventh Fleet (U. S. Navy), and Aircraft Northern Solomons with the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing came under Allied Air Forces.

Under the peculiarities of the command structure in the Pacific, it was more commonly the rule rather than the exception for a commander to exercise a dual function. Aircraft Northern Solomons (AirNorSols) was no exception. The headquarters, first established by Admiral Halsey in his capacity as ComSoPac, was a composite of Marine, Navy, New Zealand, Australian, and U.S. Army Air Forces units then based in the Solomons. Major General Ralph J. Mitchell, USMC, commanded AirNorSols and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW) simultaneously from his headquarters at Torokina, Bougainville Island. In addition to Marine aviation units, all remaining Allied aviation in the Solomons came under General Mitchell's command. Many of Mitchell's aviators were experienced and battle-hardened; others were new arrivals from the States getting their first taste of combat.

As early as May 1944, General Mitchell had made the rounds of various headquarters in Brisbane, Australia, in order to sell an idea. In addition to approaching General MacArthur, General Mitchell also conferred with the Commander of the Seventh Fleet, Vice Ad-

ORGANIZATION OF AIR COMMAND SWPA
15 JUNE 1944

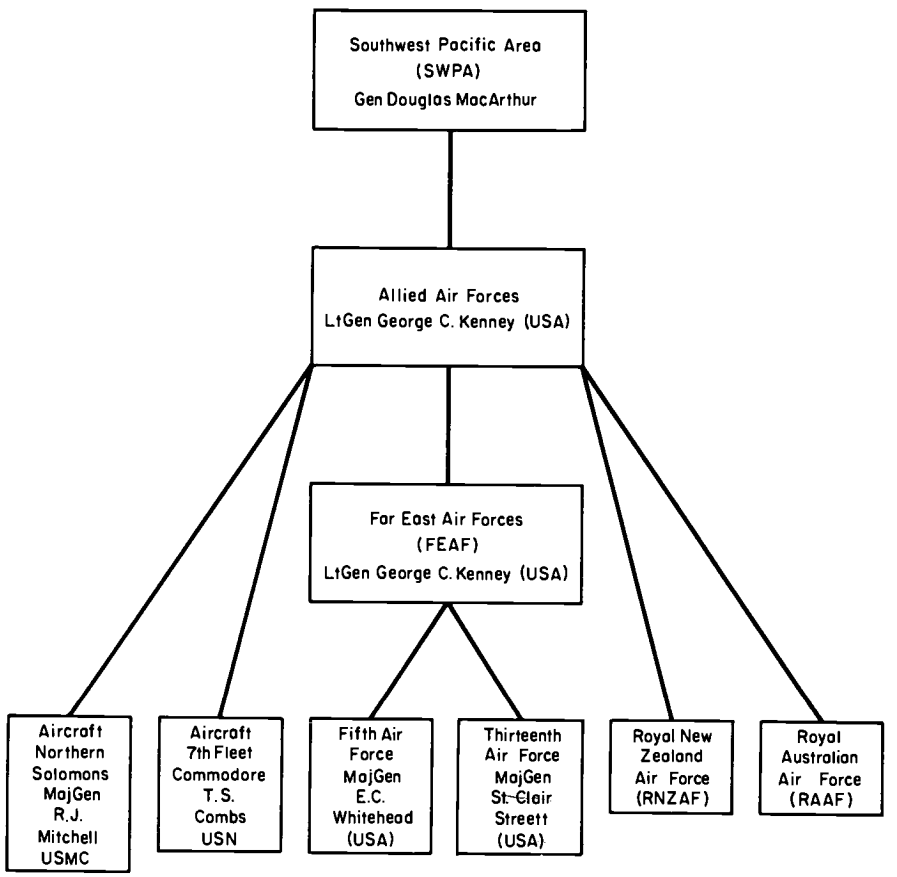


CHART 3 K.W.WHITE

miral Thomas C. Kinkaid, and General Kenney. The Marine general was attempting to draw the attention of SWPA Headquarters to the fact that under his command, a large number of well-trained and experienced aviation units were not being utilized to best advantage, even though they were eager to participate in operations farther west.[18] Japanese air power in the Northern Solomons and on New Britain was no longer in evidence and many of the aviators felt that they were beating a dead horse.

Initially, these entreaties appeared to fall on deaf ears. A ray of hope for the restive Marine aviators appeared briefly and flickered out when General Kenney directed AirNorSols to support the planned U.S. Army XIV Corps drive from the Solomons to New Ireland, then called off the move because shipping and forward airfields were not available. The Marine aviators pounded Rabaul and Kavieng without much enthusiasm, still trying to find ways and means to get some real action.

Just when it appeared that the eager Marine aviators would be forced to sit out the remainder of the war as actors in a sideshow, fate intervened and a radical change in the situation occurred. On 12 September Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet struck the Central Philippines. In three days of almost continuous air attacks, averaging 1,200 sorties per day, pilots of the Third Fleet downed 173 enemy aircraft, destroyed an additional 305 on the ground, sank 59 ships, probably sank another 58, and inflicted heavy damage on installations, at the cost of 9 aircraft. The implications of this victory were at once apparent to Admiral Halsey, who felt that:

> . . . we had found the central Philippines a hollow shell with weak defenses and skimpy facilities. In my opinion, this was the vulnerable belly of the imperial dragon. The time might be ripe not only to strike Manila, but perhaps to mount a far larger offensive. Specifically, I began to wonder whether I dared recommend that MacArthur shift to Leyte the invasion which he had planned for Mindanao, and advance the date well ahead of the scheduled November 15.[19]

Admiral Halsey made his recommendation, and on 15 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to bypass Mindanao in favor of Leyte. Five days later, Far East Air Forces announced that seven dive bomber squadrons of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing would be committed against Luzon. On 10 October, Brigadier General Claude A. Larkin, Deputy Commander of the 1st MAW, summoned Colonel Lyle H. Meyer, commanding officer of MAG-24, and informed him that the group was to get ready to provide air support to Army ground forces in the Philippines. Later information revealed that the remaining three dive bombing squadrons of the wing would become attached to another headquarters, but accompany MAG-24. MAG-32 was sent from Pearl Harbor, and Colonel Clayton C. Jerome, Chief of Staff to the Commander, AirNorSols, took command.

It appeared that Marine aviators were finally back in a shooting war again. The major impact of the new

[18] MajGen Ralph J. Mitchell memo to Maj Gen Field Harris, dtd 26Mar46.

[19] Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 199.

mission fell on MAG-24, whose operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Keith B. McCutcheon, had to come to grips with planning for effective support of ground troops. The job promised to be far from easy. As Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon himself expressed it:

> When Marine Air Group 24 was informed early in October 1944, that it would give close support to an Army Corps in the Philippines, it was completely unprepared to fulfill its mission. Efforts were made immediately to assemble all the available literature on the subject but it became clearly apparent that the existing instructions were published piecemeal in many forms and much of the data was contradictory. . . .[20]

In developing a new concept of close air support, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon was able to utilize the tools that had been previously tested by others. For instance, the radio gear that was to play such a significant role in the maintenance of ground-air communications had been obtained early in 1942 by Major Peter P. Schrider who at the time served as Air Officer for the Amphibious Training Command at Quantico under General Holland Smith. With the assistance of other aviators, communication experts, and supply personnel, Schrider, anticipating a future need for a forward air controller, experimented with portable and jeep-mounted radio equipment for direct contact with supporting air. These tests, which were conducted in the Chesapeake Bay area, included the employment of front line marking panels. Subsequently, the experiences gained were used with success in the training of Army battalions in amphibious operations.[21]

In his efforts to set forth his doctrine of close air support, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon had the full support of Colonel Jerome, Commanding Officer of MAG-32. The latter, in the words of one of his contemporaries, represented

> . . . the firm guiding hand behind all this endeavor. It was Colonel Jerome who set the general policy for implementation of close air support and who, through imagination, persuasion, salesmanship, and sheer force of personality brought his various commands so satisfactorily into the overall combat picture. . . .[22]

The time for the formulation of a clearcut doctrine for close air support had arrived; once such a procedure had been devised, it would remain for Marine aviators to test it in the crucible of combat.

TRAINING FOR CLOSE AIR SUPPORT[23]

The changed combat mission of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing immediately raised a number of questions in the minds of responsible Marine planners. Foremost among these was the question of the techniques that should be

[20] LtCol Keith B. McCutcheon, "Close Support Aviation," in Marine Aviation in Close Air Support File, HQMC-DivAvn, Aug-Nov 45, hereafter *McCutcheon Rpt.*

[21] Col Zebulon C. Hopkins ltr to Head, Hist Br, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 2Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File.*

[22] LtGen Vernon J. McCaul ltr to Head, Hist Br, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 5Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File.*

[23] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: 1st MAW Hist and WarD, Jul-Dec44; Records of Committee on History and Doctrine of Close Air Support, DivAvn, HQMC, 8Nov45, hereafter *CAS Recs.*

employed to give the most effective support to the infantry while still keeping within the generally accepted bounds of caution to avoid endangering the lives of friendly forces.

Though generally favored as a necessity, close air support had previously been employed on the basis of spur of the moment decisions, and with varying degrees of success. On Guadalcanal, Marine and Army pilots had given an excellent account of themselves in providing effective close support—so close, in fact that prior to taking off on a mission they could frequently get a look at the target from the ground. But long before World War II, back in 1927, Marine aviators had taken credit for the first organized dive bombing attack and possibly the first low-altitude attack ever launched in support of ground troops. On that occasion, Marine aviators in Nicaragua had first dived out of column from 1,500 feet and pulled out at about 600 feet. In subsequent dives the Marines started their run at 1,000 feet and pulled out at 300.[24]

During the New Georgia campaign, close air support for ground troops suffered from a lack of air-ground coordination. The simple truth was that the friendly ground troops were afraid of the bombers. At the time, close air support meant bombing and strafing about 1,000 yards in front of friendly lines, but under conditions of jungle warfare the front lines were frequently only a few yards apart. The difficulties encountered by Marine aviators attempting to provide close support on New Georgia have been described as follows:

> The use of aircraft in close support of ground troops proved to be impractical. The dense jungle encountered made the location of enemy positions suitable for air attack impossible until friendly troops were too close to the prospective target for safety. As 200 to 300 yards was a good day's advance, it was not practical to withdraw sufficiently to use air attacks. . . . Frequently troops could not locate their own position on the map, much less the position of the enemy.[25]

During the Bougainville campaign in 1943, close air support was still regarded with more than casual suspicion, once again for the reason that ground troops had occasionally been bombed by the planes they had requested. On 13 December 1943, in an attempt to dislodge the enemy from "Hellzapoppin' Ridge," one of the attacking aircraft missed the target and instead hit friendly troops 600 yards away, killing two men and wounding six. Despite this mishap, close air support was redeemed when Marine aviators, attacking with delayed-fuze bombs, greatly aided the ground troops in seizing the obstinately defended ridge. Marines who fought at Bougainville had this to say about the air support they had received:

> It was the air attacks which proved to be the most effective factor in the taking of the ridge. Lieutenant Colonel Butler, Executive Officer of the 21st Marines, was ordered to plot and direct the strikes. He flew with the flight leader to spot the enemy positions, with which he was now thoroughly familiar.
>
> The two final strikes proved to be the most successful examples of close air support thus far in the Pacific war. The

[24] Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 25.

[25] Headquarters New Georgia Air Force (Forward Echelon, MAW-2) SAR, 29Jun–13Aug43, as cited in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 151.

> planes, flying at times only fifty feet above the ground, bombed and strafed the enemy as close as 75 yards from the Marines' positions. The Japanese, who held out so desperately against infantry and artillery attack, were almost completely destroyed. Following the second air strike the 1st Battalion, Twenty-First Marines smashed through the last resistance with bayonet and grenade on the afternoon of December 18.[26]

The above action marked the first time that Marine aviators received credit for a support mission that was beyond the capabilities of the artillery. After Bougainville, there was an extended lull as far as Marine air support for Marine ground forces was concerned. Peleliu offered a welcome opportunity to further improve ground-air coordination, though conditions on that island severely limited the effectiveness of air support; the Ngesebus operation offered an even more graphic illustration of what close support during a shore-to-shore landing could accomplish.

The Navy had partially solved the problem of controlling support aircraft through shipborne radio systems, which greatly reduced the time required to coach aircraft to their targets. Since this method was geared to carrier-based air support, the Marine divisions employed air liaison parties to transmit requests for aerial support and to direct air strikes. The Marine concept of close air support differed from that of the Army or the Navy in that it was felt that members of the air liaison parties, stationed in the front lines, should maintain direct communications with the attacking aircraft instead of having the information channelled through intervening echelons.

Under the supervision of Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, operations officer of MAG-24, a detailed doctrine for air support organization was drawn up. Aside from special equipment and conditions that could be expected in the Philippines, the doctrine was based on the premise that close air support is an additional weapon to be employed at the discretion of the ground commander. He may employ it against targets that cannot be reached by other weapons or in conjunction with the ground weapons in a coordinated attack. It should be immediately available and should be carried out with deliberation and accuracy and in coordination with other assigned units.[27]

In addition to outlining the requirements for communications equipment, the establishment of radio nets, and the implementation of procedures that would ensure accurate and efficient air support when and where needed, the doctrine put forth the following points:

> 1. Air support does not supplant any of the other existing weapons and it cannot be considered a general competitor of either field or naval artillery.
> 2. Aircraft provide a mobile platform for transporting projectiles to the enemy, but if the same target is within artillery range, the latter can deliver a heavier and more accurate volume of fire per unit of time than aircraft.

[26] Robert A. Aurthur and Kenneth Cohlmia, *The Third Marine Division* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), p. 78.

[27] LtCol Keith B. McCutcheon, "Close Air Support SOP," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 29, no. 8 (Aug45), pp. 48-50.

> 3. When the infantry commander is bogged down and he makes an estimate of the situation, he must weigh clearly the advisability of using aircraft in preference to artillery. Unless the attack is coordinated closely, the planes will not do enough damage to warrant the cessation of fire by the artillery for the necessary length of time.[28]

Once the doctrine of close air support had been formulated, it remained for MAG-24 to implement it by training personnel for the impending mission. Beginning on 13 October, only three days after Colonel Meyer had received word of the new mission of MAG-24, its pilots, crews, communications personnel, air combat intelligence officers, and operations officers on Bougainville were subjected to an intensive ground school course. This course, which lasted until 8 December, covered all phases of close air support ranging from organization and tactics of U.S. and Japanese infantry units to map reading, communications, artillery spotting, and target identification. Similarly, personnel were also familiarized with the geography and history of the Philippines, as well as the peculiarities of the Philippine climate.

Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, who supervised the training, handpicked his instructors and finally emerged with a cadre of wing and group intelligence officers, and specialists from the Seventh Fleet intelligence section and the staff of two Army divisions stationed on Bougainville at the time. One of the Army units, the 37th Infantry Division, scheduled joint training problems with the Marine aviators. All pilots were able to observe a ground exercise conducted by an infantry battalion simulating an attack on a Japanese pillbox installation. To these exercises, MAG-24 added planes in close support with their own air liaison parties on the ground. No live bombs were dropped during the training exercises, but the infantry actually fired all of its weapons. Altogether, about 500 Marine pilots and gunners attended the course; a final examination and critique determined the effectiveness of the training.

Concurrently with the training program, a series of conferences were scheduled with representatives of the Fifth Air Force to coordinate planning for the Philippine operation. In the course of these conferences it was brought out that the Fifth Air Force would furnish the support air parties, but Fifth Air Force did not contemplate using direct communication between the air liaison parties and the aircraft engaged in a close air support mission. The Navy concurred with the Army Air Forces in this matter. As far as Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon was concerned, the only logical way to conduct close support was to train and utilize Marine air liaison parties, which actually constituted a combination of the air liaison party and the support air party.

The Army Air Forces agreed with a statement expressed by the British Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery:

> . . . that though a tactical air force must be integrated with the ground force,

[28] *Ibid.*

> it must not be tied in piecemeal lots to ground units. Its function was massed, theatre wide blows and deep penetrations to fill the gap between tactical and strategic operations.[29]

According to the interpretation by MAG-24, Marshal Montgomery was correct, though close support aviation was not identical with tactical aviation and there was a decided difference in the employment of the two. MAG-24 had no intention of attaching units to divisions piecemeal; it did plan to maintain close control of its aircraft when engaged in close support. If Marine liaison parties were not to be permitted to maintain that control, then the group would send out its own personnel to exercise it in accordance with the SOP that had been very carefully developed for close support by Marine aviation.

MAG-24 planned to attach air liaison parties to infantry units down to the battalion level. Utilizing radio-equipped jeeps (AN-VRC-1), air liaison personnel functioned like forward observers. The ALP could keep pace with advancing command posts and still remain in constant communication with aircraft. The radio equipment could be used to operate on Very High Frequencies (VHF) with the SCR-542 for short-range communications or with the SCR-193 on the lower frequencies (HF) where longer distances had to be covered. If, for any reason, the air liaison officer had to leave his jeep, he could still use a portable transceiver[30] or field telephone, the latter to keep in touch with the jeep radio operator, who in turn relayed messages to the aircraft.

A guide for the successful employment of close air support had now been established. Out of a hazy idea had grown a plan, which evolved into a concept. At maturity it became a doctrine that Marines could translate into action. In the short time available, all possible training that would assist Marine aviation personnel in the air and on the ground to put the theory into practice, had been given. The stage was set for the ultimate test.

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[29] Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery in TIME Magazine, v. 44, no. 7, p. 28, 14Aug 44, cited in *McCutcheon Rpt*, p. 9.

[30] A radio capable of transmitting and receiving, usually compact because part of the circuit is alternately used for either function. Each ALP was provided with a TBX portable HF radio set to meet the initial communication needs of the party.

The Leyte Landings [1]

The seizure of Peleliu and Morotai provided Allied forces in the Pacific with important air bases and airfield sites. Above all, control of these islands protected General MacArthur's flanks during the impending invasion of the Philippines. The accelerated timetable for operations in the Pacific called for landings on Leyte on 20 October 1944. Under the overall command of General MacArthur, the Seventh Fleet, under Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, was to transport and establish the ground assault force ashore. Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, Commanding General of the Sixth Army, was to command the ground forces. The Third Fleet, in conjunction with the Seventh Fleet, was to provide air support until Army Air Forces units could begin to initiate operations from airfields on Leyte.[2]

By far the most important mission assigned to Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet was the preinvasion neutralization of Japanese air power on Okinawa, Formosa, Northern Leyte, and the Visayan Islands in the Central Philippines. Admiral Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet was directly responsible for providing air cover for the invasion ships and for furnishing direct air support for the landings until land-based aircraft could assume those functions. The Fifth Air Force, based on New Guinea, was to destroy the enemy air forces in the Celebes Sea, neutralize Japanese air power in Mindanao, and give such protection to ships as it was able to provide. The Thirteenth Air Force, also stationed on New Guinea, and elements of the Royal Australian Air Force were slated to play a supporting role in neutralizing Japanese air along the east coast of Borneo and in assisting upon request the Fifth Air Force in the southern Philippines. Additional Army Air Forces units in China and the Central Pacific would furnish long-range support.

The island of Leyte, lying in the Visayas Group of the Central Philippines, is 115 miles in length and varies in width from 15 to 40 miles. The main mountain range runs the entire length of the island from north to south, leav-

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Seventh Flt Rpt of Op for the Capture of Leyte Island Incl AR of Engagements in Surigao Strait and off Samar Island on 25Oct44, hereafter *Com, Seventh Flt AR, Leyte*; 4th Marine Air Wing Operations Report, Leyte, dtd 11Nov44, hereafter *4th MAW OpRpt;* M. Hamlin Cannon, *Leyte: The Return to the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), hereafter Cannon, *Leyte;* Saburo Hayashi and Alvin D. Coox, *Kōgun—The Japanese Army in the Pacific War* (Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps Association, 1959), hereafter Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun.*

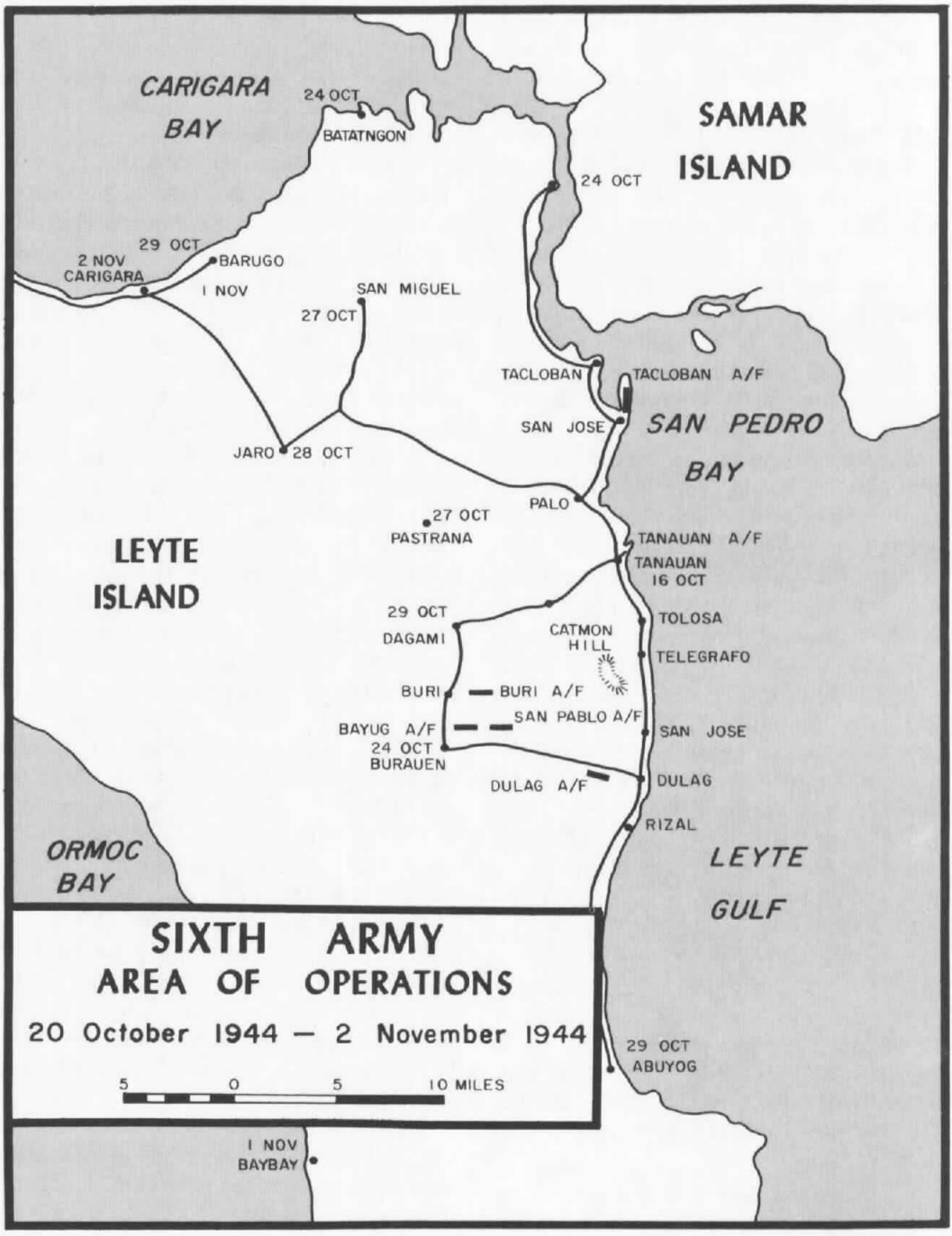
[2] For a detailed account of command relations during this period, see Morison, *Leyte*, pp. 55–60.

ing a wide coastal plain along the east coast. At the outbreak of Word War II, the population of 916,000 lived chiefly in the coastal areas, where cultivation of available ground was intense. Crops consisted mainly of coconut, corn, hemp, and rice. The area in which the invasion force was to operate initially did not contain any heavy jungle and was reasonably clear of thick undergrowth. Some difficulty was expected from swamps and marshy ground, which bordered the intricate network of rivers flowing eastward from the mountains to the coast. All beaches in the invasion area were hard sand, with no reefs or obstacles offshore.

The Sixth Army troops for Operation KING II, code name for the invasion of Leyte, were composed of the X and XXIV Corps and the 6th Ranger Battalion. The X Corps included the 1st Cavalry Division and the 24th Infantry Division; the XXIV Corps consisted of the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions. In reserve were the 32d and 77th Infantry Divisions at Hollandia and on Morotai and Guam Islands. The two divisions were prepared to embark for the objective area three days after the invasion date.

The Sixth Army had the mission of seizing and occupying Leyte, establishing control of western and southern Samar until the conquest of that island could be completed, and of destroying other hostile garrisons in the Visayas. The operation was to be carried out in three phases, beginning with capture of the entrance to Leyte Gulf. Large scale amphibious landings along the coast of eastern Leyte between Tacloban and Dulag were to usher in the second phase. Initial objective of the invasion force was the seizure of airfields and potential airfield sites in this area. The third and final phase of the operation envisioned the destruction of Japanese forces on Leyte and southern Samar. Within the scope of this overall plan, X Corps was to seize the area between Tacloban and Palo and launch a drive to the northern tip of the island. The XXIV Corps was to land near Dulag to the south of X Corps and advance westward across Leyte. A regimental combat team was to invade southern Leyte and secure Panaon Straits.

The first phase of the plan was readily accomplished on 17 and 18 October, when the islands barring access to Leyte Gulf were seized. There was no enemy resistance. Following a two-day naval bombardment, the main landings got under way on the east coast of Leyte between Dulag and Tacloban on 20 October. (See Map 17). The combined American beachhead was about 18 miles long. Except for Japanese mortar and artillery fire, enemy resistance at the beaches was light. X Corps seized the Tacloban airfield on A-Day and captured the town of Tacloban on the following day. From Tacloban, the corps advanced in a northerly and northwesterly direction. Elements of the XXIV Corps secured Dulag airfield on 21 October, then swerved westward and seized three airfields near Burauen. Troops of the XXIV Corps pivoted south along Leyte Gulf, seized Abuyog on 29 October, then swerved westward, and, cutting across the island, secured Baybay on the west coast of Leyte.



Map 17 E.L. Wilson

Japanese reaction to the American landings on Leyte consisted of a hurried activation of *Sho* No. 1. On 23 October, a Japanese fleet headed for Leyte to seek battle in a last-ditch attempt to halt the Americans. A decoy carrier force was to divert the Americans, while the two other surface forces, protected by Japanese aircraft on Luzon and Samar, were approaching Leyte Gulf through Surigao and San Bernardino Straits. The Japanese aimed at nothing less than the complete destruction of American shipping near the landing beaches.

The resulting major naval engagement, which lasted from 23-26 October, has become known as the Battle for Leyte Gulf.[3] The Japanese came close to achieving their objective, but not quite close enough. By evening of 26 October, the Japanese had lost four carriers, three battleships, six heavy and four light cruisers, nine destroyers, and a submarine. "For all practical purposes, the Japanese Navy, as a navy, had ceased to exist."[4] American naval losses in this battle, consisting of three small escort carriers, two destroyers, and one destroyer escort[5] were heavy but not crippling. Responsible Japanese commanders subsequently blamed in large part the loss of the Battle of Leyte Gulf and the defeat in the Philippines on Japanese weakness in land-based air, "October saw the end of the Japanese air forces in the conventional sense; what had once been a formidable weapon was transformed perforce into a sacrificial army of guided missiles."[6]

The Battle for Leyte Gulf was to have an interesting aftermath for at least a few Marine aviators. During the summer of 1944 General Mitchell, commander of the 1st MAW, had been unsuccessful in getting a combat assignment for his wing for the planned invasion of the Philippines. Even though Marine aviation was not assigned any part in the Leyte landings, a few aviators were assigned as observers during the invasion of Leyte. As a result, General Mitchell and three members of his staff took part in the landings and went ashore on A-Day with elements of the Fifth Air Force. On 25 October, while the Battle of Leyte Gulf was still in progress, more than a hundred U.S. naval aircraft, whose carriers had been sunk or severely damaged, were forced to land at Tacloban and Dulag airfields. The field at Tacloban was in deplorable shape; amphibious vehicles had churned up the ground, converting it into a veritable sea of mud and even though repairs had been started, the field was in no condition for the emergency landings by Navy aircraft.

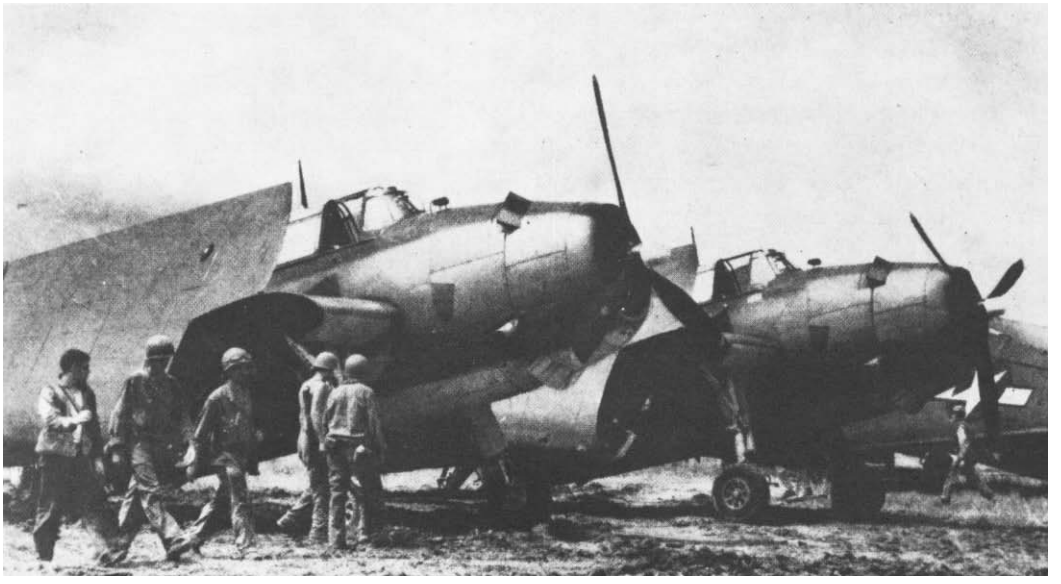
Fortunately, General Mitchell and his staff were at Tacloban airfield at this crucial time. As an experienced aviator General Mitchell realized that the only place for safe landings was to the right of the field, where the original sod was still firm. The wing commander promptly seized a pair of signal flags, ran to the end of the strip, and, acting as a landing signal officer, assisted the Navy planes in making a safe landing. At

[3] For a detailed description of this battle, see Morison, *Leyte*, *pp.* 168–343.

[4] USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 286.

[5] Cannon, *Leyte*, p. 92.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 283.



NAVY PLANES *from carriers sunk or damaged during the Battle for Leyte Gulf find refuge at Dulag airfield, Leyte, 25 October 1944. (USMC A700601)*

RADAR-EQUIPPED NIGHT FIGHTERS *of VMF(N)–541 over Leyte. (USMC A700605)*

the Dulag airstrip, about 20 miles south of Tacloban, the Navy pilots were not quite so lucky, and 8 out of the 40 aircraft attempting to land cracked up. There were no bombs, ammunition, or gasoline at Dulag, and barges had to transport those items there to enable the aircraft to become operational again by the following day.[7]

Difficulties with soft and muddy airstrips apparently were not limited to the Americans; a Japanese account of the Leyte operation mentions "a marked increase in the number of crippled planes because of poor maintenance of the air fields. . . . It became impossible for the supply to catch up with the losses."[8]

Marine aviation, aside from General Mitchell's providential presence at Tacloban, did not play a direct part in the Leyte landings or the early phase of the Leyte campaign. Nevertheless, about 1,500 Marines were deeply involved in the operation from its outset and were to contribute materially to the liberation of the island.

SUPPORTING ARTILLERY[9]

The Marines that took part in the Leyte landings were elements of the VAC Artillery, which had been attached to the XXIV Corps earlier in 1944, while still at Hawaii. The Marine complement consisted of the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James E. Mills; the 11th 155mm Gun Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas S. Ivey, and Headquarters Battery, led by Captain George K. Acker. Army field artillery battalions in the XXIV Corps were the 198th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Howitzer), the 226th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Gun), and the 287th Field Artillery Battalion (Observation).

The Marine artillery elements assigned to the XXIV Corps, as well as the 226th Field Artillery Battalion, had been formed from former seacoast artillery units; though familiar with heavy artillery, the men had received only rudimentary field artillery training. Prior to the departure of these units from Hawaii, the Marine artillery had undergone intensive field artillery training. Embarkation of personnel from Hawaii was accomplished between 6 and 14 September 1944.

The two Marine artillery battalions and the headquarters battery were embarked in the LSV USS *Monitor* and the LSV USS *Catskill*. General Bourke, on board the amphibious command ship USS *Mount Olympus*, served as XXIV Corps Artillery Officer as well as its coordinator for naval gunfire, air strikes, and artillery support. Equipment for the artillery battalions was carried by the cargo ship USS *Auriga*. The ships arrived at Eniwetok in the

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[7] Kenney, *Reports*, p. 459.

[8] Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*, p. 127.

[9] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: A History of the X Corps in the Leyte-Samar Philippine Islands Operation, dtd 6Jan45, hereafter *CG X Corps Hist;* VAC Arty SAR, Leyte, dtd 6Jan45, hereafter *VAC Arty SAR;* VAC Arty OpRpt, Leyte, dtd 28Dec44, hereafter *VAC Arty OpRpt;* 5th 155mm HowBn SAR, dtd 28May45, hereafter *5th 155mm HowBn SAR; Woodbury Rpt;* Maj Edwin J. St. Peter Rpt, Leyte, dtd 7Dec44, hereafter *St. Peter Rpt;* Maj Justin G. Duryea Rpt, Leyte, dtd 13Nov44, hereafter *Duryea Rpt.*

Marshalls on 25 September and three days later sailed for the final staging area at Manus Island in the Admiralties, where they arrived on 3 October. A Marine observer attached to the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion shed an interesting sidelight on the manner in which the troops learned of their objective:

> Two days out of Pearl Harbor (17Sep44), a PBY bomber dropped dispatches containing information changing the target from STALEMATE II to KING II. This information was not disseminated to the troops when we arrived at Eniwetok on 25 September 1944, but upon arrival at Manus Island (Admiralty Group) on 3 October 1944, said information was passed on to the lower command echelon. As a result, the name and date of the landing on Leyte Island was known even to the enlisted personnel while the ships of the convoys were still in the last staging area. Unfortunately this information was common talk among all hands and no great attempt, in general, was made to preserve the secrecy necessary in an operation of this kind.[10]

On 14 October the invasion fleet departed Manus Island for Leyte. The ships in which the corps artillery was embarked arrived in the transport area off Leyte during the morning of 20 October. Naval bombardment of the objective began at approximately 0745 and continued for two hours. Shortly before 1000, Sixth Army units began the invasion of Leyte. X Corps, on the right of the Sixth Army front, landed on the northern part of the invasion beaches; XXIV Corps, consisting of the 7th Infantry Division on the left (south) and the 96th Infantry Division on the right (north) established a southern beachhead. The landings did not take place earlier in the day because the ships could not risk a passage through minefields at night. In the words of a Marine observer with the 96th Infantry Division:

> ... the landing was perfect. LCI rocket boats and gun boats preceded the first waves of (amtracs) to the beach and laid down heaviest concentration of rocket, 40mm and 20mm fire used to date on a beach in the Pacific. All troops landed on schedule and proceeded inland without opposition. Not many more than 15 mortar shells landed in the water or on the beaches, and in the entire division only 2 dead and 14 wounded were suffered in getting ashore.[11]

As units of the X and XXIV Corps were going ashore and setting up beachheads, the artillerymen remained on board their ships. Reports from the beachheads indicated that the Japanese tactics differed completely from those encountered in the Central Pacific. The Japanese no longer concentrated their resistance on the beaches but defended the interior of the island. Owing to the large land area, the Japanese had the problem of properly utilizing their limited manpower. The Japanese *16th Infantry Division* with attached service troops was charged with the defense of Leyte. The division was disposed with the *33d Infantry* to the north, in the zone of the X Corps, the *9th Infantry* to the south opposite the XXIV Corps, and the *20th Infantry* in reserve between Dulag and Tanauan. It was estimated that there were 20,000 Japanese on Leyte, including between 5,000 and 10,000 labor and service troops mostly employed in airfield construc-

[10] *St. Peter Rpt*, p. 2.

[11] *Duryea Rpt*, p. 1.

tion and maintenance in the area around Tacloban, San Jose, Burauen, and Dagami.[12]

As the Sixth Army beachheads were established and expanded, it became evident that the Leyte landings had come as a complete surprise for the enemy. The beaches on which the 96th Infantry Division landed were undefended, though two Japanese antitank guns in the landing area of the 7th Infantry Division succeeded in knocking out five medium tanks. Aside from this action, the assault troops did not encounter any enemy interference until they had advanced several hundred yards inland. Few defensive installations were found on the beaches and those that were encountered were makeshift and indicative of hasty construction. Though some 75mm artillery and sporadic mortar fire hit the beaches, the enemy made no attempt to mass his fire. No Japanese tanks were in evidence near the invasion area. The biggest obstacle for the first 3,000 yards inland from the beaches was the terrain, which was so swampy and muddy that the advance had to be held up for a day in order to get supplies to the front lines.

On the morning of 21 October, General Bourke ordered all corps artillery units to dispatch advance parties to meet him at Blue One Beach, which was situated just north of Dulag. Owing to communications problems, word of this order reached only the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion and the Army 287th Field Artillery Battalion in time. As a result, representatives of these two battalions were the only ones to meet General Bourke before nightfall on 21 October. The remaining hours of daylight were utilized in reconnoitering and selecting initial positions. Advance parties from the 11th 155mm Gun Battalion, the Headquarters Battery of the VAC Artillery, and the Army 226th Artillery Battalion went ashore after nightfall but did not select their positions until the morning of 22 October. At this time General Bourke requested XXIV Corps to land the entire corps artillery.

The Army 198th and 226th Field Artillery Battalions and the 287th Field Artillery Observation Battalion went ashore without undue difficulty. The two Marine artillery battalions and the headquarters battery, on the other hand, ran into a major problem almost at once. The USS *Auriga* (AK-98) which carried the equipment of the Marine units, had been ordered to begin unloading on A-Day by the Commander, Transport Division 28, who had failed to coordinate his operation with either the Commanding General of the XXIV Corps or General Bourke. As a result, when advance parties of the artillery units reached the beach on A plus 1, half of the vehicles and weapons, as well as some ammunition, had already been landed, even though no artillerymen were present on the beach to dispose of this materiel. Equipment was scattered over several beaches and some of the heavy guns had been landed in areas in which no suitable firing positions could be obtained. As a result, positions further inland had to be reconnoitered.

By A plus 3 all of the Marine artillery was ashore, in position, and supporting the XXIV Corps. The first positions

[12] *CG, X Corps Hist*, p. 5.

occupied by the artillery were on a narrow rise about a quarter of a mile inland from the seashore. From here, the artillery was able to support the infantry which advanced northward from the invasion beaches towards an enemy-held hill that was nearly 400 feet high. By this time, the artillery units were well organized, and earlier problems associated with the landing had been overcome. Following in the wake of the infantry advance, the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion moved first to positions halfway between Dulag and Burauen and subsequently into the area between Burauen and Dagami. The 11th 155mm Gun Battalion followed within a few days, together with the advance echelon of Headquarters Battery. By evening of 22 October, the 226th Field Artillery Battalion occupied positions on the western outskirts of Dulag and was assigned the mission of reinforcing the fires of the 7th Infantry Division artillery, as the division advanced toward Dulag, Burauen, and Dagami. On the following day the 198th Field Artillery Battalion was assigned the mission of supporting the fires of the 96th Infantry Division Artillery to the north and northwest of San Jose. The 287th Observation Battalion established positions along the highway north of Dulag. By 24 October all units under the command of General Bourke were in position and firing in support of the XXIV Corps.

Since the Japanese were holding terrain to the west that was considerably higher than that held by the invasion force, the enemy had the advantage of superior observation. For the Americans, ground visibility was so poor that aerial observation assumed an unusual importance. Artillery spotter aircraft soon became the backbone of artillery observation. At the time of the landings some planes were brought in over the beach in a partially disassembled condition, put together, and flown to an airstrip from a narrow, sandy road parallelling the beach. Others took off from their carriers and completed the flight without undue difficulty, except for one plane, whose pilot got lost in a rainstorm and landed in enemy territory on the southern tip of Samar. The pilot, a field artillery officer, kept a cool head, which was badly needed since he carried with him parts of the operation plan. He carefully buried the important document, hid his aircraft as best he could, and, with the assistance of natives, found his way back to the American lines. Subsequently, accompanied by a rescue party, the pilot returned to the scene of the mishap, dug up the papers, repaired the plane, and flew it back to Dulag Field on Leyte.[13]

The observation planes available to the XXIV Corps Artillery consisted of 12 Type L-4 artillery spotter aircraft; a total of 13 pilots comprised the flying personnel; a dozen observers were available to carry out visual observation. The XXIV Corps furnished the pilots and planes; the observers were Marines from the artillery battalions or the Air Section of VAC Artillery Headquarters as well as Army personnel from their artillery battalions. The spotter aircraft also handled such special assignments

[13] BGen Bert A. Bone ltr to CMC, dtd 5Apr51, hereafter *Bone ltr* in *Philippines Comment File.*

as reconnaissance, search, and photographic missions for the XXIV Corps.

During the first few days of the Leyte operation, Japanese air action consisted of several raids each day. The enemy did not focus his attention on the troops but concentrated his air attacks against American shipping, beach supply dumps, and airfields. In the 96th Infantry Division area, these raids were executed by only two or three planes at a time. Since the beaches were jammed with ammunition, gasoline dumps, and other supplies for nearly 200 yards inland, the Japanese were bound to hit something. "In one raid, over 50 percent of the 7th Division ammunition and gasoline stores were burned up by the one bomb dropped, not to mention other supplies."[14] Beginning on 24 October the tempo of enemy air attacks picked up.

Aside from the destruction of materiel, the enemy air raids had an effect that could hardly have been anticipated by even the most optimistic Japanese. This unexpected byproduct was the confusion they had caused. A Marine observer attached to the Army described the result in the following words:

> Air raid warning systems had not been installed. The confusion caused by green troops having first enemy planes and then friendly planes fly over caused them to fire at all planes even when the markings were easily distinguishable. All that was necessary was for one gun to open fire, then all guns would fire even down to troops armed with M-1s and carbines. I personally saw one TBF shot down by our own fire and several others fired on.[15]

The indiscriminate firing against aircraft did not end there. According to another Marine observer, the gun crews of liberty ships and small boats were the worst offenders, probably because of poor recognition training. In any event, before the confusion died down, "they even shot down one cub artillery-spotting plane."[16]

By nightfall of 22 October, the 5th Howitzer Battalion and the 226th Field Artillery Battalion were in position ready to fire although the 5th Battalion had only 10 of its 12 pieces emplaced. The Headquarters Battery was also in position with communications to all units at this time. The 287th Observation Battalion had surveyed sufficient terrain to permit the division and the corps artillery to tie in to a common control. The initial area assigned to the 5th and 11th Battalions required the construction of a corduroy road across a small swamp. Both battalions worked on the construction of this road, but the 5th Battalion, which moved into position first, found access so difficult that the corps artillery commander ordered the 11th Battalion to occupy a different area. The battalion moved into its new position during the late afternoon and night of 23 October.

Marine artillerymen on Leyte came close to being actively involved in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. While that battle was reaching a climax, it appeared for a time that the Japanese Central Force would penetrate the screen of warships protecting the American transports. In the words of General Bourke:

> I was ordered by General Hodge, the XXIV Corps Commander, to turn the two 155mm Gun Battalions toward Leyte Gulf and prepare for the defense of the Beach-

[14] *Duryea Rpt.*, p. 3.

[15] *Woodbury Rpt.*, p. 5.

[16] *Duryea Rpt.*, p. 4.

head in that direction, against elements of the Japanese Fleet then believed to be approaching. As these battalions were originally trained in Coast Defense Methods this was readily accomplished.[17]

As the battle developed, the Japanese did not succeed in breaking through to the beachhead, and the corps artillerymen on Leyte never got a crack at the Japanese Navy. Instead, until 1 November, the XXIV Corps artillery continued to fire reinforcing missions for the division artillery in the beachhead. The marshy ground had a more adverse effect on the siting of positions and efficiency of artillery support than did the tactical situation. More often than not, cross country movement of medium and heavy artillery became impossible and positions had to be selected along roads or in the vicinity of airfields. On numerous occasions, positions to cover target areas could not be selected without frequently shifting the weapons. The 198th Field Artillery Battalion, as late as 1 November, was forced to occupy positions about 1,200 yards behind the front line because of unfavorable terrain. As a result, for several days the artillerymen drew intermittent small arms fire and attracted infiltrators.

On 1 November, the Marine howitzer battalion followed the infantry advance and displaced inland into the area between Burauen and Dagami. On the same day, the 198th Field Artillery Battalion was assigned the mission of reinforcing the fires of the 96th Infantry Division Artillery in support of operations west and northwest of Dagami. A few days later, the Marine gun battalion and the forward echelon of Headquarters Battery moved into the same general area as the Marine howitzer battalion. The immediate establishment of a fire direction center situated along the road between Burauen and Dagami enabled the artillery to fire massed concentrations along the entire XXIV Corps front. On 4 November, the 226th Field Artillery Battalion was detached to operational control of the X Corps and displaced to that sector.

Heavy rains in November immobilized almost all vehicular traffic in the Burauen-Dagami area. A static period developed along the entire corps front. At this time the artillery battalions often found themselves very close to the front, so that local perimeter defense assumed major importance. Heavy infantry weapons were sited with emphasis on air defense during the day and ground defense at night. At various times all artillery battalions came under enemy air attack, particularly the Marine battalions stationed near newly captured airfields. The 5th Howitzer Battalion claimed two enemy aircraft shot down and the 11th Battalion claimed one; the Army 226th Battalion also took credit for two aircraft downed.[18]

Local defense of artillery units consisted of manned positions around each

[17] LtGenThomas E. Bourke ltr to CMC, n.d., hereafter *Bourke ltr*, in *Philippines Comment File*. "The 11th Gun Battalion, near the beach, found itself swinging its guns around to fire on dug-in Japanese positions on Catmon Hill from which the beach and rear area installations were receiving fire. They also had to swing around 180 degrees, prepared to fire at sea." Col James E. Mills ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC dtd 7Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File*, hereafter *Mills ltr*.

[18] *VAC Arty SAR*, p. 7.

battery and barbed wire when possible.[19] Each artillery battalion was bothered from time to time by infiltrating snipers, who attempted to neutralize the batteries by small arms fire which was normally delivered as the artillery pieces fired. In this way the enemy hoped to escape detection by local security details. In some instances at night it became necessary to load the pieces and have the cannoneers take cover before firing. During the night of 24 October, the 226th Artillery Battalion was attacked by about 35 Japanese equipped with automatic weapons, explosive charges, magnetic mines, and grenades. Part of Battery A was temporarily neutralized, and one piece was disabled by an explosive charge. After a heavy exchange of fire the enemy force was scattered. The Japanese left 26 dead around the battalion sector. Remnants of this patrol evidently remained in the swamps around the battalion for some time, and for the next few nights sniping on the artillery position continued.

Since much enemy activity along the front occurred at night, the corps artillery had to maintain intermittent harassing and interdiction fires during the hours of darkness. It soon became evident that after personnel had been provided for all firing installations, the number of men available for local security was scanty. Nevertheless, the artillerymen performed their missions and despite poor roads, bad weather, and enemy harassment, lent effective support to the advancing infantry units.

In general, the corps artillery missions were the usual interdiction, harassing, and deep supporting fires. Each time a counterbattery mission was fired, air observation was utilized to locate and adjust upon the target. During daylight hours, fires consisted usually of registrations and adjustment on sensitive areas as a basis for night fires. Targets of opportunity were fired on as they appeared. Upon occasion, close supporting fires at night were requested by division artillery during periods of enemy activity.

The Japanese employment of artillery on Leyte was such that it was seldom used to maximum effect. In the words of the U. S. Army history of the Leyte campaign:

> The gunnery techniques were "remarkably undeveloped" and inefficient, the pieces being used singly or in pairs and only rarely as batteries. Their fire was never massed. The gun positions generally were well constructed but they were frequently selected with such high regard for concealment that the fields of fire were limited.[20]

By 2 November the Sixth Army ground offensive on Leyte had attained initial objectives. Advancing up the Leyte Valley, U. S. Army troops had advanced to Dulag, Burauen, Dagami, and Tanauan, reaching the west coast of Leyte on 1 November. Though initially slow to react, the Japanese did not by any means consider their situation on the island hopeless. While the

[19] "The 5th Battalion was in such a forward position that it had to maintain extensive patrol activity to the front and flanks of its position. There were a few patrol encounters with small scattered groups of the enemy. This battalion did not encounter enemy harassment or sniping which is attributable to the patrol activity." *Mills ltr.*

[20] Cannon, *Leyte, p.* 252.

Battle of Leyte Gulf was still in progress and American attention was focused on the naval operation, several Japanese infantry battalions from the western Visayas landed at Ormoc on the west coast of Leyte. On 26 October, an additional 2,000 men comprising the *41st Infantry Regiment* from Mindanao went ashore.

These reinforcements were only driblets of what was shortly to turn into a torrent of men and supplies. On 1 November, the Japanese *1st Division*, coming from Shanghai on troop transports escorted by destroyers and coast defense vessels, reached Ormoc and went ashore with about 12,000 men and equipment. Unloading was virtually completed before the convoy was discovered. Within two weeks after A-Day, the Japanese had landed some 22,000 reinforcements.[21]

To deprive the Japanese of their main port of debarkation on Leyte, General Krueger decided to launch two converging drives against Ormoc. X Corps was to move south through the Ormoc Valley; XXIV Corps was to advance northwards from Baybay. At the conclusion of this drive the Japanese remaining on Leyte would be forced to move into the mountains west of the Ormoc Valley, where effective organized resistance was all but impossible. In the XXIV Corps area, the 96th Infantry Division was to eliminate about 6,000 Japanese in the hills west of Dagami during the time that the 7th Infantry Division was consolidating its gains between Abuyog and Baybay.

Meanwhile, the Japanese continued to pour reinforcements into Leyte. In fact, "the idea of a mobile counterlanding force to reinforce the invaded area, had been an integral part of the Japanese Sho plan."[22] Between 23 October and 11 December 1944, the Japanese landed substantial reinforcements in nine echelons, until a total of some 30,000 men had gone ashore.[23] At the same time, strong enemy aircraft reinforcements arrived from Formosa. As November came to a close, the Japanese resistance on Leyte stiffened, aided by heavy rainfall, which impeded the progress of the Sixth Army's mechanized equipment. By mid-November it had become clear to both opponents that the struggle for Leyte would be long and costly; the idea of an easy victory for either opponent had vanished once and for all.

In an attempt to gain the initiative, the Japanese resorted to some unorthodox tactics. During the early hours of 27 November, three enemy transport aircraft came in low over Leyte Gulf. The aircraft made no attempt to black out and had all their lights on. When one of the planes crash-landed just 25 yards offshore near the bivouac of an amphibian tractor battalion, one of the guards jumped on the wing to offer assistance. Hand-grenade throwing Japanese emerging from the plane quickly convinced the guard that his help was not wanted. Two of the enemy were subsequently killed by small arms fire. Three others vanished into a swamp, where about a dozen others soon joined them.

[21] Sixth Army Report of Leyte Operation, pp. 34–40, as cited in Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, p. 377.

[22] USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 287.

[23] *Ibid.*

The second air transport crashed while attempting to land on Buri airstrip and all of the occupants were killed. The third airplane crash-landed north of Abuyog across a small river from a bivouac area occupied by troops of the 11th Airborne Division. According to a history of that division:

> An antiaircraft machine gun crew, which outfit is forgotten now, was in position on the alert for enemy aircraft. When the plane landed and came to a halt, they called across the small river: "Need any help?" "No, everything OK," someone yelled back, and the machine gun crew went back to watching the skies for enemy aircraft.[24]

The presence of stronger Japanese reinforcements on Leyte soon had an effect on the tactical situation of the XXIV Corps Artillery, particularly those units stationed in the Burauen area, where three out of the four airfields on Leyte were situated. During the early morning of 6 December, an estimated 100 Japanese infiltrated the area adjacent to Headquarters Battery, 287th Observation Battalion, in an apparent attempt to advance towards Buri airfield. Two days were to pass before the enemy infiltrators were eliminated.

At dusk on 6 December, enemy planes bombed Buri airfield, which harbored the corps artillery air sections totalling 30 officers and men, and laid a heavy smoke screen over the surrounding area. Shortly after the bombing, a force of about 150 Japanese parachuted into the vicinity of the field. The Marines of the air sections were armed with individual weapons and two machine guns, one of which had been salvaged from a wrecked plane. In the course of the morning, enemy attacks gradually drove friendly troops from their positions. As these men fell back on the position held by the Corps Artillery air sections, an additional 175 antiaircraft gun crews and service troops were hastily organized for defense by Marine Captain Eugene S. Roane, Jr., Assistant Corps Artillery S-2 and Air Observer, who was the senior officer present at the time of the Japanese attack.

Fighting for Buri airfield continued until 8 December. During the afternoon of that day, the antiaircraft personnel comprising part of the defensive force were ordered off the field. Having lost a large segment of their strength by this reshuffling of troops, the Marines were forced to pull back to the infantry perimeter. While fighting for the airfield was in progress, liaison pilots and observers from corps artillery repeatedly took off from and landed on the field under fire to evacuate wounded and bring in supplies and ammunition. All planes were hit by enemy small arms fire, which wounded one pilot and a mechanic. On 9 December the remaining personnel of the Corps Artillery Air Section were evacuated from Buri airfield.[25]

Some of the enemy paratroops dropped on 6 December landed near the position of the 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion. For the next four days and nights, Marines of the battalion found themselves dodging enemy bullets and hand grenades. The tactics employed

[24] Maj Edward M. Flanagan, Jr., *The Angels, A History of the 11th Airborne Division, 1943–1946* (Washington, D. C., 1948), p. 34.

[25] *VAC Arty SAR*, p. 9.

by the Japanese consisted of remaining inactive during the day and emerging at night to lob grenades into the battery positions. For the most part such attacks were sporadic, lasting no more than one hour at a time and repeated four to five times each night. At this particular time, most of the equipment and men were at the beach preparing to load on board ship to depart Leyte, and those Marines who remained to encounter the enemy paratroops were members of cleanup details consisting of about 50–75 men whose nights were made even more unpleasant by the hard rain which filled the foxholes with cold water. Fortunately for the Marines, it was possible to trace the grenade trajectory by the glow of the fuze, enabling them to fire at the source. Before the action ended, the artillerymen had killed 23 of the Japanese and accounted for one more who preferred to commit suicide.[26] The remaining Japanese were driven from Buri airfield on 10 December.

At 0800 on 11 December, following the arrival of the XXIV Corps Artillery from Saipan, the V Amphibious Corps Artillery was relieved of all missions in support of the XXIV Corps. The 5th and 11th Battalions and Headquarters Battery sailed from Leyte on 13 December for Guam. General Bourke departed from the island by air for Guam on the same day.[27] During their attachment to XXIV Corps, the Marine artillerymen lost 2 officers and 7 enlisted men killed, 3 officers and 31 enlisted men wounded in action, and 1 Marine missing.[28] Though the battle for Leyte was still far from over, the Marine artillerymen had contributed their share to ultimate victory.

ENTER MARINE AIR[29]

During the early days of the Leyte operation, the Navy furnished all air support for the U. S. ground troops. The Battle for Leyte Gulf made it necessary for the escort carriers to use all available aircraft for offensive and defensive missions. Incessant rains and mud on Leyte impeded the development of airfields. The advent of Japanese suicide attacks[30] against American ships in Leyte Gulf caused losses that badly hurt the Navy escort groups.

Alien as the spirit of self-destruction may appear to Occidental eyes, the idea of sacrificing an airplane and pilot to destroy an Allied ship was effective and entirely practical from the Japanese point of view. Overwhelming American superiority in both personnel and materiel forced the Japanese to adopt this step. The effectiveness of *kamikaze* attacks in Leyte Gulf was further increased by American difficulties with shore-based radar, which left supporting units in the Gulf exposed to increasing threat of suicide attack.[31] Among the many statements made during and after World War II on the subject of the *kamikaze*, perhaps the most poignant one came from a Navy commander, who philosophized as follows:

[26] *5th 155mm HowBn SAR*, 6–10Dec44.

[27] BGen Thomas E. Bourke ltr to CMC, dtd 28Dec44, Encl to *VAC Arty SAR*.

[28] *VAC Arty OpRpt*, p. 16.

[29] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from MAG–12 WarDs, Nov-Dec44.

[30] Designated as *Kamikaze* in Japanese naval terminology and called *Tokko* by the Japanese Army.

[31] USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 286.

> Every time one country gets something, another soon has it. One country gets radar, but soon all have it. One gets a new type of engine or plane, then another gets it. But the Japs have got the *kamikaze* boys, and nobody else is going to get that, because nobody else is built that way.[32]

Despite the initial success of the Japanese ramming attacks and the losses they were able to inflict on American shipping at Leyte, such bizarre tactics could not offset American superiority, nor could they accomplish a turning of the tide in the strategical situation. No other tactic could have illuminated more clearly the weakness of the Japanese Air Force. A dispassionate and objective analysis of the overall impact of the *kamikaze* tactic came to the conclusion that with the first *kamikaze* attack:

> ...the Japanese may be said to have abandoned the air war; from this time on they made little attempt at reviving their air force. Macabre, effective, supremely practical under the circumstances, supported and stimulated by a powerful propaganda campaign, the special attack became virtually the sole method used in opposing the United States striking and amphibious forces, and these ships the sole objectives.[33]

The exploits of Japanese *kamikaze* pilots could not change the fact that Japanese air operations in the Philippines were beset by severe difficulties. Foremost among these was the speed employed by the American invasion forces in seizing the Japanese airfields on Leyte. Even though the numerical weakness of American land-based aircraft initially permitted the Japanese to land substantial reinforcements, the arrival of additional aircraft and the completion of airfields on the island were bound to shift the balance in favor of the Americans. For the Japanese, there was a marked increase in the number of crippled aircraft because of the poor state of Japanese airfields in the Philippines. Only about 10 Japanese aircraft reached the battle zone towards the end of October. At that time the daily attrition rate was 20–25 aircraft.[34] It became impossible for Japanese aircraft production to catch up with the losses.

Throughout November, the fast carriers hit Luzon in order to reduce the heavy flow of Japanese aircraft reinforcements that were being sent to the Philippines from Formosa. No fewer than 700 enemy aircraft and 134,000 tons of Japanese shipping were destroyed in this manner.[35] The Japanese Air Force was unable to compensate for such heavy losses. In the words of the former Military Secretary to the Japanese Minister of War:

> Aerial operations in the Philippines were conducted in the form of an aircraft-replacement race, instead of combat between hostile aircraft carriers. At the time, moreover, there existed such a tremendous difference in the air-replacement capabilities of the Japanese and the Americans that there was scant opportunity for the former to win the decisive battle for Leyte—even if various other conditions were temporarily favorable.[36]

During the initial phase of the Leyte campaign, the Japanese Air Force had the upper hand. FEAF aircraft were too few in numbers to do more than

[32] Cdr John Thach, quoted in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 273.
[33] USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 286.
[34] Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*, p. 127.
[35] USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 287.
[36] Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*, p. 127.

provide a defense against enemy air attacks. Tacloban was the only operational strip on Leyte, though the Dulag airfield was used on occasion for emergency landings. Before the first Army Air Force planes could land at Tacloban on 27 October, 2,500 feet of steel matting had to be laid in two days. The advent of the rainy season and the arrival of three typhoons, accompanied by heavy rains, further complicated airfield construction. As a result, the arrival of sorely needed light and medium bombers had to be postponed repeatedly. On several occasions engineers engaged in airfield construction had to be diverted to road maintenance.

By the end of November, all of Leyte except the Ormoc Bay area and the northwest coast of the island was in American hands. The continuous flow of Japanese reinforcements threatened to cause a military stalemate, even though Sixth Army had seven divisions ashore and the Navy had driven the Japanese fleet from the waters surrounding Leyte. The Tacloban airstrip received unwelcome attention by the Japanese, who made several determined attempts to render the strip useless for the Americans. On 4 November, 35 enemy aircraft raided the airfield, killing 4 men, wounding 30, and destroying 2 P-38s and damaging 39 others.[37] Two *kamikazes* crashed into two air transports bringing in the ground echelon of a bombardment group, killing 92 men and wounding 156 others. Additional American aircraft at the Tacloban field fell victim to Japanese air attacks later in the month.

Even though Allied air power had begun to count by mid-November and an increasing number of Japanese ships engaged in shuttling reinforcements to Leyte were sent to the bottom, air operations on Leyte continued to be hamstrung by the lack of base facilities. "FEAF could meet the demand for planes and combat crews, but they could not operate without surfaced strips. By 30 November, only 182 fighters were on Leyte, and an average of only 111 had been operational daily during the preceding week."[38]

No immediate relief for the shortage of airfields on Leyte was in sight. Facilities completed at Bayug and Buri were closed down by bad weather shortly after they had become operational; poor drainage, faulty soil bases, and poor access roads finally forced Fifth Air Force to abandon Buri and San Pablo airstrips. Construction of an all-weather airfield at Tanauan between Tacloban and Dulag began during the latter part of November, but until completion of this strip the lack of air facilities on Leyte was bound to reduce the effectiveness of American air power. Fifth Air Force expended its strength in a struggle to gain air superiority; the insufficient number of aircraft available on Leyte precluded the employment of aircraft for close support missions until late in the campaign.

By 27 November, Admiral Kinkaid had become increasingly restive under the continued *kamikaze* attacks, which continued to exact a heavy toll among American ships. Admiral Halsey's carriers had already stayed in the Philippines almost a month longer than had

[37] Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, pp. 374–375.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 383.

been planned and the Admiral itched for action against the Japanese mainland. General MacArthur was dissatisfied with the air defense of Leyte and suggested to Admiral Nimitz an exchange of night fighter squadrons. The Marine night fighters were better able to cope with the Japanese night bombers, which were too fast for the P-61 Black Widow fighter plane, built by Northrop, used by the Army night fighter squadron on Leyte. VMF(N)-541 was to be shifted from Peleliu to Leyte, relieving a Fifth Air Force squadron that in turn was to move to the Palaus.

For General Mitchell's Marine aviators, the old adage that "all good things come in bunches" was about to prove true. Hardly had the word of VMF(N)-541's transfer to Leyte been passed when Admiral Halsey intervened in order to get the Marine aviators more fully committed in the Philippines. The Admiral described this development in the following words:

> I had under my command in the South Pacific a Marine Air Group which had proved its versatility in everything from fighting to blasting enemy vessels. I knew that this group was now under MacArthur's command, and I knew, too, without understanding why, that when Kenney was not keeping it idle, he was assigning it to missions far below its capacity. Kinkaid's complaint of insufficient air cover prompted me to take a step which was more than a liberty; to a man of meaner spirit than MacArthur's, it would have seemed an impertinence. I called these Marines to his attention. He ordered them forward, and within twenty-four hours of their arrival, they had justified my recommendation.[39]

[39] Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 231.

Admiral Halsey's recommendation to General MacArthur bore immediate fruit. As November drew to a close, VMF(N)-541 on Peleliu and four Marine fighter squadrons of MAG-12 in the Solomons stood ready to move to Leyte when the word was received.

Marine Night Fighter Squadron 541 was placed on standby alert for departure to Leyte on 28 November. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Peter D. Lambrecht, the squadron had spent over two months on Peleliu. Equipped with Grumman "Hellcats," more formally known as F6Fs, the squadron specialized in night intercept operations. To this end, the "Hellcats" were equipped with special radar devices, and all of the pilots had received thorough training in the squadron specialty.

Three days later, General Mitchell ordered Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG-12), commanded by Colonel William A. Willis, to move four of its fighter squadrons, VMF-115, -211, -218, and -313 to Tacloban by 3 December for duty with the Fifth Air Force.[40] To expedite the movement, General Mitchell requested Fifth Air Force to make C-47 transports available to airlift men and materiel of the ground echelons to Tacloban. This request was granted; similarly, the Seventh Fleet promised logistic support for the ground echelon at its destination.

Early on 2 December, 85 Corsairs from MAG-12, escorted by PBJs from

[40] MAG-12 WarDs, Nov-Dec44. At this time VMF-115 was commanded by Maj John H. King, Jr; VMF-211 by Maj Stanislaus J. Witomski; VMF-218 by Maj Robert T. Kingsbury III; and VMF-313 by Maj Philip R. White.

MAG–61, left the Solomons for Leyte. After refuelling at Hollandia and other islands, 82 fighters reached Peleliu on 3 December, only a few hours after VMF(N)–541 had left for Tacloban. The remainder, having developed mechanical trouble, required repairs before they could catch up with the main flight. The night fighters of VMF(N)–541 flew the 600 miles from Peleliu to Leyte without incident and landed at Tacloban during the morning of 3 December; in the course of the afternoon, 66 Corsairs and 9 escorting patrol bombers touched down on the same airstrip; 16 Corsairs had remained at Peleliu with mechanical troubles, none of them serious.[41]

Marine aviators had come to the Philippines in strength to fly cover for convoys, execute fighter-bomber strikes against enemy shipping in Visayan waters and ground installations on southern Luzon, and fly ground support missions on Leyte. Above all, they helped to deny the ports of western Leyte to the enemy during his desperate attempts to reinforce his troops and made him pay dearly for attempting to run the aerial blockade.

CORSAIRS AND HELLCATS ON LEYTE[42]

Marine aviators arriving at Tacloban were quick to discover that facilities at the airfield left something to be desired. One author gave the following graphic description:

> Tacloban strip was now the none-too-happy base of 87 Marine planes. Although the invasion had taken place six weeks before the first Marine flyers got there, work on the airfield had progressed but little. Severe storms lashed the east coast of Leyte during the October-January northeast monsoon, and stories about the mud at Tacloban are still legendary.[43]

One of the aviators of MAG–12 has described the arrival of the Air Group as being attended "by some of the worst conditions of overcrowding, lack of space, and inadequate operational facilities, not even excluding Guadalcanal in August of 1942."[44]

On the day of their arrival at Tacloban, six Hellcats of VMF(N)–541 flew their first mission in the Philippines by covering PT boats in Surigao Strait and providing air cover over Ormoc Bay. Bad weather on 4 December precluded flight operations; instead, Marine aviation personnel set up and improved the camp site located about 300 yards west of the southern end of the Tacloban strip.

Marine pilots in the Philippines drew their first blood on 5 December, when a Hellcat on predawn patrol between Bohol Island and southern Leyte shot down an enemy fighter. Not to be outdone by the nightfighters, the Corsair pilots also claimed a Japanese fighter on the same day.

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[41] MAG–12 WarD, Dec44.

[42] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Dec44 WarDs of MAG–12, VMF–115, VMF–211, VMF–218, VMF–313; Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines; Philippines Comment File;* Smith, *The Approach to the Philippines;* Morison, *Leyte;* Craven and Cate, *The Pacific;* Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story;* Cannon, *Leyte.*

[43] Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 276.

[44] Maj Roy T. Spurlock ltr to CMC, dtd 7Feb51, in *Philippines Comment File*, hereafter *Spurlock ltr.*

This was only the beginning of what was to prove an exciting, demanding, and fruitful operation for the Marine aviators. For the remainder of the month, the biggest assignment for the nightfighters, alternately known as the "Bateye Squadron," was to intercept Japanese aircraft that preferred to execute raids at dusk, dawn, and during the night. Some difficulty was experienced initially because the ground controllers guiding the night fighters were Army personnel using procedures that differed from those followed by Marine controllers, though in time coordination improved. Crowded conditions at Tacloban and deficiencies in radar coverage and performance did not make the task of the Hellcat pilots easier.

The day-fighter squadrons of MAG-12 soon discovered that the mission they had so thoroughly trained for—that of close support for ground troops—did not materialize at once. There were daily missions of raiding enemy airfields, providing air cover for friendly convoys, rescues, and attacks against Japanese troops and communications. The most important contribution of Marine fighters in the Leyte operation resulted from the tactical situation, which made it necessary for Marine pilots to play an active part in stemming the steady enemy flow of reinforcements to Leyte by attacking Japanese ships.

Marine fighters of VMF-211 struck their first blow against Japanese shipping on the morning of 7 December, when a dozen Corsairs went out in search of seven Japanese vessels reportedly en route to Ormoc Bay. By the time the Corsairs spotted the ships at anchor at San Isidro Harbor, Japanese fighters were flying cover for the convoys. Eight Marine fighters engaged the Japanese aircraft; four Corsairs went after the enemy ships and damaged one destroyer, which caught fire and subsequently ran aground. In the course of this action, three Corsairs were shot down.

The action continued during the afternoon, when Corsairs of VMF-211, -218, and -313 with Army fighters as escorts, returned to San Isidro and sank three cargo ships, a troop transport, and a destroyer. While this action was in progress, Ormoc Bay became a hotbed of activity for both belligerents, for a convoy carrying the Army 77th Infantry Division was approaching to land the division several miles south of Ormoc.

That plenty of air action resulted from the attempts of both Americans and Japanese to put troops ashore near Ormoc on the same day is not surprising. Nor could it be expected that the Japanese would stand by idly as the American convoy approached the shores of Leyte. Beginning at 0820, and practically without interruption, Japanese air attacks hit the American ships in Ormoc Bay. Fifth Air Force aircraft did all they could to protect the friendly vessels, but more than once enemy aircraft broke through this cover and a curtain of antiaircraft fire put up by the ships. The enemy air attacks continued for more than nine hours and included numerous *kamikaze* runs that found their mark. A destroyer and high-speed transport were so badly damaged that they subsequently had to be sunk by gunfire.[45] In addition, a

landing ship was hit near the beach and had to be abandoned, and a destroyer, an LST, and a high-speed transport were damaged.

On 11 December, the Japanese made a final attempt to reinforce their garrison on Leyte. In the course of the morning, a Japanese convoy of six cargo ships and transports and four destroyers and escorts was observed heading for Leyte. The four Marine dayfighter squadrons put 27 Corsairs into the air, which intercepted the Japanese ships about 40 miles west of Panay Island. Each plane carried a 1,000 pound bomb armed with a 4–5 second delay fuze. Pilots of VMF–313, commanded by Major Joe H. McGlothlin, dive-bombed a troop transport, scoring a hit amidships with two bombs. VMF-115, led by Major John H. King, scored a hit on a cargo ship, setting it on fire. The eight Corsairs from VMF-211 in the group did not score any direct hits on the convoy but instead became embroiled in a dogfight with more than a dozen enemy fighters and downed four of them. During the bombing run, the Corsairs drew heavy antiaircraft fire, which was intense but inaccurate. Pilots of VMF-218 did not have a chance to observe the results of their bombing because they suddenly found themselves under attack by seven enemy fighters. In a running fight, two of the Japanese fighters were downed; another one disappeared in a cloudbank, trailing black smoke. When the action ended, the score was two enemy ships severely damaged and six aircraft downed, with one more probable.

During the afternoon of 11 December, 30 additional Marine aircraft, accompanied by Army P-40s, attacked the same convoy. Pilots of VMF-313 sank one large troop transport, a cargo vessel, and a destroyer and set two freighters on fire, at a cost of four Corsairs hit by antiaircraft fire, two of which were badly damaged. VMF-211 sank two destroyers and a troop transport at a cost of two aircraft. Aviators of VMF-115 scored a direct hit on a large cargo ship and left another listing and burning, at the cost of two aircraft. VMF-218 set the remaining destroyer on fire and scored hits on a large troop transport with unobserved results; one Corsair was lost in that operation.

Throughout the action, Japanese antiaircraft fire was unusually intense. Equally noteworthy were the tactics employed by the Marine pilots to counter it. While the Army aircraft released their bombs at altitudes between 2,000 and 10,000 feet, the Corsairs attacked at masthead level. One of the Marine pilots, speaking of the P-40s, somewhat caustically remarked:

> They accomplished nothing except to make interesting splashes in the water and wake up the Japs. AA immediately became very intense. As the last Army bombs were falling our Corsairs were in position and coming in fast and low. The Japs never saw us coming until we started to shoot (we received no fire until past the screening destroyers).[46]

Elsewhere off Leyte, the situation was reversed, and Corsairs of MAG-12 found themselves protecting American

[45] Cannon, *Leyte*, p. 283.

[46] Capt Rolfe T. Blanchard ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Philippines Comment File*, hereafter *Blanchard ltr.*

ships in Leyte Gulf from enemy air attacks. During the afternoon of 11 December, 4 Corsairs of VMF-313 spotted 16 Japanese fighters, carrying 500-pound bombs under each wing, headed for an American convoy passing through Surigao Straits. The Marine aviators, diving through friendly antiaircraft fire, engaged the enemy fighters, shot down five, and drove the remainder from the area, but not before two Japanese suicide planes had sunk a destroyer. Even though the timely intervention of the Corsairs prevented far greater damage to the convoy, the Marine aircraft received considerable damage from friendly antiaircraft fire.[47]

While the Corsairs of the Marine dayfighter squadrons were busy attacking Japanese ships, protecting American shipping, and patrolling, the Hellcats of VMF(N)-541 also did their share of fighting. Early on 12 December, the nightfighters intercepted a number of unidentified aircraft on their radar screens while flying cover for a convoy near Ormoc Bay. Just as a Japanese flight of 33 torpedo bombers, dive bombers, and fighters approached the American convoy, the Hellcats intercepted them and broke up the formation. Even though some of the enemy bombers inevitably got through to the target, the outnumbered Marine aviators kept the enemy off balance. As a result, all of the enemy bombs missed the convoy. During the battle it became evident that the Japanese evaded air combat whenever possible, though the Marines were greatly outnumbered. When the battle ended, the night fighters of VMF(N)-541 had destroyed 11 enemy aircraft and damaged 1, with no losses to themselves.[48]

War is not only the realm of suffering, as Clausewitz has put it, but is equally the sphere of the unexpected. Frequently, the perversity of weather or terrain can do greater harm than enemy action. For MAG-12, the predawn hours of 13 December spelled tragedy. At 0530, under conditions of extremely poor visibility, six Corsairs of VMF-313, accompanied by two Hellcats, set out on a mission to escort a friendly convoy. Because of bad weather and poor runway conditions at the Tacloban airfield, one of the Corsairs crashed during takeoff. In a tragic sequence of events, the plane smashed into a jeep, injuring its two occupants, one of whom was the group intelligence officer, who lost his left arm and suffered numerous other injuries. With scarcely diminished force, the plane hit an ambulance and a crash truck in front of the operations building, killing four men. The flaming inferno spread by the wrecked aircraft and vehicles prevented the remainder of the flight from taking off.[49]

Shortly afterwards, another Corsair, which had previously taken off crashed between Leyte and Samar for undetermined reasons. The pilot, in attempting to bail out, was struck in the face by the vertical stabilizer and killed. Far luckier was the pilot of one of the Corsairs who, following another strike against enemy shipping, was last re-

[47] MAG–12 WarD, Dec44.

[48] VMF(N)–541 WarD, Dec44.

[49] MAG–12 WarD, Dec44.

ported attempting a water landing. When no further word from him was received, he was initially presumed missing in action. Days later, after an odyssey that included ditching in the water, rescue by natives who thought he might be a German, and a feast on candy bars, whose wrappers bore the legend "I shall return," the pilot made it back to Tacloban, not much the worse for wear.[50]

Before the day was over, the 13th lived up to its reputation in yet another way. Even though 35 Corsairs of MAG-12 covered a friendly invasion convoy bound for Mindoro Island, a Japanese suicide plane arrived over the convoy at a time when the Corsairs were not on duty. The *kamikaze* selected none other than the flagship *Nashville* as his victim. The plane crashed into the ship, killing 129, including the chiefs of staff of both the naval force and the ground force commander, as well as the commanding officer of the 310th Bombardment Wing. In addition, four men were missing in action. Twenty-eight of the 41 Marines in the ship's detachment perished in the disaster.

Better days were to follow. The invasion of Mindoro Island, located just south of Luzon and 200 miles northwest of Leyte, promised to secure better airfields without the mud, which had so greatly plagued ground troops and aviators alike. At the same time, construction of a new airfield at Tanauan, about 45 miles west of Tacloban, promised to provide some relief for the overcrowding that had characterized MAG-12 operations at Tacloban. Though Japanese air power over Luzon remained strong, enemy air strength over Leyte was rapidly diminishing by mid-December. During the latter half of that month, ground operations on Leyte went into their final phase. Corsairs and Hellcats met fewer and fewer of their opponents in aerial combat until enemy resistance in the air all but ceased. For the Marine aviators on Leyte, the demise of the Japanese air strength did not mean the end of a mission but merely a change in emphasis. The type of operation for which they had been trained so zealously before coming to the Philippines, the support of ground troops, still had to be put into practice.

GROUND SUPPORT MISSIONS AND CLOSING PHASE[51]

Marine pilots on Leyte flew their first ground support missions on 10 December, when they struck at enemy bivouac areas at Ormoc and San Isidro on the west coast of the island. The results of both raids were generally unobserved, though fires subsequently swept the target areas. On 17 and 19 December, Corsairs again hit Japanese ground targets. On these occasions, 12 aircraft of MAG-12 bombed and strafed Japanese supply installations at Palompon, on the northwest coast of Leyte.[52] For the remainder of the month, Japanese airfields on Negros and Panay Is-

[50] Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, pp. 281–282.

[51] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MAG–12 WarD, Dec44; VMF(N)–541 WarDs, Dec44–Jan45; Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines; Philippines Comment File.*

[52] MAG–12 WarD, Dec44.

lands as well as on Mindanao and Luzon became primary targets of the Marine aviators.

Even though such attacks ultimately contributed to Japanese demoralization and defeat in the Philippines, this type of air support was a far cry from the close support tactics for which the Marines had trained. At no time during the Leyte operation did MAG-12 ever receive an assignment commensurate with its capabilities of giving close air support to ground troops. The Joint Assault Signal Companies, equipped with air-ground signal communication facilities, were not used for direct air-ground control. Pilots were briefed on their missions prior to takeoff and targets assigned on the day preceding an air strike. Once the flight became airborne, no further control was exercised from the ground.

It must be recalled that Marine aviation on Leyte came under the overall command of the Fifth Air Force and for this reason operated under the procedures and guidelines set forth by the AAF. Even though Marine and Army Air Forces pilots flew numerous missions over Leyte together, important differences in doctrine and training continually cropped up. Army aircraft on bombing missions, when subjected to enemy attack, tended to jettison their bombs and engage the enemy fighters. In so doing, they tended to abandon their primary mission; the Corsair pilots, on the other hand, kept their bombs and continued on despite enemy interference. As one of the Marine aviators on Leyte put it:

> The reason the Marine air strikes against enemy shipping were markedly more successful than the Army strikes was due simply to more thorough briefing and planning and vastly better air discipline.
>
> The thought was instilled in the minds of all Marine pilots that the assigned mission came first. Time after time Marine flights on combat air patrol would give up chasing bogeys who escaped from their assigned patrol area, rather than leave their assigned area, even though they could hear Army patrols on the same type of mission, merrily chasing Japs all over the Visayan Sea.[53]

For the remainder of December 1944 the Corsairs of MAG-12, in close teamwork with two Army fighter groups, bombed a series of villages on Luzon and attacked railway bridges, trains, and other railroad facilities. On Leyte, the fate of the Japanese was sealed when, on 25 December, elements of the Army's 77th Infantry Division went ashore at Palompon and seized the last port on Leyte under Japanese control. The enemy units remaining on Leyte were now completely cut off without any further hope of receiving reinforcements or evacuating the island. In their customary style, the Japanese fought on for another five months in a battle to the bitter end, but the die was cast. On 26 December, operations on Leyte passed into the hands of the Eighth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger. The Sixth Army now prepared for the next vital step in the liberation of the Philippines, the invasion of Luzon, scheduled for 9 January 1945.

For the fighter squadrons of MAG-12, the latter part of December brought at least some relief from the squalid conditions under which they had op-

[53] *Ibid.*

erated at crowded Tacloban airfield. Beginning on 21 December, and continuing through the 27th, the four day-fighter squadrons moved from Tacloban to the newly completed airstrip at Tanauan. This move once and for all brought to an end the congestion and mud that had been the trademark of Tacloban. The runway at Tanauan consisted of Marston matting, which had been placed over sand; despite the noisy vibration of the metal, landings were considerably safer than they had been at Tacloban.

As 1944 drew to a close, the role that Marine aviation was destined to play in support of ground operations on Leyte, had been partly fulfilled. In less than four weeks of operations, the fighter pilots of MAG-12 had flown a total of 264 missions. They destroyed 22 enemy ships and accounted for a total of 40 enemy aircraft. The price paid by the Marines for their exploits during the Leyte operation was 9 pilots killed and 34 aircraft lost.[54]

The night fighters of VMF(N)-541, during their stay on Leyte, also established a record worthy of mention. During the month of December, the squadron carried out 312 individual combat flights, totalling 924 combat hours. When, on 11 January, the Hellcats returned to Peleliu, they had accounted for 22 aircraft destroyed in the air, 5 destroyed on the ground, plus several probables. The night fighters had also destroyed four small surface craft loaded with enemy personnel.[55]

For their performance on Leyte, the nightfighters received a Letter of Commendation from Fifth Air Force and V Fighter Command, praising the squadron for making "an important contribution to the control of the air that is now assured our forces."[56]

As planning for General MacArthur's accelerated drive through the Philippines gained momentum, additional Marine aviation units stood poised to play their part in the liberation of the islands. For the enemy, the damage inflicted by Marine squadrons during the Leyte campaign was only a forerunner of what was to follow. The full impetus of the Marine doctrine of close support for the ground forces was yet to be tested in battle. The day for this test was fast approaching.

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[54] MAG-12 WarD, Dec44.

[55] VMF(N)-541 WarD, Dec44-Jan45.

[56] Ltr of Commendation, BGen Paul D. Wurtsmith, CG, V Fighter Cmd., n.d., as shown in VMF(N)-541 WarD, Dec44-Jan45, pp. 16-17.

The Luzon Campaign[1]

Except for a prolonged mopping up operation, the Leyte campaign was completed on 26 December 1944. The next step in the liberation of the Philippine Islands, scheduled for 9 January, was the invasion of Luzon at Lingayen Gulf, about 150 miles north of Manila. The lack of air bases on Leyte had already made necessary a postponement of the Luzon operation, initially scheduled for 20 December. The need to build airstrips on Mindoro Island just south of Luzon, from which land based aircraft could support the invasion, contributed further to the delay.

In many respects, the plan advanced for the seizure of Luzon resembled that employed for Leyte. Once again, the Sixth Army was to execute the landings, supported by the Third Fleet. Allied Naval Forces, under the command of Admiral Kinkaid and Allied Air Forces under General Kenney were to support the operation. In addition to the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces under SWPA, the Fourteenth Air Force in China and the Twentieth Air Force in the China-Burma-India Theater were to lend strategic support to SWPA operations in the Philippines. The immediate objective of the Luzon campaign was seizure of the plain of Central Luzon and Manila, the annihilation of Japanese forces on the island, and denial of the northern entrance to the South China Sea to the enemy.

As preparations for the Luzon invasion were going into full swing, additional Marine aviation units were en route from the Solomons to the Philippines, an indication of the expanded role that Marine aviation was to play in the liberation of the islands. As early as 7 December, General Mitchell had alerted MAG-14, then based in the Solomons, for movement to the Philippines. Under the command of Colonel Zebulon C. Hopkins, the group consisted of VMFs-212, -222, -223 and VMO-251, subsequently redesignated a fighter squadron.[2] For the remainder of December, despite the early alerting order, MAG-14 sat out the month in the Solomons, awaiting the conquest of Samar by the 1st Cavalry Division and

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: 1st MAW WarD, Dec44; VMF–212 WarDs, Oct44-Feb45; VMF–222 WarDs, Oct44-Mar45; USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns;* Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1963), hereafter Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines;* Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines, Luzon, Mindanao, the Visayas, 1944–1945—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II,* v. XIII (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959) hereafter Morison, *Liberation of the Philippines.*

[2] The names of squadron commanders during this time period have been included in the Marine Task Organization and Command List which forms an appendix to this volume.

the construction of an airstrip near the town of Guiuan on southeastern Samar. By the last week of December, the Seabees of the 61st and 93d Naval Construction Battalions had completed facilities at Guiuan to handle at least one squadron of MAG-14. On 30 December the flight echelon of VMO-251 departed Bougainville, and by way of Emirau, Owi, and Peleliu, reached Samar on 2 January. By mid-January, the remaining squadrons of MAG-14 had installed themselves at Guiuan, under conditions as primitive as those which MAG-12 had encountered on Leyte barely a month previously.

As 1944 neared its end, ground echelons of the squadrons of MAGs-24 and -32 were en route to yet unspecified objectives in the Philippines, though it appeared certain that their destination could be none other than Luzon. Following a Christmas service at Headquarters, General Mitchell made a brief speech to the assembled Wing Headquarters personnel. "His pronouncement that his Headquarters would be on its way to a forward area in a matter of weeks was enthusiastically received."[3]

Marine aviation based on Leyte was to play only a very limited role in support of the landings on Luzon. Two weeks prior to the assault on the main island and the days following the landings, Corsairs of MAG-12 struck at highway and railroad bridges in order to restrict enemy mobility and disrupt the Japanese transportation system. Because of frequent bad weather, the Corsairs occasionally were unable to reach the objectives assigned to them and instead attacked such targets of opportunity as trains and vehicular traffic. Japanese air activity was negligible throughout this period and air-to-air combat occurred infrequently, with "the remaining operational Japanese aircraft being either so widely dispersed as to be unavailable on short notice, or else being held in reserve for suicide attacks against the most dangerous enemy, the expected approaching fleet."[4]

The approach of that fleet was not a figment of the enemy's imagination, for on 3 January the minesweeping, shore bombardment, and escort carrier groups headed north through the Sulu Sea toward Lingayen Gulf. At the same time that the Seventh Fleet was departing from Leyte Gulf, the fast carriers of Halsey's Third Fleet struck hard at Formosa and the Ryukyus in order to forestall any Japanese attempt to reinforce the Luzon garrison. These air strikes, in which VMFs-124 and -213 from the carrier *Essex* participated, resulted in the destruction of over 100 enemy aircraft, despite extensive Japanese attempts at dispersal and camouflage.[5]

As the invasion fleet headed for Luzon, the officers and men on board the transports and escort ships were under no delusions as to the enemy's strength. In mid-December, a SWPA intelligence

[3] 1st MAW WarD, Dec44.

[4] USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 288.

[5] For a detailed account of Marine aviators on carriers, see Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Victory and Occupation—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. V (Washington: HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC, 1969), Part III, Chap 2, section entitled "Marine Air on Carriers," *passim*.

estimate had identified a tank division, five infantry divisions, six independent mixed brigades, and two separate infantry regiments on Luzon. By the end of the month, MacArthur's intelligence estimate figured enemy strength at a total of 152,000 troops of all categories. The Japanese were expected to commit all available air strength against the Allied invasion fleet and against any beachhead that might be established on Luzon. Japanese air strength in the Philippines was estimated at 400-500 aircraft, most of them stationed on Luzon.

As the main body of the Luzon Attack Force moved out of Leyte Gulf, the huge convoy posed a challenge which the enemy could not ignore. Beginning on 4 January, the remnants of the Philippine air garrison launched a series of *Kamikaze* attacks that soon began to take a toll of Allied ships. A suicide plane crashing into the escort carrier *Ommaney Bay* started a chain reaction of gasoline explosions which resulted in the abandonment and sinking of the ship. Another escort carrier barely escaped the same fate. On the following day the Japanese attacks against the convoy reached a new high when seven *Kamikazes* crashed into Allied ships and inflicted heavy damage on an escort carrier, two cruisers, and a destroyer, though none of these ships were sunk.[6] On 6 January the fury of the enemy onslaught from the air reached a climax. One of the ships attacked was the USS *New Mexico*, which was carrying Colonel Clayton C. Jerome, who was charged with the direction of the Marine aviation effort on Luzon. As the officer helplessly watched, a *Kamikaze* crashed the bridge of the *New Mexico*, causing 30 fatalities, including the captain of the ship, and wounding 87 men.[7] Before the day ended, an additional 15 Allied vessels were struck by suicide attacks. Even though only one ship sank as a result of this assault from the air, damage to the ships struck varied from moderate to extensive. Loss of personnel for 6 January alone totalled 167 killed and 502 wounded.[8]

As it became apparent to General MacArthur that land-based Allied aircraft could not keep all of the enemy airfields on Luzon neutralized, he diverted the fast carriers of the Third Fleet from Formosa and committed them against Japanese airfields on central Luzon. During a two-day period, on 6 and 7 January, repeated strikes by Navy and Marine carrier-based aircraft of the Third Fleet resulted in the destruction of more than 100 enemy aircraft.[9]

This blow, combined with strikes by land-based Allied aircraft on Leyte and Mindoro, broke the back of the massive Japanese onslaught against the invasion convoy, though this was not immediately apparent to American commanders, who were openly worried about the situation. From the Japanese point of view, the *Kamikaze* attacks were not as effective as had been hoped. Orders issued to the suicide pilots to concentrate their attacks on Allied transports were not followed, and com-

[6] USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 288.

[7] Morison, *Liberation of the Philippines*, p. 105.

[8] *Ibid.*, App IV, p. 325.

[9] USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 289.

bat vessels were instead singled out for attack. No one can estimate what would have happened, had the Japanese decided to rush air reinforcements from Formosa to Luzon. After 7 January the massive Japanese air effort tapered off, though:

> ... suiciders continued to appear in two's and three's for a week or more, but the battle in the Gulf, weird as it was and impressive as a testimony to the effectiveness of this form of attack, marked the end of the Japanese air forces in the Philippines. On 8 January the Naval Air Commander left for Singapore and his staff for Formosa, while the Commanding General of the 4th Air Army retired without his army to the hills of Luzon.[10]

Following in the wake of the harrowing voyage of the invasion convoy from Leyte Gulf to Lingayen, the Sixth Army landings of 9 January came as something of an anticlimax. Contrary to an earlier intelligence estimate at MacArthur's headquarters, which assumed that "a large and potentially dangerous concentration of Japanese forces held the region immediately east, northeast, and southeast of Lingayen Gulf,"[11] and deduced the presence of "at least two infantry divisions in position to defend Lingayen Gulf and environs,"[12] the landings were in fact unopposed. The X and XIV Corps went ashore and by nightfall had secured positions 3-5 miles inland along 15 miles of shoreline of southern Lingayen Gulf. (See Map 18).

The first Marines to go ashore on 10 January were Colonel Jerome, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, operations officer of MAG-24, and the colonel's driver, a Marine corporal. As the three Marines consolidated their "beachhead," they immediately set out in search of a strip which could be developed for the use of Marine aviation. A prewar field near Lingayen soon was so crowded with Army aircraft that selection of another strip was deemed desirable. An undeveloped site about 15 miles east of Lingayen appeared promising and was selected. Work on the strip had barely begun when, on 14 January, it became apparent that heavy graders had destroyed the thin crust of top soil and with it any chance of a solid undersurface. Colonel Jerome forthwith decided to abandon this site and instead selected an expanse of rice fields between Dagupan and Mangaldan about six miles to the southwest.

The selection of such a locale may at first glance appear a poor choice, though Colonel Jerome explained his action in the following words:

> The Mangaldan strip was only a rice paddy. But if the hills of a rice paddy are knocked down without tearing out the roots they make a fine, flat surface which, when oiled, will serve as an airstrip about 12 inches above the water level. Rains would eventually raise the level of the muck but Colonel Jerome, an old Philippines hand from the twenties, figured three dry months were due and that was all he needed at Mangaldan, and recommended that the Army engineers build there.[13]

And build they did. On this occasion Army engineers employed light bulldozers and built a 6,500-foot east-west runway. While this work was in prog-

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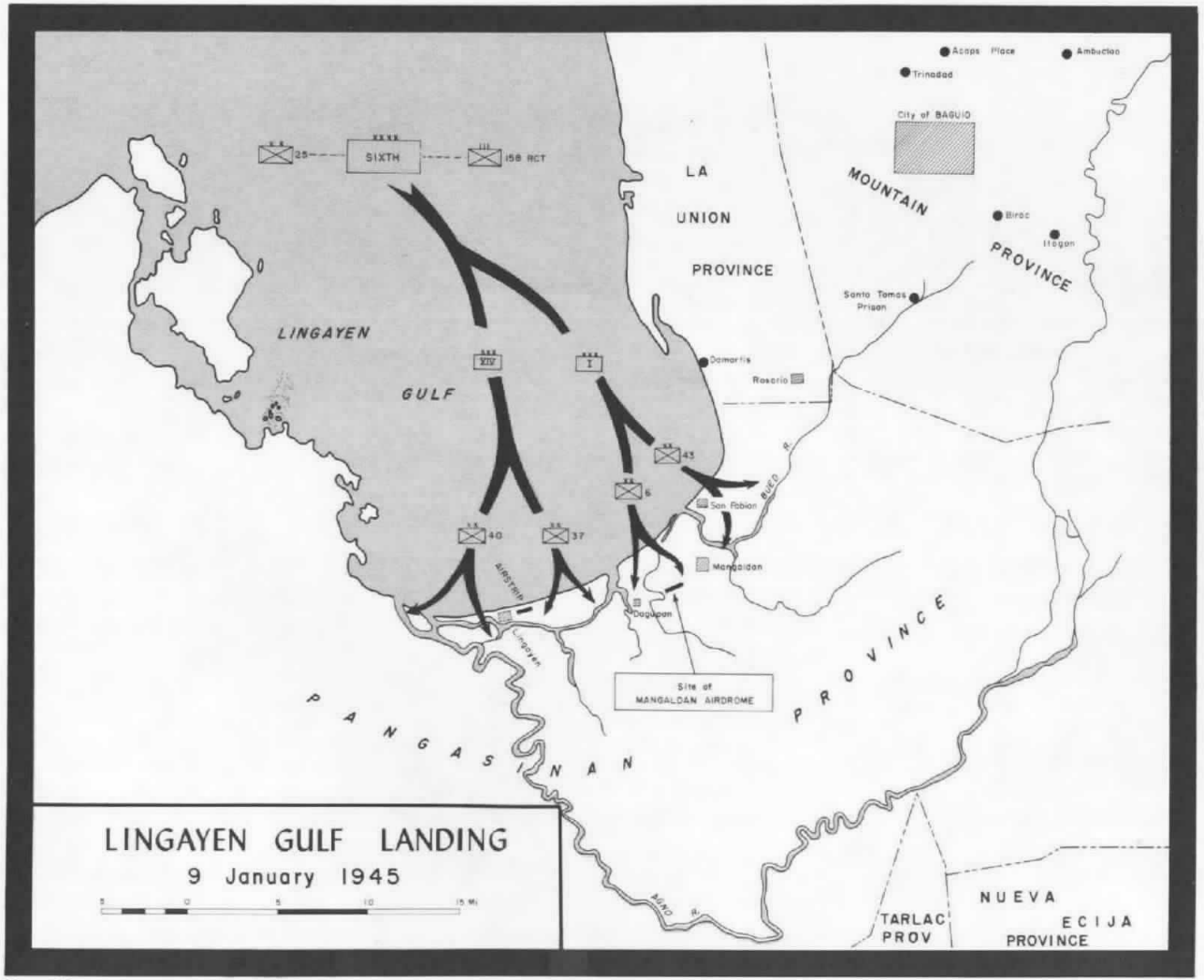
[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 27.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[13] Colonel Clayton C. Jerome interview by Robert Sherrod, cited in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 299.



Map 18

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ress, Colonel Meyer, commanding officer of MAG-24, who had been in charge of the movement of the ground echelon, arrived at Lingayen with 14 pilots and 278 enlisted men. Before leaving for the Marine airstrip at Mangaldan, the Marines assisted Sixth Army in unloading and laying steel matting on the Lingayen airfield, which earned them a commendation from General Krueger, the Sixth Army commander. In mid-January additional men and supplies arrived at San Fabian, five miles north of Mangaldan, where all hands helped in constructing a camp and such other facilities as were required for full-scale operation of the strip.

As work on the Mangaldan airstrip neared completion, Colonel Jerome was designated Commander, Air Base, Mangaldan, and at the same time Commander, Marine Aircraft Groups, Dagupan (alternately abbreviated as MAGs-Mangaldan or MAGsDagupan). The first aircraft of MAGs-24 and -32 arrived at Mangaldan on 25 January, and combat operations began two days later. By the end of the month, 7 squadrons consisting of 472 officers and more than 3,000 men, and 174 Douglas Dauntless divebombers (SBDs) had reached Mangaldan. These squadrons were VMSBs-133, -142, -236, -241, -243, -244, and -341.

Before long, the splendid isolation in which the Marine aviation squadrons had hoped to operate was shattered with the arrival of 250 Army Air Forces planes which were also stationed at the field. The Army aircraft and personnel, as well as the Marines, were under the operational control of the 308th Bombardment Wing of the Fifth Air Force. Colonel Jerome retained complete responsibility for the operation of the base and camp facilities, though he had not envisioned at the outset that before long Mangaldan airfield would become one of the busiest airports in the Western Pacific.

The arrival of two Marine air groups on Luzon and preparations for close support of Sixth Army ground troops on the island during most of January tended to overshadow the activities of MAGs-12 and -14 on Leyte and Samar. During the month of January, MAG-12 flew 306 missions, most of them in support of the Lingayen operation, while MAG-14 flew 1,590 sorties.[14]

Following completion of an improved landing strip at Tanauan on Leyte, operations of MAG-12 could be carried on under somewhat more normal conditions than had been the case on the overcrowded and treacherous Tacloban strip. For the Marines of MAG-14 stationed at Guiuan strip on southeastern Samar, problems grew from the lack of dispersal areas, adequate taxiing strips, and a field lighting system. These conditions inevitably resulted in a number of operational accidents; during January alone, MAG-14 lost 19 aircraft from this cause.

A spectacular accident, somewhat akin to the disaster that had struck at Tacloban on 13 December, marred operations at Guiuan on the morning of 24 January. During takeoff, a Corsair blew a tire, went out of control, and smashed into the revetment area shared

[14] Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 289.

jointly by VMFs-212 and -222. Within a matter of seconds the tents housing the intelligence section, oxygen, and other supplies were completely destroyed. In a desperate effort to rescue the pilot, Marine aviation personnel rushed to the blazing wreck, reaching it just as the plane exploded. The explosion snuffed out the lives of 11 Marines, including the pilot; more than 50 Marines were injured, many of them seriously.[15]

The occurrence of such accidents was unavoidable under existing conditions. By late January, the military situation in the Philippines had radically changed in favor of the Allies. Massive *Kamikaze* attacks had hurt the huge Allied invasion fleet headed for Luzon, but had failed to interfere with the actual landings. In effect:

> The submarine blockade, four months of carrier strikes overwhelming the Japanese air garrisons and destroying their merchant shipping, the destruction of their fleet in the great battle of October, and the attrition of their surviving air, of their transport, and other installations ... made possible the invasion of Luzon under militarily ideal circumstances. Unopposed on the beaches, our troops went ashore to fight a campaign at their leisure against an enemy disorganized and demoralized, badly equipped and badly supplied, isolated beyond hope of remedy; a campaign in which every aircraft in the sky was friendly.[16]

A large number of the friendly aircraft sweeping ahead of and clearing the path for the advance of the Sixth Army were the dive bombers of the Marine air groups based at Mangaldan, and a historical account of the Army sweep through Luzon also becomes the story of Marine aviation close support.

CLOSE AIR SUPPORT ON LUZON[17]

The overall Japanese plan for the defense of Luzon provided for the *Fourteenth Area Army* to halt or delay the advance of American forces into Central Luzon (See Map 19). Such tactics were designed to forestall additional American advances towards the Japanese homeland or other islands scheduled for invasion. On the whole, the outlook for the Japanese did not appear promising. At a time when MacArthur's headquarters estimated Japanese strength on Luzon at 152,000, the *Fourteenth Area Army* had only about 90,000 men there; the remainder consisted of 25,000 airmen and 20,000 naval personnel. The defense was further hampered by an extremely meager supply of arms and ammunition. Poor transportation facilities, the lack of effective antitank weapons, and a shortage of rations added to the precariousness of the Japanese foothold on Luzon. Increased activity on the part of American-led Philippine guerrillas also began to prove bothersome to the Japanese.

[15] VMF–212 and VMF–222 WarDs, Jan-Feb45.

[16] USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 289.

[17] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Marine Aviation in Close Air Support File; (HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC), hereafter *Marine Close Air Support File; McCutcheon Rpt; Philippines Comment File;* Maj Bertram C. Wright, USA, *The First Cavalry Division in World War II* (Tokyo: Toppan Printing Company, Ltd., 1947) hereafter, Wright; *1st CavDiv Hist;* Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun;* Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II.*

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These disadvantages did not prevent the enemy from offering determined resistance, but during the latter part of January Sixth Army made important gains. The I Corps had driven 50 miles southeast of Lingayen Gulf to Talevera. (See Map 20). By the end of January, the XIV Corps had seized Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg and was advancing westward into the Zambales Mountains. Elements of the XIV Corps had in fact reached a point only 25 miles from Manila. Other units landed on western Luzon near Subic Bay on 29 January and pushed eastward. Two days later, American paratroopers descended on Batangas Peninsula to the south of Manila. The stage was set for the envelopment of the capital of the Philippines.

Following the completion of the airstrip at Mangaldan, the Marine aviators of MAGs-24 and -32 had anticipated immediate close support operations for the Sixth Army advance across Luzon. It quickly became apparent, however, that the missions assigned to the Marines differed little from those flown on Leyte by MAG-12, and were directed against targets far behind the front lines. Beginning on 27 January, Marine aviators from Luzon raided San Fernando and Clark Field; in four days' time they had flown 255 sorties and dropped 104 tons of bombs, at the cost of one aircraft. The missions flown were assigned the evening preceding the attacks; moreover, control of the air strikes followed a cumbersome chain of command which led through the Army Air Forces 308th Bombardment Wing all the way to the Sixth Army, a far cry from strikes directed on target from jeep-mounted air liaison parties in the front lines.

Nevertheless, the dive bombers of the two Marine aircraft groups on Luzon performed creditably during the early phase of their employment on the island. The use of the Douglas Dauntless dive bombers by the Marines was unique in at least one respect, for the Marine squadrons were the only units still flying that type of aircraft during this phase of the war. The Army had discontinued use of dive bombers as early as 1942, and during the summer of 1944 the Navy had turned to more heavily armed and faster aircraft. Despite the valiant service the dive bomber had rendered for Marine aviation from Midway to Bougainville, due to the accuracy obtained with the aircraft in pinpointing targets, the SBD was rapidly becoming obsolete. This was due particularly to its limited combat radius of only 450 miles. The Luzon campaign was to become its swan song and the plane was scheduled for retirement at the end of the Philippines campaign. But Marine aviators in their outmoded aircraft were to have one more chance to show what they could do with the dive bombers in which they had so carefully trained in the Solomons. The opportunity was not long in coming.

It came with the arrival of the Army 1st Cavalry Division on Luzon on 27 January. The division had fought on Samar and Leyte before moving to Luzon. On the following day, the cavalrymen moved to an assembly area near Guimba, 35 miles inland from Lingayen, where the division was assigned to the XIV Corps. When General MacArthur visited the troopers on 31 Janu-

ary, he gave them an electrifying order, which was to:

> ...go to Manila. Go around the Nips, bounce off the Nips, but go to Manila. Free the internees at Santo Tomas. Take Malacanan Palace and the Legislative Building.[18]

To sustain this daring 100-mile dash through enemy territory, the 308th Bombardment Wing alerted all seven Marine squadrons on Luzon to provide a screen of nine planes from dawn to dusk over the 1st Cavalry Division.[19] Here was an assignment that the Ma-Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon formulated his doctrine of close air support back in the Solomons. For the first time, Marines would be able to fly close support with their own ALPs functioning right in the front lines. The teams, working closely in conjunction with the ground force commander, could call for air support when opposition was encountered, guide the aircraft to their targets, observe the effects of bombing or strafing, and correct any pilot errors without delay. For the dive bomber squadrons of MAGs-24 and -32, this was the long-awaited chance to prove their value to the ground forces.

At 0001 on 1 February, a specially organized "flying column" under the command of Brigadier General William C. Chase set out on the dash to Manila. There was an element of risk involved in the venture, for at such short notice the cavalrymen had not been able to reconnoiter routes of advance. Intelligence concerning the enemy was vague. The only transportation available consisted of vehicles organic to the 1st Cavalry Division and attached units. The advance, carried out over primitive roads, began in a complete blackout; the columns crossed rivers and rice paddies. At dawn the troopers approached Cabanatuan, their first major objective. There, the enemy offered determined resistance which continued throughout the day.

Despite enemy opposition, the column was not long delayed, and the high degree of mobility of the task force began to pay off. Included in the force were reconnaissance, antitank, medical, field artillery, tank, engineer, and infantry heavy weapons units, all working together to form a balanced striking force. Mindful of the mission they had received from General MacArthur, the cavalrymen did not waste any time on a costly frontal assault but, approaching Cabanatuan, converged on the town from three directions. Bypassing the Japanese stronghold, the main body of the task force continued on towards

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[18] General MacArthur to MajGen Verne D. Mudge, (USA), cited in Wright, *1st Cav Div Hist*, p. 126.

[19] "The 308th Bomb Wing did not want to authorize the 1st Cavalry Division to levy requests on us directly. Since the Division could not tell a day ahead exactly when and where targets would occur we suggested to them that they submit a request for nine aircraft to be overhead on station continuously from dawn to dusk. These arrangements were made by Captain Francis B. "Frisco" Godolphin of MAG–24. He visited the 1st Cavalry and ran into a staff officer who had been a student of his at Princeton University. Liaison was thus firmly established. The Division requested the aircraft from the 308th Bomber Wing. The 308th flagged us. We took it from there." MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon ltr to Head, HistBr, dtd 21Oct66, in *Philippines Comment File*, hereafter *McCutcheon ltr.*

Manila. The tactic of bypassing the Japanese wherever possible was followed on successive days, for:

> The mission of the 1st Cavalry Division was not to become embroiled in a large scale battle with the enemy, however, but rather to dash through him using such force as was necessary to get to Manila where the internees were waiting for liberation.[20]

During the three day sweep to Manila, the nine Marine dive bombers screening the advance and flanks of the column maintained a continuous vigil during the daylight hours. The planes were not utilized for bombing or strafing as the troops were able to cope with whatever resistance was encountered. Even though this state of affairs was disappointing to the pilots, "the very presence of the planes contributed greatly to the advance of the Division. The planes in effect were the flank guards and were used for observation and recco missions to provide information to the ground units on the status of roads, bridges, etc."[21]

From the very outset of the operation, an excellent relationship prevailed between the Marine air liaison parties attached to the task force and the cavalrymen. The Marine ALP consisted of two radio jeeps and a radio truck, manned by personnel of MAGs-24 and -32. Each jeep carried a Marine officer and one enlisted man, while the communications officer of MAG-24 and two enlisted men manned the radio truck.[22] Indicative of the matter-of-factness and cordiality which the Marine ALP received from the cavalry troopers is the reception accorded them by General Chase, who was in charge of the expedition. When informed of the presence of a radio jeep carrying two Marines, he merely ordered the occupants to stay beside him and his jeep at all times. Since the jeeps travelled well forward and were very useful in getting information from the planes direct to the unit commanders, it was not long before a battalion or regimental commander became a passenger in one of the radio jeeps.[23]

It was apparent that the simplicity of the Marine air-ground communications setup appealed to General Chase, as did the idea of literally having nine SBDs at his fingertips. Droning overhead in a lazy circle, the dive bombers were ready to pounce downward to stop any threat to the flanks of the column. Subsequently, the Marines were to learn to their astonishment that the 308th Bombardment Wing had also attached a formidable air liaison party to the "flying column." This party consisted of:

> ...a DUKW (complete with Filipino houseboy), a weapons carrier, a jeep, 27 men and 2 officers . . . but its equipment was such that it couldn't keep up with the advance or semiexposed positions.

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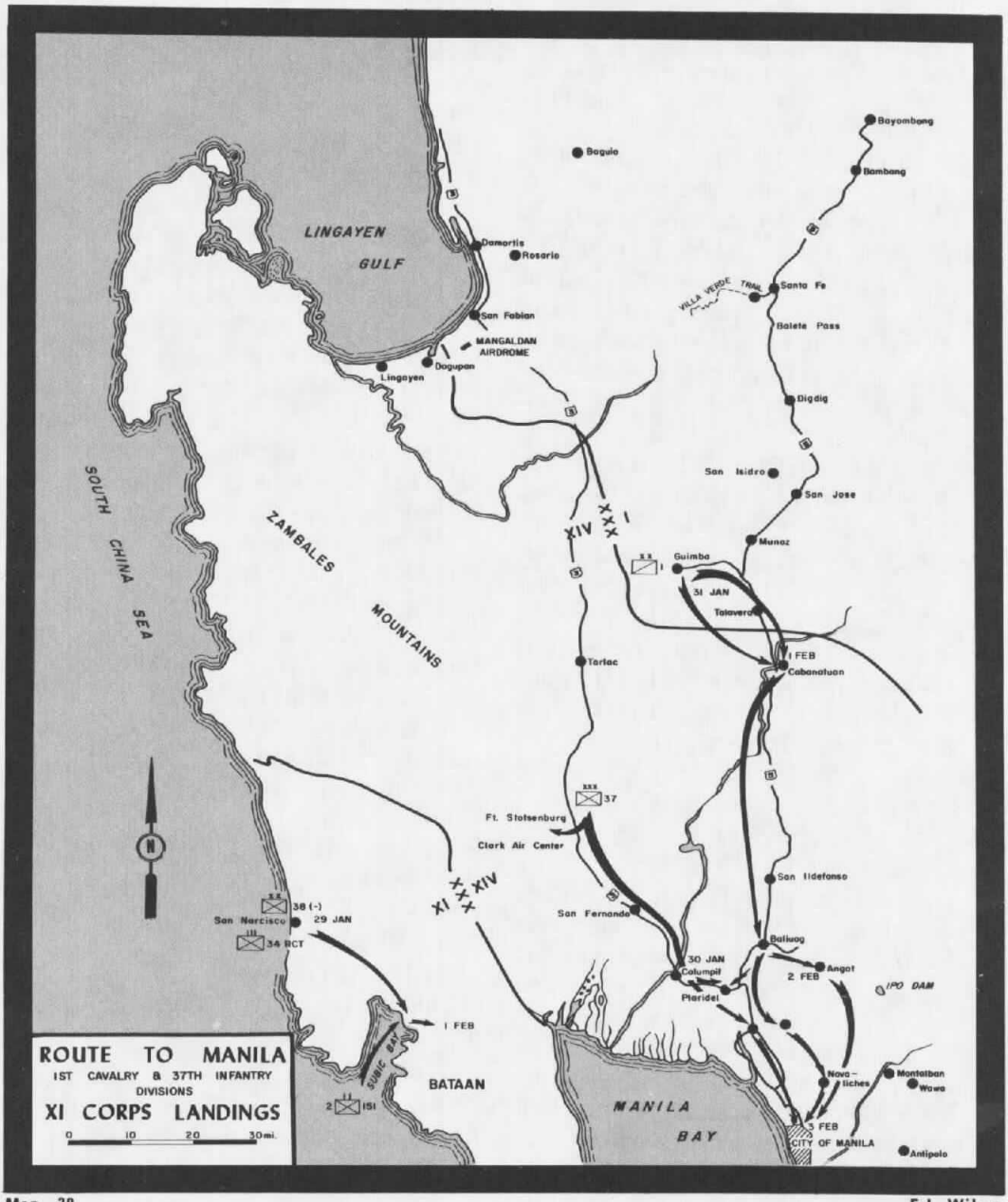
[20] Wright, *1st CavDiv Hist*, p. 127.

[21] *McCutcheon Rpt*, p. 8.

[22] With General Chase and the 1st Brigade was the radio jeep with Captain McAloney, driven by radio operator PFC P. E. Armstrong. With General Hugh Hoffman and the 2d Brigade was Captain Godolphin and his driver-radio man, Technical Sergeant R. B. Holland. In the radio truck, travelling with General Mudge and division headquarters were Captain Titcomb, Staff Sergeant A. A. Byers, and Staff Sergeant P. J. Miller. Captain Samuel H. McAloney ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Philippines Comment File.*

[23] *Ibid.*



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> Besides, for air support through that channel, requests would have to be forwarded and approved first by Division, then Corps, then Army and finally by 308th Bomb Wing.[24]

For three days the Marine dive bombers rode shotgun over the exposed left flank of the advancing column. Tirelessly, the Marine aviators searched an area 30 miles ahead and 20 miles behind the advance ground patrols, reporting all enemy troop movements that could conceivably interfere with the cavalrymen's ever lengthening lines of communications.

Aside from the nine SBDs flying over the task force, other Marine aviators bombed and strafed ahead of the column. On 1 February, while fighting at Cabanatuan was still in progress, two separate nine-plane flights attacked ahead of the cavalrymen in air strikes directed against Angat and San Jose del Monte, where enemy troops were known to have concentrated. On the following day, aircraft of VMSBs-133, -142, and -241 bombed and strafed San Ildefonso just ahead of the "flying column." Later on 2 February, after having passed through Baliuag, vanguards of the column linked up with elements of the 37th Infantry Division near Plaridel and crossed the Angat River, where strong opposition was encountered.

To the southeast of Baliuag, near Santa Maria, the cavalrymen encountered a well-entrenched enemy battalion occupying high ground which commanded the road and the river valley. In a situation where a costly firefight appeared unavoidable, the Marine aviators distracted the Japanese through a ruse which had worked once before during the capture of Hellzapoppin Ridge on Bougainville.[25] Since friendly troops were too close to enemy positions for a conventional dive bombing and strafing attack, "the dive bombers of MAG-32 made several strafing passes at the Japs without firing a shot . . . and enabled the squadron to slug its way into the defensive position and rout the occupants."[26]

The end of the second day of the drive towards Manila found the vanguard of the column within 15 miles of its objective. As the cavalrymen continued their advance south along Route 5, they ran into a road junction just north of Novaliches which was heavily defended by the Japanese. This junction, quickly dubbed "The Hot Corner," protected the approaches to a vital bridge in the path of the column. When the Marine aviators reported that this bridge was still intact, the cavalrymen rushed the Japanese defenses at the road junction and made for the bridge. Braving a hail of enemy fire, a Navy mine disposal officer ran onto the span and cut a burning fuze to a large mine which would have blown the bridge to bits within seconds.

At 1835 on 3 February, the vanguard of the "flying column" crossed the Manila city limits. The cavalrymen slipped

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[24] *Ibid.*

[25] For a detailed account of the battle for Hellzapoppin' Ridge, see Henry I. Shaw, Jr., and Maj Douglas T. Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. II (Washington: HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC, 1963), Part III, Chap 6, section entitled "Hellzapoppin' Ridge and Hill 600A," *passim*.

[26] Wright, *1st CavDiv Hist*, p. 128.

into the city just as dusk was settling. Guided by two Filipinos, the troopers began to roll past the Chinese Cemetery, where they became embroiled in a running battle with the enemy who sought cover behind the tombstones. The column kept moving through the darkness toward Santo Tomas University. Shortly before 2100, the 3,700 emaciated and tattered internees huddled inside the compound heard the clanking of tank treads.

> Indistinct voices floated up to the internees leaning out of the windows bent on missing nothing. A flare was sent up. Its light showed the time to be 8:50 P.M. Everything was quiet.
>
> A voice cut through the darkness: "Where the hell is the front gate?" The Americans had arrived for sure.[27]

Thus ended the 100-mile dash of the 1st Cavalry Division to Manila. In 66 hours after setting forth from Guimba, the task force had reached its objective, though driving the enemy out of Manila was to prove a costly and time-consuming process which was not due to be completed until 3 March.

For the part they had played during the dash for Manila, the Marine aviators received generous praise from the cavalrymen. The 1st Cavalry Division history evaluated the contribution of the Marines as follows:

> Much of the success of the entire movement is credited to the superb air cover, flank protection, and reconnaissance provided by the Marine Air Groups 24 and 32. The 1st Cavalry's audacious drive down through Central Luzon was the longest such operation ever made in the Southwest Pacific Area using only air cover for flank protection.[28]

Major General Verne D. Mudge, commanding the 1st Cavalry Division, was equally unsparing in his praise. Commenting on the support received from Marine dive bombers, the general had this to say:

> On our drive to Manila, I depended solely on the Marines to protect my left flank against possible Japanese counterattack. The job that they turned in speaks for itself. I can say without reservation that the Marine dive bombers are one of the most flexible outfits that I have seen in this war. They will try anything once, and from my experience with them, I have found out that anything they try usually pans out in their favor. The Marine dive bombers of the First Wing have kept the enemy on the run. They have kept him underground and have enabled troops to move up with fewer casualties and with greater speed. I cannot say enough in praise of these men of the dive bombers and I am commending them through proper channels for the job they have done in giving my men close ground support in this operation.[29]

General Chase remarked "that he had never seen such able, close and accurate air support as the Marine fliers were giving him,"[30] and this was ample praise, indeed, from the man who had fearlessly led his "flying column" into the heart of Manila.

Events in the progressing Philippines Campaign did not permit the Marine aviators to rest on their laurels, and other missions, equally as challenging as the drive to Manila, awaited them.

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[27] *Ibid., p. 125.*

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[29] Statement of MajGen Verne D. Mudge, USA, n.d., in *Marine Close Air Support File*, p. 9.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

SUPPORTING GUERRILLAS[31]

The excellent record which the Marine aviators of MAG-24 and -32 established in rendering close support to the 1st Cavalry Division on Luzon did not end with the liberation of Manila. While fighting for the capital of the Philippines continued throughout February and into the early days of March, another unusual assignment awaited the Marine pilots. Once again they were called upon to provide close air support, but in this instance the support was for Filipino guerrilla bands which were attempting to drive the Japanese invaders from Philippine soil.

The insurgent movement dated back to the early days of World War II, when U.S. Army officers organized remnants of cut-off Filipino forces into guerrilla bands. At the time that American resistance on Bataan ended, two U.S. Army officers, Major Russell W. Volkmann and Captain Donald D. Blackburn escaped and made their way to Northern Luzon, where they reported for duty to Colonel Martin Moses, the senior U.S. Army officer in that area.[32] It was estimated that "five regiments of these natives roamed the mountains and jungles of Northern Luzon,"[33] though a more conservative breakdown in the official Army history lists guerrilla strength on Luzon prior to the Lingayen landings at about 8,000 men, of whom only 2,000 were well armed.[34] This figure subsequently increased to more than 20,000 men.

Following the Luzon landings, Sixth Army took official cognizance of these insurgents by organizing them under the designation of United States Armed Forces in the Philippines (USAFIP or USFIP), North Luzon (NL). By any standard, the equipment of the guerrillas was primitive and consisted primarily of small arms. They had no artillery, only a few mortars, and very few machine guns.

From the Japanese point of view, even prior to the Lingayen landings, the guerrillas had already become annoyingly active. The *Area Army* was apprehensive lest all the natives become partisans whenever U.S. troops landed on Luzon. From the middle of November 1944, the Japanese therefore began to suppress the armed guerrillas. The outnumbered and ill-equipped insurgents proved no match for the Japanese, for they were not organized to engage major Japanese units in a sustained effort. At the outset it appeared unlikely "that Volckmann's or any other guerrilla unit, would ever become effective combat organizations."[35]

Increasing guerrilla strength and successes prompted General Krueger to reassess the role that the insurgents

[31] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MAG-32 WarDs, Jan44-Jun45; Wright, *1st CavDiv Hist;* Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II;* Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun.*

[32] BGen Russell W. Volkmann, USA, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 21Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File,* hereafter *Volkmann ltr.*

[33] Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II,* p. 307.

[34] Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines,* p. 466.

[35] *Ibid.* The above is disputed by General Volckmann who claims that after January 1944 the Japanese forces presented very little overall threat to USAFIP. *Volckmann ltr.*

were to play on Luzon. In the course of February more and more of the irregulars were equipped with arms and uniforms. In addition to harassing the Japanese, guerrillas also were increasingly active in reporting Japanese troop movements and gun positions on northern Luzon by means of radio equipment controlled by Colonel Volckmann. The rapid growth of the guerrilla forces on northern Luzon permitted an expansion of the role that the irregulars were to play. In addition to harassing raids, sabotage, and intelligence, the guerrilla mission was enlarged until in due time Colonel Volckmann's insurgents were able to substitute for a full combat division.

By mid-February 1945, Sixth Army was aware of the close support work that Marine aviation had been doing on Luzon. Since the Marines had trained ALPs which had already been successful in coaching dive bombers to their targets near Manila, the 308th Bombardment Wing decided to attach Marines to Colonel Volckmann's guerrillas to direct close support missions. Once again, the Marine aviators were confronted with a situation that even a few months previously no one could have anticipated. On 20 February, four officers from MAG-24 and -32 held a preliminary conference with Colonel Volckmann, the purpose of which was to plan methods of giving close air support to the guerrillas on northern Luzon.

As a result of this meeting, three officers, three enlisted men, a radio jeep, and a radio truck were loaded on an LCT and put ashore on northwestern Luzon about 50 miles behind the enemy lines and attached to Colonel Volckmann's guerrilla headquarters at Luna, where they arrived on Washington's Birthday. From the point of view of Marine aviation, the assignment promised to be of more than casual interest, for:

> ... there the airplane could prove itself as a weapon against enemy troops because there was no confusing it with the field artillery and naval gunfire. If a dead Japanese was found who hadn't been drilled by a .30 caliber bullet, the chances were he owed death to the close-support airplane.[36]

The first mission awaiting the Marine ALP was the elimination of Japanese entrenched on a ridge just east of the enemy-held port of San Fernando. The ridge ran from north to south; in the hands of the guerrillas this terrain feature would afford control over the port city from the east. The trouble was that the Japanese were well dug in on the ridge and held the highest parts of it. The terrain was devoid of cover and with no supporting weapons to assist them, the Filipinos were stymied.

The arrival of the ALP offered new possibilities, which were realized at once. The resourceful guerrillas cut a trail from the north to the top of the ridge. Under cover of darkness, they dragged the radio jeep up to the top, where it was concealed behind a rise in the ground about 50 yards from the front line. A remote control was run from the jeep to a good observation post at a high point just behind the dug-in troops. The radio truck remained a few miles to the rear at a

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[36] Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 308.

location where it could function as a direct link between the jeep and MAGs-Dagupan 50 miles to the south. In order to eliminate any chance of having an air strike hit friendly troops, cloth panels were displayed to mark the front line, a procedure that had already been tested and adopted prior to World War II.

The first strike aircraft to arrive were 12 Army planes, which were guided to the ridge and flew over its entire length until the pilots had a clear picture of the front lines. What followed next has been described in the following words:

> All was now set for the strike. Running from north to south at a minimum altitude in three plane sections, the planes released 100-pound parafrags [fragmentation bombs dropped by parachute, fuzed to go off instantaneously on contact] to hit less than 200 yards beyond the front line panels, and at minimum intervals on down the ridge. The result was a complete plastering of the entire ridge and the Jap entrenchments for 1,000 yards ahead of the Filipinos. At the completion of the bomb runs the planes returned and made very low altitude strafing runs, starting in hardly 100 yards ahead of the guerrillas and raking the ridge for a little over 1,000 yards. After three or four live runs were made by the planes everything was set for the troop advance.[37]

Following a prearranged signal, the guerrillas charged out of their holes while the aircraft, forewarned of the forward movement of friendly troops by radio, skimmed over the heads of the insurgents in dry runs. The Filipinos advanced 1,000 yards to a high point on the ridge without incurring a single casualty, encountering only dead Japanese and seizing a quantity of abandoned materiel en route. About 50 Japanese attempting to withdraw from the ridge were spotted and strafed by the Army aircraft.

Once the aircraft left the area, however, the Japanese rallied and began to inflict casualties. Once more, the Marine radio truck called for air support. On this occasion five Marine dive bombers carrying 500-pound general purpose bombs pounded and strafed the Japanese positions on the center of the ridge. Again the Japanese were forced to pull back from the hill, but on this occasion the radio jeep "talked" the dive bombers onto houses in the valley where a number of the enemy had been observed taking refuge. Both houses and occupants were eliminated after final corrections had been made by dry runs on specific buildings.

On 26 February, as the fight for San Fernando continued, the guerrillas encountered difficulty in driving well dug-in Japanese from Reservoir Hill, an elevation just north of the city. Once again, using the same tactics previously employed in driving the enemy from a hilltop at San Fernando, Army and Marine aircraft bombed and machine-gunned the Japanese on the hill, knocking out individual pillboxes during the attack. While aircraft buzzed over their heads, the guerrillas occupied the hill. Later that day the Japanese counter-attacked with artillery support and recaptured the height. As a result, on 28 February, the Marine dive bombers and Army fighters had to repeat the entire performance, though on this occasion

[37] Samuel H. McAloney, "Air Support," in *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 29, no. 11, (Nov 45), pp. 38–43, hereafter McAloney, "Air Support."

napalm was added to burn down bamboo thickets. This measure was effective, and guerrilla capture of Reservoir Hill proved permanent.

In many other instances too numerous to mention here the coaching of air strikes by Marine ALPs in the front lines was similarly successful. In one instance, the air strikes killed 137 out of 150 enemy troops. As to the remainder, the guerrillas reported: "Of the 13 who were still alive, we have killed seven and are hunting the other six in the woods."[38] As the guerrilla movement on Luzon grew in size and insurgent operations increased in momentum, the Marines continued to give such close air support as was required. On 1 March, one of the Marine officers serving as a member of the ALP with USAFIP, Captain Jack Titcomb, was killed by a sniper's bullet "while asking for more planes for a strike, microphone in hand."[39]

Between 5-31 March, a total of 186 missions were flown in support of guerrillas on Northern Luzon. As the guerrilla operations spread to other islands in the archipelago, the Marines provided additional ALPs where needed, as well as the necessary close support. In each instance, the results obtained were the same. The Japanese either died in place or were forced to pull back. Of one position where the Japanese had decided to stick it out, a report of the position after it had been pasted by close support aircraft described it as "a stink hole of dead."[40]

On northern Luzon, guerrilla operations finally reached proportions where Colonel Volckmann's force was able "to substitute for a full division, taking the place of the regular division that Krueger had planned to send up the west coast in a series of shore to shore operations, an undertaking that by mid-February, USAFIP(NL) successes had rendered unnecessary."[41]

Once again, as in close support of regular forces, the versatility of Marine aviation had vindicated Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon's doctrine. Before the liberation of the Philippines was completed, Marine aviators were to make further important contributions to the campaign.

FINAL MARINE AVIATION ACTIVITIES ON LUZON[42]

The arrival of the 1st Cavalry Division in the city of Manila in early February did not mean the end of fighting for the capital of the Philippines. An additional month was required before the last Japanese resistance was wiped out. In the mountains northeast of the city, about 80,000 Japanese were holed up in caves and pillboxes. The Japanese line of defense known as the *Shimbu* Line, generally extended for about 25 miles, from north to southeast. The

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[39] Comment of Capt Samuel H. McAloney, as cited in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 310.

[40] McAloney, "Air Support," p. 41.

[41] Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 467.

[42] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MAG–24 WarD, Mar45; MAG–32 WarDs, Feb-Mar45; *Marine Close Air Support File;* Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines;* Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II.*

50,000 Japanese comprising the *Shimbu Group*, firmly entrenched in excellent defensive positions, posed a threat not only to the city of Manila but also to the vital reservoir on which the city depended for its water supply.

Even though Marine aviators had given an excellent account of themselves in supporting the 1st Cavalry Division Drive to Manila and in assisting guerrillas in northwestern Luzon, a number of Army commanders still were unaware of the type of air support available to them or otherwise remained skeptical. It became incumbent upon the Marine aviators to make their capabilities known to high-ranking Army officers. As commander of the Marine air base at Mangaldan, Colonel Jerome approached Major General Innis P. Swift, Commander of I Corps, and the Commanding General of the XIV Corps, Major General Oscar W. Griswold, urging these commanders to make maximum use of close air support. In the final analysis, the division commanders had to be convinced that close support would materially help the infantry.

The task of making the rounds of infantry divisions fell to officers of Colonel Jerome's staff. The efforts of these officers to sell Marine close support to the division commanders did not always fall on fertile ground. One of the division commanders, Major General Edwin D. Patrick, USA, commanding the 6th Infantry Division was particularly hard to convince. Captain James L. McConaughy, Jr., one of the assistant MAG-32 intelligence officers, summed up the division commander's attitude as follows: "He (the general) was scared of airplanes; that is, scared of their accuracy and lack of ground control. He was polite but absolutely firm."[43]

On 8 February, when the 6th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division faced formidable Japanese defenses east of Manila, the division commander experienced a change of heart. General Patrick happened to be visiting the 1st Cavalry Division zone of attack when General Mudge, commander of the cavalry division, called for an air strike to help his troops seize a ridge from which the Japanese were pouring heavy machine gun and mortar fire on his troops. When the leader of the air strike arrived overhead, the Marine air liaison officer instructed him to hit the Japanese on the reverse side of the hill in order to preclude any chance of hitting friendly troops. As the two division commanders watched, the target was marked with white phosphorus smoke. Shortly thereafter, the first bomb hit near the crest of the ridge, on the reverse slope. As seven dive bombers in succession unloaded their bombs on the target, "the cavalrymen cheered like football fans."[44] After the dust had settled a patrol gingerly moved up to the crest of the ridge. There was no opposition. What was left of 8 machine gun and 15 mortar emplacements offered mute testimony to the effectiveness of close air support. Three hundred enemy dead lay nearby. In

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[43] Capt James L. McConaughy, Jr., ltr to Robert Sherrod, dtd 13May48, as cited in Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 84, hereafter *McConaughy ltr.*

[44] Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 304.

addition, the troopers picked up 11 unmanned heavy machine guns.

Two days later, in the biggest strike of the Luzon campaign, 81 aircraft from VMSBs-241, -142, -243, -244, and -341 attacked Japanese oil dumps, antiaircraft artillery positions, and a number of towns serving as enemy strongpoints. Once again, with the help of guerrilla-supplied information, the bombs landed square on target.

By this time General Patrick required no further urging. When the 6th Infantry Division launched an attack against the *Shimbu* Line on 24 February, the division commander saw to it that Marine aviators were coached to the target by an air liaison officer. The first bombs hit targets 1,000 yards from the friendly troops, but on subsequent runs bombs were dropped within 500 yards or less from the American lines. All the tricks of the trade, including dummy runs while the infantry advanced, were employed.

General Patrick was so impressed with this performance that henceforth he not only began to insist on close air support but also required all units of his division to submit accurate evaluations of air strikes. As they arrived, such evaluations bore additional witness to the value of Marine air support.

One of the regiments of the 6th Infantry Division, the 1st Infantry, staunchly refused to have anything to do with air support—Marine or otherwise. Colonel James E. Rees, the regimental commander, had been leery of aircraft ever since 4 February when Fifth Air Force B-25s, making an unscheduled strafing run across the regimental front, had killed 2 and wounded 25 of his men near San Jose north of Manila.[45] However, on 28 February a situation arose which made it incumbent upon the regimental commander to call for the assistance of Marine aircraft. During the heavy fighting then in progress at the *Shimbu* Line to the east of Manila, most of a group of 15 or 20 men withdrawing from high ground near Mount Mataba lost their footing and tumbled into a 40 foot ravine. Eventually a lieutenant and a dozen men wound up in the ravine, which was covered by enemy fire. The men refused to abandon the lieutenant whose leg was injured and who was unable to walk. A member of the Marine ALP in the vicinity has described the situation as follows:

> There were Japs a couple of hundred yards away, though because of the terrain it might take them an hour to reach the stranded party. We said we could help. After a very thorough briefing, all by radio, the regimental commander said the lead plane could drop one wing bomb. It was beautiful to watch. We were on a high cliff on one side of the valley and it was a clear day. The first drop was dead on. The colonel was impressed and allowed that we could let the lead plane come in again and drop his belly and other wing bomb. It took the SBD 20 minutes to climb up again. His second dive was fantastically accurate, too, and the colonel said he was convinced, so the other eight planes followed the squadron leader down. The bombing was fantastically successful—the farthest one of 27 bombs being 30 yards off the target. They got the party out thanks to this discouragement to the Nips and from then on this colonel couldn't get enough planes for his regiment. Liter-

[45] 6th InfDiv Jnl and Jnl File, 4Feb45; 1st InfRpt Luzon, pp. 23–24 as cited in Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 198.

ally, he asked for nine flights (nine planes each) as a standing, daily order.[46]

One of the bystanders closely observing the air strikes was General Patrick, commander of the 6th Infantry Division. In a letter of commendation, the division commander had this to say about Marine air support and this incident:

> The close air support given this Division by the 308th Bombardment Wing and Marine Air Group, Dagupan (MAGD), in the operations now being conducted in the Marakina Watershed area has been outstanding. The advance of our troops over difficult mountainous terrain against a well-armed determined enemy is being made possible in no small part by such air strikes.
>
> Particularly noteworthy have been the skillfully coordinated and accurate air strikes of the SBD's of the MAGD based at Mangaldan Field. In one strike made on 28 February against Mt. Mataba, these Marine pilots dive-bombed a pinpointed target located between two friendly forces with accuracy comparable to that obtained by field artillery. The courage, patience, and willingness displayed by these men deserve high praise.[47]

Throughout the month of February, while bitter fighting continued in and around Manila, Marine aviation remained much in evidence in the Philippine capital. In addition to providing close air support to the ground troops, SBDs of MAGs-24 and -32 divebombed Nichols Field, attacked docks and buildings on Corregidor, struck at derelict shipping that served as enemy nests of resistance in Manila Harbor, and otherwise harassed the Japanese at every turn. Marine aviators, never loath to improvise when the situation called for it, soon took advantage of one of the broader Manila avenues:

> Within three days after the American entry into Manila, the 1st Cavalry Brigade had established itself in the vicinity of Quezon City, a suburb in the eastern outskirts of Manila. A widened Quezon boulevard turned into a makeshift airstrip, became a familiar roosting spot for SBDs. Especially did it facilitate pilot forays to front lines for ground liaison duty or observation. A MAGSDAGUPAN skeleton crew later was maintained on the "strip" to service Marine planes landing there, and two jeeps were kept on hand for transportation forward.
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> * * * * * * *
>
> The boulevard-strip, as an emergency landing field during these (close support) operations, had something more than incidental utility. For a time, an average of one SBD per day had reason to seek refuge there because of damage from antiaircraft fire, mechanical difficulties or fuel shortage.[48]

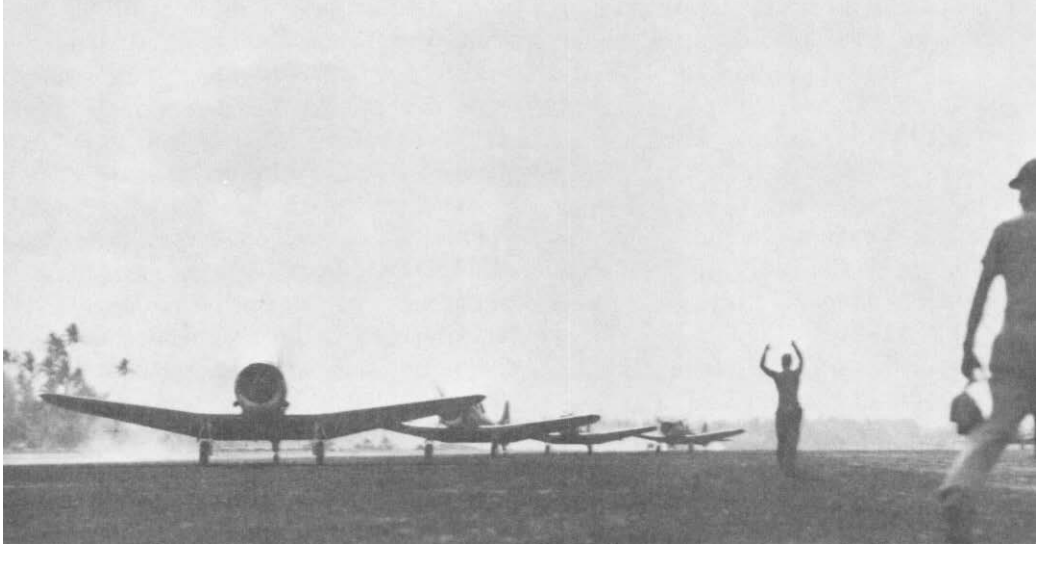
For the remainder of February and during early March the SBDs gave close support to the 6th, 25th, 37th, 38th, 40th, and 43d Infantry Divisions, as well as the 1st Cavalry and the 11th Airborne Divisions. In the case of each division the Marine aviators found acceptance once the quality of their air support had become recognized. Far from being content to rest on their laurels, Marine aviators continued to perfect air-ground coordination of air strikes. One innovation tested on 19 February was the use of an airborne coordinator. A single plane, piloted by the air coordinator, reported to the

[46] *McConaughy ltr.*

[47] MajGen Edwin D. Patrick ltr to CO, 308th Bombardment Wing; CO, Marine Air Group, Dagupan (MAGD) Thru: CG, XIV Corps, dtd 1Mar45, in *Marine Close Air Support File.*

[48] Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 90.

U.S. ARMY 37TH INFANTRY DIVISION *troops move up Highway 5 on Luzon after Marine dive bomber attack on enemy hill positions. (USMC A700603).*



MARINE DIVE BOMBERS *returning from close air support mission for Sixth Army troops on Luzon. (USMC 109092)*

SAP and ALP prior to arrival on target of the strike flight. Ground radio tendered him all target and friendly troop identification and, upon the arrival of the flight over the target, he would make a marking run on the objective for their benefit. This run could be followed by an immediate attack.

Aside from an occasional air alert, the air base at Mangaldan escaped enemy attack throughout the month of February. Early on 2 March, the Japanese struck back in retaliation for all the indignities Marine aviation had heaped upon them since the invasion of Luzon. At 0200 a Japanese twin-engine bomber (commonly known as Betty), flying at a high altitude, was picked up by the searchlights. While every antiaircraft gun in the area opened up on this lone intruder, almost all personnel stood up in their foxholes to watch the action. Exploiting the diversion, two additional Bettys came over the camp area at an altitude of 300 feet or less and dropped nearly 300 antipersonnel bombs on the unsuspecting Marines. The casualties caused by this air attack were 4 dead and 78 wounded.[49] Among the officers wounded were Colonel Lyle H. Meyer, who had assumed command of MAGs-Dagupan on 19 February, and Lieutenant Colonel Wallace T. Scott, operations officer of MAG-32.

Around a dozen 500-lb. bombs struck the east end of the airfield and burrowed deeply into the ground, but did not explode. A direct bomb hit on an SBD resulted in the total loss of the aircraft; another SBD had a wing torn off by shell fragments. Damage to the telephone switchboard, sick bay area, ordnance and quartermaster tents, and other base facilities was extensive. Nevertheless, the raid did not disrupt flight operations, and squadrons carried out their assigned strikes as usual while the ground echelon went about the business of restoring the camp.

The progress of operations on Luzon and operations planned for the southern Philippines resulted in a reshuffling of Marine aviation units at MAGsDagupan. As early as mid-February Colonel Jerome received word that MAG-32 would be used in the Mindanao campaign and that the ground echelon of the air group would accompany Army assault forces into Zamboanga on 10 March. For the Zamboanga operation, one additional tactical squadron was transferred to MAG-32, bringing the strength of the air group to four squadrons. By 20 February the ground echelon of MAG-32 had moved to the vicinity of San Fabian, and departed in LSTs on 23 February. Some members of the MAG-32 headquarters staff left Mangaldan during the last two days of February by air transport.

Even though the landings at Zamboanga took place on schedule on 10 March, the flight echelon of MAG-32 remained on Luzon until 24 March, the last aircraft of the air group departing from the island on the 26th. MAG-24, now reduced to three squadrons, remained at Mangaldan. For the ground echelon of MAG-24, the departure of MAG-32 planes and pilots represented a major relief, since the movement of the ground echelon of MAG-32 on 23 February had imposed on the MAG-24

[49] MAG–24 WarD, Mar45.

ground crews the necessity of servicing both air groups. Combat operations of MAG-24 continued unchanged until 2 April, when the squadrons were ordered to halt operations and prepare for movement to Mindanao. As the ground echelon of MAG-24 was in the process of boarding ship on 7 April, Sixth Army called for the resumption of combat operations. Torrential rains and extremely heavy mud precluded operational use of Mangaldan until 10 April, when nine aircraft bombed the Japanese near Balete Pass. Four days later, it became evident that rain and mud were washing out the airfield, and all operations ceased as of that date. The flight echelons of the three squadrons moved south to Clark Field. On 20 April MAG-24 joined MAG-32 on Mindanao.

During the time they operated on Luzon, the Marine aviators of MAGs-24 and -32 had flown a total of 8,842 combat missions. The SBDs fired over one and a half million rounds of .30 and .50 caliber ammunition and dropped 19,167 bombs. Between 27 January and 14 April, the Marines flew an average of 1,000 sorties per week.[50] The ground crews at MAGsDagupan kept an average of 81 percent of the SBDs in a state of combat readiness; in many instances individual aircraft were flown up to nine hours per day.

Marine Corps files are replete with letters of commendation from Army corps and division commanders who witnessed the performance of Marine aviators on Luzon. In praising the achievements of Marines on Luzon, General Walter Krueger, commanding the Sixth Army, had this to say:

> In the crucial stages of the Luzon Campaign . . . this support was of such high order that I personally take great pleasure in expressing to every officer and enlisted man . . . my appreciation and official commendation for their splendid work.
>
> Commanders have repeatedly expressed their admiration for the pin-point precision, the willingness and enthusiastic desire of pilots to fly missions from dawn to dusk and the extremely close liaison with the ground forces which characterized the operations of the Marine fighter groups. By constant visits of commanders and pilots to front line units in order to observe targets and to gain an understanding of the ground soldier's problems, by the care which squadron commanders and pilots took to insure the maximum hits, and by the continuous, devoted work of ground crews in maintaining an unusually high average of operational crews, the 24th and 32d Marine Air Groups exemplified outstanding leadership, initiative, aggressiveness and high courage in keeping with the finest traditions of the Marine Corps.[51]

[50] Figures taken from Marine Corps statistics as cited in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 311.

[51] General Walter Krueger ltr to CO, 1st MAW, dtd 16May45, in *Marine Close Air Support File.*

Southern Philippines Operations[1]

The beginning of March 1945 saw American forces firmly entrenched in the Philippines. On Leyte, military operations were all but completed and the objectives of the Leyte campaign, the establishment of a solid base for the reconquest of the Philippines, had been achieved. Japanese emphasis on the defense of Leyte had adversely affected the enemy capability of making a decisive stand on Luzon, the strategic nerve center of the Philippines. Unable to stem the American advance, the *Fourteenth Area Army* on Luzon resorted to the operational stratagem of "confining the American forces to Luzon despite inferior strength . . . and holing up in the mountainous districts of Luzon."[2] Aside from tying down sizable American forces in what was at best a prolonged delaying action, the enemy was unable to seriously upset the American timetable. In four months of operations, the U. S. Sixth and Eighth Armies had also seized Samar and Mindoro, as well as some of the smaller islands in the Visayan and Samar Seas.

Barely a month after the campaign on Luzon had begun, General MacArthur decided that the time had come to move into the southern Philippines. The general deemed the recapture of Palawan, Mindanao, and other islands in the Sulu Archipelago essential for two reasons. First, bypassing the southern Philippines would leave their inhabitants at the mercy of Japanese garrisons for an undetermined period of time, a situation clearly inconsistent with United States interests in the area. Secondly, theater strategy required early seizure of the islands for ultimate use as air and naval bases, as well as for serving as a steppingstone in the projected conquest of Borneo and other Japanese-held islands in the Dutch East Indies, the area presently part of Indonesia.

The plans developed for the recapture of the Southern Philippines were known as the VICTOR operations. They were numbered I through V and called for the following schedule:

VICTOR I (Panay) 18Mar45
VICTOR II (Cebu, Negros,

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: Eighth Army Operational Monograph on the Palawan Operation (VICTOR III) n.d., hereafter Eighth Army, *Palawan Ops* (NARS, WWII Recs Div); Eighth Army Operational Monograph on the Zamboanga-Sulu Archipelago Operation (VICTOR IV), n.d., hereafter Eighth Army, *Zamboanga-Sulu Archipelago Ops* (NARS, WWII Recs Div); *Marine Close Air Support File;* Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun;* Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines;* Robert L. Eichelberger and Milton Mackaye, *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo* (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), hereafter Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo,* quoted with permission; Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines;* Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II.*

[2] Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun,* p. 132.

Bohol)	25Mar45
VICTOR III (Palawan)	28Feb45
VICTOR IV (Zamboanga and Sulu Archipelago)	10Mar45
VICTOR V (Mindanao)	17Apr45

On 6 February 1945, General MacArthur ordered Eighth Army to prepare operations against Palawan, Mindanao, and other islands in the Sulu Archipelago. Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, the army commander, had available for the southern Philippine operations Headquarters, X Corps, five infantry divisions, and a regimental combat team of parachutists. On 17 February, Eighth Army issued a plan of operations for the reoccupation of the southern Philippines.[3] The first of the operations was VICTOR III. Landings by the 41st Infantry Division were to be carried out on 28 February at Palawan and on 10 March at Zamboanga, the western extremity of Mindanao. The Thirteenth Air Force was to provide air support for the two operations in addition to its mission of supporting Eighth Army on those Philippine islands that were located south of Luzon.

Far East Air Forces planned to have Marine aviation units participate in the liberation of the southern Philippines. To this end, MAG-12 and -14, stationed on Leyte and Samar respectively, were to reinforce the Thirteenth Air Force; the Marine dive bomber units of MAGs-24 and -32, which had performed so well on Luzon, were to be shifted south to Mindanao as soon as they had completed their mission of supporting the Sixth Army. MAGs-12, -14, and -32 were to provide direct air support during the landings on Zamboanga and in the subsequent ground operations.

The 41st Infantry Division had the task of seizing the town of Zamboanga in an amphibious assault. Due to its peculiar location in relation to the remainder of Mindanao, Zamboanga province was virtually separated from the island except for a narrow isthmus. There, inaccessible mountains and dense jungle formed a major terrain obstacle. During the conquest of Mindanao, Eighth Army expected to rely on the assistance of a sizable guerrilla force. Organized in 1942 and supplied and trained by the Americans since then, this native force could be of immediate assistance to the invasion troops. The guerrillas, under the command of Colonel Wendell W. Fertig, numbered over 33,000 by February of 1945; 16,000 of them were armed.

Similar guerrilla organizations of varying size existed on the islands of Negros, Cebu, and Panay. Bohol, Palawan, and other islands in the Sulu Archipelago harbored small guerrilla units that were relatively ineffective. Prior to the assault on the southern Philippine islands, the primary mission of the insurgents was to furnish intelligence; once the invasion of an island was imminent, the guerrillas were to cut enemy lines of communications, clear beachheads, and box in the Japanese to the best of their capabilities.

The Japanese garrison on eastern Mindanao consisted of the *30th* and *100th Infantry Divisions*; the *54th Independent Mixed Brigade*, consisting of three infantry battalions as a nucleus, with attached naval units, was deployed on

[3] Eighth Army FO No. 20, dtd 17Feb45.

CURTIS "HELLDIVERS" *armed with rockets and bombs, replace SBDs of VMSB-244. (USMC A700606)*

FILIPINO GUERRILLAS *at Malabang Airstrip, Mindanao. (USMC 117638)*

Zamboanga Peninsula. The *55th Independent Mixed Brigade,* composed of two infantry battalions, occupied Jolo Island in the Sulu Archipelago. *The 102d Division* was spread over Panay, Negros, Cebu, and Bohol; half of the division had been previously sent to Leyte. The Japanese in the southern Philippines were under the command of the *Thirty-Fifth Army* headed by Lieutenant General Sosaku Suzuki. The latter's attempts to evacuate most of his forces from Leyte to the southern islands was frustrated by the vigilance of American aircraft and torpedo boats; in all, only about 1,750 of the 20,000 Japanese on Leyte eventually made it across to Cebu Island during the early months of 1945. The Japanese commander was able to make good his escape to Cebu in mid-March, only to perish at sea a month later while en route to Mindanao, when the vessel on which he was embarked was sunk off Negros by American aircraft.

There were more than 102,000 Japanese in the southern Philippines, including 53,000 Army troops, nearly 20,000 members of the Army air forces, 15,000 naval personnel, and 14,800 non-combatant civilians. Despite this imposing figure, there were only about 30,000 combat troops. Moreover, the enemy garrisons were spread over numerous islands. Even though they were aware of the existence of guerrilla units, the Japanese felt that they were firmly in control of the situation. There was a sense of optimism—quite unfounded as it turned out—that the Americans might bypass the southern Philippines as they left Japanese garrisons unmolested on other islands in the Pacific. The sentiment among the Japanese was one of general unconcern; even if the Americans decided to venture into the southern Philippines, they would probably be content to seize only the principal ports. The overall attitude of the Japanese garrisons in the southern Philippine islands was perhaps best summed up by a U. S. Army historian, who described the situation as follows:

> The Japanese in the Southern Philippines, therefore, apparently felt quite secure if not downright complacent. Such an outlook would be dangerous enough if shared by first-class troops; it was doubly so when held by the types of units comprising the bulk of the forces in the southern islands. . . . Most of the Japanese units in the Southern Philippines had enough military supplies to start a good fight, but far from enough to continue organized combat for any great length of time. . . . As was the case in Luzon, the Japanese in the Southern Philippines, given their determination not to surrender, faced only one end—death by combat, starvation, or disease.[4]

What could happen when Japanese complacency was shattered was clearly illustrated on Palawan Island in mid-December 1944. Up to the autumn of 1944, the Japanese garrison numbering somewhat more than 1,000 men, had led a relatively peaceful existence, except for an occasional ambush by Filipino insurgents. Since the summer of 1942, about 300 American prisoners of war had worked on the construction of an airfield on Palawan. This field was eventually destroyed by American air attacks before it ever became of any major use to the enemy. As the pace of the campaign quickened and an invasion

[4] Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines,* pp. 588–589.

of Palawan appeared imminent in mid-December, the Japanese garrison panicked and carried out a brutal massacre of the unarmed American prisoners of war. Many of them, huddled in trenches or shelters, were soaked with gasoline and burned to death, while others were bayoneted or shot in the stomach. A few of the Americans were able to escape their tormentors and eventually found their way back to American-held islands, where word of the atrocity was spread. But for most of the prisoners of war on Palawan, the eventual liberation of the island two months after the massacre came too late.[5]

ZAMBOANGA[6]

Marine aviation did not play any part in the conquest of Palawan, though the Thirteenth Air Force carried out extensive bombing and strafing operations during the two days preceding the landing. Results of these air attacks were limited by the absence of enemy installations and defenses. The landing itself was unopposed and the two airstrips on the island were seized within hours after the first troops had gone ashore. The Japanese garrison withdrew to the hill country in the interior and from there offered sporadic opposition, which continued well into the summer. Even though work on airstrips near Iwahig and Puerta Princesa began at once, neither strip was ready for use by fighter and transport planes until 18 March. By that time, it was too late to provide air support for the invasion of Zamboanga, for that operation had already been launched on the 10th.

Participation of Marine aviation units in the VICTOR operations had already been decided upon in the course of February. Under the overall direction of the Thirteenth Air Force, MAGs–12, –14, –24, and –32 were slated to move south to Mindanao. The initial mission of MAGs–12, –14, and –32 was to provide direct air support to the 41st Infantry Division during the invasion of Zamboanga. General Kenney authorized the 1st MAW to reinforce the four Marine air groups with additional wing units from the northern Solomons.

The imminent liberation of the southern Philippines necessitated the employment of even more Marine aircraft. From his headquarters at Bougainville in the Solomons, General Mitchell, commander of 1st MAW and Commander Aircraft, Northern Solomons, controlled all aircraft in the area, except for a few Australian tactical reconnaissance planes. Since by late February of 1945, only few Marine squadrons were still operating in the Solomons, it was planned that responsibility for air operations in the Solomons-Bismarck Archipelago would in time be transferred to the Royal New Zealand Air Task Force.

In preparation for the invasion of Zamboanga, Marine air units from bases scattered between the northern

[5] For a detailed account of this incident, see Eighth Army, *Palawan Ops*, pp. 44–48.

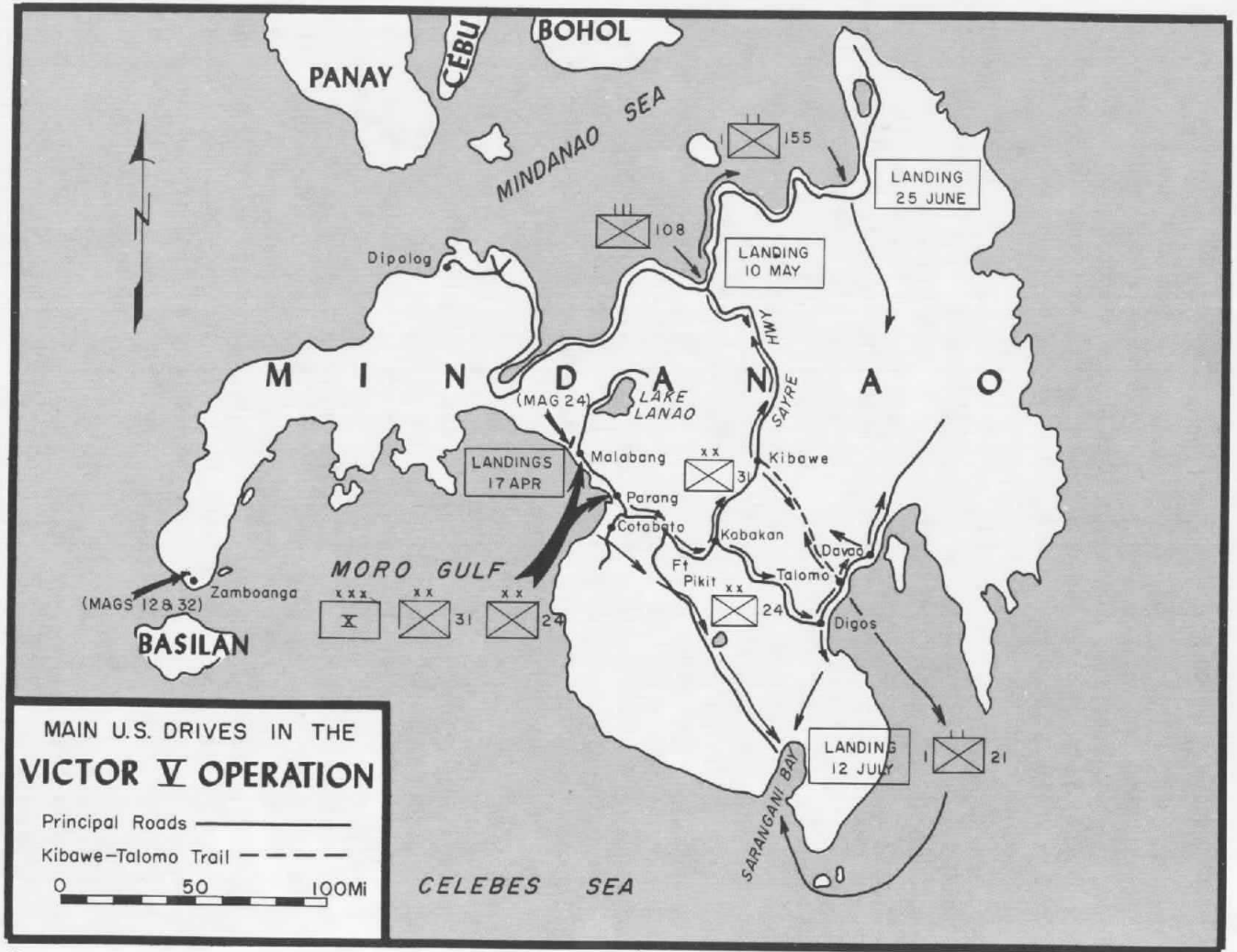
[6] Additional sources for this section include: 1st MAW WarDs, Jan-Mar45; MAG–24 WarDs, Jan-Mar45; *TG 78.1 AR, Zamboanga, Mindanao, Philippines;* VMF–115 WarD, Mar45; VMB–611 WarD, Jul44-Nov45; *Philippines Comment File;* William F. McCartney, *The Jungleers, A History of the 41st Infantry Division* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), hereafter McCartney, *41st InfDiv Hist.*

Solomons and the Philippines began to stage. Control of the staging was complicated by the fact that a number of aviation units had been broken up. As a result, by late February, the headquarters and service squadrons of MAG–12 still had not caught up with the air group, nor had the ground echelons of VMF–115, –211, –218, and 313 joined their flight echelons, which were engaged in combat operations on Leyte. The situation of MAG–14 was similar, with ground echelons of VMF–212, –222, –223, and –251 still en route to the Philippines in late February, even though the flight echelons of these squadrons had been operating from Samar since early January. MAG–61, commanded by Colonel Perry K. Smith, was still stationed on Emirau Island, north of the Solomons, where it was both undergoing final training in medium altitude bombing and employed for tactical operations against the Japanese on New Britain, New Ireland, and Bougainville. Like other Marine air groups, MAG–61 suffered from overdispersal. The headquarters and service squadrons, as well as VMB–413, –433, –443, and the flight echelon of VMB–611 were stationed on Emirau; VMB–423 occupied Green Island; the ground echelon of VMB–611 had departed Hawaii in late September 1944 and since then had remained aboard ship off Leyte, Samar, and Lingayen before finally going ashore on Mindoro on 25 February.

Additional Marine air units sent to assist in operations in the southern Philippines were Air Warning Squadrons 3 and 4 (AWS–3 and –4). The latter arrived off Leyte on 4 March from Los Negros in the Admiralty Islands, while the former, coming from Bougainville, reached Mindoro on the 20th. As the date for the invasion of the Zamboanga Peninsula drew closer, a personnel change occurred when on 25 February, Colonel Verne J. McCaul relieved Colonel William A. Willis as commanding officer of MAG–12. General Mitchell charged Colonel Jerome of MAG–32 with overall command of Marine air units of MAGs–12, –24, and –32 scheduled to move to Zamboanga for participation in operations against Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. From the island of Samar, MAG–14 was to support operations on Panay, Cebu, and Mindanao.

Before the assault against Zamboanga could be launched, steps had to be taken to assure that the primary objectives of the operation were met. The prime purpose of the seizure of the peninsula was to gain control of Basilan Strait which constitutes one of the two main approaches to Asia from the southwest Pacific. The peninsula featured good landing beaches and airfields protected by inaccessible mountains. The airstrips were located along the southeast coast near Zamboanga Town. Possession of Zamboanga would enable the Americans to establish additional air and naval bases for continued operations in the southern Philippines, particularly against eastern Mindanao.

On Zamboanga, as on other enemy-occupied islands in the Philippines, Filipino insurgents had gradually taken over small areas; on Mindanao, Negros, and Cebu half a dozen airstrips were in Filipino hands. When necessary, these airstrips were used by Army transport



Map 21

E.L. Wilson

aircraft, escorted by Marine Corsairs, to furnish the natives with supplies. About 150 miles to the northeast of Zamboanga Town, near the northern tip of the peninsula, the guerrillas were in possession of an airstrip near the town of Dipolog. (See Map 21). This airfield had been used since 1943 by Allied aircraft to supply guerrilla forces on the Zamboanga Peninsula.

As preinvasion plans for the assault against western Mindanao neared completion, Far East Air Forces reported on 2 March that the airfield on Palawan Island would not be completed in time for VICTOR IV, and it was decided to move one fighter squadron to Dipolog. Before the arrival of the fighters, however, it became necessary to provide adequate protection for the airfield. In a rapid change of original plans, and in order to forestall any Japanese attempt to seize the airfield from the guerrillas, two companies of the 24th Infantry Division, reinforced with two heavy machine gun platoons and one 81mm mortar section, were airlifted to Dipolog on 8 March, two days before the actual invasion date. The mission of this force was to defend the airfield, though they were not to take offensive action unless it became necessary to do so in maintaining uninterrupted air support.

This Army force, however, was not the first American contingent to arrive at Dipolog, for as early as 2 March MAG–12 ordered an advance echelon consisting of two officers and six enlisted men to move to the airstrip to prepare it as a staging base for guerrilla support missions in northwestern Mindanao. This move was completed on the following day. On 7 March, two Corsairs arrived at Dipolog in order to support the guerrillas. By 9 March, a total of sixteen Corsairs were stationed at the field, all of them engaged in support of guerrillas or in flying missions in support of the imminent invasion. As far as was known to Eighth Army, "this was the first time that aircraft have operated from airdromes before securing them by an assault landing. The use of guerrilla-held airstrips proved to be a marked advantage in this operation."[7]

There were bizarre overtones to the activities of Marine aviators operating from an enemy-held island, as outlined in the following account:

> Two planes from Dipolog reconnoitered the road from Dipolog to Sindangan. On the road about a mile north of Siari they sighted about 200 troops dressed as natives but all were carrying arms. The troops at the head of the column were carrying a large American flag. The planes buzzed the troops and the troops waved back. They also sighted four bancas (dugout canoes) about thirty to forty feet long just off Lanboyan Point. Upon returning to Dipolog and reporting their sightings, guerrilla headquarters informed them that the troops sighted were Japs, not guerrillas, and that the bancas were also Jap controlled.[8]

In a quick response to this information, the two Marine aviators took off again, and headed back to the scene of the earlier sightings. Five dugout canoes, under sail and occupied, were the first to be strafed. The planes then went after the troops and caught up with the column, which was plodding

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[7] Eighth Army, *Zamboanga-Sulu Archipelago Ops.*, p. 31.

[8] MAG–12 WarD, Mar45.

along the road, still carrying the American flag. When the aircraft began to circle for a strafing run, the troops dropped the flag and headed for the bushes. The two pilots strafed the troops on the road, five pack carabaos, as well as bushes on either side of the road, using about 4,000 rounds of ammunition in the process. The foliage prevented any observation of results.

While Marine aircraft were operating with impunity from Dipolog under the very noses of the Japanese, an amphibious force under the command of Rear Admiral Forrest B. Royal, Commander of Naval Task Group 78.1, was en route to Mindanao. The invasion convoy carried the 41st Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Jens A. Doe, charged with making the assault landing. The prime mission of the naval task group was to transport the division from its staging areas on Mindoro and Leyte to the Zamboanga Peninsula and keeping it supplied after the landings. A secondary mission was the protection of the assault force against hostile naval action, although intelligence indicated that only motor torpedo boats and submarines would be encountered.

Included in the assault force were staffs and ground echelons of MAG–12 and –32, as well as AWS–4. The ground echelon of MAG–32, loaded in six LSTs, had left Luzon on 23 February and proceeded to Mindoro for staging. Ground crewmen of MAG–12 had boarded LSTs at Leyte and headed to Mindoro for staging. AWS–4 staged directly from Leyte Gulf on 8 March and joined the invasion convoy as it headed for western Mindanao. Among the Marines headed for Zamboanga were the forward echelons of MAGs–12 and –32 consisting of operations, intelligence, and communications personnel under the command of Colonel Jerome.

The Thirteenth Air Force had commenced the preinvasion bombardment of the Zamboanga Peninsula as early as 1 March. From 4-8 March, the Army Air Forces concentrated on the destruction of enemy aircraft, personnel, and supplies in areas adjacent to Japanese airfields in Borneo, Davao, and Zamboanga. Planes from MAG–12, based at Dipolog, and Army aircraft provided air cover for the assault force as the ships approached the Zamboanga Peninsula. No opposition was encountered in the air.

Early on 10 March, a task force consisting of two light cruisers and six destroyers moved into Basilan Strait just off the southern tip of the Zamboanga Peninsula. This force began an intense bombardment of the beachhead area, which included a stretch of the coastline from Caldera Point to Zamboanga City and inland for a distance of 2,500 yards. As incessant air strikes hit the landing beaches and adjacent area to the north, the first infantrymen went ashore. The beaches, though heavily fortified, were not defended in strength and only moderately heavy machine gun fire greeted the assault units. Japanese defensive positions, although superior in layout and construction to any previously encountered in the Philippines, were in many instances unmanned.

By midmorning, the advancing infantrymen seized the first airstrip near Zamboanga Town. At noon, the 163d

Infantry Regiment, supported by a tank company, stood poised to assault the town itself. Except for a number of mines and booby traps that remained to be cleared, Zamboanga Town was firmly in American hands by late afternoon.

The initial objective of the Marine aviation personnel taking part in the landings was San Roque airfield, situated northwest of Zamboanga Town and only a mile inland from the invasion beaches. Heavy resistance encountered by the men of the 41st Infantry Division near the village of San Roque delayed capture of the airfield until 12 March, though Colonel Jerome and his staff were able to reconnoiter the strip on the day of the first landings. Personnel from MAGs–12 and –32 began unloading shortly before noon of J-Day, even though by this time the Japanese were shelling the beaches with artillery and mortars.

The 41st Infantry Division did not succeed in driving the Japanese entirely from the San Roque airstrip area until the afternoon of 13 March. At this time, the 973d Aviation Engineer Battalion moved in on the heels of the advancing infantry and work began around the clock to ready the field for operations. Upon arrival at San Roque airfield, the Marines promptly redesignated it as Moret Field in commemoration of a Marine aviator, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Moret, formerly commanding VMTB–131, who had been killed when a transport on which he was a passenger crashed on New Caledonia in 1943.

While work on Moret Field was in progress, aircraft from Dipolog flew patrol missions over the beach area and executed air strikes in support of the infantry. As the soldiers advanced into the foothills to the north of Moret Field, Japanese resistance stiffened; elaborate booby traps also took their toll among the Americans. On 13 March the 163d Infantry Regiment suffered 83 casualties when the Japanese blew up a hill north of Santa Maria to the north of Zamboanga Town.[9] Apparently the enemy had decided to explode a hidden bomb and torpedo dump and detonated it electrically when American troops had advanced up the hill in strength.

Japanese demolition experts also succeeded in throwing a scare into the Eighth Army commander following his inspection trip to Zamboanga. Just as General Eichelberger was preparing to return to the USS *Rocky Mount* and was passing through Zamboanga Harbor on a barge, the Japanese decided to give him a farewell salute. As the general himself described the incident:

> Apparently enemy field glasses still accurately observed the harbor. Anyway, a detonator somewhere let loose a naval mine which sent a cascade of water ten stories high. It just missed my boat; after swallowing hard, I found myself intact and went aboard the cruiser. A Navy flying boat picked me up shortly after and took me back to Leyte in very stormy weather.[10]

During the time that Moret Field was being readied for operations, the Japanese remained passive in the air. The only exception occurred on 13 March, when a single enemy aircraft made two strafing runs over the field and dropped a bomb with negligible effect. Moret Field became operational on 15 March

[9] McCartney, *41st InfDiv Hist*, p. 147.

[10] Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo*, p. 207.

with the arrival of eight Corsairs of VMF–115. By the 18th, the flight echelons of VMF–211, –218, and –313 had reached Zamboanga. The Army Air Forces 419th Night Fighter Squadron, equipped with P–61s, was also based at Moret Field.

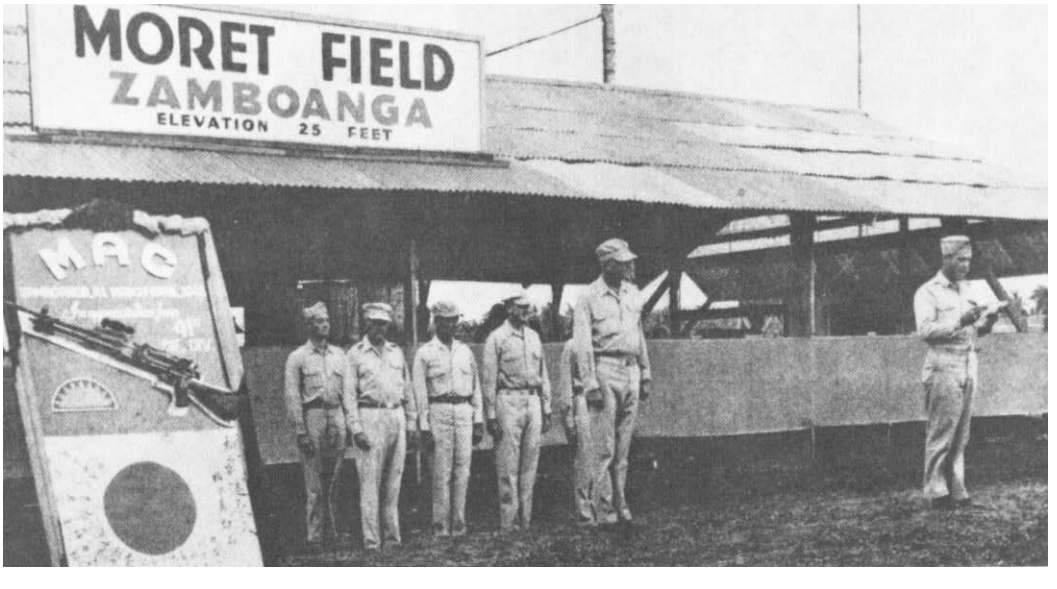
As early as 12 March, Thirteenth Air Force had designated Colonel Jerome as Commander Air Groups, Zamboanga, Mindanao, hereafter referred to as Marine Aircraft Groups, Zamboanga (MAGsZam). Initially, Colonel Jerome's command included MAGs–12 and –32, though a month later MAG–24 joined the two air groups on Mindanao. One member of MAG–24, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, had accompanied Colonel Jerome to Moret Field for the express purpose of establishing an organization similar to the one previously used at MAGsDagupan on Luzon.

As the infantry continued the advance into the interior of the Zamboanga Peninsula, enemy harassment of Moret Field decreased until it stopped altogether. The Corsairs of MAG–12 began to lend close air support on 17 March, when Captain Samuel H. McAloney, intelligence officer of MAG–32, was designated as commander of the support air party with the 163d Infantry Regiment. The primary mission of MAGsZam was close support of ground troops, though Marine Corsairs also maintained continuous convoy over friendly shipping in the Sulu Sea.

Marine organization for close air support at MAGsZam was simpler than it had been on Luzon, since Marine aviation had sole responsibility for the operation of Moret Field. In addition, the regiments of the 41st Infantry Division requested air support directly from MAGsZam. The support air parties with the infantry consisted of a captain, one or more first lieutenants, two or more radio operators, and two or more radio technicians. Air-ground communication was carried on with two types of mobile radio gear. A large van with high frequency (HF) equipment with an effective range of more than 100 miles was used; where only distances of less than 15 miles had to be covered, more compact equipment was employed. The use of the van or jeep depended on the distance of the air support parties from MAGsZam, though there were many occasions when the two vehicles, working as a team, were employed. The radio jeep, in view of the limited range of its radio equipment, maintained contact with the communications van; the latter, in turn, acted as a relay with MAGsZam.

On the level below the air support party was the air liaison party consisting of a Marine aviator, a radio operator, and a technician. The liaison party was equipped with a radio jeep, maps and aerial photographs of the area in which it was to operate, as well as a field telephone which could be used in conjunction with the radio. Air-ground liaison was helped by the presence of AWS–4 at Moret Field. The latter unit, redesignated the 76th Fighter Control Center, had ample communications facilities. Beyond its mission of watching for approaching enemy aircraft and assisting friendly aircraft in getting back to the field, personnel of the air warning squadron employed their radio

LSTs *land Marine aviation personnel and supplies on Zamboanga. (USMC 116824)*



U.S. ARMY *41st Infantry Division honors Marine aviation for air support received in the Southern Philippines. (USMC 116887)*

and radar equipment in supplementing the existing ground-air communications setup.

Marine aviators on the Zamboanga Peninsula flew their first air support missions at very close range, since the objectives invariably were located just a few miles from the runways of Moret Field. In a situation similar to that on Peleliu, Marine aviation personnel could watch the entire action from the runway. It was not unusual for a member of the air liaison party to scan the frontline before a mission, accompanied by the flight leader. The two Marines would then discuss the situation with the commander of the Army battalion involved, and the flight leader thus could receive a direct briefing as to the type of air support desired by the ground troops.

As the Japanese were driven back into the hills of Zamboanga, and Moret Field was further extended, additional aviation units began to arrive. The mission of the Marine dive bomber squadrons on Luzon came to a close on 23 March and VMSB–142 and –236 reached Moret Field on the following day. Despite an otherwise uneventful flight of the SBDs from Luzon to Zamboanga, this flight was to culminate in the death of two Marine aviators:

> Fate decided this by the toss of a coin. Squadron procedure had two pilots assigned to one plane. Prior to departing from Luzon, it was decided to toss a coin to see who would fly to Zamboanga. Lt. Charles C. Rue and Lt. Charles F. Flock tossed, and Rue won the toss. On the flight down from Mangaldan, Rue broke an oil line and made a crash landing, on the supposedly guerrilla held air strip on Panay. Planes in the flight observed Rue and his gunner get out of their plane and wave to a group of men who came out of the jungle at the edge of the strip. About six weeks later, when the Army invaded Panay, it was learned through interrogation of prisoners, that Rue and his gunner had been beheaded the day after they were taken prisoner.[11]

Between 18 and 24 March, MAGsZam aircraft carried out their primary mission of supporting the 41st Infantry Division advance. Among the first air strikes was an attack by eight aircraft against the enemy dug in at Capisan, 3,500 yards north of Zamboanga Town. The planes dropped instantaneously fused 1,000 pound bombs on the assigned area, but results of the attack were unobserved. While strafing the entire area, the Marines drew light but accurate machine gun fire which damaged two of their aircraft. In a second strike on the same day, eight aircraft, each carrying a 175-gallon napalm fire bomb, attacked a ridge north of Zamboanga Town, where the enemy was dug in. Six napalm bombs covered the area; two failed to release; one of these was jettisoned over the water and the other was returned to base. After the strike, ground observers reported that the area of the target was well burned out and appeared lifeless and deserted.

As the Japanese were driven back into the inhospitable interior of Zamboanga, Marine aviators continued to carry out similar missions. In an innovation of close air support techniques, a support air party officer on 21 March relayed target information from an L-4 spotter plane to the air liaison party in a radio jeep on the ground; the lat-

[11] 1stLt Charles F. Flock ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Philippines Comment File.*

ter, in turn, coached the planes to the target. Positions indistinguishable from a fast moving Corsair thus could be easily pinpointed. The observer in the Cub plane remained over the target after the strike and reported excellent results. This was later verified by the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 162d Infantry Regiment, who reported that the enemy had withdrawn from the bombed area, blowing up two ammunition dumps and firing one warehouse on their way.

On 22 March, 16 Corsairs executed a concentrated attack on Japanese troops dug in on top of an L-shaped ridge 500 yards northwest of Masilay. The infantry had failed in the attempt to take the ridge on the preceding day. The planes dropped 13 quarter-ton bombs over the target without being able to observe the results of the bombing. However, when 2/162 resumed its advance, the infantrymen did not encounter any enemy opposition on the ridge. The battalion commander subsequently reported that an enemy pillbox had received a direct bomb hit and 63 Japanese dead had been counted by nightfall.

The remainder of March saw the continued advance of 41st Infantry Division troops into the interior of Zamboanga. As early as 26 March, MAG–32, in discussing the development of Moret Field, was able to make the following note:

> This lower end of Zamboanga Peninsula has taken on a bustling, business-like air, and with the air strip in full operation, camps being built, engineering sheds being rushed to completion, mess halls going up, all Marine units are functioning at top speed to establish all the elements of a fully equipped advance Marine Air Base.[12]

Except for the presence of an Army Air Forces night fighter squadron and a few Navy PBYs used for rescue work, Moret Field continued to remain under Marine control. Eventually, the field was to house a total of 299 aircraft: 96 F4Us, 151 SBDs, 18 PBJs, 18 SB2Cs, 2 F6Fs 1 FM, 2TBFs, 5 R4Ds, and 6 Army P-61 "Black Widow" night fighters.[13]

Operations at Moret Field soon were going into high gear and MAGsZam aircraft extended their operations to adjacent islands in the Sulu Archipelago. Between 8 and 22 March, the guerrilla-held strip at Dipolog was occupied by a group of Marine ground personnel and an Army security detail. The grass strip even boasted a temporary fighter control center. Aircraft from MAGsZam became frequent visitors to Dipolog, flying in one day with supplies for the guerrillas, staying overnight, and returning to Moret Field on the following day.

On 27 March word was received at Moret Field that a force of about 150

[12] MAG–32 WarD, Mar45.

[13] Figures cited from Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 316. Aircraft designations for abbreviations used above are as follows:

SBD — Douglas Dauntless dive-bomber
PBJ — Mitchell, North American medium bomber, identical to the Army Air Forces B-25
SB2C — Curtiss dive-bomber, "Helldiver"
F4U — Vought fighter-bomber, "Corsair"
F6F — Grumman fighter, "Hellcat"
FM — Martin fighter, "Wildcat"
TBF — Grumman torpedo-bomber, "Avenger"
R4D — Douglas utility or cargo plane, "Skytrain"

Japanese, armed with two grenade launchers, one light machine gun, two automatic rifles, and more than a hundred rifles was headed towards Dipolog and had advanced to within about 11 miles of the field.[14] The guerrilla force of 400, commanded by Army Major Donald H. Wills, was armed but had never been in action before. Because of the potentially menacing situation, all American personnel were ordered to evacuate Dipolog on 27 March and left the field in the course of the day.

MAGsZam dispatched four aircraft to Dipolog to investigate conditions there. Though somewhat at variance in minor details with the official record, the comments of the division leader are of interest:

> We sent a division of Corsairs to Dipolog in response to a request for air support. The tone of the message received at Zamboanga was that Dipolog was in imminent danger of falling, which we learned was not the case when we got there. The 500 to 600 Filipino guerrillas who opposed the Jap force were evidently keenly interested in avoiding a fight with the Japs. Major Wills evidently figured an air strike might boost their morale and damage the enemy at the same time.
>
> The lack of maps or photos of any kind, as well as no way to mark targets and no communication with the troops all combined to dictate the method we used. Sharpe [1st Lieutenant Winfield S. Sharpe], as the smallest man in the division, was elected to sit on Major Wills' lap.[15]

Shortly thereafter, the aircraft took off. Sitting on the Army major's lap, Lieutenant Sharpe led the four Corsairs in six strafing runs over the enemy positions while Major Wills pointed out the targets. The Japanese received a thorough strafing and were forced to pull back several miles. Having expended their ammunition, the Corsairs returned to Dipolog where Captain Rolfe H. Blanchard, the division leader, and Lieutenant Sharpe spent the night while the remaining two aircraft returned to Moret Field. Following his return to MAGsZam on 28 March, Captain Blanchard discovered that squeezing two men into the narrow confines of a Corsair cockpit did not meet with the wholehearted approval of his superiors. In the flight leader's own words:

> I don't recall what happened to Sharpe for this incident, but I was mildly reprimanded by Lieutenant Colonel Leek of MAG–12, who acted as MAGSZAM Group Operations Officer, together with Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon until the latter's departure from Moret Field and I learned (reliability of source unknown) that Major Wills was awarded the Silver Star.[16]

The existence of a Marine aviation group with two operations officers requires an explanation, which since the end of World War II has been furnished by Colonel Leek, who made the following comment:

> The operations organization as it existed had been set up by LtCol Keith B. McCutcheon who, although the operations officer of MAG–24, had accompanied Colonel Jerome from Dagupan for the express purpose of placing into effect a command operations organization similar to the one at Dagupan. Once the organiza-

[14] VMF–115 WarD, Flight Rpt No. 27, 27-Mar45.

[15] Capt Rolfe H. Blanchard ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Philippines Comment File.*

[16] *Ibid.*

> tion was functioning, LtCol Frederick E. Leek who had taken the advance echelon of MAG–12 into Zamboanga relieved LtCol McCutcheon. Although personnel were pooled, responsibilities can never be shared. LtCol Leek as senior of the two group operations officers functioned as MAGSZAM operations officer until he was detached, at which time (17May45) he was relieved by LtCol Wallace T. Scott of MAG–32.[17]

On 29 March, a ceremony was held in front of the operations tower on Moret Field. While the 41st Infantry Division band played, Colonel Jerome, with officers of the Marine air groups at attention behind him, received a plaque from General Doe, commanding the 41st Infantry Division. The plaque itself was spectacular in its own right Six feet high by four feet, it was trimmed with captured Japanese naval signal flags. Mounted on it was a Japanese light machine gun, still showing the scars of battle. Below that was an enemy battle flag of white silk with the red "Rising Sun" of Nippon. Beneath it were listed the islands nearby which the division had invaded with Marine air support. At the top of the plaque were the words: "In Appreciation-41st Infantry Division."

Even more impressive for the Marines were the words of the Army division commander which accompanied the award. In addition to commending the air groups for the support of ground operations, General Doe had this to say:

> The readiness of the Marine Air Groups to engage in any mission requested of them, their skill and courage as airmen, and their splendid spirit of cooperation in aiding ground troops have given this Division the most effective air support yet received in any of its operations.[18]

On 30 March, the already formidable Marine establishment at MAGsZam was further strengthened by the arrival of the flight echelon of VMSB-611 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George H. Sarles. Prior to its arrival at Moret Field, the squadron had been stationed on Emirau Island in the St. Matthias Group. VMSB-611 was equipped with 16 Mitchell medium bombers (PBJs). Each of these aircraft was capable of carrying eight rockets, a bombload of 3,000 pounds, and anywhere between eight and fourteen .50 caliber machine guns. The bombers further contained airborne radar, an instrument panel for the pilot and copilot, as well as long-range radio and complete navigation equipment. The profusion of electronic gear made the PBJs particularly adaptable to operating at night and under conditions of poor visibility.

The versatility that Lieutenant Colonel Sarles expected from his pilots and planes became evident during intensive training on Emirau. His copilot, who remained with the squadron commander in preference to having a crew of his own, made this following comment about his commanding officer:

> He wanted us to be able to play the role of fighters where fighters were needed, of bombers, of photographers, skip bombers,

[17] Colonel Frederick E. Leek ltr to CMC, dtd 29Jan51, in *Philippines Comment File.* Upon being relieved, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon returned to MAG–24 and there became involved in planning for the Malabang landing. He went ashore at Malabang and set up operations for a third time. *McCutcheon ltr.*

[18] Sgt E. Payson Smith, Jr., Marine Corps combat correspondent rpt, as cited in MAG–32 WarD, Mar45.

> and indeed it seemed on some occasions that he thought we were capable of dive bombing. During the Philippine campaign we strafed, bombed, skip bombed, fired rockets, photographed, flew observers, were sent on anti-sub patrols, were sent up at night as night fighters, and bombed at medium altitudes. In fact, one member of VMB–611 shot down with his fixed guns, and using his bombsight as a gun-sight, a Japanese twin-engine light bomber, a "Lily."[19]

Shortly after their arrival at Moret Field, the PBJs began to fly long-range reconnaissance patrols over Borneo and Mindanao. They searched the seas for enemy submarines and photographed future landing sites in the Sulu Archipelago. Pilots of VMB-611 struck at enemy truck convoys and airfields at night and harassed the Japanese with nuisance flights. Use of the Mitchells made it possible for MAGsZam to conduct operations against the enemy around the clock.

Progress of the 41st Infantry Division advance across the Zamboanga Peninsula was a costly and time-consuming process. Operations on the peninsula continued until the latter part of June, which saw the end of coordinated enemy resistance, though infantrymen and guerrillas continued to ferret enemy stragglers out of the inaccessible hills and jungles long after that date. At the same time that Japanese resistance on Zamboanga was gradually reduced, a number of operations, many of them supported by Marine aviation, were executed in the southern Philippines. For many of the enemy, the illusion that the islands which they garrisoned might be bypassed by the Americans, was effectively destroyed.

[19] 1st Lieutenant Willis A. Downs ltr to CMC, dtd 23Jan51 in *Philippines Comment File.*

SOUTHERN VISAYAS AND SULU ARCHIPELAGO[20]

The invasion of the Zamboanga Peninsula on 10 March 1945 represented only the first step in an entire series of amphibious landings designed to drive the Japanese out of the southern Philippines. Six days after the 41st Infantry Division set foot on Zamboanga, a company of the 162d Infantry of that division crossed Basilan Strait and went ashore on Basilan Island, 12 miles south of Zamboanga Town. Other islands in the vicinity were quickly captured against negligible enemy resistance.

Capture of Basilan Island marked the arrival of the first American troops in the Sulu Archipelago, a chain of islands extending southwestward from Mindanao toward Borneo. Even while the drive against the Sulu Archipelago got under way, two other divisions of the Eighth Army were assaulting additional islands in the central Philippines, particularly those islands surrounding the Visayan Sea. The assault on these islands—Panay, Negros, Cebu,

[20] Additional sources for this section include: Eighth Army Operational Monograph on the Panay-Negros Occidental Operation (VICTOR I), n.d., hereafter Eighth Army, *Panay-Negros Ops* (NARS, WWII Recs Div); Eighth Army Operational Monograph on the Cebu-Bohol-Negros Oriental Operation (VICTOR II), n.d., hereafter Eighth Army, *Cebu-Bohol-Negros Ops* (NARS, WWII Recs Div); *Philippines Comment File;* VMF–222 WarDs, Apr45-Jul46; VMF–223 WarDs, Apr45-Jul46; VMSB–236 WarDs, Mar-Apr45.

and Bohol—began with the invasion of Panay on 18 March when the 40th Infantry Division landed on the latter island unopposed. Following a brief destroyer bombardment the first assault wave hit the beach—to be greeted on shore "by men of Colonel Peralta's guerrilla forces, dressed in starched khaki and resplendent ornaments."[21]

The landing on Panay marked the beginning of the VICTOR I operations. Air support for the landings was provided by planes from three Marine fighter squadrons of MAG-14 based on Samar. Twenty-one Corsairs of VMF-222 patrolled over the beachhead during the day of the landings, though the enemy remained just as passive in the air as on the ground. The squadron's only attack mission for 18 March was the strafing of six barges in the Iloilo River.

Pilots from VMF-251 searched the waters adjacent to the Panay beachheads for enemy shipping, but failed to find any trace of enemy activity. VMF-223 had the mission of neutralizing any Japanese air effort on adjacent Negros Island while the landings were in progress. The Corsairs swept down on six enemy airstrips on Negros during the day and destroyed two Japanese fighters. No lucrative targets ever materialized for the eager Marine aviators on Panay; the enemy kept to the woods and offered only weak resistance to the advancing infantry. The occupation of Panay largely resembled a major mop-up operation; just as most of the American forces on Panay had refused to surrender to the Japanese in 1942, so now the Japanese commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ryoichi Totsuka, marched the 1,500 troops under his command into the hills, where they remained until the end of the war. By the end of June, U.S. Army casualties on Panay were about 20 men killed and 50 wounded.

On 26 March, VICTOR II got under way when the Americal Division landed on Cebu Island, about five miles southwest of Cebu City. Preceded by a devastating naval bombardment, leading waves of LVTs rolled onto the beach, where a nasty surprise awaited them. The first wave was abruptly halted when ten of the 15 landing vehicles were disabled by land mines. Several men were killed and others were severely injured as they stepped on mines while dismounting.

> It was soon discovered that the existing beach defense was the most elaborate and effective yet encountered in the Philippines, even though the covering fire from prepared defenses was limited to small arms and mortar fire. The entire length of the landing beach bristled with mines ranging in size from 60mm mortar shells to 250-pound aerial bombs.
>
> Subsequent waves of infantry unloaded on the beach, but made no attempt to move forward into the mined area. All along the shore, between the minefield and the water's edge, men were crowded shoulder to shoulder, two and three deep. As they moved up and down the beach, unsuccessfully trying to find a clear opening, it became apparent that organization was breaking down and adequate control was lacking.[22]

Eventually, the confusion on the beachhead subsided, and despite the

[21] Eighth Army, *Panay-Negros Ops*, p. 37.

[22] Eighth Army, *Cebu-Bohol-Negros Ops*, pp. 41–42.

lack of an adequate number of engineers, the troops pushed through after lanes were finally cleared. Behind the minefield, 50 yards inland in the palm groves, the assault force encountered continuous barriers; antitank ditches, log fences and walls, timber sawhorses, and steel rail obstacles all designed to block the advance of tracked or wheeled vehicles. Together with the minefields, these obstacles were covered by well-prepared firing positions which included concrete pillboxes having walls from seven inches to three feet thick, emplacements walled with one to four coconut logs, barbed wire, and a network of trenches.

Strangely enough, the presence of such formidable defenses did not induce the Japanese to vary their recently instituted strategy of withdrawing from the beach area and resisting the American invasion troops with a force only strong enough to be of nuisance value. The enemy reaction to the American assault on Cebu proved no exception to his earlier practice. Even the few Japanese who were left to man the prepared positions had been forced to abandon them by the intensive and concentrated bombardment of the beach area by American naval guns. "Had these installations been manned by even a small but determined force, the troops massing behind the mine field would have been annihilated and the eventual victory would have become far more costly."[23] As it was, enemy casualties on or near the invasion beaches the first day were 88 killed and 10 captured; American losses were eight killed and 39 wounded.[24]

As infantrymen of the Americal Division consolidated their beachhead on Cebu and advanced northward toward Cebu City, the Japanese began a hasty evacuation of the town. Throughout 26 March, Marine aviators of MAG-14 attacked enemy motorized columns and dismounted infantry headed for the hills northwest of Cebu City. Planes from VMF-222, -223, and -251 strafed the enemy with .50 caliber machine guns, destroying about 20 trucks and inflicting an undetermined number of casualties.

Japanese resistance on Cebu followed a familiar course. Unable to stem the American advance and severely harassed by American air, the enemy withdrew into the hills, from where he offered prolonged resistance. By late June numerous Japanese were still able to hide out in the hills, living a hunted existence, but ineffective as fighting groups.

Meanwhile, the American drive through the southern Philippines continued. Two days after the invasion of Cebu, troops of the 40th Infantry Division invaded Negros Island in a shore-to-shore operation from Panay. As on Cebu, the enemy withdrew into the hills, harassed by Marine aircraft and Filipino guerrillas. By mid-June, the Japanese on Negros no longer constituted an organized fighting force. A number of stragglers remained to lead a precarious existence, in which a struggle for survival in the hills was paramount.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

The isolation in which the remaining enemy troops in the southern Visayas found themselves is best illustrated by their ignorance of the end of the war. American leaflets dropped over enemy-held areas on Cebu by order of Major General William H. Arnold, commanding the Americal Division, informed the Japanese holdouts that the war was over and promised them fair treatment in accordance with the rules of the Hague and Geneva Conventions. On 17 August the Japanese replied with the following message:

> We saw your propaganda of 16th August 1945; do not believe your propaganda. We request that you send to us a Staff Officer of General Yamashita in Luzon if it is true that Imperial Japanese surrendered to the Americans.[25]

A further exchange of communications proved fruitless. The Japanese radio equipment on Cebu was out of order, and the holdouts had no way of getting direct information from Tokyo. Orders were issued to the effect that officers and men would be punished if they believed the American propaganda. The situation was clarified however, on 19 August, when the Japanese were able to repair one of the radio receivers and learned that Japan was in fact defeated. "There was no longer any doubt in their minds; their country was really defeated, so their only course of action was to surrender themselves to the Americans."[26] On Cebu, two lieutenant generals, a major general, and an admiral surrendered, as did the remaining Japanese garrison of 9,000 men. The Americal Division and attached units had killed another 9,300 Japanese on Cebu and about 700 more on nearby Bohol and eastern Negros at a cost of 449 men killed and 1,872 wounded in action.

Throughout the VICTOR I and II operations in the southern Visayas, aircraft of MAG-14 gave all possible support to the ground troops. In addition to guerrillas who directed the Marine pilots to their targets, Army support air parties also were in operation on all of the newly invaded islands. The Thirteenth Air Force on Leyte directed MAG-14 by means of daily assignment schedules to report in for control to various support air parties. The Army Air Forces on many occasions furnished air coordinators in B-24s, which led the flights to the targets and pinpointed objectives. Despite poor weather, planes of MAG-14 flew a total of more than 5,800 hours during the month of April alone, an average of almost nine hours per day per plane.[27]

By early May, the need for air support in the central Philippines had decreased and MAG-14 was transferred to the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing on Okinawa. The air group ceased combat operations on Samar on 15 May. Once more, Marine aviators had made a material contribution to the liberation of the Philippines. In paying tribute to the accomplishments of these Marine aviators, General Eichelberger expressed himself as follows:

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[25] G–2 Periodic Rpt, HQ, Americal Div, dtd 18Aug45, as cited in Eighth Army, *Cebu-Bohol-Negros Ops*, p. 131.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

[27] Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 119.

> Marine Air Group Fourteen rendered an outstanding performance in supporting overwater and ground operations against the enemy at Leyte, Samar, Palawan, Panay, Cebu, and Negros, Philippine Islands. This group provided convoy cover, fighter defense, fire bombing, dive bombing and strafing in support of ground troops. The enthusiasm of commanders and pilots, their interest in the ground situation and their eagerness to try any method which might increase the effectiveness of close air support, were responsible in a large measure for keeping casualties at a minimum among ground combat troops.[28]

Concurrently with operations in the southern Visayas, the drive into the Sulu Archipelago, a continuation of VICTOR IV, also gained momentum. On 2 April, elements of the 41st Infantry Division invaded Sanga Sanga in the Tawi Tawi Group at the extreme southern end of the Sulu Archipelago, 200 miles south of Zamboanga and 30 miles east of the coast of Borneo. The invasion force encountered only light opposition and, later in the day, launched a shore-to-shore assault against adjacent Bongao Island.

Both assault operations were supported by Marine aircraft. On 1 April, both islands had been heavily bombed and napalmed by Corsairs of VMF-115 and -313. The next day, on board the destroyer USS *Saufley*, Colonel Verne J. McCaul, commanding MAG-12, served as support air commander. The control room of the destroyer contained three air support circuits. One of these controlled the combat air patrol; another circuit was available for air-sea rescue operations; a third was utilized for direction of support missions on the beach. In the course of both landings, as Marine fighters and bombers circled overhead, a radio jeep went ashore with the assault troops. This jeep contained the Marine air-ground liaison team headed by Captain Samuel McAloney as support air controller. As soon as the Marine team reached the beach, Captain McAloney took charge of the direction of the strike planes.

During the Bongao landings, 44 dive bombers from MAG-32 dropped 20 tons of bombs on the island. SBDs of VMSB-236 attacked an enemy observation post and troop concentrations. While the dive bombers were bombing such enemy objectives as they could locate, Corsairs from VMF-115 and -211 flew combat air patrol over Sanga Sanga. The Marine fighters attacked an enemy radio station with unobserved results. The Corsairs provided air cover for the invasion force until 8 April, when targets suitable for aerial bombing or strafing were no longer in evidence.

Even as the occupation of Sanga Sanga and Bongao Islands was progressing, bypassed Jolo Island to the north was drawing a lot of attention from the Marine aviators, who carried out daily raids. As early as 4 April, SBDs of VMSB-236 carried General Doe, commanding the 41st Infantry Division, and a member of his staff to Jolo Island on a reconnaissance mission. Following several reconnaissance flights by the division commander, all officers and senior noncommissioned officers of RCT 163 made similar flights over their landing beaches and zones of advance. This was possible because

[28] Eighth Army, Office of the CG, ltr, dtd 25Jun45, as cited in Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, pp. 120–121.

of the large Marine aircraft group at Zamboanga and the lack of Japanese air strength.

Jolo, situated 80 miles southwest from Zamboanga, was within easy range of Moret Field. Moro guerrillas had seized the initiative from the Japanese prior to the American landings. As a result the Japanese had been forced to withdraw into the interior, where they established their defenses on five mountains named Bangkal, Patikul, Tumatangas, Dato, and Daho.

On 9 April, elements of the 41st Infantry Division landed on Jolo Island in a shore-to-shore operation from Zamboanga. The Marine landing party, consisting of 5 officers and 11 men, was headed by Captain McConaughy. Lieutenant Colonel John Smith was support air commander and Captain McAloney was support air controller. The team was equipped with a radio-equipped truck and two similarly equipped jeeps. During the landing near Jolo Town, the Marine air liaison party was compelled to disembark the radio-equipped jeeps in four feet of water, because the Landing Ship, Medium (LSM), carrying these vehicles could not get close enough to the beach. The unexpected baptism in salt water played havoc with the radio gear, which had to be disassembled, carefully cleansed with fresh and sweet water, dried with carbon tetrachloride from fire extinguishers, and finally reassembled before it could be put back into operation. The radio truck landed somewhat later at a different beach without undue complications.

In the face of light enemy opposition, the 41st Infantry Division pressed onwards into the interior of the island. Two of the Japanese hill strongholds, Mt. Patikul and Mt. Bangkal, were seized within 24 hours after the initial landings. The infantry advance was executed under a constant umbrella of Marine fighters and dive bombers. On the very first day of the Jolo operation, Marine aviators pummeled the enemy with 7,000 pounds of napalm, nearly 15 tons of bombs, and 18,200 rounds of ammunition.[29] In one day, Marine aviators knocked out nine enemy gun positions, razed two radio shacks and towers, and knocked out seven enemy-occupied buildings and personnel areas.

The infantry advance into the interior of Jolo Island met its first strong resistance at the approaches to Mt. Dato. Nevertheless, this enemy strongpoint fell on 12 April. Mt. Daho, six miles southeast of Jolo Town, loomed as the next major obstacle in the path of the advancing infantry. This formidable strongpoint with an elevation of 2,247 feet was of historical significance, for about four decades earlier Americans had fought the Moros on this mountain. It was estimated that about 400 *Special Naval Landing Force* troops were entrenched on Mt. Daho, equipped with nine dual 20mm guns, as well as heavy and light machine guns.

The attack against Mt. Daho began on 16 April, when infantrymen and Filipino guerrillas ran into a veritable hail of fire from the Japanese defenders, who were using connecting trenches, pillboxes, and dugouts to best advantage. The preliminary bombardment of the Japanese strongpoints by aircraft and artillery proved inade-

[29] MAG–12 WarD, Apr45.

quate and the advance stalled. For the next four days, artillery and Marine aviation took turns in softening up the enemy, who obviously was determined to make his last stand here. On 18 April, 27 SBDs of VMSB-243 and 18 SBDs of VMSB-341 from Moret Field dropped over 21 tons of bombs on the enemy under the direction of the Support Air Party. On the following day, 47 SBDs of VMSB-236 and 18 SBDs of VMSB-243 continued the neutralization of the enemy on Mt. Daho. Of the results achieved, the ground forces reported: "Of 42 bombs dropped this morning, 35 were exactly on the target. Remainder were close enough to be profitable."[30]

By 20 April it seemed that Mt. Daho was ripe for a direct assault. As the infantrymen edged their way up the hill, they were halted by a hail of fire which killed 3 men and wounded 29.[31] Once more, the attack was halted as artillery and supporting aircraft shelled, bombed, and strafed the obstinate holdouts. In the course of 21 April, 70 SBDs dropped more than 15 tons of bombs on enemy positions at Mt. Daho. As night fell, the artillery began to saturate the target area.

Early on 22 April, 33 SBDs from VMSB-142, -243, and -341 and four rocket-firing Mitchell bombers (PBJs) of VMB-611 attacked Japanese positions on Mt. Daho. Again, the infantry jumped off for the attack on the stronghold. This time, the attack carried the hill. Speaking of the final assault, the division historian made the following comment:

> The combined shelling and bombing was so effective that the doughboys were able to move forward at a rapid pace without a single casualty. The area was found littered with bodies of 235 Japs and it was believed that many more had sealed themselves into caves and blown themselves to bits. This broke the Jap stand in this sector and the few enemy troops that escaped from Mt. Daho wandered aimlessly in small groups and were easy prey for roving guerrilla bands.[32]

Fighting on Jolo Island continued until well into the summer of 1945, but the capture of Mt. Daho had broken the backbone of the enemy defense. Control of Jolo provided the Americans with the best port in the Sulu Archipelago; it also marked the completion of the drive into the archipelago.

MINDANAO[33]

One more operation was required to bring all of the southern Philippines under Allied control. This operation was VICTOR V, the seizure of Mindanao, southernmost and second largest island in the Philippines. This island, measuring 300 miles from north to south and about 250 miles from east to west at its widest point, had a population of nearly two million just before the outbreak of World War II. Even

[30] MAG–32 WarD, Apr45.

[31] McCartney, *41st InfDiv Hist*, p. 152.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[33] Additional sources for this section include: CG, X Corps, History of X Corps on Mindanao, 17April-30June45, herafter *X Corps Mindanao Hist;* VMSB–241 WarD, May45; VMB–611 WarDs, Jul44-Nov45; John A. DeChant, *Devilbirds—The Story of United States Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1947), hereafter DeChant, *Devilbirds.*

though the Zamboanga Peninsula technically is part of the Mindanao mainland, "the peninsula, for purposes of military planning, was not considered part of Mindanao at all."[34] Hence, because of the forbidding mountain barrier separating eastern Mindanao from the Zamboanga Peninsula, a separate invasion of the eastern portion of the island had to be instituted despite the presence of American forces on Zamboanga since 10 March 1945.

Prior to the VICTOR V operation, enemy strength on Mindanao, less Zamboanga, was estimated at 34,000. Of this number, 19,000 were combat troops; 11,000 were service troops; an estimated 3,000-5,000 poorly armed Japanese civilians, conscripted residents of Mindanao, made up the rest of the garrison.[35]

Responsibility for the Mindanao operation was assigned to the X Corps, commanded by Major General Franklin C. Sibert. Capture of the island was to be carried out by the 24th and 31st Infantry Divisions, which were to invade the west coast of Mindanao near Malabang and Parangon 17 April 1945. Task Group 78.2, under the command of Rear Admiral Albert G. Noble, furnished the amphibious lift, convoy escort, and naval gunfire support for the X Corps en route from staging areas on Mindoro, Leyte, and Morotai to Mindanao.

Despite the impressive size of the Japanese garrison on Mindanao, the invasion force could count on assistance from guerrilla forces on the island, which "were the most efficient and best organized in the Philippines."[36] These Filipinos were commanded by Colonel Wendell W. Fertig, a former American engineer and gold miner, who had turned guerrilla after the fall of the Philippines and built up an effective insurgent force. Fertig had maintained radio communications with MacArthur's headquarters ever since the summer of 1942 and, from 1943 onwards, had been the recipient of supplies brought in first by submarine and later by air or small vessels. The presence of an insurgent force in the enemy rear began to pay dividends even before the first X Corps troops landed on Mindanao. Prior to the invasion force's move towards the island, Colonel Fertig's guerrilla force had been attacking the Japanese garrison at Malabang, with the support of Marine aircraft from Moret Field.

By 5 April, following the expulsion of the enemy from Malabang and vicinity by the guerrillas, Marine aircraft started to operate from the Malabang airstrip. "As the front lines were then less than a half mile from the airstrip, Marine pilots visited ground observation posts for briefing, and after studying enemy defenses, flew a mere 800 yards before releasing their bombs on primary hostile targets."[37]

Nor were these Marine air strikes in support of the guerrillas all the Japanese had to worry about. For six days prior to the American landings on Mindanao, heavy bombers hit Cagayan, Davao, Cotabato, Parang, and Kabacan, some of the more important towns

[34] Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo*, p. 216.

[35] *X Corps Mindanao Hist.*, p. 6.

[36] Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo*, p. 217.

[37] *X Corps Mindanao Hist.*, p. 53.

on the island. At the same time medium bombers struck Surigao, Malabang, Cotabato, and the Sarangani Bay area. Dive bombers hit pinpointed targets, while fighters carried out several sweeps daily over the roads and trails throughout the island.

The official Army history has described the situation of the Japanese in the immediate area of the contemplated landings as follows:

> By the 11th of April the last Japanese had fled toward Parang and the guerrillas had completed the occuption of the entire Malabang region. On 13 April Colonel Fertig radioed Eighth Army that X Corps could land unopposed at Malabang and Parang and that the Japanese had probably evacuated the Cotabato area as well.[38]

In addition to the assistance furnished to the guerrillas on Mindanao by aircraft from MAGsZam, the Thirteenth Air Force, reinforced by elements of the Fifth Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force Command, had carried on a continuous air offensive of neutralizing enemy air, ground, and naval forces, and to prevent Japanese reinforcements and supplies from reaching the objective area. Fifth Air Force, commanded by Major General Ennis C. Whitehead, had the specific mission of providing aerial reconnaissance, photography, and providing air cover for the convoys and naval forces. The Allied Forces had done their job well. As the time for the invasion of Mindanao approached, little was left of the 1,500 enemy aircraft once assumed to have been stationed on Mindanao. The actual measure of the destruction of the Japanese Air Force was evident by the number of Japanese aircraft that were to make an appearance over the island during the VICTOR V operation. Throughout the campaign, only five enemy aircraft were sighted over Mindanao. Even though the enemy controlled two dozen airstrips on the island, American air supremacy was complete.

As soon as possible after X Corps had gone ashore on Mindanao, MAG-24 was to be flown from Luzon to the Malabang airstrip, situated 150 miles east of Moret Field. Upon its arrival on Mindanao, MAG-24 was to operate under the direction of Colonel Jerome as part of MAGsZam in an organizational scheme closely resembling that previously existing on Luzon.

Since the guerrillas appeared to be in firm control of the Malabang area, the landing force sent to Malabang was reduced from a division to one battalion. Instead, the main assault was made at Parang, 17 miles to the south. This decision, which involved changing the entire assault plan at sea, was reached after Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon of MAG-24 had personally reconnoitered the Malabang area several days before the landings. The Marine aviator conferred with guerrilla leaders on the ground and, accompanied by one of them, Major Rex Blow, an Australian who had been captured by the Japanese at Singapore and who subsequently had found his way to the Philippines, flew back to Zamboanga. These two men proceeded by small boat to join the Mindanao-bound invasion convoy on the afternoon of 16 April. "Information these two men furnished

[38] Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 621.

to the X Corps commander, firmed the decision to land at Parang rather than Malabang."[39]

The landings at Parang proceeded without incident early on 17 April, following an unnecessary two-hour cruiser and destroyer bombardment. Fighters, dive bombers, and medium bombers from Moret Field maintained vigil over Parang and Malabang. Incessant sweeps over the highways of Central Mindanao kept the movement of enemy troops to a minimum. An Army Air Forces air support party, in direct contact with the Marine pilots, directed the aircraft to targets that included enemy supply dumps, troop concentrations, and installations. Eighteen dive bombers of VMSB-341 and 17 SBDs of VMSB-142 circled over the beachheads, subject to call by the support air party. At the same time, 20 Corsairs of VMF-211 flew combat air patrol over the beaches; another 10 Corsairs from VMF-218 protected the cruiser force offshore.

First Marine unit ashore at Parang was AWS-3, which landed at noon and set up radio equipment on the beach. VMSB-244 personnel landed at Parang along with the main body of X Corps. The remainder of the Marine aviation units landed later in the day three miles north of Malabang Field. Movement of personnel and equipment to the airstrip was impeded by heavy rains, muddy roads, and bridges which had been demolished by guerrillas or the withdrawing enemy. In the words of the U.S. Army X Corps commander: "As to bridges, they had been destroyed by guerrillas time and again until I don't believe there was a highway bridge intact in the whole island."[40]

With the help of Army engineers, Malabang Field was readied for the flight echelon of MAG-24. When the first planes of MAG-24 arrived from Luzon on 20 April, the pilots and crews found an engineering line already set up and a camp area beginning to take shape. First of the dive bomber squadrons to arrive was VMSB-241, followed by VMSB-133 and -244 during the following two days. The Marines renamed the airstrip Titcomb Field in honor of Captain John A. Titcomb who had been killed while directing an air strike on Luzon.

On 21 April, AWS-3, meanwhile redesignated as the 77th Fighter Control Center, assumed fighter direction and local air warning responsibility from the control ship. The air warning squadron's radio and radar equipment operated around the clock; personnel monitored two radar search sets, in addition to eight different radio channels at various frequencies in the high frequency and very high frequency bands.[41]

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[39] Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, p. 126.

[40] MajGen Franklin C. Sibert, USA, ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC, dtd 24Oct66, in *Philippines Comment File.*

[41] HF band is an arbitrary designation for frequencies in the radio spectrum between 3 and 30 megacycles; VHF comprises that part of the spectrum between 30 and 300 megacycles. Over the years, the concept of what constitutes high, very high, ultra high, and extremely high frequencies had undergone

The advance of the 24th and 31st Infantry Divisions towards the east coast of Mindanao near Davao and towards the southeastern tip of the island towards Sarangani Bay made good progress in the days following the invasion. On 22 April, MAG-24 initiated operations from Titcomb Field to support the advance of the Army divisions, one day ahead of schedule. Technically, MAG-24 came under the control of MAGsZam. In practice, because of the distance between Moret and Titcomb Fields, MAG-24 operated practically as a separate unit. Night fighters and local combat air patrols for Titcomb Field were made available by MAGsZam to MAG-24 from aircraft stationed at Moret Field.

The operations of MAG-24 on Mindanao differed considerably from those of Marine aviators elsewhere in the Philippines. The X Corps retained control of the air support strikes because of the distances support aircraft had to fly to provide support and the existence of two separate Marine air groups, not including elements of the Thirteenth Air Force which furnished heavy strikes. The circumstance that the two infantry divisions were operating in widely separated zones, plus the necessity of close coordination with the guerrillas, all combined to make a centralized control indispensable.

To facilitate close control over air strikes, support air parties were attached to X Corps and the two infantry divisions. The support aircraft officer worked closely with the division air officer and provided communications facilities for direct support requests. In addition to the support air parties, the Army 295th Joint Assault Signal Company (JASCO) made available 12 forward air control teams equipped with short-range radio gear mounted in jeeps for air-ground communication. These teams were apportioned between the two infantry divisions for the primary purpose of directing close support strikes.

The technique employed on Mindanao was unusual in other respects. Due to the organizational setup, a constant air alert was maintained overhead to minimize the delay between requests for air support and the actual strikes. JASCO teams were used throughout the Mindanao campaign. With the support air parties thus reinforced, there was no need to shuffle the JASCO teams from one line unit to the other as strikes were required. Instead, a battalion commander could request air support with reasonable assurance that the strike would be carried out without undue delay.

As the two infantry divisions of X Corps advanced across Mindanao, SBDs from Titcomb and Moret Fields ranged ahead of the Army troops, driving the enemy from roads and villages in the path of the American advance. Despite demolished bridges and sporadic resistance, the advance of the ground forces proceeded ahead of schedule. On 27 April, the 24th Infantry Division seized

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considerable change. During the early years of radio, frequencies above two megacycles were generally considered useless for communications. During World War II, frequencies up to 600 megacycles were used, primarily for radar in the high end of the spectrum.

Digos on the east coast of Mindanao and pivoted northward towards Davao; the capital city of the island fell on 3 May, after the infantry had covered a distance of 145 miles in 15 days. The 31st Infantry Division, advancing northward through the Mindanao Valley seized Valencia on 16 May and Malaybaley several days later.

Marine aviators employed napalm bombs for the first time on Mindanao on 30 April, when they were dropped on an enemy held hill near Davao. The results of this attack were such, that, according to an official Army account:

> From this time on, fire from the air was available, with strikes as large as thirty-two 165 gallon tanks being dropped on a target. In several instances, entire enemy platoons were burned in their positions and in other cases, flaming Japanese fled from positions, only to encounter machine gun fire from ground troops.[42]

On 8 May, three SBDs of VMSB-241 and eight dive bombers from VMSB-133 flew a spectacular strike against an enemy strongpoint west of Sayre Highway opposite Lake Pinalay. At this point, elements of the 124th Infantry Regiment, 31st Infantry Division, were encountering heavy enemy resistance. Since the weather was closing in, and the opposing forces were only about 200 yards apart, there was a great risk involved to the friendly troops in obtaining close support. Nevertheless, such support was forthcoming in what the Marine pilots subsequently termed "the closest support mission yet flown by VMSB-241."[43] Yellow panels were employed to indicate friendly positions. The target was marked with smoke, and nine SBDs, in a neat example of precision bombing, unloaded nearly five tons of bombs within the 200 yard area. The Japanese position was completely eliminated. The grateful commander of 3/124 requested the Marine ground controller to radio the following message to the Marine pilots:

> Jojo (133) and Dottie (241) flights gave finest example of air-ground coordination and precision bombing I have ever seen. Debris from the bombs fell on our men but none was injured.[44]

As the 24th Infantry Division approached Davao, the normal combat air patrol was increased from three to six aircraft. At the same time, an intensive effort was under way to break up the Japanese defensive positions near the city. As a result, the pace reached between 150 and 200 sorties a day. The largest number of strikes in one day involved 245 aircraft, dropping 155 tons of bombs.[45] Attempts by Marine aviators to have close air support gain the acceptance of the ground troops had by this time come full circle. As early as the drive through the Sulu Archipelago, one observer noted:

> . . . the sight of the jeeps with their Marine insignia was a matter of course to the infantrymen. Close air support was no longer novel or a matter of unusual interest to the soldiers. It was always there. It always worked. It was now just a part of the first team.[46]

Far from having to fight for acceptance, some Marine pilots on Mindanao found that "the infantry was apt to call

[42] *X Corps Mindanao Hist.*, p. 56.
[43] VMSB–241 WarD, May45.
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *X Corps Mindanao Hist.*, p. 56.
[46] De Chant, *Devilbirds*, p. 197.

for planes to hit a pin-point target that any hard-driving rifle squad could have taken. However, such enthusiasm was much preferred to indifference."[47]

During the latter part of May, Japanese resistance in the mountains east of the Sayre Highway stiffened appreciably. Even though, by this time, the X Corps operations on Mindanao had entered the mop-up and pursuit phase, rough terrain and poor trails in the mountainous regions of the island hampered the advance of the infantry. At the same time, heavy rains curtailed aerial observation of Japanese activity. As American troops advanced farther into the mountains, the enemy began to fight doggedly for every inch of ground.

In order to drive the Japanese from one of their strongholds, Marine dive-bomber pilots tried out yet another tactic on 1 June. This new method involved the saturation bombing of a very small area. No less than 88 SBDs attacked an enemy troop concentration and gun positions with a variety of bomb loads, including napalm. No enemy fire greeted the advancing infantrymen, who had expected to encounter stubborn resistance.

The stage for the biggest air strike on Mindanao was set when, on 19 June, a 31st Infantry Division artillery spotter aircraft observed large contingents of enemy troops moving into the Umayam River Valley in northern Mindanao. On the following morning, additional liaison aircraft flew over the area and reaffirmed the presence of enemy concentrations, but unfavorable weather precluded any offensive action from the air. On 21 June, all Marine aircraft that could be spared were requested to hit this area. Airborne coordinators in artillery spotter planes directed 148 dive bombers and fighter bombers to the target. During a four-hour period, the planes unloaded 75 tons of bombs on bivouac areas, supplies, buildings, and marching troop columns. Because of inclement weather, observation of results was limited; nevertheless, a number of large fires were clearly visible, bodies were observed floating in the river, and individual Japanese could be seen fleeing before the strafing aircraft. Subsequent reports indicated that about 500 Japanese were killed in this attack.

Despite bad weather and occasionally fanatical enemy resistance in the mountains of central and northern Mindanao, the handwriting was on the wall for the Japanese remaining on the island. On 30 June, General Eichelberger declared the eastern Mindanao operation completed and reported to General MacArthur that organized opposition on the island had ceased. Actually, isolated Japanese units were to continue fighting right up to the end of the war, and during the period 30 June through 15 August, American and Filipino guerrilla units killed 2,235 Japanese in addition to the more than 10,000 enemy killed on Mindanao prior to 30 June.[48] U.S. Army casualties through 15 August had numbered 820 killed and 2,880 wounded.[49] Among the Marine aviators who did not survive the Mindanao operation was Lieutenant Colonel Sarles, the energetic commander of VMB–611,

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 647.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 648.

whose PBJ failed to pull up after a low level attack on the Kibawe Trail in northern Mindanao on 30 May.[50]

During the period of 17 April through 30 June, Marine aviators flew a total of 10,406 combat sorties in support of X Corps, and dropped a total of 4,800 tons of bombs. Nearly 1,300 five-inch rockets were fired in low level attacks against Japanese installations during the same period.[51] From the first strategic attack until the final Japanese defeat, more than 20,000 sorties of all types of aircraft were flown in support of the Mindanao Campaign.[52]

On 12 July, Marine aviators in the Philippines carried out their last major support mission of the war when they flew cover for an amphibious landing team of the 24th Infantry Division at Sarangani Bay in southern Mindanao. With few exceptions, Marine and Allied aircraft had exhausted all profitable targets by mid-July. As far as the liberation of the Philippines was concerned, Marine aviation had fully achieved the objective it had set for itself: close air support that was consistently effective, and a menace only to the enemy.

CONCLUSION OF PHILIPPINE OPERATIONS[53]

By late April 1945 the main objectives of American operations in the Philippines had been accomplished: MacArthur's forces had seized strategic air bases which could be used to deny the enemy access to the East Indies; at the same time, American forces had gained control of bases in the Philippines from which an invasion of Japan could be mounted. In addition, the Allied advance through the Philippines had freed the majority of Filipinos from Japanese occupation. In a futile attempt to stem the American advance through the Philippines, the Japanese had sacrificed more than 400,000 of their troops.[54] When the war ended, more than a 100,000 Japanese—including noncombatant civilians—still remained in the archipelago. While the main body of American troops were preparing for an assault against Japan proper, the remnants of erstwhile proud Japanese garrisons in the Philippines were reduced to impotence and forced to forage for scraps to keep themselves alive, hunted by Americans and Filipinos alike.

For Marine aviators in the Philippines, the summer of 1945 brought changes both in personnel and equipment. On 1 June, Colonel Lyle H. Meyer turned over the command of MAG–24 to Colonel Warren E. Sweetser, Jr.[55] Two days later, after 26 months' service in the Pacific Theater, General Mitchell relinquished his command of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and AirNorSols

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[50] VMB–611 WarD, May45.

[51] *X Corps Mindanao Hist.*, p. 57.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] Additional sources for this section include: 1st MAW WarDs, 1945; Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea—The United States Marine Corps, 1775–1962* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1962), hereafter Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea;* George Odgers, *Air War Against Japan, 1943–1945—Australia in the War of 1939–1945*, series 3, Air, v. II (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957), hereafter Odgers, *Air War Against Japan.*

[54] Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, pp. 651–652.

[55] MAG–24 WarD, Jun45.

to Major General Louis E. Woods who, as a lieutenant colonel, had organized and commanded the wing at Quantico during the summer of 1941. General Woods was to recall:

> . . . I arrived at Headquarters, AirNorSols before lunch and about 3 p.m. I received immediate orders to proceed to Guam and report in person to Admiral Nimitz. I left later that night so that I would arrive in Guam at about seven o'clock when his Headquarters opened. I reported to him personally, was briefed by him, and ordered by him to proceed at once to Okinawa and relieve General Mulcahy. I doubt if I was in command of AirNorSols more than five hours.[56]

Upon his arrival on Okinawa, General Woods took over the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing. Colonel Harold C. Major, who had succeeded General Woods in command of the 1st Wing, held the post for only four days. On 10 June, Brigadier General Lewie G. Merritt arrived on Bougainville to take command. Two months later to the day, General Merritt, in turn, was relieved by Major General Claude A. Larkin, who was initially scheduled to take the 1st Wing into Kyushu once the invasion of the Japanese home islands got under way.

Other Marine aviators who had been instrumental in gaining acceptance for Marine close air support operations were caught up in the reshuffling of personnel. On 4 July, Colonel Jerome turned over his command of MAG–32 and MAGsZam to Colonel Stanley E. Ridderhof and returned to the United States. Six weeks later, on 17 August, Colonel Verne J. McCaul assumed command of MAGsZam.

The rapid turnover of personnel was accompanied by a similar reshuffling of Marine aviation units. On 1 August, the dive bomber squadrons of MAG–32, VMSB-133, -236, and -241 were decommissioned. Three days later, Headquarters of the 1st MAW and MAG–61 (including VMB–413, –423, –433, and –443), were ordered by Far East Air Forces to proceed from Bougainville to Zamboanga. Two weeks after the Japanese surrender, MAGsZam was dissolved; operational control of Moret Field and the air defense of Mindanao was turned over to the Army Air Forces 13th Fighter Command, effective 1 September. The end of the war saw numerous Marine aviation units in the process of being decommissioned; only a few Marine squadrons were to remain in the Philippines. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing would shortly move to Okinawa, and from there into China.

Even as units and personnel in the Philippines were undergoing major changes, the SBDs, long the mainstay of Marine dive bombing, were also making their exit. On 16 July, in a formal ceremony at Titcomb Field, Colonel Warren E. Sweetser, commanding MAG–24, bid farewell to the Douglas Dauntless dive bombers, which had rendered such faithful service to the Marine Corps from the first day of the war to almost the end. Several days later, the SBDs were ferried to Cebu for final disposition by the Navy.[57] Only VMSB–244, equipped with the

[56] LtGen Louis E. Woods ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC, dtd 25Nov66, in *Philippines Comment File.*

[57] 1st MAW WarD, Jul45.

new SB2C Helldivers, remained operational within MAG–24.

For the 1st MAW and Marine aviation in general, the employment of Marine aircraft in the Philippines marked the end of a lengthy period in which the Marines had believed, with some validity, that they were being left out of major operations in the Pacific Theater. In this feeling they were not alone, for Australian flying units expressed similar discontent at being assigned missions against long bypassed Japanese which they considered costly and nonessential.[58]

For Marine aviation, the Philippines campaign represented a unique opportunity to improve on a doctrine of air support that had been born long ago in the jungles of Central America. Earlier in World War II, there had been air support provided to ground forces by Marines. However, this air support had left something to be desired; a doctrine had not yet been evolved and techniques were yet to be refined. One Marine observer put it into the following words:

> Although there had been jury-rigged, prearranged airstrikes on Guadalcanal (some even involving depth charges as bombs), effective close air support never developed, nor did subsequent air support ventures in the undistinguished New Georgia campaign provide much encouragement.[59]

On Bougainville, it was Lieutenant Colonel John T. L. D. Gabbert, air officer of the 3d Marine Division, who began to study ways to make close air support more effective. Marine aviators proved at Hellzapoppin' Ridge what their close support capabilities were. Prior to the invasion of the Philippines, Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon with the benefit of improved radio equipment that had meanwhile become available, adapted his own and Gabbert's experiences as a further step in evolving a sound doctrine of Marine style aviation close support. That this technique, so often vindicated towards the end of the Second World War, really worked is attested to by many letters of commendation and gratitude from commanders of ground forces benefiting from such support. Though the Marine doctrine has come under attack from various quarters, during World War II and since, the comments of the ground forces themselves provide the most eloquent testimony in its favor. On this subject, the official U.S. Army history of the Philippine campaign has this to say:

> Ground combat units that at one time or another had close support from both U. S. Army and U. S. Marine Corps Aviation were virtually unanimous in preferring the latter, at least during the earlier months of the campaigns. Later, when Fifth Air Force units became more experienced in close ground support activity and began to work more closely with the ground combat forces, confidence in the Army's air arm grew. Nevertheless, the campaign ended with almost all ground units still hoping for an improved, more effective air-ground liaison system insofar as Army air echelons were concerned, and also seeking methods by which to establish a closer, more effective working relationship between the Army's ground and air units.[60]

[58] For a detailed discussion of this situation, see Odgers, *Air War Against Japan*, pp.386–390.

[59] Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, p. 386.

[60] Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 655.

Towards the end of the campaign in the Philippines, more than 30 letters of gratitude and commendation were directed to Marine aviation units from General MacArthur down to Army division commanders.[61] Perhaps General Eichelberger has summed it up best when he made the following comment, after the war, on the subject of close air support:

> There were four groups of Marine fliers who, in the interest of the integration of the services, were attached to the Thirteenth Air Force. During the central and southern Philippines campaign I had personal contact with the 12th, 14th, and 32nd Groups, and that was enough to convince me. These fliers had been trained by the Marine Corps with ground troops for the *specific purpose* of supporting ground troops. Their accomplishments were superb in the Zamboanga and Mindanao campaigns. The Marine liaison officers were always in front lines with the infantry commanders, and they were familiar with the forward positions as was the infantry. By radio they guided in the planes, and often the target of the strike was no more than three hundred yards ahead of the huddled doughboys.
>
> Colonel Clayton C. Jerome commanded these air men, and their accurate bombing and strafing earned them the gratitude and friendship of the 24th, 31st, and 41st Infantry Divisions. Nothing comforts a soldier, ankle-deep in mud, faced by a roadblock or fortified strongholds, as much as the sight of bombs wreaking havoc on stubborn enemy positions. It puts heart into them.[62]

The success of Marine aviators in the Philippines was not without sacrifice; 58 officers and 42 men of aviation units committed in the archipelago were killed in action; 46 officers and 81 Marines were wounded; and a total of 22 officers and 28 Marines died in operational aircraft accidents, from disease or accidents, or were missing.[63]

In the evolution of Marine aviation, the experiences gained by Marine pilots in the Philippines marked an important milestone. Close air support of ground forces became an accepted factor in ground operations. Techniques pioneered in the Philippines would require further refinement as new equipment became available; but Marine aviators had proven once and for all that their concept of close air support was correct and workable.

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[61] Copies of these letters are contained in *Marine Close Air Support File.*

[62] Eichelberger and Mackaye, *Jungle Road to Tokyo*, p. 250.

[63] Figures furnished by Marine Records Section, HQMC, in a Special Aviation Rpt on 19Nov47, cited in Boggs, *Marines in the Philippines*, App. III, p. 152.