

PART V

Marine Aviation in the Western Pacific

Mounting the Offensive ¹

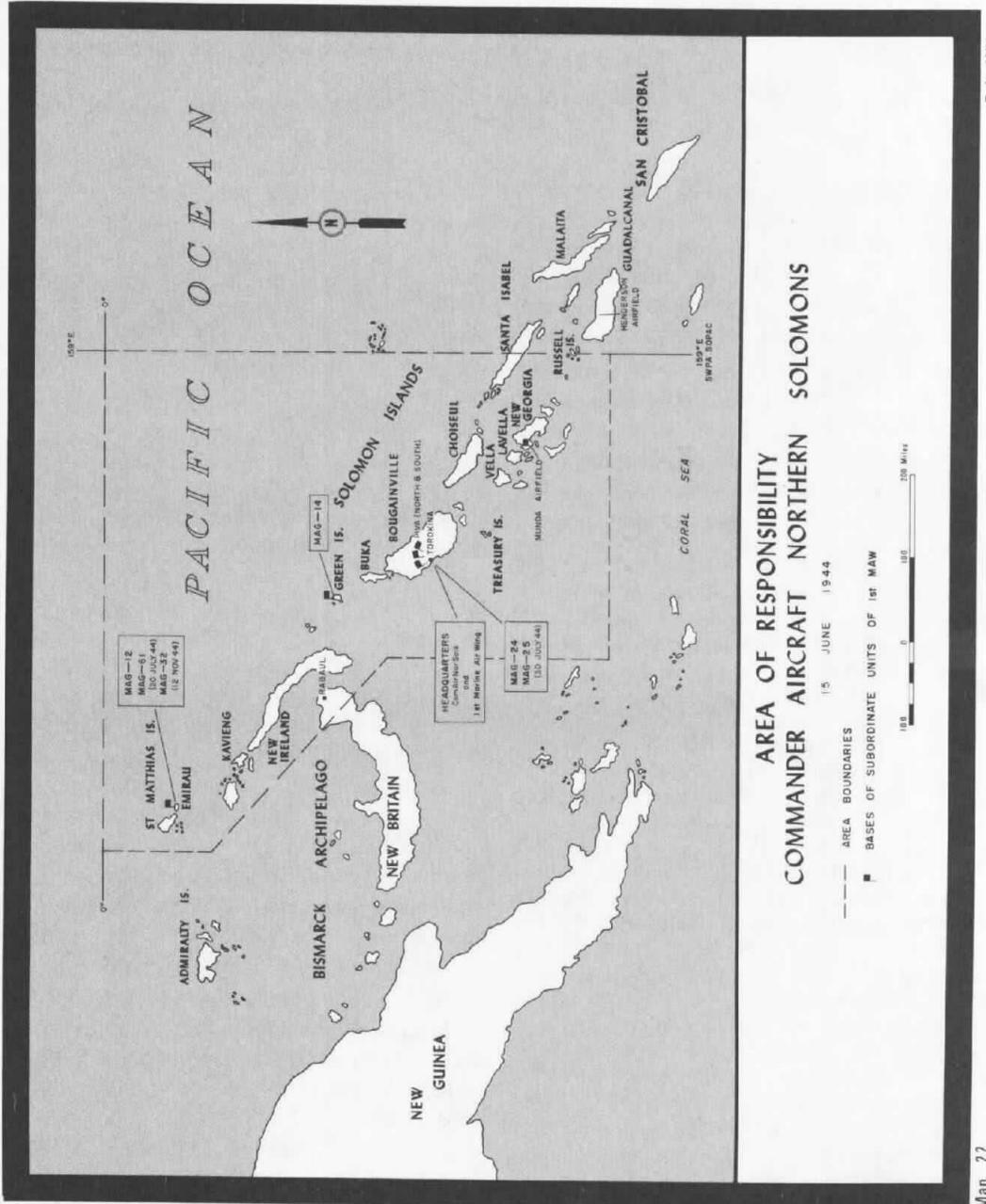
The movement of Marine aviation into the Central Pacific followed the general pattern of operations that earmarked the turning of the tide as the Guadalcanal campaign neared a successful conclusion. In late February 1943, U.S. Army troops, supported by Army Air Forces and Marine squadrons based at Henderson Field, landed

in the Russell Islands. By May, an airstrip had been completed on Banika from which Marine dive bombers, as well as Army and Navy aircraft, stepped up the air war against enemy fields along the chain of islands extending up to Bougainville.

Invasion of the New Georgia Group in the Central Solomons on 30 June by a joint Marine-Army force was supported by squadrons of MAG-21. In addition to providing close air support to the ground troops, it became a prime mission of Marine aviation to reduce Japanese air strength in the Solomons and at the same time neutralize and isolate Japanese strongpoints that had been bypassed in favor of seizing more weakly defended islands farther to the enemy's rear. This strategy was successfully applied to recently established enemy airfields on New Georgia that had been designed to support the five major air bases ringing Rabaul, which were neutralized from the air for more than a year. Similarly, the capture of Vella Lavella Island effectively isolated an enemy garrison of 10,000 on Kolombangara Island 20 miles to the southeast. (See Map 22).

Once the success of such island-hopping tactics had been established, it was a foregone conclusion that they would be applied in the Central Pacific which was the logical next step in the American drive towards the Japanese

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: DivAvn, HQMC, Pers and Loc Status Sheets, Mar43-Dec46, hereafter DivAvn, *Status Sheets*, with date; 4th MBDAW WarDs, Dec42-Mar46; MAG-13 WarDs, Jan43-Sep44; MAG-15 WarDs, Jan43-Dec45; MAG-22 WarDs, Apr43-Dec44; MAG-22 Hist, Mar42-Apr47; MAG-31 WarDs, Feb43-Jul46; VMF-111 WarDs, Jun43-Nov45; VMF-113 WarDs, Jan43-Jul45; VMF-151 WarDs, Apr43-May45; VMF-224 WarDs, May42-Jun44; VMSB-231 WarDs, Jun43-Jul45; VMF-241 WarDs, Apr42-Dec44; VMF-241 Hist, Mar-Dec43; VMF-311 WarDs, Sep43-Aug45; VMSB-331 Hist, Feb43-Dec44; VMJ-353 WarDs, Jun43-Jun44; VMF-422 WarDs, Jun43-Dec44; VMF-422 Hist, Jan43-Apr47; VMF(N)-532 Hist, Apr43-May47; Richard W. Johnston, *Follow Me!—The Story of the Second Marine Division in World War II* (New York: Random House, 1948), hereafter, Johnston, *2d MarDiv Hist*; Masatake Okumiya, Jiro Horikoshi, and Martin Caidin, *Zero!* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1956), hereafter, Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, quoted with permission; Capt. Carl W. Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1946), hereafter Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*; DeChant, *Devilbirds*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.



Map 22

home islands. United States strategy for operations in the Central Pacific called for the seizure of the Gilbert Islands, to be used as a stepping-stone towards the Marshall Islands, the Marianas, and in time, the Carolines. The offensive in the Central Pacific was to begin on 20 November 1943 with an attack against the Gilberts. Operations in the Central Pacific were to be conducted under the command of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. In emphasizing Navy sentiment towards the employment of Marines for assault missions of this type, Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief of the United States Fleet, expressed his conviction "that they were singularly appropriate for assaults on atolls, where no extended ground operations would follow the landings. In this kind of warfare you either take an island or you do not take it."²

Marine aviators took part in preliminary movements towards the Gilberts as early as 25 August 1943, when the 2d Marine Airdrome Battalion (Reinforced) moved into Nukufetau, a small atoll in the Ellice Islands. With the help of naval construction battalions, Marines constructed a fighter strip in Nukufetau, where VMF-111 landed on 20 October. Following this, the Seabees cut down 50,000 coconut trees to make room for a bomber strip. On 7 November, Navy Bomber Squadron 108 (VB-108) arrived on the strip, followed a week later by VM5B-331. Subsequently, a U.S. Army Air Force B-24 squadron also was based on this field.³

² King and Whitehill, *A Naval Record*, p. 481.

³ Col J. Frank Cole ltr to Head HistBr, G-3

On 31 August, the 16th Naval Construction Battalion, together with a detachment of the 7th Marine Defense Battalion (Reinforced) had gone ashore on Nanomea, the northernmost of the Ellice Islands, situated about 400 miles southeast of Tarawa. A Marine fighter squadron, VMF-441, arrived on the island in late September. After an uneventful stay, the Marine squadron relinquished Nanomea in December to two Army Air Forces heavy bomber squadrons.

In connection with the Gilberts operation, it should be noted that the primary purpose for the expenditure of lives and materiel was not the elimination of Japanese garrisons on Tarawa and other islands in the group, but the further use to which the islands could be put in pursuit of the overall American strategy in the Pacific. To this end, initial possession of the Gilbert Islands, and subsequent seizure of the Marshalls would provide the United States with a base for an attack against the Marianas. In effect, the island groups and atolls in the Central Pacific represented unsinkable aircraft carriers. It was hoped that the airplane—capable of spanning ever-greater distances and of carrying an increasing bomb load—would be the medium that could isolate the enemy on the ground, knock him out of the sky, and when within launching distance of the Japanese homeland, could curtail and in time eliminate his capacity to wage war.

The epic assault by the 2d Marine Division on Tarawa in the Gilberts was

Div, HQMC, dtd 1Sep67, in *Marine Aviation Comment File*, hereafter *Cole ltr*.

destined to write an indelible page in the history of the Marine Corps. Heavy resistance and unusual beach and tidal conditions resulted in 20 percent casualties among the 15,000 Marines in the assault force.⁴ Nevertheless, after three days of ferocious fighting, the 2d Marine Division was in firm control of Betio Island.

Marine aviators were not directly involved in air operations at Tarawa and at Makin Island either prior to or during the amphibious assault. Such aerial support was the task assigned to Army Air Forces pilots and carrier-based Navy aviators. Bombers of the Seventh Air Force, flying from recently occupied Nanomea and from Funafuti in the Ellice Islands, 660 miles east of Tarawa, were charged with denying the enemy the use of his airfields on Tarawa, Makin, Mille, Jaluit, Maloelap, and Nauru. Between 13 and 19 November 1943, they dropped 63.3 tons of bombs on Tarawa, in addition to flying missions against the other islands in the Gilberts and the Marshalls. On 18 November, naval planes dropped more than a hundred tons of bombs on Tarawa; nearly 70 additional tons were dropped on the following day. Altogether, approximately 900 carrier-based naval aircraft supported the operation in the Gilberts. The pilots flew 2,284 sorties in missions designed to neutralize Japanese air bases, provide direct support of ground operations, oppose enemy air efforts, and create diversions on adjacent islands.

Japanese efforts to assist their hard-pressed garrisons in the Gilberts con-

sisted of air and submarine activity. Neither arm proved capable of seriously interfering with the American assault, though on 20 November one Japanese aircraft scored a torpedo hit on the light carrier *Independence*, which had to withdraw for repairs. Four days later, the enemy submarine *I-175* torpedoed and sank the escort carrier *Liscome Bay*, but even this serious loss failed to stem or even delay the tide of events in the Gilberts.

For Marine aviators, hampered by the short range of their aircraft, the Gilberts operation consisted of executing search and patrol missions and generally fulfilling a base defense mission. When, on 23 November, the smoke of battle lifted over newly captured Betio, the time had come to bury the dead, clear up the debris of battle, and take stock of what had been accomplished. Of the valor of the Marines, who had seized the island, little remained to be said; long rows of casualties awaiting burial spoke for themselves. The enemy's fanaticism in holding the atoll to the last also required little comment. In view of the 3,000 tons of naval shells hurled at Betio, an island less than half a square mile in size, and the relative ineffectiveness of this bombardment, Admiral Nimitz expressed the view that "heavier support of this kind is not to be expected in the Central Pacific Campaign, but increased efficiency in that support is to be expected."⁵

Following the Tarawa operation in

⁴ Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, Pt II, pp. 23-114.

⁵ CinCPac forwarding ltr of 15Dec43 on ComCenPacFor rpt dtd 10Dec43, cited in Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 230.

late 1943, General Holland Smith recommended that Marine aviators be assigned to escort carriers, where they would play a part in furnishing direct air support in any future amphibious operation involving a Marine division. In the event such an assignment was not feasible, the Navy aviators given this mission would have to receive special indoctrination and training in close support tactics.

At the time, the climate was not yet ripe for the changes recommended, partly because the Navy already had its carriers earmarked for other employment and partly because not all of the Marine officers grappling with this important issue were pushing in unison for the same objective. In this connection, criticism may be directed against those both within the Navy and within the Corps who simply failed to see a need for putting Marine aviation on carriers. In the words of at least one authority on this subject:

High-ranking Marine officers—aviators and non-aviators alike—showed a remarkable lack of foresight in failing to insist that their flyers be put on escort carriers at this time. It is easy to say that “Ernie King would never have stood for it,” or “Admiral Whoosis doesn’t believe in Marine aviation.” But it was the job of the Marine Corps to find the right “persuaders.”

The truth is that the top Marine aviators didn’t pay enough attention to (1) close support, (2) amphibious landings, (3) a combination of the two. They were too deeply interested in shooting enemy planes out of the wild blue yonder, so they lost sight of their primary mission.⁶

The story of how, following lengthy

⁶ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 235.

negotiations in 1944, Marines finally did get carriers assigned to them, has been well told elsewhere in this series.⁷ In any case, during operations in the Central and Western Pacific in 1944 and early 1945, the absence of such close air support by Marines as had been envisioned was bound to have a profound and long-lasting effect on the role that Marine aviation could be expected to play during this phase of the war. One authoritative account of the campaign summed up the situation in the following words:

The decision, however, prevented Marine pilots from supporting their comrades and army troops ashore in the Marshalls and the Marianas. Marine pilots in the Central Pacific before Tarawa served important defensive missions, but after that battle, since their craft were of short range, they watched the war leave them far behind. Their principal function in that section of the globe was bombing by-passed atolls.⁸

On 26 November, while the last enemy defenders were being hunted down on the northern islands of Tarawa Atoll, a Marine transport plane piloted by Major Edmund L. Zonne, executive officer of VMJ-353, landed on the newly reconditioned Japanese airstrip on Betio. This was the first Marine aircraft to touch down on the freshly captured island. At the same time, naval

⁷ For a detailed account of Marine air on carriers, see Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., in *Victory and Occupation—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. V (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1969) pt. III, Chap. 2, section entitled “Marines on Carriers,” pp. 410–429, hereafter Frank and Shaw, “Marines on Carriers.”

⁸ Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 231.

construction battalions and Army engineers began work on airfields on Makin and Apamama Islands. Scheduled flights to the latter two islands got under way in mid-December, when both airstrips became the terminals of regular passenger flights.

Christmas Day of 1943 witnessed the forward displacement of the 4th MBDAW, commanded by Brigadier General Lewie G. Merritt, who on 5 October had succeeded General Campbell as wing commander. The forward echelon of the wing moved from Funafuti in the Ellice Islands to Tarawa; a week later, on 2 January 1944, the rear echelon displaced from Tutuila in Samoa to Funafuti. In August 1943, when General Campbell had first brought the wing to Tutuila, he had under his command the forward echelons of VMJ-353 and VMF-224, as well as MAG-13, consisting of Headquarters Squadron 13 and Service Squadron 13, VMF-111, -151, -241, and -441. Five squadrons of Fleet Air Wing 2 were attached to his command for operational control.

Increasing Marine aviation strength in the Central Pacific was reflected in the organization of the 4th MBDAW at the beginning of 1944. General Merritt had under his command MAG-13, headed by Colonel Lawrence Norman; MAG-31, commanded by Colonel Calvin R. Freeman; and units of Fleet Air Wing 2, which was headed by Rear Admiral John Dale Price, with headquarters at Kaneohe, Hawaii. MAG-13, based on Funafuti, consisted of its headquarters and service squadrons and VMSB-151 and -331. In addition to headquarters and service squadrons, MAG-31, based on Wallis Island on the

western fringes of Samoa, was comprised of VMF-111, -224, -311, -422, and -441. Units of Fleet Air Wing 2 in the Samoa-Gilberts-Ellice area consisted of three scouting squadrons, two patrol squadrons, four bombing squadrons, and a photographic squadron.

Marine aviators arriving in the South and Central Pacific often found the accommodations awaiting them little to their liking, as indicated by the history of one bombing squadron, whose author had this pungent comment to make:

Wallis Island in French Samoa is by no stretch of the imagination the Pearl of the Pacific. It has gained the reputation—at least among the personnel of this squadron—as about the best spot on God's earth to keep away from. The health conditions were far from favorable and the quarters were not very satisfactory, being in part tents and in part huts constructed by the natives without floors or similar improvements. The recreational facilities—such as they were—consisted of a movie theater at a distance which invited only the most ambitious, and half a dozen books and a dart game which our predecessors had left behind. There were no electric lights, the water supply lasted for about half an hour a day, and the food was made up almost entirely of C rations. And to top matters off it was either so dusty you couldn't breathe or so muddy you couldn't walk, and always present was the tropical mosquito responsible for giving at least half the complement Dengue fever at one time or another. But despite the personal difficulties that everybody had to contend, our planes were kept in the air and the patrols went out on schedule and an intensive training program was undertaken.⁹

After only about three weeks on Wallis Island, the first ground echelon departed on 13 November for Nukufetau

⁹ VMSB-331 Hist, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

in the Ellice Islands. By 28 November, all of VMSB-331 had settled down on Nukufetau. The island was described as "a coral atoll about the size of a ten cent piece and when the tide was in gave us around 9 cents change. The health conditions were as good as those at Wallis had been bad. There were no mosquitoes and no diseases and the worst we had to contend with were tribes of rats."¹⁰

Two days following its arrival on Nukufetau, VMSB-331, commanded by Major Paul R. Byrum, Jr., dispatched a detachment of six SBDs and maintenance personnel to Tarawa to lend a hand in air patrols and possible air strikes. One such strike materialized on 21 December, when 5 SBDs, together with a dozen Army B-24 bombers and 15 of the new Navy F6F Grumman fighters as escorts, attacked enemy shipping at Jaluit in the Marshalls. In the course of this strike, the squadron claimed credit for sinking a 6,000- or 7,000-ton cargo ship in the Jaluit lagoon. Postwar accounts have made it appear more likely that the enemy ship sunk on this occasion was a 1,912-ton converted water tender already immobilized in a previous raid by naval aircraft from the *Yorktown*. In any case, the men of VMSB-331 considered the sinking of an enemy vessel during their first combat mission a promising omen. This air strike turned out to be the only offensive mission executed by any unit under the 4th MBDAW until March 1944.

The attack inflicted little damage on

the Japanese in the Marshalls. Possibly, the greatest significance can be found in the presence of the F6F Grumman fighters. This new Grumman fighter, otherwise known as "Hellcat," made its debut during the Gilberts Operation. Like the Corsair, the F6F was powered by a Pratt & Whitney 2,000-horsepower air-cooled radial engine. This airplane quickly won the grudging admiration of Japanese aviators, one of whom expressed this opinion of the Hellcats' capabilities:

There is no doubt that the new Hellcat was superior in every respect to the Zero except in the factors of maneuverability and range. It carried heavier armament, could outclimb and outdive the Zero, could fly at higher altitudes, and was well protected with self-sealing fuel tanks and armor plate. Like the Wildcat and Corsair, the new Grumman was armed with six 12.7mm machine guns, but it carried a much greater load of ammunition than the other fighters. Of the many American fighter planes we encountered in the Pacific, the Hellcat was the only aircraft which could acquit itself with distinction in a fighter-vs.-fighter dogfight.¹¹

Following their capture by the Americans, Tarawa, Makin, and Apamama Islands immediately were converted into a springboard for the aerial offensive against the Marshall Islands. By late December, no less than four airfields in the Gilberts had become operational, and B-24s had begun staging missions through Tarawa. As 1943 drew to a close, bombers of TF 57 dropped 550 tons of bombs on the Marshalls and 28 tons on Nauru, an island 525 miles west of the Gilberts. Japanese

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹¹ Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 222.

antiaircraft fire was frequently intense and hostile fighters also took a toll of American bombers. Enemy land-based aviation in the Marshalls, however, was unable to cope with the development and operation of American bases only 300 miles to the south; during the latter part of December 1943, and throughout January 1944, the Japanese raided the new American bases in the Gilberts on more than 30 occasions. With only one exception, the Japanese air attacks occurred at night. Total damage inflicted at the four airfields consisted of 33 aircraft destroyed, 9 planes damaged, 5 men killed, and a number of men wounded. In early December 1943, the arrival on Tarawa of VMF(N)-532, commanded by Major Everette H. Vaughan, severely hampered the after-dark raids of the enemy air marauders. Major Vaughan's night fighters were the first planes of this type to reach the Central Pacific, though a sister squadron, VMF(N)-531, had already begun to fly night patrols from Banika in the Russell Islands in September 1943.

Throughout January 1944, preparations for the imminent invasion of the Marshall Islands continued at a brisk pace. By the 13th, the 4th Marine Division had arrived in Hawaii en route to the Marshalls from the west coast of the United States. The Marine division, as well as the Army's 7th Infantry Division, departed Hawaii on 22 January en route to Kwajalein. A total of 297 ships, not including fast carrier task groups or submarines, transported about 54,000 troops to their objectives. A force of three cruisers, four destroyers, and two minelayers stood by to neutralize enemy bases at Wotje and

Taroa. Landings were scheduled for 31 January.

As in the case of Tarawa, Marine aviation was not scheduled to play an active part in the amphibious phase of the assault. Once again, the Marine squadrons based in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were assigned patrol and logistic missions. After the initial objectives in the Marshalls had been seized, Marine air squadrons were to relocate rapidly to them. In line with this forward movement, MAG-13 was to displace to Majuro. The destination of MAG-31 was Roi Island, at the northern tip of Kwajalein Atoll. During the first two weeks of January, VMF-111 under Major J. Frank Cole, VMF-224, commanded by Major Darrell D. Irwin, VMF-441, headed by Major James B. Moore, and VMF-113 under Major Loren D. Everton joined MAG-31, as did VMF(N)-532.¹²

Six planes of the latter squadron, comprising its forward echelon, were the first aircraft to land on the newly activated field at Roi, led by the squadron commander, Major Vaughan. The latter was to comment later:

I was the first American pilot to land on Roi as I led the unit there via Makin Island. The story was carried by United Press and appeared in the San Diego Union saying that I was the first American pilot in the Central Pacific to land an

¹² "After Roi was bombed and supplies and space were limited, the ground echelon of VMF-111 was returned to Makin Island to join the air echelon waiting there. VMF-111 remained on Makin bombing bypassed islands in the Marshalls. A typical day would see planes take off from Makin, bomb Mille, rearm and refuel at Majuro, and strike again on the return to Makin." *Cole ltr.*

aircraft on pre-war-held Japanese territory. I had been instructed to let Colonel Calvin Freeman make the first landing but when I arrived in the vicinity of Roi with my group of aircraft low on fuel, the Colonel was not in the area so, I proceeded to land. (I heard much about it later when he did arrive!)¹³

In order to further strengthen Marine aviation in the Central Pacific, MAG-22, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James M. Daly, was scheduled to come under General Merritt's 4th MBDW in early February 1944. The air group had been stationed on Midway Island ever since 1 March 1942, and following the epic defense of that island, had led a relatively peaceful and isolated existence there, engaged in routine patrols and occasional search and rescue missions.

Into the period preceding the invasion of the Marshall Islands falls the saga of VMF-422, destined to become the "Lost Squadron." VMF-422, commanded by Major John S. MacLaughlin, Jr., had been part of MAG-22 until 15 December, when it was detached from the air group and flown to Hawaii in transport aircraft. Upon arrival there, the ground echelon was attached to the task force staging for the invasion of the Marshalls. On 17 January 1944, the flight echelon consisting of 27 pilots and 3 enlisted men together with 24 newly issued Corsairs, boarded the escort carrier USS *Kalinin Bay* and departed for the Gilbert Islands on the following day. Once the escort carrier arrived within 50 miles of Tarawa, the

squadron was to launch its aircraft and fly to Hawkins Field on Betio Island for further orders from Admiral Hoover, who had assumed direct operational command of garrison aircraft effective 11 January.

On the morning of 24 January, the aircraft were catapulted as planned practically within sight of Tarawa and shortly thereafter landed on Hawkins Field. The three spare pilots, as well as the three enlisted men who were to service the planes, went ashore by boat. Upon its arrival on Betio, the squadron received orders from Admiral Hoover to proceed to Funafuti, pending further assignment within the scope of Operation FLINTLOCK, the invasion of the Marshalls.

At 0945 on 25 January, 23 of the Corsairs left for Funafuti on a two-leg trip of a 700-mile flight; a stopover was scheduled at Nanomea, the northernmost of the Ellice Islands, about 463 miles south-southeast of Tarawa. One aircraft remained behind at Hawkins Field because of starter trouble. The flight departed Betio Island under good weather conditions without any navigational escort. Major MacLaughlin, the squadron commander, led the fighter formation of three flights. Estimated time of arrival at Nanomea was 1225.

Flying at an altitude of 2,000 feet, the squadron encountered the first of two severe weather fronts only 15 minutes before reaching Nanomea. The front rapidly developed into a violent tropical storm, reaching from sea level to over 13,000 feet. Because the torrential downpour greatly restricted visibility, the squadron commander ordered the planes to descend to a water-level

¹³ Col Everette H. Vaughan ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 28Sep67, in *Marine Aviation Comment File*.

course and to follow it through the disturbance. When the flight emerged from this front, it discovered that three Corsairs had lost formation and had disappeared from sight. Radio contact was maintained with these pilots, but they had been hopelessly separated from the formation and were on their own. Of the three, Captain John F. Rogers disappeared without a trace. The second, Lieutenant John E. Hansen, was able to get bearings towards Funafuti from one of the other pilots and actually reached his destination. The third, Lieutenant Walter A. Wilson, landed on an island, where natives looked after him until he was taken off by a destroyer, the USS *Hobby*.

The remaining 20 pilots established their position as being over Nui Island, about halfway between Nanomea and Funafuti. At this point, one of the Corsairs piloted by Lieutenant Christian F. Lauesen developed engine trouble and made a water landing. The flight circled over him and observed that he was afloat by means of his "Mae West" life preserver; the pilot's life raft, however, was not to be seen. While the remainder of the pilots continued the flight, one of the group, Lieutenant Robert C. Lehnert, circled the castaway pilot until his own plane ran out of gas and Lehnert was himself forced to bail out. After hitting the water, Lehnert conducted a futile search for Lauesen with whom he intended to share his life raft. Lauesen was never seen again and Lehnert himself remained adrift for two days before he was rescued.

At 1245 Major MacLaughlin informed the remainder of the flight that he had made contact with the Funafuti

beam¹⁴ and that they would proceed there. At this time, the squadron encountered a second squall which, if anything, was worse than the first. As the storm increased in violence, the flight again reported navigational difficulty. Simultaneously, something went haywire with the squadron commander's radio receiver. Failing to contact Major MacLaughlin by radio, Captain Cloyd R. Jeans flew across the squadron commander's bow and attracted his attention. Aware of the malfunctioning of his receiver, Major MacLaughlin turned over command of the flight to Captain Jeans and ordered the latter to lead the flight back to Nui Island. Shortly thereafter, Major MacLaughlin was observed to fly a course tangent to the rest of the flight. He disappeared in the thick overcast and was not sighted again, despite the efforts of his wingmen to keep him in view.

Led by Captain Jeans, the flight made a 45 degree turn off its original heading of 180 degrees and reversed course towards Nui. In an effort to avoid the squall, some of the pilots broke formation and quickly became confused as to their positions. Lieutenant Earl C. Thompson disappeared into the tropical storm and was not seen thereafter. At 1500, Lieutenant Robert P. Moran, one of the 16 remaining participants in the flight informed Captain Jeans that contact with Nanomea had been established. This link lasted for only five

¹⁴ Beam—a directional radio signal transmitted in quadrants from a radio range station audible as a continuous tone or whine as long as an aircraft proceeds directly on the proper course, but audible as dot-dash or dash-dot as it veers to the left or right.

minutes, for Lieutenant Moran's plane ran out of fuel. The pilot parachuted but became entangled in his shroud lines and drowned in the heavy surf off Nui Island.

For the 15 remaining pilots, the confusion was compounded by the fact that the aircraft were not flying at identical speeds. In summing up the disastrous flight, the squadron history was to describe the plight of VMF-422 in this manner:

Some elements of the formation were compelled to fly full throttle to maintain contact with the flight leaders, as the latter maintained normal cruising speed. However, the density and violence of the storm prevented flying a standard formation, resulting in maneuvers at full throttle one instant and retarded throttle the next. Several pilots soon reported being low on fuel. Those who maintained good formation had sufficient gas to have possibly reached Funafuti.¹⁵

At 1530 two of the remaining pilots informed Captain Jeans that they were running short of fuel and had to land. One of them, Lieutenant William A. Aycrigg, set his plane down in the water and was seen to be riding in his life raft. The other pilot ditched seven miles away. At this point, Captain Jeans decided that the remaining aircraft should hit the water together, because it appeared that most of the planes would shortly run out of fuel, though several pilots reported having sufficient gasoline to remain airborne for another hour. The flight then formed a traffic circle and made water landings. Of the two pilots that had run out of fuel at 1530, Lieutenant Aycrigg vanished in the

vastness of the Pacific and was never found. The pilot of the second aircraft, Lieutenant Theodore Thurnau, was rescued by the USS *Welles* on 28 January.

The remainder of the flight landed and, with one exception, each pilot got his life raft and survival equipment out of the plane before it sank. One pilot lost all of his clothing and equipment extricating himself from his plane and had to take refuge on board one of the other rafts. By this time, the other 12 pilots had joined and had started to pool their equipment for equal sharing among the survivors. The rafts were secured together by the cord hand holds but in the extremely heavy seas some of these holds were torn off. Eventually, the rafts had to be held together by hand.

The drifting aviators quickly noticed that their new environment was hardly more secure than the turbulent air had been. In fact, there appeared a new kind of hazard:

A number of sharks were observed, some making passes at the sea anchor or scraping against the boats—which added nothing to the peace of mind of the occupants. Facetious names were given to the most persistent of these animals, one being readily identifiable by a notched dorsal fin. Their persistence in scraping against the boats grew to such an extent that one of them was finally shot, whereupon all dispersed. To the now familiar statement, "There are no atheists in foxholes," may it also be added that there are no atheists in rubber boats! Frequent "prayer meetings" and songfests helped to bolster morale.¹⁶

The odyssey of VMF-422 ended during the afternoon of 27 January, when

¹⁵ VMF-422 Hist, *op. cit.*, Anx B, Flight Echelon, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

a search plane sighted the group. The pilot, eager to be of assistance, landed in the heavy sea and damaged his plane while taxiing to pick up the survivors. The rescuer, himself now marooned, radioed for help. About two hours later, the USS *Hobby* arrived and picked up the 12 pilots of VMF-422 as well as the rescue pilot and eight members of his crew. Upon coming on board, the survivors of VMF-422 were pleasantly surprised to find Lieutenant Wilson, one of the first three pilots that had become separated from the squadron during the first squall, waiting for them. The destroyer had picked him up from his island refuge, which "he left rather reluctantly because of his royal treatment by the natives."¹⁷ A thorough search of the area by the USS *Hobby* and other ships failed to yield any sign of Lieutenant Thurnau. The defunct rescue plane was sunk by naval gunfire. All of the rescued pilots were suffering from immersion, sunburn, and general weakness, though only the pilot that had lost his clothing had to be hospitalized.

On 29 January the 14 castaways were placed ashore at Funafuti, where they were met by Lieutenant Hansen. The latter was the only one to have flown his aircraft to Funafuti. Of 23 Corsairs and pilots that had left Tarawa, only one plane had reached its destination. In addition to the loss of 22 aircraft, the episode cost the lives of 6 pilots.

A board of investigation, subsequently convened to probe the disaster, determined that faulty communications and human error were largely responsible

for the mishap.¹⁸ Radio aids data were incomplete in that voice calls for the bases were not listed and range bearings for the Funafuti range were not given. Operations towers on various fields in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were monitoring a radio frequency different from that used by the squadron. It was further brought out that no one at Hawkins Field had cleared the flight in the first place. Nothing was sent to Nanomea telling of the flight until that base requested information. The final touch of irony was added when it became known that Nanomea had been plotting the planes by radar since 1225 of 25 January at a distance of between 10 and 70 miles. Inasmuch as Nanomea had not been advised of the flight, the control tower personnel assumed that bombers were passing through the area.

In connection with the VMF-422 disaster, it may be of interest that the Japanese suffered an almost identical mishap earlier in the war, with even more serious consequences. After the war, a leading enemy air ace was to make the following comment on flying conditions and long-distance fighter hops:

In the vast reaches of the Pacific the distance between each small outcropping of land can assume terrifying proportions. Without radar, indeed, without even radios in our Zero fighters, we dared not risk the loss of most of our planes. Our experience in such matters had been tragic. Early in 1943, several squadrons of Army fighter planes, manned by pilots

¹⁸ "At least two senior officers in the 4th Defense Wing received letters of reprimand because of this disaster." LtGen Louis E. Woods ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 2Nov67, in *Marine Aviation Comment File*, hereafter *Woods ltr*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

who had absolutely no experience in long-distance flying over the ocean, left Japan for a base to the south. En route, they encountered severe weather conditions, but refused to turn back. Almost every plane disappeared in the endless reaches of the Pacific.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the invasion date for the Marshalls was drawing near. Fast carrier task groups of Task Force 58, commanded by Rear Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, began preinvasion attacks against the Marshalls on 29 January 1944. Launched from 12 carriers, 700 aircraft began to carry out simultaneous attacks against enemy airfields on Roi, Kwajalein, Wotje, and Taroa (also known as Maloelap). (See Map 23). In the words of an official report, "simultaneous attacks by this force were so successful in achieving surprise and destroying their targets that by evening on 29 January there was not an operational Japanese aircraft east of Eniwetok."²⁰

The American landings on 31 January were executed on schedule. Japanese planners had expected an invasion of Jaluit, Mille, or Wotje and had reinforced those garrisons, as well as the one at Maloelap. That the Americans would strike at Kwajalein, in the heart of the Marshalls, came as a complete surprise to the enemy, whose reinforcement of the atolls under attack was not quick enough to stem the tide. Roi-Namur was secured by noon of 2 February. Two days later, all Japanese resistance on Kwajalein Island came to an end. Majuro Atoll fell into American hands without opposition, having been aban-

doned by the Japanese before the invasion force reached the objective.²¹

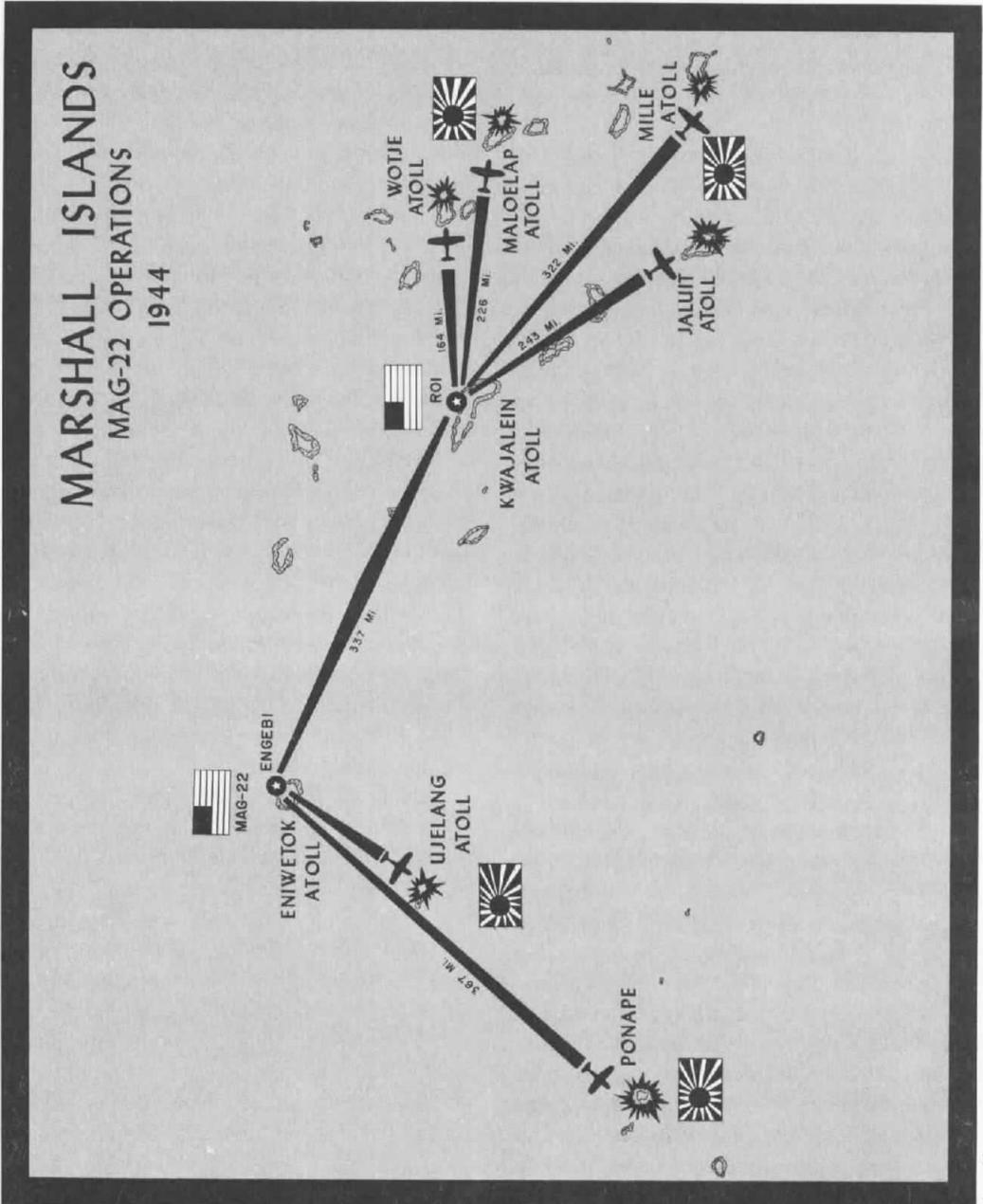
Elimination of Japanese air power in the Marshalls was of crucial importance for the continuation of the American drive in the Central Pacific. The widely held view that the Japanese had fortified the Marshalls long before the outbreak of World War II proved to be erroneous. The Japanese had built an airstrip on Roi during the 1930s, but had undertaken little else to fortify the Marshalls until 1941. By the end of that year, the enemy had constructed airstrips on Maloelap and Wotje; the latter island also served as a seaplane base. On Mille, the Japanese completed an airstrip towards the end of 1942, but for the remainder of that year, the total number of aircraft stationed on the four atolls did not exceed 65. As the end of 1943 approached and the invasion of the Marshalls became imminent, the Japanese built up their air strength to about 130 aircraft, which Admiral Mitscher's preinvasion bombing and strafing promptly destroyed.

The first Marine aviation personnel to go ashore in the Marshalls were members of the forward echelon of VMSB-231, which reached Majuro on 3 February 1944. The airstrip on the island became operational on 19 February and two days later the flight echelon, led by the squadron commander, Major Elmer G. Glidden, Jr., took off from the escort aircraft carrier *Gambier Bay* and landed on the island. On 26 February, VMSB-

¹⁹ Sakai, Caidin, and Saito, *Samurai!*, pp. 199-200, quoted with permission.

²⁰ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 193.

²¹ For a detailed account of Marine operations in the Marshalls, see Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, Pt 3, v. III, pp. 117-227.



331 arrived on Majuro. Both of the MAG-13 squadrons were given the mission of neutralizing the enemy on those Marshall islands that had been bypassed.

On 7 February, Colonel Calvin B. Freeman's MAG-31 moved to Roi right on the heels of the ground action. Only five days had elapsed since the 4th Marine Division had completed the conquest of Roi and Namur Islands and barely 48 hours had gone by since the 7th Infantry Division had eliminated the last enemy resistance on Kwajalein Island, 50 miles to the south. The daring advance into the heart of the Marshalls and Gilberts had brought an area one thousand miles long and including at least seven Japanese strongpoints under the control of the United States. Accruing to the American forces as a result of the Gilbert-Marshalls operations were additional benefits, summed up in an official postwar analysis:

Continuous operation of United States carrier task forces in the area, unchecked by Japanese land-based aircraft, forced the Japanese Fleet to abandon Truk as a major base. Between 3 and 10 February 1944 all units of that fleet except a few cruisers and destroyers of the Area Defense Forces withdrew to Palau and the Empire leaving United States forces in the Central Pacific unopposed except by garrison troops and a decimated Japanese air force.²²

Even though the Japanese no longer considered Truk as a safe anchorage for large segments of the *Combined Fleet*, they nevertheless were determined to hold it to the last. A buildup of enemy strength on Truk began in early 1944 and continued throughout the year. The

Japanese Army sent troops to the island, which soon bristled with pillboxes, minefields, and coast defense and antiaircraft artillery. Navy torpedo boats and rocket launchers supplemented the Japanese defenses on the island. In line with the policy of avoiding, if possible, a direct assault on enemy islands known to be strongly fortified, the JCS decided on 12 March 1944 to bypass and neutralize Truk. Keeping the Japanese on Truk off balance was a job delegated to long-range Army Air Forces and Navy bombers in the Marshall and Admiralty Islands. Cancellation of a direct assault on Truk left Marine aviation without an important part, which, according to initial plans, Marine fighters and dive bombers were to have played in the conquest of the Japanese stronghold. It appeared as if Marine pilots, eager to participate in the advance into the Carolines, would instead be relegated to riding herd on a large number of Japanese marooned on various islands in the Gilberts and Marshalls. This was hardly the type of mission that would appeal to young aviators eager to test their skill in aerial combat with the enemy.

The fledgling Marine fliers should not have been disenchanted with their assignment, for bypassed Japanese had shown themselves to be cunning and dangerous opponents. This fact was brought home to the ground echelon of MAG-31 only five days after its arrival on Roi-Namur. Shortly before 0300 on 12 February, about a dozen enemy bombers, based on Ponape Island in the Carolines, hit Roi in a devastating surprise raid. Immediately preceding the bombing, Japanese scattered large quantities of narrow tinfoil strips in the air,

²² USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 194.

which rendered the American radar equipment practically useless. These metallic pieces, known as window or chaff, had first been successfully used by the British Royal Air Force over Germany earlier in the war. The enemy raiders, believed to be seaplanes, came over in four flights of three planes each with about five-minute intervals between flights. The bombs dropped were 500 pounders, antipersonnel bombs, and magnesium incendiaries. One of the first bombs dropped by the enemy scored a direct hit on the biggest bomb dump on the island. In the words of a 4th Marine Division historian, ". . . a moment later the whole island was an exploding inferno. To elements of the Twentieth Engineers and Seabees, who were still on Roi, the holocaust was more terrible than anything they had gone through in capturing the island."²³

Even more graphic in his description of the resulting inferno was a combat correspondent who commented:

Tracer ammunition lit up the sky as far as we could see and for a full half hour red-hot fragments rained from the sky like so many hail-stones, burning and piercing the flesh when they hit. A jeep exploded in our faces a few yards away. Yet half an hour after the first bomb hit, several hospitals and first aid stations were functioning with all the efficiency of urban medical centers.²⁴

The bombardment from the ammunition dump continued for four hours. When it was all over, nearly half of the air group equipment, which had just been unloaded, lay destroyed about the area. Individual equipment, personal ef-

fects, and the clothing of approximately 1,000 officers and men were also lost. There were casualties as well. Five enlisted personnel of MAG-31 were killed in the course of the attack. Six officers and 67 enlisted men were wounded; they were evacuated to Hawaii, ironically enough on the same ships that had brought them to the Marshalls. An additional 10 officers and 67 enlisted men were wounded, but not seriously enough to require evacuation.²⁵

After 14 February, MAG-31 took positive action to prevent similar attacks. On that date, the air group commander, Colonel Freeman, reached Roi with 10 F4U-1s of VMF-224 and 6 F4U-2s of VMF(N)-532 from Tarawa via a refueling stop at Makin Island. Day and night combat air patrols were instituted at once. Seven additional night fighters of VMF(N)-532 arrived on Roi on 23 February. Two Douglas Skytrain aircraft (R4Ds) brought radar equipment and crews to the island to improve the defense against surprise air attacks.

The drive into the Marshall Islands continued to gain momentum. On 18 February, coinciding with a devastating attack of TF 58 against Truk, two battalions of the 22d Marines seized Engebi Island, in the northern portion of Eniwetok Atoll. On the following day, a combined force of soldiers and Marines went ashore on Eniwetok. Three days later, the 22d Marines seized Parry Island after a stiff fight.

Shortly after the assault troops had landed, Marine aviation personnel came ashore. Among those to land on Eniwetok was the ground echelon of the ill-

²³ Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*, p. 34.

²⁴ Marine combat correspondent Bernard Redmond, cited in *Ibid.*

²⁵ MAG-31 WarD, Feb44.

fated VMF-422. Between 17 and 27 January, this echelon had left Hawaii en route to the Marshalls with elements on board the escort carrier *Kalinin Bay*, and the transports *President Monroe*, *Island Mail*, and *Cape Isabel*. On February 6, six days after the invasion of the Marshalls, the ground personnel of VMF-422 on board the *Island Mail* were ordered ashore on Kwajalein. There, they were detailed to stevedore duties; some of the men worked continuously for 48 hours at this task. Others actually participated in the occupation of the island when scattered resistance flared up in some shattered blockhouses and some of the working parties came under small arms fire. Several members of VMF-422, ordered to collect and bury the enemy dead, discovered that not all of those slated for burial had been rendered harmless. Booby traps attached to some of the bodies made the Marines' task not only unenviable and odious, but dangerous as well. In this connection, the official account of the activities briefly states that "officers in charge were quick to recognize dangers to enlisted personnel and the unit was quickly reorganized into small groups with NCO's enforcing rigid discipline."²⁶

The remaining personnel of the fighter squadron's ground echelon on board the *Kalinin Bay*, the *President Monroe*, and the *Cape Isabel* stayed on their ships which were peacefully anchored off Kwajalein Island. On 7 February, this interlude came to an end when the squadron was advised that it would proceed with a new task force in attacking and garrisoning Engebi Island on Eni-

wetok Atoll. Squadron gear was transferred from the *Island Mail* and the *Cape Isabel* in two days. While this work was in progress, Army troops boarded the *President Monroe*, adding greatly to the congestion already prevailing on that ship.

On 18 February, after an uneventful two-day journey, the ground echelon of VMF-422 approached Eniwetok Atoll. The arrival of the convoy at the objective led an observer to note:

Mine sweepers led a mighty column through Deep Passage, assault troops little dreaming that Parry and Japtan Islands, flanking the entrance into the lagoon, would soon be the scene of the most bitter fighting. The *Tennessee* and *Colorado* led the attack columns into the lagoon, proceeding directly to the site of the airfield, Engebi Island, fifteen miles away. The normally khaki colored decks appeared deserted as all hands were ordered below. Troops decorating the rails of transports would be easy prey for hidden Jap marksmen. Despite protestations, officers being in the majority, all recalcitrants were summarily ordered from the weather decks. The importance of guarding against fire from beach positions was forceably demonstrated when a squadron mechanic was seriously wounded by sniper fire as the ship lay at anchor off Engebi Island.²⁷

The preinvasion bombardment of Engebi continued throughout 17 February. Early on the following morning, assault units landed on the island and after a six-hour battle, brought all organized resistance to an end, though enemy pockets of resistance were to remain active for several days. On the evening of 19 February, one month to the day since embarking at Pearl Harbor, the VMF-422 echelon on board the

²⁶ VMF-422 Hist, *op. cit.*, Anx A, Ground Echelon, p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

President Monroe went ashore. The joy these men felt at having dry land under their feet once again was somewhat diminished as, in the gathering dusk, they bedded down in shell holes and craters on the nearly flat island. Less than a quarter of a mile away, the enemy was still giving battle from remaining pockets of resistance. On several occasions during that long night, small arms fire swept the bivouac of the newly arrived aviation personnel, and a mortar lobbed several rounds into the area.

Throughout the night, the men of VMF-422 on Engebi saw, or at least thought they saw, silhouetted enemy remnants moving from one place of shelter to the next. A squadron security detail fired at fast-appearing and -disappearing shadows without being able to determine who or what was actually transpiring all around them. Some of the doubts as to whether there were still any Japanese around were dispelled on the morning of 20 February, when a Japanese was found occupying a foxhole within the squadron bivouac area. This enemy soldier did not offer any resistance, and after capture, assisted in the apprehension of another 15 troops and laborers.

In the bright light of day, the men of VMF-422 had an opportunity to assess the newly won real estate. The appearance presented by Engebi "on the morning after" made many of them wish that they were back on board ship, as expressed by one of those present:

The unsuspecting initiates were confronted with a disturbing scene as they looked over the newly won island. Enemy dead were grotesquely strewn over the landscape. Duds varying from fourteen inch shells to grenades littered the battle-

ground. All types of enemy ordnance and material, as well as Marine, were scattered over the scarred surface of Engebi. Souvenir seeking was held down to a minimum with repeated warnings of the attendant dangers proving an effective measure. All hands immediately set to work and before the sun reached its high point on the 20th of February, temporary shelters had been erected with many a bomb crater serving as an expedient foxhole.

In the ensuing twelve days, the bivouac area came to be familiarly known as "Jungle Town." It compared favorably with the ramshackle abodes ineptly constructed by wayward citizens in city disposal areas. The procedure included the digging of a three foot deep foxhole, large enough to fence in a necessary cot, and then elaborately camouflaged with Jap corrugated tin. A plentiful supply was on hand. Lightweight Jap lumber, ponchos and remnants of enemy tents were often added to embellish temporary shelters. All these precautions were but slight protection against the hot sun and irritating dust. The well tanned individual fared best as the white skinned Marine suffered from heat blisters which were aggravated by the salt water, the only medium, if temporary, of keeping clean. Guadalcanal veterans readily admitted that this was the roughest going yet.²⁸

In addition to being exposed to the unfavorable climate and poor living conditions on Engebi, enlisted personnel were detailed to working parties, which on occasion manhandled supplies for 36 consecutive hours. Some of the men assigned to such details considered themselves fortunate, for they were on occasion able to obtain a hot meal on board ship, a welcome change from the K rations dispensed ashore. Other work details were engaged in the construction of a squadron living area. There was

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

an ever-present possibility of evening air raids. To at least one observer it appeared that "the likelihood of evening air raids spurred the men on and as the moon became larger on the horizon the tempo increased. Fortunately, no attacks were launched until our unit was squared away in its new area. It was a gesture for which all hands were thankful."²⁹

While the ground echelon of VMF-422 worked to make Engebi habitable, additional Marine aviation units began to arrive on the island. Among the first to reach Engebi was the headquarters of MAG-22 under Colonel Daly, who reached the island on 20 February. The same day witnessed the arrival of AWS-1 (Air Warning Squadron 1), with 9 officers and 218 men. The air warning squadron had moved to Engebi directly from the West Coast. Ten days after setting up its radar equipment on the island, the squadron began to function as a fighter-director unit. On 27 February, VMF-113, coming from Kwajalein, took up station on Engebi. On the same day, eight night fighters of VMF(N)-532 were transferred from Roi to Engebi. Two days later, on the last day of the month, the flight echelon of VMSB-151, commanded by Major Gordon H. Knott, arrived on Engebi following a five-day flight from Wallis Island, roughly 2,000 miles to the southeast. The other half of the squadron remained on Roi Island to fly patrols and cover landings on some of the smaller Marshall islands. That part of the squadron stationed on Engebi was assigned to reef and submarine patrols.

The rapid buildup of Marine air strength on Engebi did not fail to escape enemy attention, and on the night of 8-9 March the Japanese struck. AWS-1 detected the approaching enemy bombers on the radar scope and alerted the night fighter on patrol. A second night fighter was launched, but neither aircraft succeeded in intercepting the enemy. The enemy flight, skillfully using cloud cover and jamming the radar instruments with tin foil, was aided by a stroke of luck, for the first string of bombs, dropped shortly after 0400, rendered the radar equipment inoperative. The VHF equipment, essential for ground-air communication, was destroyed next. As if sensing that they were immune from interception, the Japanese carried out the raid in a leisurely fashion and remained overhead for two hours. During this time, the enemy hit a squadron bomb storage area; the resulting blast was to cause the most damage. Next, a small fuel dump less than 50 yards from the squadron area was hit and burst into flames. The illumination produced by this fire provided the enemy with the light necessary to pinpoint other targets. Antiaircraft fire was meager and ineffectual. As a parting gesture, one of the bombers strafed the north end of the bivouac area.

An assessment of the damage from this air attack showed that, in addition to the bombs detonated and the fuel destroyed, four tents had burned down and many others had been perforated by bomb fragments. For some unaccountable reason, several aircraft parked off the recently completed runway remained undamaged. The raid de-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

stroyed large supplies of machine gun ammunition and quartermaster items. Casualties to Marine aviation personnel included 3 killed and 21 wounded.³⁰

On 4 March, the 10 fighter and 4 bomber squadrons under the 4th MBDAW began the first of a long series of attacks against Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit Atolls, which were still garrisoned by the Japanese. The enemy, who no longer had any aircraft left, nevertheless, put up a curtain of anti-aircraft fire and scored hits on nearly half of the attacking planes of Majuro-based VMSB-331, the squadron carrying out the first bombing mission. Since most of this surprisingly accurate anti-aircraft fire had come from Jaulit, VMSB-231, on the following day, made the enemy anti-aircraft defenses on that island its special objective.

Continued enemy resistance on the bypassed atolls was particularly surprising in view of the severe pounding inflicted on them over a four-month period by Army, Navy, and Marine aircraft. During the spring and early summer of 1944, the bombing of the four bypassed islands in the Marshalls became a joint enterprise, for in addition to the squadrons of the 4th MBDAW, land-based Navy aircraft and bombers of the Seventh Air Force flew strikes against the islands. Even before Marine aviation became involved in flying missions against Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit, carrier aircraft alone had flown more than 1,650 sorties against the same objectives.

During March 1944, planes from 4th MBDAW squadrons flew a total of 830

sorties against enemy bases in the Marshalls and eastern Carolines. These 830 sorties were flown in 87 missions; during March enemy anti-aircraft fire downed three aircraft. On 18 March, eight Corsairs of VMF-111, based on Makin Island, bombed anti-aircraft gun emplacements on Mille Island. This raid marked the first time that the F4U was used as a fighter-bomber in the Marshalls. Together with an attached Navy F6F squadron, 4th Wing aircraft, including F4Us equipped with improvised bomb racks, dropped 419,000 pounds of bombs on enemy installations. Of this total, 75,000 pounds were 1,000 pound bombs carried by Corsairs. The F4Us carried out 11 bombing raids during March and the results obtained in these raids indicated that the Corsair could be used safely and efficiently as a dive bomber.³¹

All of the strafing and bombing missions flown against the Marshall Islands during March were marked by the complete absence of the enemy in the air. No Japanese fighters were in evidence to intercept air attacks against those bypassed islands. The situation changed temporarily on 26 March, when six Corsairs of VMF-113, led by Major Loren D. Everton, were escorting four B-25s of the Army Air Forces' 48th Bomber Squadron for a strike against Ponape, in the eastern Carolines, 370 miles southwest of Eniwetok. This was the island from which the devastating enemy air attack of 8 March against Engebi had originated. During the later attack, the Marine aviators encountered 12 Zero fighters over Ponape. In the en-

³⁰ 4th MBDAW WarD, Mar44.

³¹ *Ibid.*

suings melee, eight of the enemy fighters were destroyed in the air; three were listed as probably destroyed, and a fighter was destroyed on the ground. None of the Corsairs sustained any damage. This aerial encounter marked the last time for the remainder of 1944 that the enemy dispatched fighters to intercept Marine aviators. For the remainder of 1944, except for occasional night heckling raids, enemy air activity in the Marshalls and Carolines remained completely passive.

Unable to put up any effective resistance in the air against American fighters and bombers, the Japanese decided to strike back against American airfields in the Marshalls during the night of 14 April, possibly for a repeat performance of the damaging raid previously executed against Engebi in March. Once again, Engebi was to be the target of the Japanese attack. As a flight of 12 enemy bombers approached their objective, night fighters of VMF(N)-532 were waiting for them. This is how the squadron history recorded the air action that took place:

During this night operation, Lieutenant Edward A. Sevik was able to reach 20,000 feet in ten minutes. He was vectored on to a bogey, made visual contact, identified the aircraft as enemy, and at fourteen minutes after takeoff, had fired at it and seen it explode. Captain Howard W. Bollman also successfully intercepted and shot down one of the enemy bombers. Lieutenant Joel E. Bonner, Jr. was not so fortunate. Although the bomber he intercepted was probably destroyed it was able to damage Lieutenant Bonner's plane to the extent that it became necessary for him to jump.³²

Lieutenant Bonner was subsequently rescued by the destroyer-escort USS *Steele*. Another night fighter flown by Lieutenant Frank C. Lang completed several interceptions, but all of his targets turned out to be cleverly designed decoys, which the enemy bombers had ejected over the target. Made of tin foil or other thin metallic material, the "Gismos," as they were called by Marine pilots, caused the radar gear on the ground as well as that used in the F4U night fighters, to pick up images.

One night fighter pilot, Lieutenant Donald Spatz, received incorrect directions from a fighter control unit on Eniwetok and instead of heading back to his field, went out to sea and did not return. In addition to the downing of two enemy bombers and the probable destruction of a third, the successful night-fighter operation resulted in all of the enemy bombs being dropped into the water. On this occasion, personnel on Engebi did not suffer any casualties and there was no damage to materiel.

The 4th MBDAW was further augmented when on 1 April, MAG-15, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ben Z. Redfield, reached Apamama Island, where VMJ-252 and -353 were attached to the air group. This brought the total strength of 4th MBDAW to 4 air groups with 15 flying squadrons and an attached naval squadron. During the month of May, Marine aviators stepped up their attacks against the remaining bases in the Marshall Islands. Once again, Wotje, Mille, Jaluit, and Maloe-lap Atolls were subjected to attack as continuously as weather conditions permitted. In addition to daily dive-bombing and strafing attacks by aircraft of

³² VMF-532 Hist, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

the 4th Air Wing, Jaluit and Wotje Atolls were subjected for one day each to mass attack by the concentrated strength of all available squadrons of the Wing. Army and Navy aviation units carried out additional attacks against these islands. Night harassment of the enemy-held atolls also got under way. The primary purpose of these missions was to keep planes over the target at all hours of the night to drop bombs singly. In this way, the enemy was compelled to remain on the alert and prevented from sleeping.

Use of the F4U-1 fighter as a bomber, begun in March by squadrons of the 4th Wing for the first time in the Central Pacific, increased during May. Results obtained were gratifying; the elimination of a concrete power plant, three reinforced magazines, and a radio station on Wotje Island, and the destruction of a radio station on Aineman Island could be directly attributed to low-level bombing by the F4U. Altogether, during the month of May 1944, General Merritt's wing dropped 949,805 pounds of explosives on enemy positions. The F4Us alone dropped 514,765 pounds of this total and fired approximately 722,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition in strafing runs. During the same period, the SBDs dropped a total of 435,040 pounds of bombs on enemy installations.³³

In mid-May Brigadier General Thomas J. Cushman succeeded General Merritt as wing commander. The numbers of missions flown by units of the 4th MBDAW hit a peak in July and August

1944 both in sorties flown and in the tonnage of bombs dropped. By July all Marine squadrons using Corsairs were equipped with the necessary bomb racks and were taking part in dive-bombing and low level bombing attacks. Total tonnage of bombs dropped during the month by 4th MBDAW aircraft amounted to more than 700 tons. The F4Us dropped over 300 tons of this total and fired approximately 448,250 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition in strafing attacks; SBDs dropped a total of nearly 400 tons.³⁴ In August 1944, the bombing reached a peak of 1,200 tons of explosives dropped on the bypassed atolls in the Marshalls; of the total, 650 tons were released by F4Us and 546 tons by SBDs.³⁵

In September the neutralization missions against the remaining enemy-held islands in the Marshalls continued but on a reduced scale. In accordance with an order from the Commander of Shore-Based Aircraft, Forward Area, Major General Willis H. Hale, USA, who in turn was subordinate to the Commander, Forward Area, Central Pacific, Vice Admiral Hoover, the number of squadrons sent on strikes was limited to four per day. As a result of this ceiling on the number of squadrons that could be employed each day and numerous cancellations of strikes due to inclement weather, the total number of sorties flown during the month dropped to about 61 percent of the August total. Tonnage of bombs dropped similarly decreased by about 38 percent.

Compared to what it might have cost

³³ 4th MBDAW WarD, May44.

³⁴ 4th MBDAW WarD, Jul44.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Aug44.

in human lives had a direct attack been launched to seize the bypassed islands, the cost in pilots and planes expended in keeping these islands neutralized to the end of the war was relatively small. Between the beginning of the employment of Marine aviation against the Marshalls and the end of 1944, the squadrons of the 4th MBDAW lost 29 pilots, 2 gunners, and 57 aircraft due to enemy action. As the summer of 1944 turned into autumn, the observation, harassment, and neutralization of the bypassed islands were extended beyond the Marshalls to Kusaie, Ocean, Nauru, and Wake Island.

As far as much-bombed Wotje, Ma-loelap, Mille, and Jaluit in the Marshalls were concerned, visual observation and official photographs indicated that the garrison forces there were capable of repairing the airfields. This capability might enable the enemy to fly in aircraft for supply, evacuation, and reconnaissance. Even though such a possibility was remote, it nevertheless could not be overlooked. At the same time, Marine aviators had to be on a continuous lookout for enemy submarines, which might attempt to supply or evacuate the bypassed bases.

To the north, Wake remained a threat. Even though no shipping or land plane activity had been noted there for some time, reconnaissance had revealed the use of seaplanes, probably for supply or evacuation. The possibility that the Japanese might use Wake Island as a base from which to stage an attack against American bases in the Marshalls could not be excluded. Ponape and Nauru, while largely neutralized, also remained potential threats, espe-

cially as staging points for reconnaissance aircraft.

For many of the Marine aviators, the daily bomb runs over the bypassed enemy garrisons gradually became a monotonous undertaking. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the air strikes in keeping the enemy neutralized in this area was also obvious. A report by the 4th MBDAW stated:

The constant hammering is obviously wearing the Japanese down, for their anti-aircraft fire is steadily getting lighter. There has been no fire from heavy guns for some time, so these obviously have been destroyed. The Japanese now defend themselves with 20, 40 millimeter, and .50 caliber fire. Just what the conditions are on the Japanese Islands, where probably no supplies from home are obtained, is not known for certain; but there can be no doubt that supplies are running low, and the time will come when they will be left without ammunition, weapons, and the necessities of life.

All this, however, isn't a harmless game. The besieged Jap garrisons still have their light anti-aircraft weapons and sufficient ammunition left to make it hot for the Marine birdmen each time they come. Indeed, the Japanese have been getting so much practice in anti-aircraft fire that the Japs remaining in the Marshalls and Gilberts are probably the most proficient anti-aircraft gunners in the world today. Many of the Marines' planes have been shot down, and many pilots have been killed. Again and again planes have returned to their bases after being struck, and the pattern of Japanese bullet holes has been in the dead center of the airplane. Such remarkable hits have been made so many times that it is obviously not a matter of luck.³⁰

³⁰ Capt C. C. Beach memo to LtCol Brayton, 4th MAW, dtd 2Jan45, Encl to 4th MAW WarD, Nov44.

Aside from providing the Japanese anti-aircraft crews with gunnery practice, Marine aviators relieved some of the monotony of their missions by trying out new methods of attack, experimenting with new types of bombs, and by improvising new uses for their aircraft. On 22 April 1944, Major Everton, commanding VMF-113, led three F4Us in a long distance flight to cover landing operations on Ujelang Atoll. Nine hours and 40 minutes after takeoff, the Corsairs returned to their home base. Another long-distance bomber mission flown in October was to set a new record for the fighter-bombers of the 4th MBDAW. For the record, this occasion was noted in the following words:

A notable event of the month was the bombing of Ponape Island on the 5th by Corsair fighter-bombers of the Fourth Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing—an attack which set a new distance record for Pacific fighter-bomber operations. When this strike was made and the planes completed the long over-water round trip of 750 miles without loss or damage of any kind or injuries to personnel, the event was heralded as the longest fighter-bomber mission ever carried out by such planes with normal bomb loads. By the end of the month such attacks had become routine.³⁷

Another important event during the month of October was the first employment of napalm by aviators of the 4th MBDAW; it was used on the 28th in an attack against Emidj Island in Jaluit Atoll. This was the first of a series of attacks to determine the effectiveness of napalm against enemy installations in the bypassed Marshall Islands. The

first raid, carried out by 17 Corsairs of VMF-224 and 21 Corsairs of VMF-441, was considered promising; jettisonable gas tanks loaded with napalm, dropped on enemy automatic weapons positions, found their mark; as the raiders departed from the area, four large fires, started by the napalm bombs, were still burning brightly.

Before the year 1944 came to an end, several changes in personnel took place within the headquarters of the 4th MBDAW. General Cushman, who on 15 May 1944 had relieved General Merritt as Commanding General, 4th MBDAW, was succeeded on 20 August by Major General Louis E. Woods. Shortly before the end of 1944, there had also been a change in the designation of the air wing, long overdue in the opinion of many Marine aviators. In keeping with the more offensive mission of the air wing during the latter part of 1944, the 4th MBDAW on 10 November 1944 was redesignated as the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing.

The neutralization of the bypassed Marshalls continued for the remainder of 1944. Momentous events had taken place elsewhere in the Central Pacific, where the Marianas and some of the islands in the Palaus had been seized. In early 1945, the invasion of Iwo Jima was imminent. In the southwestern Pacific, the campaign in the Philippines was well underway. On land, on sea, and in the air, the Japanese had sustained major reverses. The general course of the war affected the operations of the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing. Effective 23 January 1945, bombing attacks against the enemy-held islands in the Marshalls and adjacent areas

³⁷ 4th MBDAW WarD, Oct44.

were virtually terminated by a change of policy ordered by the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas. Pursuant to this order, such attacks were no longer to be made except where expected results would justify the expenditure of personnel, fuel, and explosives.

Beyond any doubt, this order was issued in the knowledge that by the beginning of 1945, the isolated enemy bases, which had been under almost constant attack since the invasion of the area by American forces a year ago, had been battered into virtual impotence. Most of the enemy installations had been knocked out by air power alone. Fixed anti-aircraft positions for the most part had been destroyed, and shore defense positions blasted to rubble. Bivouac areas had been gutted and the hapless surviving Japanese were virtually forced underground.

Following the implementation of the new policy, Marine aviators were able to devote considerable attention to the destruction of enemy submarines, which became active in the vicinity of the Marshalls during the first week of February, when six verified enemy submarine sightings were made. Countermeasures promptly instituted by air and naval units presumably prevented the enemy from attacking any of the numerous convoys that were passing through the area at the time. Four of the submarines were declared sunk, though ultimately the Marine aviators failed to receive credit for these sinkings. Nor was Marine aviation employed solely against enemy submarines during the turn of the year, for Marine aviators continued their attacks against enemy shipping in the bypassed atolls. In February 1945,

23 small boats were destroyed by Marine aircraft; the following month, search planes attacked and sank 17 small boats of various categories, damaged three more, and attacked six with unobserved results.

The month of February also saw the inauguration of a new phase of warfare in the Marshalls—a war of psychology, an experimental but well-organized campaign in which exhortations to give up and showers of propaganda leaflets replaced the bombs that had reduced the bypassed Japanese bases to a shambles. This campaign was directed initially against the remaining enemy forces on Wotje Atoll. In a novel series of flights, a psychological warfare plane cruised over the islands of this atoll, broadcasting music, news, and messages to the Japanese holdouts. After every flight of this aircraft, planes of VMF-155, commanded by Major John E. Reynolds and subsequently Major Wayne M. Cargill, dropped propaganda leaflets by the thousands. Initial results of the propaganda campaign were meager, though the leaflets may have served to undermine flagging enemy morale.

On 27 February, a transport plane carrying its crew and a number of passengers, including Lieutenant General Millard H. Harmon, Commander, Strategic Air Forces, Central Pacific Area, was lost en route from Kwajalein to Oahu, Hawaii. The disappearance of this plane, for which no explanation was ever found, set in motion an air and sea rescue effort in which all available aircraft participated around the clock. The extended search failed to turn up any wreckage of the plane.

During the month of March, Marine

aviators based in the Marshalls devoted increased attention to interdiction of inter-island traffic between the bypassed islands. To this end, search and patrol craft blasted all forms of surface craft encountered, attacking a total of 39 boats of various categories ranging from small skiffs and rowboats to sizeable power launches. Of this number, 22 were destroyed, 13 were damaged, and 4 were attacked with unobserved results. At the time, American commanders in the Marshalls could only estimate the results of the prolonged isolation on the Japanese marooned on the bypassed islands, though the toll taken by disease and starvation was estimated to be high. That death and hunger were stalking these islands is shown in the diary of a Korean, who was a member of the Japanese force garrisoning Aur Atoll. The diary shows the progressive reduction in strength from 367 men on 1 January to 308 by the end of the month; nearly all of them died of malnutrition. Representative of the diet to which the Japanese were reduced by this time are the following entries:

18 January—

Breakfast: Rice and bush leaves.
 Dinner: Rice and bush leaves, and canned fish.
 Supper: Fried rice, canned fish and salt.
 Every two men must catch a rat for food. This kind of food is not good for our health. Another new kind of food is added to our diet: earthworm. We began eating earthworm in supper last night.

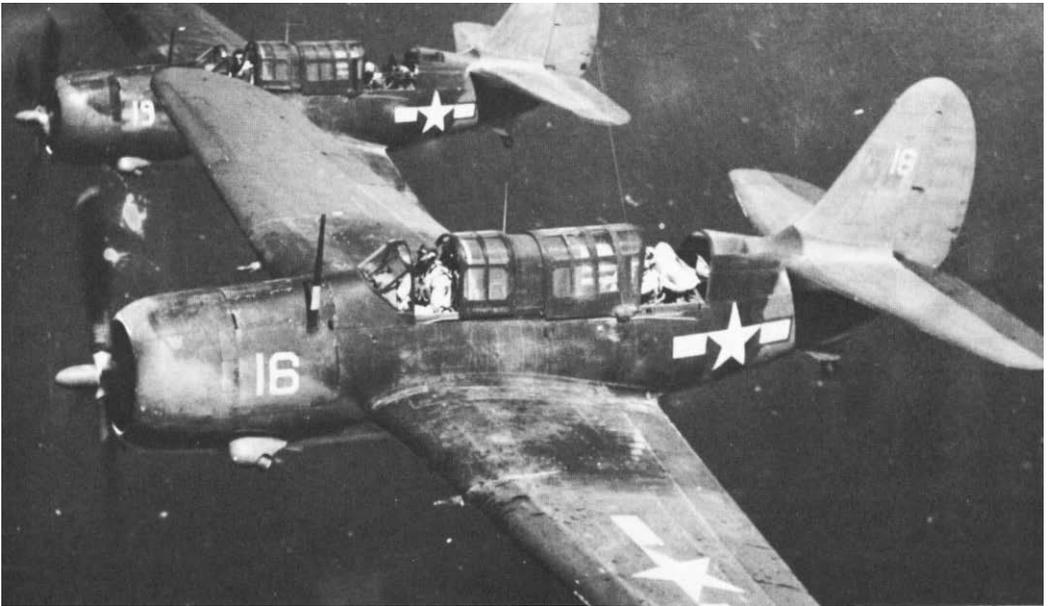
19 January—

Breakfast: Rice and bush leaves.
 Dinner: Too bad, nothing to eat.
 Supper: Rice, salt, and rats.³⁸

March of 1945 saw the first concrete evidence of a deterioration of morale on the part of enemy holdout garrisons in the Marshalls. On 24 March, several Japanese on Wotje Atoll surrendered after verbal exhortations from a plane manned by psychological warfare personnel. The Japanese on Wotje were clearly undernourished and otherwise in poor physical shape. Four days later, 5 Koreans, 1 Japanese, and 2 natives from Mille Atoll surrendered to the crew of LCI-392 after persuasion over a megaphone. Upon interrogation, these gaunt, emaciated, and almost dazed men asserted that hunger was the factor which had led them to turn themselves in. Even the enemy personnel appeared happy to have been taken prisoner.

The month of April saw the use of rockets by 12 Helldivers (Curtiss SB2C scout-bombers) of VM5B-331 against Wotje Island. Of 89 rockets fired against two enemy gun positions, 67 landed in the target area and scored six possible direct hits. Seven rockets failed to function properly and had to be brought back to base. On the 27th, a significant development occurred when three Japanese chief petty officers were taken into custody on Mille Atoll. Following their capture, the prisoners contended that many others would have capitulated if high seas had not prevented them from doing so. As in the

³⁸ Anx D to CTG 96.1 Shore Based Air Force WarD for period 1-30Apr45, 4th MAW WarD, Apr45.



MARINE DIVE BOMBERS based in the Marshalls en route to target in the bypassed islands. (USMC 118399)



U.S. PERSONNEL tour Mille Island after 18 months of continuous bombing by 4th Marine Aircraft Wing. (USMC 134062)

preceding month, Marine aviators devoted particular attention to interdicting enemy inter-island food supply traffic. Nineteen small craft of various categories ranging from 10-foot rowboats to 30-by-50 foot barges were hunted and strafed. Four of these craft were sunk or completely demolished, 3 were left inoperable, and 12 were damaged in varying degrees.

From the spring of 1945 to the end of the war in the Pacific Theater, the Japanese hold on the islands they still occupied in the Marshalls grew progressively weaker. On 6 May, the destroyer-escort USS *Wintle*, a minesweeper, and YMS-354, infantry landing craft LCIs -392, -394, -479, -491, and -484 together with appropriate air cover evacuated 494 natives from Jaluit Atoll. The Japanese attempted to prevent the evacuation, but were unable to do so. In the course of the operation, the enemy killed a Navy lieutenant, inflicted a bad arm wound on a native scout, and sprayed one of the landing craft with .50 caliber bullets, injuring an enlisted man. On the following day, an additional 84 natives were evacuated from the atoll.

On 11 May 1945, Brigadier General Lawson H. M. Sanderson succeeded General Woods in command of the 4th Aircraft Wing. During the summer of 1945, the neutralization of the bypassed Marshall islands entered a new phase when, in response to the combined strike and psychological warfare campaign, 42 Japanese and Koreans surrendered. On 2 July, search planes located a Japanese hospital ship, the *Takasago Maru*, on an eastward course

and tracked it. At the same time, the destroyer *Murray* departed from Eniwetok with two Japanese language interpreters to investigate the ship. On the following day, the *Murray* stopped the enemy vessel, which was bound for Wake Island to evacuate sick personnel. After boarding the ship, the Americans conducted a search which failed to uncover any violations of international law; as a result, the enemy ship was permitted to proceed to Wake Island. On 5 July, when the hospital ship was on its return voyage, a renewed search indicated that the vessel had picked up 974 patients at Wake, nearly all suffering from serious malnutrition. Medical personnel on board the *Murray* estimated that 15 percent of the Japanese would not survive the return trip to Japan.³⁹ The ship was permitted to proceed on its voyage by order of Admiral Nimitz over Admiral Halsey's objections.

In his memoirs, Admiral Halsey made this comment on the incident:

That made me mad. Although Japan had never signed the Geneva Convention, she professed to observe it; yet I had suspected throughout the war that she was using her hospital ships for unauthorized purposes. This was an instance. Battle casualties are legitimate evacuees; malnutrition cases are not. For three years we had been blockading the bypassed Jap islands in an attempt to force their surrender. The starving men on the *Takasago Maru* had constituted a large part of the Wake garrison; their evacuation meant that Wake's scanty provisions would last that much longer. I sent a destroyer to intercept the ship and escort

³⁹ 4th MAW WarD, Jul45.

her to Saipan, and I intended recommending either that all but her battle casualties be returned to Wake, or that an equal number of Japs be sent there from our Saipan prison camps as replacements. CINCPAC directed me to let her proceed, and I had to comply.⁴⁰

When, on 15 August, Japan accepted the Allied demand for an unconditional surrender, CinCPOA issued an order calling for the cessation of all offensive

operations against the Japanese except for the continuance of searches and patrols. On 22 August, the Japanese commander of Mille Atoll surrendered his forces unconditionally. The remaining Japanese strongholds in the Marshalls capitulated following the signing of the formal surrender documents in Tokyo Bay on 2 September.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Bryan and Halsey, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 258.

⁴¹ For information concerning Marine surrender and occupation duties in the Pacific islands following the war, see Frank and Shaw, *Victory and Occupation*, pp. 449-463.

Marine Aviation in the Marianas, Carolines and at Iwo Jima¹

THE MARIANAS²

While Marines of the 4th MAW were engaged in neutralizing enemy strongholds in the Marshalls, American military operations in the Central Pacific were accelerating. By June of 1944, Operation FORAGER, the invasion of the Marianas, had gotten under way. For the operation, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commanding the Fifth Fleet, had assembled more than 800 ships, a far cry from the total of 82 ships that had been available for the Guadalcanal landings barely two years

earlier. A similar increase in aircraft strength available for FORAGER was notable. Shore-based aircraft for the invasion of the Marianas totalled 879 planes; 352 belonging to the Marine Corps, 269 to the U.S. Army, and 258 to the Navy. Marine aircraft consisted of 172 fighters, 36 night fighters, 72 dive bombers, 36 torpedo bombers, and 36 transport aircraft.³

Despite the large number of Marine shore-based aircraft in the Gilberts and Marshalls, air operations in the Marianas were carried out largely by the Navy carrier planes. Previous attempts by exponents of Marine aviation to have

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: 2d MAW Hist, Jul41-Sept46; 4th MBDAW WarDs, Dec42-Nov44 and 4th MAW WarDs, Nov44-Mar46; MAG-11 WarDs, Oct42-Oct44 and MAG-11 Hist, Aug41-Dec49; MAG-21 WarDs and Hist, Feb43-Dec44, hereafter *MAG-21 Hist*; MAG-25 WarDs, Aug42-Jun46; MAG-45 *OpRpt*, 8Jan45; MBDAG-45 WarDs and Hist, Feb-Oct44; VMO-2 WarDs and Hist, Nov43-Jul46 hereafter *VMO-2 Hist*; VMO-4 WarDs, Mar44-Oct45 and Hist, 20Dec43-31Dec44, hereafter *VMO-4 Hist*; AWS-5 AR and WarDs, Mar-Jul44; VMF-114 WarDs, Jul43-Apr47; VMF-121 WarDs, Oct42-Dec44 and Hist, May41-Jul44; VMTB-131 WarDs, Dec41-Sep42 and Jan44-Nov45; VMF-216 WarDs, Jun43-Mar46; VMF-217 WarDs, Jul43-May46; VMF-225 WarDs, Jan43-Mar47; VMF-225 Hist, Jan43-Dec49; VMTB-232 WarDs, Jul43-Feb45; VMTB-242 WarDs, Jul43-Nov45; VMTB-242 Hist, Jul43-Jul45; VMF-252 WarDs, Apr42-Jan44; VMF-321 WarDs, Sep-43-Jan46; VMF(N)-532 WarDs, Dec43-Jul46

and VMF(N)-532 Hist, Apr43-May47; VMF(N)-541 Hist, Feb44-Dec49; VMB-612 WarDs, Aug-Dec44 and VMB-612 Supp and Hist, Oct43-Aug45; VMR-952 WarDs and Hist, Jul44-Jul46, hereafter *VMR-952 Hist*; Isely and Cowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*; Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*; Morison, *Victory in the Pacific*.

² Additional sources for this section include: Major Carl W. Hoffman, *Saipan—The Beginning of the End* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1950), hereafter Hoffman, *Saipan*; Major Carl W. Hoffman, *The Seizure of Tinian* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1951), hereafter Hoffman, *Tinian*; Major Orlan R. Lodge, *The Recapture of Guam* (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1954), hereafter Lodge, *Guam*; USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*.

³ Aircraft figures above cited in USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 235.

Marine flyers operate from carriers had not yet reached fruition. The invasion of Saipan on 15 June found Navy aviation in full control of the skies. During the epic air battle of the Philippine Sea, which was to become known as the "Marianas Turkey Shoot," the Navy destroyed 476 enemy aircraft, nearly all of them in the air. Between 22 and 24 June, 73 Army Air Forces Thunderbolt fighters (P-47s) were catapulted from the Navy carriers USS *Natoma Bay* and USS *Manila Bay* 60 miles off Saipan and landed on Aslito airfield. These planes gave valuable assistance to the Navy in furnishing close support for the troops on Saipan, where bitter fighting was in progress.⁴

At the end of the Saipan operation, numerous voices were raised in criticism of the close support the hard-pressed Marine divisions had received on the ground. The most frequent complaint was that excessive time was required before a much needed air strike was actually executed. Many of the requested missions had to be cancelled because the infantry had already advanced beyond the targets before the first airplane appeared over the battlefield. An evaluation of close air support on Saipan summed up the situation this way:

. . . as compared with the assistance given to the fighting troops by naval ships, close air support was decidedly inferior. In the early part of the operation, close support missions were flown exclusively by navy planes, and only toward the end of the operation were army aircraft . . . employed for this purpose. At no time

were specially trained Marine pilots available for this kind of work.⁵

Responsible officers of the 4th Marine Division attributed deficiencies in close air support on Saipan to inadequate training of pilots, overcrowding of radio circuits between troops on the ground and units controlling the air strikes, involvement of too many echelons in the control of air strikes, and poor coordination between aviation, naval guns, and artillery. Following the Saipan operation, General Holland Smith once again urged that air groups be designated and trained as direct support groups and be assigned to CVE-type carriers (escort aircraft carriers, hereafter referred to as CVEs), and that Marine aviation provide air groups for this specialized duty.

At the same time, General Vandegrift, Commandant of the Marine Corps, initiated action designed to get Marine aviation assigned to carriers. Following discussions with the Chief of Naval Operations and a conference at Pearl Harbor in August 1944, attended by General Vandegrift and ranking naval leaders, the placement of Marine aircraft on carriers was authorized. On 21 October, Marine Carrier Groups, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, was established as a tactical command with headquarters at Santa Barbara, California. Colonel Albert D. Cooley was appointed commanding officer of the Marine Carrier Groups, which consisted of Marine Base Defense Aircraft Group 48 (MBDAG-48) at Santa Barbara and MAG-51 at Mojave. In early November, the two groups were re-

⁴ For a detailed account of Marine ground operations on Saipan, see Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, pp. 231-428.

⁵ Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 333.

designated as Marine air support groups. Each group consisted of four carrier air groups, each with an 18-plane fighter squadron and a 12-aircraft torpedo bomber squadron. The Marine air support group was scheduled for assignment to a CVE division of six carriers. Each carrier air group was to be stationed on a CVE. The Marine air support group staff was to function in the flagship as part of the admiral's staff for directing operations of the carrier air groups in support of ground troops in a target area.

It was not envisioned that the Marine squadrons would furnish all close air support. Instead, Marine aviation was to provide close air support for Marine divisions when the situation permitted. Though carrier-based Marine aviation was not yet a reality during the Marianas campaign, the framework for such an organization was rapidly being laid.

Lest it be thought that Marine aviation was completely left out of operations on Saipan, it must be mentioned that some Marine aircraft did take off from carriers and perform a very useful mission in support of the ground action. These were airplanes of VMO-2, commanded by Major Robert W. Edmondson, and VMO-4, under Captain Nathan D. Blaha. Most of the small artillery spotter monoplanes flew off the carriers USS *Fanshaw Bay* and USS *White Plains* on 17 June, landed on Yellow Beach and the dirt strip at Charan-Kanoa, and subsequently, on 22 June, moved to Aslito airfield.

The flying personnel of VMO-2 soon noticed that combat situations varied considerably from textbook theory, as related in the squadron history:

From the first hops on, it was realized that use of our planes could not be employed the way it was originally intended. Theoretically, we were to remain at all times behind our front lines, never going deep into or even over enemy territory and all artillery firing and adjustment was supposed to be done behind our own pieces. Very little time was needed for us to realize that this method was impractical and relatively ineffective. Due to the rugged mountainous terrain, observation was practically impossible from such a position. Consequently, we found it necessary not only to go behind enemy lines, but deep into enemy territory to scout and pick out targets, and to remain there while fire was conducted on these targets so proper adjustments could be made and the effect of the fire on the targets could be observed. Therefore, most all of our flying was done over and forward of our front lines for the remainder of the Saipan and Tinian operations.⁶

The monoplanes of VMO-2 continued their spotting missions until the end of the Saipan operation on 9 July 1944. None of the pilots or planes was lost, though enemy antiaircraft fire hit many of the aircraft; two of them had their gas tanks damaged but both returned safely to their base. On the night of 26 June, enemy bombers raided the squadron area and dropped numerous anti-personnel bombs, wounding some of the Marines on the ground.

Considerably less lucky in the course of the Saipan operation were the men of VMO-4, whose mission in support of the 4th Marine Division was identical to that executed by VMO-2 for the 2d Division. The first two planes of VMO-4 left the *White Plains* 150 miles offshore on 19 June and arrived safely at

⁶ VMO-2 Hist, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

the Charan-Kanoa strip. The remaining aircraft, in crates, were brought ashore two days later; by 22 June, eight squadron planes were in operation. From this point on, and for the duration of its employment on Saipan, bad luck appeared to dog the squadron. Six days after reaching Saipan, VMO-4 had already lost a substantial number of its original aircraft. Two planes were damaged beyond repair by enemy fire; another had to be scrapped after it collided with a vehicle during takeoff. Loss of the fourth plane resulted in the death of the pilot as well.

The misfortunes of VMO-4 did not end there. On the night of 26 June, the squadron area was bombed. This raid, from which the men of VMO-2 had escaped relatively unscathed, had a far more serious effect on the sister squadron. Three enlisted men of VMO-4 were killed and three officers and men were wounded. Among the seriously injured was the squadron commander, who had to be evacuated and was succeeded by Lieutenant Thomas Rozga.⁷

Another Marine aviation unit on Saipan was Air Warning Squadron 5 (AWS-5). On 17 April 1944 the squadron, commanded by Captain Donald D. O'Neill, had been divided into three detachments for operations with V Amphibious Corps. One of these was assigned to the Northern Troops and Landing Force, the other two to the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions. The initial mission of these detachments was to provide an early air raid alert for the headquarters to which they were attached and to record all enemy air

activity observed. On the morning of D plus 2, 17 June, the squadron went ashore on Saipan. As fighting on the island progressed, the detachments displaced forward with their radar equipment in line with the advance of the two Marine divisions. While conducting a reconnaissance for a new site to be occupied on 29 June, a lieutenant and five men were taken under enemy machine gun fire. The lieutenant was killed and a corporal subsequently was reported as missing.

On 12 July, after the battle for Saipan had come to an end, a dozen aircraft of VMF(N)-532 joined the Army Air Forces night fighters already stationed on the island. An advance echelon of 7 officers and 32 enlisted men had been flown to Saipan a week earlier. Beginning 10 July, in addition to patrolling over Saipan, the squadron maintained one night fighter on station over Guam between the hours of 1930 and 0530.

The invasion of Guam on 21 July found MAG-21, commanded by Colonel Peter P. Schrider, offshore awaiting the seizure of the Orote Peninsula. The air group had been detached from the 2d MAW on 4 June and subsequently was attached to the 4th MBDAW. After 30 days at sea, the aviation Marines were eager to go ashore and get an airfield operational on the peninsula. Due to the heavy and prolonged fighting in this particular part of Guam, the forward echelon of MAG-21 was still ship-bound a week after D-Day. Two days later, a work detail of 50 men finally went ashore to assist in the restoration of the old airstrip. The initial job was to clear the strip of shell fragments and Japa-

⁷ VMO-4 Hist, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

nese dead in various stages of decomposition. There remained to be done another extremely unpleasant job, which fell to the bomb disposal officer of MAG-21: clearing the area of mines, unexploded bombs, and the booby traps around the designated bivouac area.

From the time that the first Marines of MAG-21 started to restore the airstrip, and for many weeks thereafter, they were constantly harassed by enemy snipers and bypassed stragglers who lurked in the underbrush at night and infested the coral caves on both sides of the strip. Mechanics of the air group captured several Japanese; hundreds remained to be killed or captured on Orote Peninsula.

By 31 July, a 2,500-foot section had been added to the coral strip, which had already been cleared. The strip was ready for operations and several Marine officers planned to have the first American plane to land on Guam be one from VMO-1, commanded by Major Gordon W. Heritage, whose craft were poised on the escort carriers USS *Sangamon* and USS *Suwanee*.⁸ This plan was frustrated when, during the afternoon of 31 July, a Navy torpedo bomber from the USS *Chenango* attempted a landing on the newly constructed strip shortly before the Marine observation planes were scheduled to arrive. The importance of the occasion was not lost on the numerous observers gathered to witness this memorable event, which was recorded for posterity in these words:

Sniper fire cracked across Orote Air-

⁸ Col Frederick P. Henderson ltr to CMC, dtd 21Nov52, as cited in Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, p. 525n.

field as the first American plane attempted to land on the captured strip, and the Marine reception committee lay pinned to the deck at the moment the Grumman torpedo bomber began its cautious approach toward the former Jap airbase. Halfway down the strip, mangled and charred Jap bodies lay in grotesque mounds before a fallen redoubt of concrete. The stench of 3,000 other dead Japs was over the scorched peninsula . . . a bullet-riddled wind sock flapped wearily in the hot breeze from across Apra Harbor. The noise of battle from the smoky mountain sides beyond the harbor rode on the same wind.

The word passed quickly. In a few minutes the strip was lined with curious spectators. But as Navy Lieutenant (jg) Edward F. Terrar, Coffeyville, Kansas zoomed the field, the sharp whine of bullets cut the air overhead, and the onlookers scrambled for cover without thought of dignity. Unmindful of the commotion on the ground, the Navy pilot dropped his flaps, cut his throttle and came on. His wheels touched lightly once, bounced harder a second time, and as the plane leaped on the third impact, he opened the gun and roared back into the air for a second try.

As he circled for another approach, the Marines on the ground weighed curiosity against prudence. But even the sniper was caught up in the drama of the situation. As suddenly as they had begun, the shots ceased. The TBF settled in again, but this time it greased the runway all the way, and pulled up to an easy stop as Marines swarmed around on every side. The time was exactly five o'clock; American aviation was on Guam.⁹

The stay of this American aircraft on Guam was very shortlived. Three minutes after landing, heavy sniper fire forced the torpedo bomber to take off. Minutes later, without major fanfare, a "grasshopper" of VMO-1, piloted by

⁹ *MAG-21 Hist*, pp. 33-34.

the squadron commander, Major Gordon W. Heritage, landed on the airstrip as previously scheduled. As it developed, neither the torpedo bomber nor the VMO-1 spotter planes were the first American aircraft to touch down on Guam following its recapture. That honor fell to an Army liaison aircraft assigned to the 77th Infantry Division Artillery, which had taken off from an improvised airstrip elsewhere on the island at 1310 of the 30th.¹⁰

Work on the field continued at a furious pace through 4 August, by which date all but 150-200 yards at the west end of the strip had been completed. Except for unloading parties working on board ships, most of the MAG-21 headquarters and service squadron personnel moved into a new bivouac area at the east end of the field. Initially, the lot of these men was not an easy one. For one thing, the new "shelter-half camp" lacked mess and sanitary facilities. The air group history gives a vivid account of conditions prevailing at Orote airstrip at this time:

In the camp, unavoidably in some respects, the men lived for more than a month in filth. The group did not bring with it ready-made heads or sanitation facilities. Men ate canned rations for some time before stoves could be set up and hot rations served. Worse than the mosquito that pestered Marine aviation men in the South Pacific, far worse was the big, fat ordinary variety of houseflies that swarmed over everything on Guam the first month. Of course, as the dead were gradually buried and ration cans properly disposed of, the fly began to disappear.

But the men were only on Guam a few days when dengue fever and dysentery began to take their toll. Dengue fever, with its symptoms very much like malaria, doesn't hang on and recur like malaria, but its original effects are much more painful. Every section of the MAG was hit seriously by dengue in those first few weeks. As soon as hot food was served, when dead Japs had all been buried, and when plenty of fresh water was available, dengue and dysentery slowly disappeared. After the first month and a half, cases dropped appreciably.¹¹

On 4 August, Marine aviation returned to Guam in force. MAG-21 squadrons, flying in from the aircraft carrier USS *Santee*, safely touched down on the airstrip just before noon. The first squadron to land was VMF-(N)-534 flying Grumman Hellcats, led by the squadron commander, Major Ross S. Mickey, followed by VMF-216, -217, and -225. As the squadrons touched down, the planes were moved to the edge of the runway for parking since revetment areas had not yet been completed. At 0600 on 7 August, VMF-225 took off from Orote Field to make the first regular combat air patrol flown by Guam-based aircraft.

Barely a week after Orote Field had become operational, distinguished visitors arrived on board a large C-54 Skymaster transport. The dignitaries included Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, and Lieutenant General Alexander A. Vandegrift, Commandant of the Marine Corps. Awaiting them at the field were Lieutenant General Holland H. Smith, Major General Roy S. Geiger, Major General Henry L. Larsen, Brigadier

¹⁰ 77th InfDiv Arty AAR, 21Jul-10Aug44, as cited in Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, p. 525.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

General Pedro A. Del Valle, and other ranking Marine and naval officers on the island.

Even though pilots and ground crews had landed on Guam with high hopes of engaging the enemy in combat, they soon learned to their disappointment that no enemy airmen were going to challenge American domination of the skies over the island. For a few months following the capture of Guam, there were several air alerts, but no enemy bombs were dropped. There were no operational accidents in more than 6,000 takeoffs and landings during the first month. Orote airfield had the distinction of becoming the first all-Marine airfield in the Pacific Theater.

Situated only 1,500 miles from Tokyo, the new base dispatched fighters and bombers to attack Japanese-held Pagan Island, 200 miles north of Guam, and Rota, only 55 miles to the northeast and halfway to Saipan. The establishment of Orote airfield represented a long and ambitious step forward in the two-year story of developing American air power in the Pacific. Just two years earlier, Marine pilots had flown into embattled Henderson Field on Guadalcanal to establish a precarious foothold in the southern Pacific. Almost a year later, in August 1943, Marine aviators were the first to land on Munda airstrip on New Georgia. That advance of only 181 tortuous miles had followed a year of bitter fighting in the South Pacific. By August 1944, American forces had advanced boldly into the Marianas—1,100 miles west of the Marshalls and halfway along the 3,000-mile road from the Solomons to the Japanese homeland.

In flying strafing and bombing missions against the enemy-held island of Rota, the pilots of MAG-21 initially concentrated their attacks on the enemy airfield. Continuous bombing, on the average of once a day for four consecutive months, kept the enemy field in a chronic state of disrepair. The run to Rota and return required barely an hour and at least one pilot cracked: "Sighted Rota, sank same, and got home in time for lunch."¹²

For a while it appeared that the bomb runs to Rota were a picnic, and Marine aviators came to look upon the island as something akin to a practice range—a place to discharge a dull, routine, and necessary, but not overly hazardous, task. Enemy antiaircraft fire initially was feeble. As weeks turned into months, the enemy antiaircraft gunners marooned on the island apparently derived some benefit from tracking the daily low level sweeps of the Marine pilots. In any case, as time went on, the raiding aircraft began to get hit. Some managed to limp back to their base, others were shot down outright. In contrast to their earlier nonchalance, the pilots learned to respect Rota. When vegetable gardens were subsequently spotted on the island, the Corsair squadrons were dispatched to destroy them and so to deprive the enemy holdouts of a much-needed food supply. The tactics used were simple but effective. Several fighters dropped belly tanks of aviation gasoline on the targets. Planes following closely behind the belly-tank-bombers would then

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

strafe the fuel-soaked fields with incendiary bullets.

Another enemy-held strongpoint frequently on the receiving end of Marine fighter bombers was Pagan. Ever since the American invasion of the Marianas, the enemy had tried to keep the Pagan airstrip operational, but these efforts were frustrated by continuous air raids. Taking off with a heavy gas load, carrying belly tanks and a pair of thousand pound bombs apiece, the Corsairs repeatedly attacked the enemy airfield on Pagan in the face of fairly heavy anti-aircraft fire. Enemy aircraft caught on the ground were raked by strafing fighters, and in time the field became well pockmarked with bomb craters. In keeping the enemy airstrips on Rota and Pagan Islands in daily disrepair, the Corsairs of MAG-21, acting as fighter-bombers, played a vital part in protecting the new B-29 Superfortress bases on Saipan, Tinian, and Guam from enemy air action.¹³

On 7 September 1944, Colonel Schrider, commanding MAG-21, was succeeded by Colonel Edward B. Carney, who remained in command until late March 1945. By late November, MAG-21 consisted of VMF-216, -217, -225,

-321, VMTB-131 and -242, VMO-1 and -2, VMF(N)-534, VMR-253, VMB-612, and AWS-2. The complement of the group at this time included 529 officers and 3,778 enlisted personnel. Aircraft of the group included 113 fighters (98 F4Us and 15 F6Fs), 15 night fighters (F6F-Ns), 39 torpedo bombers (TBFs and TBMs), 15 medium bombers (PBJs), 14 transports (R4Ds), 22 observation planes (OYs), and a solitary amphibious utility plane (J2F-6).¹⁴ As 1944 drew to a close, most veteran pilots of the MAG-21 fighter squadrons either had or were in the process of returning to Pearl Harbor and the continental United States for training on aircraft carriers.

THE CAROLINES¹⁵

The occupation of the Marianas by U.S. forces during the summer of 1944, coupled with further advances in the southwest Pacific, opened the door to the seizure of the Philippine Islands. The logical step before retaking the Philippines was the seizure of the western Carolines, whose possession would not only provide the final stepping-stone to the Philippines but also protect the right flank of the invasion force. By this time, the Japanese were facing a strategic situation that had greatly changed to their disadvantage, for American forces were strongly em-

¹³ The first B-29 arrived on Saipan on 12 October 1944 while final paving and other construction was still incomplete. Facilities were not substantially operative until April 1945. On Guam, the newly constructed airfields did not become operational for B-29s until late February 1945. On Tinian, the first two runways were completed in January 1945, the third in late February, and the fourth in early May. The first runway of West Field became operational on 22 March 1945, the second on 20 April. Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, pp. 515-520.

¹⁴ Figures on personnel and materiel taken from *MAG-21 Hist*, p. 50.

¹⁵ Additional sources for this section include: 2d MAW WarD, Jan-Apr43; *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Fane and Moore, *The Naked Warriors*.

placed on their inner line of defense. The fall of Saipan in the overall Japanese view of the war was a disaster comparable to the German defeat at Stalingrad during the winter of 1942-43. For many Germans the loss of the *Sixth Army* at Stalingrad meant the war could no longer be won; many Japanese reached the same conclusion following the loss of Saipan. While, for the time being, no political repercussions in Germany followed in the wake of the military debacle, the loss of Saipan proved a sufficient disaster to topple the cabinet of General Tojo. In announcing the fall of Saipan to the nation, the latter was forced to admit that "Japan was facing an unprecedented national crisis."¹⁶

As early as 10 May 1944, Admiral Nimitz had designated the commander of the Third Fleet, Admiral Halsey, to head the invasion of Peleliu and Angaur under the code name Operation STALEMATE. A second phase of the operation called for the capture of Yap and Ulithi. The seizure of Yap was subsequently shelved, and the island remained in enemy hands until the end of the war. The invasion date for Peleliu and Angaur was set for 15 September. While planning for STALEMATE was in progress, Army Air Forces bombers frequently attacked enemy installations in the Palaus. As in previous invasions, the target was out of range of land-based fighter aircraft, and direct air support for the Peleliu beachhead would have to be furnished by naval aviation. The Navy had already struck at enemy defenses on Peleliu in March

1944, when carrier-based planes had dropped 600 tons of bombs on the island in a two-day raid. Preinvasion air strikes were designed to eliminate any enemy aircraft left in the Palaus. Once the Marines of the III Amphibious Corps had seized the Peleliu airfield, the main objective of the operation, Marine aviation was to be based on the island.

The task of bringing Marine aviation to Peleliu was turned over to the 2d MAW, commanded by Brigadier General Harold D. Campbell. The air wing, consisting of MAGs-11 and -25, had spent considerable time in the Pacific Theater. Some of its squadrons had participated in the Battle of Midway and in operations on New Georgia. On 30 June 1944, the headquarters of the 2d MAW moved from Efate, in the New Hebrides, to Espiritu Santo, where it joined the remainder of the squadrons attached to the wing. One week later, Major General James T. Moore took over as wing commander. Upon his arrival at Espiritu Santo, General Moore found the wing fully engaged in preparing for Operation STALEMATE. Commanding officers and loading officers of VMF-114, -121, -122, and VMF(N)-541 were reporting to the 1st Marine Division at Guadalcanal with embarkation data for the impending operation.

It is perhaps not surprising that officers of the 2d MAW should show a greater than average interest in shipborne movement to a new objective. Many of them remembered or had heard of the saga of the liberty ship *S.S. Walter Colton*, which in January 1943 had transported part of the wing headquarters to the South Pacific. At the

¹⁶ USSBS, *Pacific Campaigns*, p. 220.

time, what had begun as a routine three-week voyage when the ship pulled out of San Diego Harbor on 8 January, had turned into a seemingly interminable odyssey for the aviation Marines on board. No one to this date has determined what factor was responsible for the strange voyage of the *Colton*, but something went awry along the way. The wing historian subsequently was to describe the sequence of events in the following words:

Instead of proceeding directly to Guadalcanal, the *Colton* received a change of orders directing her to Noumea; then, running ahead of schedule, she failed to pick up radioed orders from Pearl Harbor which directed her to Espiritu Santo instead. Dropping anchor in Noumea Harbor, the ship and passengers learned they were not expected there. Several days later they steamed on, arriving February 4 at Espiritu. Apparently the ship was not expected there either, for during the following 2½ months while crew and passengers fretted to be moving, and the Squadron's materiel lay useless in her hold, the ship remained tied up in that big port without orders for further movement.

Major Wilfrid H. Stiles and several other officers and enlisted personnel got off the *Colton* on February 6, and were flown to Guadalcanal. Others followed at later dates, but some of those who left the States on that ship never were detached from her until she reached Auckland, New Zealand, late in April.

The result was that the ship never reached Guadalcanal, nor did she reach Efate, where the material aboard also could have been used. Until she sailed for Auckland where the cargo finally was taken ashore, she remained at Espiritu Santo.¹⁷

No such long voyage was planned

for the ground personnel of Marine squadrons attached to the 2d MAW, and ground elements of the air wing went ashore on Peleliu on 15 September only one hour behind the assault waves. During the early phase of the operation, enemy resistance was so fierce that aviation Marines were used as stretcher bearers, ammunition carriers and riflemen.¹⁸ Six Marines of the 2d MAW were killed and 11 wounded while aiding the ground troops during the early part of the operation.

The unfinished Japanese airfield on Peleliu was captured on 16 September; roughly a week later it became operational. On 24 September, General Moore, with part of his staff, arrived by transport and set up his headquarters as Air Commander, Western Carolines (Task Group 59.6). In this capacity, he headed a combined Army-Navy-Marine staff in addition to personnel of the 2d Wing, to direct the operations of all aircraft based on Peleliu, Angaur, and Ulithi. Garrison Air Force, Western Carolines, whose largest component was the 2d MAW, had a threefold task. It had to provide air defense for all ground troops and convoys in the Western Carolines, furnish air support for the ground troops in the vicinity of Peleliu Island; and neutralize the remaining enemy bases in the Western Carolines.

The first Marine aircraft to operate on Peleliu Island were the spotter planes of VMO-3, commanded by Captain Wallace J. Slappey. The ground echelon of the observation squadron

¹⁷ 2d MAW WarD, Jan-Apr43.

¹⁸ For the complete history of ground operations on Peleliu, see Part III of this volume.

went ashore on Peleliu on 17 September and built a small airstrip about 500 feet long, just south of the main airfield. The first planes touched down on the following day, the remainder arriving on the 19th. On that day artillery spotting got under way and continued for the remainder of the month. The difficult and jagged terrain on the island required aerial observation 90 percent of the time. Most spotting was directed at seeking out previously unidentified natural fortifications, which had remained hidden from view beneath heavy vegetation. Despite the volume of fire directed against such fortifications, positive destruction of the enemy could not be determined because of the depth and strength of these positions. All enemy positions, buildings, and dumps of any kind that were exposed or built above ground level were either destroyed or left burning.

In addition to artillery spotting, the squadron assisted the infantry by executing numerous reconnaissance flights at extremely low altitudes over the front lines, seeking enemy gun positions that were holding up the advance. Other flights maintained a patrol over enemy-held islands to the north, looking for activities in general and barge movements in particular. Spotter aircraft also aided in directing amphibian tractor patrols to enemy troops trying to escape from the island. The pilots, not content with passively spotting targets, carried hand grenades and mortar shells along on many flights and dropped these on enemy troops and buildings. On occasion, planes returned from flights with holes from small arms fire and shell fragments. During the

Peleliu operation, two OY-1 spotter aircraft were lost. The first loss occurred on take-off from the CVE on the day that the spotters were launched from the carrier off Peleliu. The second aircraft was shot down behind enemy lines. In both instances the flying crews were rescued.

On 24 September, the first eight F6F night fighters of VMF(N)-541, which had staged from Emirau through Owi Island, off New Guinea, arrived on Peleliu. Two days later, the Corsairs of VMF-114, commanded by Major Robert F. Stout, touched down. The Marine Corsairs wasted no time in assisting the ground troops in blasting the enemy out of his strongpoints. Details of these missions have been described elsewhere in this volume, but for the purposes of an overall description of Marine aviation activities on Peleliu there were two types of missions that deserve particular mention. One feat was the dropping of 1,000-pound bombs by Corsairs on enemy caves less than a mile from the Peleliu airstrip. The other was the employment of napalm, beginning on 12 October, against enemy caves and dugouts.

Japanese air power in the Western Carolines never posed any serious threat to Marine aviation. Enemy strips at Babelthuap and Yap were kept out of commission by repeated attacks of Marine fighters and torpedo bombers. By the end of October, Garrison Air Force, Western Carolines, had complete control of the air. The capture of Ulithi and adjacent islands provided Marine aviation with additional airfields. As a result, by the end of 1944, 11 squadrons were operating from fields on Peleliu,

Angaur, and Ulithi. As early as 17 November, Army bombers based on Angaur and attached to General Moore's task group were able to bomb enemy-held objectives on Luzon.

The only instance of direct air support for ground troops during the Peleliu operation occurred on 28 September, when the Corsairs of VMF-114 supported the landing of 3/5 on Ngesebus, an island adjacent to Peleliu. This isolated instance of direct air support was only a forerunner of what Marine aviation was to accomplish several months later in the Philippines. Nevertheless, even on this occasion, spectators to the operation, including Generals Smith, Geiger, Rupertus, and Moore, were highly impressed with the results obtained. The commander of the 1st Marine Division, General Rupertus, complimented the squadron commander, Major Robert F. Stout, on the performance of his pilots. Major Stout was destined not to survive the war; he was killed by enemy antiaircraft fire over Koror on Babelthuap Island on 4 March 1945, one of 16 pilots and 2 crewmen to lose their lives in bombing the remaining enemy-held islands in the Palaus and on Yap.

Following the capture of Ulithi on 21 September 1944, MBDAG-45, commanded by Colonel Frank M. June, was charged with the responsibility of providing air defense for the biggest anchorage in the western Pacific. The air group, subsequently redesignated as MAG-45, landed on Falalop Island on 8 October. The 51st Naval Construction Battalion, assisted by the group, completed a 3,500-foot airstrip within three weeks. On 22 October, the ground eche-

lons of VMF-312 and VMTB-232 arrived at Ulithi from Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides and joined the air group at Falalop. Two days later, VMF-312 was administratively attached to Commanding General, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Operational control remained with the commanding officer of MAG-45 until the ground echelon departed from Ulithi on 19 November.

On 29 October, the flight echelon of VMF(N)-542, led by Major William C. Kellum, reached Falalop and began flying local combat air patrol around the clock on the following day. The second day of November witnessed the arrival of the flight echelon of VMTB-232, led by Major Menard Doswell III, from Peleliu. On the 4th, a division of six Avengers of this squadron carried out a reconnaissance of Yap Island. By 14 November VMTB-232 had begun a regular antisubmarine patrol, with two-plane sections flying two-hour flights around the atoll from dawn to dusk. Two days later, the Avengers launched the first of many strikes against the Japanese airstrip on Yap.

Even though the enemy field on Yap had been heavily pounded from the sea and air long before the arrival of Marine aviation on Ulithi in early October 1944, it remained a constant threat to Allied bases and shipping in the Western Carolines. Well entrenched enemy ground troops on Yap made it necessary to neutralize the enemy strongpoint from the air, for there was always the danger that the strip might be hastily repaired and used as staging point for a surprise air assault on the Ulithi base and anchorage. There was a further

possibility that the enemy might use Yap as a refuelling station for submarines. Even though Marine pilots did not expect aerial opposition over Yap, they did encounter anti-aircraft fire of sufficient intensity to cause them to maintain a minimum altitude of 6,000 feet.

Proof that the enemy was aware of the presence of American shipping at Ulithi anchorage was furnished on the morning of 20 November, when enemy submarines, the *I-36* and *I-47*, released five midget subs. One of these torpedoed the USS *Mississinewa*, a fleet oiler loaded with more than 400,000 gallons of aviation gas. The ship sank at her berth in the lagoon with a loss of 50 officers and men.¹⁹ Immediate countermeasures taken by hunter-killer teams under the atoll commander, Commodore Oliver O. Kessing, resulted in the destruction of all five midgets, two of which fell victim to Marine Corps aircraft. Nevertheless, both the *I-36* and the *I-47* were able to make good their escape.

In general, tactical operations of MAG-45 from 30 October 1944 through the end of the year consisted of routine strikes and reconnaissance of Yap, Sorol, and Fais, and regular dawn to dusk antisubmarine patrols, all executed by Avengers of VMTB-232. VMF(N)-542 flew the regular combat air patrols, using the Falalop strip and its facilities, but depending on its own maintenance crews for service. On such missions, naval aviators were briefed by the Marine group operations and intelligence officers.

¹⁹ Morison, *Leyte*, p. 51.

IWO JIMA²⁰

As Marine aviation began to expand its operations to the Western Carolines, a development important to the future of Marine air was taking place far from the Pacific scene of action. After prolonged discussions and long delays, Marine Carrier Groups, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific was finally established on 21 October 1944 as a tactical command.²¹

Training of Marine pilots for carrier qualification had already started during the summer of 1944. Even though about 15 percent of the aviators assigned to Marine Carrier Groups, FMFPac, had seen combat action, few had ever landed on a carrier. On 3 February 1945 the first carrier, the *Block Island*, was assigned to MASG-48. Three other carriers were furnished at one-month intervals. It was hoped that by late 1945, when the invasion of Japan itself was to get under way, eight carriers would be available to the Marines.²²

The invasion of Iwo Jima, Operation DETACHMENT, came too early to en-

²⁰ Additional sources for this section include: MajGen Holland M. Smith, ConfRpt, TF 56, "Air Operations in Support of the Capture of Iwo Jima," n.d., hereafter Smith, *Iwo Jima Special Air OpsRpt*; S. E. Smith, *The United States Navy in World War II* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1966), hereafter Smith, *U. S. Navy in World War II*; Vice Admiral E. P. Forrestel, *Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, USN—A Study in Command* (Washington: GPO, 1966), hereafter Forrestel, *Admiral Spruance*; Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*; Leckie, *Strong Men Armed*.

²¹ Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 329.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 331.

able Marine aviation to furnish close air support from its escort carriers. Each one of the 11 escort carriers taking part in the operation was manned by Navy pilots. Nevertheless, Marine aviators were to be given at least a limited opportunity to strike a blow both directly and indirectly in support of the Iwo Jima operation, one against the island itself, the other in the diversionary attack against the Japanese mainland.

While the program to put Marines on carriers was being slowly implemented stateside, a crisis arose in the field that was to hasten this development in an entirely unforeseen fashion. The appearance of Japanese suicide planes during the Leyte campaign in the autumn of 1944 had created an instant need for additional fighters based on the big carriers of the Third Fleet. The employment of Marine fighters and pilots was decided upon as an immediate expedient; by the end of 1944 the first of the Marine fighter squadrons were to fly from the decks of five of the big carriers in major operations involving a fast carrier task force.²³

On 28 December 1944, VMF-124, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William A. Millington, and VMF-213 under Major Donald P. Frame, went aboard the USS *Essex* at Ulithi. After a series of air strikes against Formosa and Luzon from 3-9 January 1945, Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet moved into

the South China Sea, from where air strikes were launched against Indochina, Hong Kong, and Formosa. Effective 27 January, having returned to Ulithi, the Third Fleet was redesignated the Fifth Fleet and Admiral Spruance took over the tactical command from Admiral Halsey.

On 10 February, TF 58 sortied from Ulithi bound for Tokyo, 1,500 miles to the north. Three additional large carriers, each with two Marine fighter squadrons on board, joined the Fifth Fleet, so that in the end Admiral Spruance disposed over eight Marine fighter squadrons on four large carriers. The air attack on Tokyo was to precede the invasion of Iwo Jima by troops of the V Amphibious Corps by three days. Following their attacks against the Japanese capital, the Marine squadrons of TF 58 were to furnish air support at Iwo Jima on D-Day, which was set for 19 February.

Following the air strikes against Japan, which were carried out under unfavorable weather conditions, TF 58 was approximately 100 miles from Iwo Jima on D-Day, and prelanding strikes were launched against the landing beaches and adjacent areas. The initial sweep against the Iwo defenses was executed by a flight of 24 Marine Corsairs and an equal number of Navy Hellcats. Under the command of Colonel Millington of VMF-124, this flight attacked the flanks and high ground along the landing beaches with napalm, rockets, and machine gun fire. Five minutes before the first Marines hit the shore, the flight attacked the landing beach in low-level attacks. The contribution of Marine aviation in direct support of

²³ For additional details on this subject matter, see Frank and Shaw, "Marines on Carriers," *op. cit.*

the Iwo landings was relatively small in numbers, for on D-Day a total of more than 600 aircraft, including those of the Navy and Army Air Forces, were engaged in reducing enemy defenses and supporting the assault. Carrier-based Marine aviation continued to fly in close support of the assault troops until 22 February, when Corsairs from the *Wasp* flew a ground support mission as part of a 23-plane flight. After that date, air support for the embattled Marines on the island was turned over to Navy escort carrier planes and Army P-51s, who did the best job under the circumstances.

Marine aviation contributed to operations on Iwo Jima in other ways. First to become engaged in the aerial assault against the island were the Mitchell medium bombers (PBJs) of VMB-612 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jack R. Cram. From early December 1944 until the end of January 1945, this squadron, based in the Marianas, flew night sorties against enemy shipping in the Volcano and Bonin Islands and seriously disrupted the flow of enemy supplies to these islands. Once the Marines had landed on Iwo, artillery spotter aircraft of VMO-4, commanded by Lieutenant Thomas Rozga, and VMO-5, headed by Lieutenant Roy G. Miller, lent valuable support to ground operations. For the Marines, whether on the ground or in the air, Iwo was to be an extremely difficult operation; the spotter aircraft were to share the dangers and tribulations of the campaign along with the remainder of the assault force.

The difficulties of the observation squadrons had begun in December 1944. The Commanding General, V Amphibi-

ous Corps, directed the pilots of VMO-4 in Hawaii to test a special piece of equipment, dubbed "Brodie gear," which had been designed by the U. S. Army to launch the small observation aircraft from an LST. The device, which resembled a giant slingshot, consisted of two projecting beams, a cable, arresting gear, and a loop. Hooks were fitted on the planes, and on 21 December 1944 tests were begun using LST 776 as a base. Initial tests were unsatisfactory and resulted in the loss of several spotter aircraft.

The experimentation did not end here, however. With added experience it became evident that launching the small spotter aircraft from an LST in this fashion was possible, though three planes fell overboard and sank before the feasibility of such launchings was established. For more than a week following the invasion of Iwo Jima, LST 776 with Brodie gear and observation planes on board remained offshore. By 26 February, when the first strip on Iwo had been secured, two spotter aircraft of VMO-4 on board the aircraft carrier *Wake Island* took off and reached the new field while it was still under mortar and artillery fire. A plane of VMO-5 reached the strip on the following day. By the last day of February, all of the planes that had made the voyage on aircraft carriers were ashore.

When the first of the observation planes on board LST 776 was finally launched with the help of the Brodie gear on 27 February, it fell into the water. Another attempt made on 1 March was at least partially successful. Of the four planes of VMO-4 launched that day, two received a dunking; the

remainder made it to Maple Field No. 1 on Iwo Jima.²⁴

Pilots and planes of the two observation squadrons eked out a hazardous existence even after their arrival on the island. While stationary on the airstrip, the small aircraft were frequently hit by enemy fire. VMO-4 spotted for the 3d and 4th Marine Divisions; VMO-5 supported the 3d and 5th Marine Divisions. When VMO-4 completed its mission on Iwo after 19 days, the pilots had flown more than 200 missions. Of the squadron's seven planes, six had been so badly damaged that they had to be scrapped. VMO-5 pilots flew 379 missions in support of the divisions on the ground; their spotter aircraft incurred heavy damage similar to those of VMO-4. One pilot was shot down behind the enemy lines and lost.

The story of Marine aviation in the Central Pacific would be incomplete without mention of the Marines that were members of the Transport Air Group, an organization responsible for hauling passengers and equipment all over the Pacific area.

VMR-952 was organized on 15 June 1943 under MAG-15. At the time of the squadron's activation, it was commanded by Major Harry F. Baker, who in early July was replaced by Major Malcolm S. Mackay. One of the first problems facing the newly commissioned squadron was the replacement of its time-honored R4D Douglas Skytrain transports with the little heard of and lesser known R5C, the Curtiss "Com-

mando," the largest twin-engined plane then in production. The squadron history described the early weeks of the unit's existence at an airfield in California as follows:

An area was pointed out along the taxiway at Camp Kearney Field; tents were erected, a field telephone was installed, and the three "commandos" then belonging to the Marine Corps were rolled onto the check line.

This was an occasion! Although a few of the squadron's new recruits could boast of a little experience with the "Commando" (they had flown and maintained the three first planes for the short time that they were attached to Marine Aircraft Group 15), the majority of the personnel from the pilots to the mechanics had never been in one. Their time in the R4D had been brief enough, but now this. Never had they been confronted with so large a portion of the unknown at one showing. Amazement soon gave way to curiosity and the quest for knowledge began anew.²⁵

In February 1944, the squadron was transferred to Hawaii, where it became attached to Marine Air, Hawaiian Area, working directly under the supervision of that headquarters. The initial mission of the transport squadron was to keep open the lines of communication and supply between Hawaii and Midway, Johnson, and Palmyra Islands. Weekly and semi-weekly flights were made to each island with special additional flights when the need arose. VMR-952 transported personnel and equipment and escorted single engine aircraft to facilitate their movements. Pilots of the transport squadron carried out overwater flights which extended to New Caledonia in the Southwest Pacific

²⁴ RAdm E. M. Eller, Navy HistDiv, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 28Sep67, in *Marine Aviation Comment File*.

²⁵ VMR-952 Hist, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

and included stops at Espiritu Santo and Guadalcanal, as well as at Tarawa, Kwajalein, Majuro, and Eniwetok, in the Central Pacific.

In August 1944, the squadron moved to Emirau, in the Bismarck Archipelago, where it remained until Christmas Day, when it shifted to Guam. Following the capture of the Peleliu airfield in mid-September, transport aircraft of VMR-952 made frequent stops on Peleliu, bringing in urgently needed equipment and departing with wounded. On 4 October 1944, two of the big Curtiss transports, carrying 43 wounded, left Peleliu, inaugurating the first air evacuation of battle casualties from the island.²⁶ On the following day, three more flights took out an additional 63 casualties.²⁷ During the extended Peleliu campaign, the planes delivered large quantities of welcome fresh food to the island.

Three Marine transport squadrons and a similar Army Air Forces unit participated in the Iwo Jima operation. These four were VMR-253, -353, and 952, as well as the 9th Troop Carrier Squadron. The Army Air Forces squadron dropped supplies to Marine ground forces on Iwo on 28 February. On the following day, pilots of VMR-952 arrived with urgently needed mortar shells, spare parts for machine guns, blood plasma, and mail. On 3 March, the commanding officer of VMR-952, Lieutenant Colonel Mackay, flew from Guam to Saipan and then to Iwo Jima, where he piloted the first plane to land on the slightly more than 3,000 feet of

runway. After the unloading of its 5,500 pounds of mortar ammunition, the aircraft returned to Guam. The next day, a crippled B-29 bomber, returning from a raid on Japan, was the first of many in like condition to make an emergency landing on the Iwo strip.

On each return flight from Iwo, the air transports evacuated casualties. Before the Iwo operation ended, VMR-952 had made 79 trips to the island and evacuated 625 wounded. The remaining air transport squadrons also contributed to the operation. VMR-353, for example, carried out 8 flights during the month of March 1945; and VMR-253 evacuated 100 casualties in 20 flights.

In a direct ratio to the growth of American air power in the Pacific theater was the decline of Japanese air strength. Aside from a growing shortage in raw materials and aviation fuels, there was a breakdown in planning and aircraft production all along the line. As seen from the "enemy side of the hill," the technical and administrative factors that hampered production were explained as follows:

The urgent need of the combat air corps forced the Army and Navy to place in production several types of experimental aircraft which lacked the required test flights and design modifications. Airplanes were rushed from the experimental hangars to the production line, with the result that the planes were dispatched to the front lines before we could determine the missions which they could most effectively perform. Our engineers lacked the time necessary to prepare maintenance manuals and texts; thus the front-line mechanics, plagued with primitive working conditions, were forced to service airplanes about which they understood little. The confusion of the maintenance crews

²⁶ VMR-952 WarD, Oct44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

inevitably caused equipment malfunction and breakage on a prohibitive scale.²⁸

Along with the decline of older equipment and failure of new and better models to replace aircraft that were becoming more and more obsolete as the American war effort swung into full action, there was a corresponding drop of morale in the ranks of Japanese pilots. This did not in any way lessen the enemy pilot's determination to do his duty to the death. Nevertheless, even the enemy was well aware of the human factor involved, though few, if any, positive steps were taken by the Japanese military leadership to ease the lot of their aviators. Enemy flyers, sizing up their adversaries, could see with their own eyes the great value that Americans placed on retaining experienced pilots and air crews. Japanese flying personnel, whose quality and quantity were both in a severe state of decline, avidly observed:

. . . after every mission the Americans sent out flying boats to the areas in which their planes had fought, searching for and rescuing air crews which had been shot down and stood a good chance of surviving aboard life rafts. Every lumbering flying boat, normally an easy catch for our fighter planes, went out on its search mission with nine to twelve escort fighters. Although their duties were extremely hazardous, the crews of these flying boats performed their missions gallantly, and there arose few occasions during the war when groups of men so consistently exposed themselves to multiple dangers. Our pilots could not fail to be impressed with these daring search missions and, despite the fact that enemy pilots manned the

flying boats, our men regarded them as unusually courageous.²⁹

In contrast with the all-out American attempts to salvage downed air crews was the attitude of the Japanese naval command, which held that the possible loss of a large flying boat could not be risked to effect the rescue of one air crew. A former Japanese naval aviator who participated in and survived action over Midway, Guadalcanal, New Guinea, and Santa Cruz, expressed the following thoughts on the subject of rescue and survival:

I pondered this situation more than once. For this apathy toward rescuing downed pilots was not merely the attitude of the high command . . . our own combat men, the flying mates of the same men who were shot down and adrift at sea, would not, even under orders, take any unnecessary chances to save their lives. Lest this attitude be misconstrued as indicating that our men lacked compassion for their friends, it should be added that they would not expect otherwise should they be the ones to be shot down. Any man who was shot down and managed to survive by inflating his liferaft realized that his chance for continued survival lay entirely within his own hands. Our pilots accepted their abandonment stoically. At any rate, the entire Japanese Navy failed to evince any great interest in rescue operations of this nature.³⁰

Along with the men fighting on the ground, and the flying personnel of the other services, Marine pilots in the Central Pacific made their contribution to the overall war effort. The day of close air support that Marines were to deliver in the Philippines had not yet dawned when operations in the Central Pacific

²⁸ Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 357.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

got under way. But the Marine air arm left its milestones across the vast reaches of the Central Pacific. Often relegated to arduous but monotonous duty, Marine pilots defied death and disease in areas that did not rate headlines and that are all but forgotten today. They braved the dangers of combat or, if captured, humiliation, torture,

and oftentimes death, at the hands of a remorseless enemy. Many survived against all odds the ravages of an equally cruel sea. Others fell victim to flying accidents. All of them, together with those who survived, had an equal share in bringing the war across the Central Pacific to the enemy's doorstep, paving the way for final victory.

PART VI

Iwo Jima

Background to DETACHMENT¹

The autumn of 1944 saw the Allies poised for a major thrust both in Europe and in the Pacific. On the European Continent, the Allies had liberated almost all of France and stood ready to advance into Germany; in fact, the German western border and the heavily fortified Siegfried Line had already been breached; on the Eastern Front, the Russians had recaptured almost all Russian territory, had driven deep into the Balkans, and were engaged in cutting off sizable German forces in the Baltic countries after an advance into East Prussia. It was evident that Germany, now fighting by herself, having been abandoned by nearly all of her former allies, could stave off the collapse of the Third Reich for only a limited time.

In the Pacific Theater, the year of 1944 had gone badly for the Japanese also. Starting with the American offensive against the Gilberts in Novem-

ber 1943, the inexorable advance across the Pacific had taken American forces 3,000 miles westward by the end of the year. The conquest of Saipan, more than any other reverse, had brought home to Japanese leaders the realization that there no longer was any chance of a Japanese victory. Loss of the Marianas, accompanied by the Battle of the Philippine Sea which all but destroyed Japanese naval aviation, left the Japanese home islands open to American attack. Capture of Peleliu and Ulithi protected the American right flank for a thrust into the Philippines. By late October 1944, American forces had not only gained a foothold on Leyte, but had also inflicted disastrous punishment on the *Imperial Navy* during the Battle for Leyte Gulf.

The beginning of 1945 saw American forces in possession of most of Leyte and with a solid foothold on Luzon. The enemy naval forces, rendered largely impotent by the reverses they had suffered during the previous year, were no longer able to interfere successfully with American operations in the Philippines, whose liberation had become merely a matter of time.

The Allied advance by early 1945 had carried friendly forces deep into enemy territory in a line extending from an area east of the Kurile Islands southward and westward to a point separating the Mariana and Volcano Islands,

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: LtCol Whitman S. Bartley, *Iwo Jima: Amphibious Epic* (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1954), hereafter Bartley, *Iwo Monograph*; Iwo Jima Comment File (HRB, HistDiv, HQMC), hereafter *Iwo Comments*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Capt. Clifford P. Morehouse, *The Iwo Jima Operation* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1946), hereafter Morehouse, *Iwo Jima Campaign*; Morison, *Victory in the Pacific*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*.

thence westward to the Philippines, where the line turned to the southeast and continued southwestward towards New Guinea and Australia (see Map I, Map Section). Even though many thousands of enemy troops remained on by-passed islands such as New Britain, Kavieng, Wake, Marcus, and Yap, these erstwhile Japanese strongholds had been so effectively isolated and neutralized by American air power and submarines that they remained merely a nuisance. With the capture of the Mariana Islands during the summer of 1944, the United States had obtained a strongpoint from which the further assaults towards the Japanese home islands could be launched. As an added steppingstone towards the ultimate invasion of Japan, an advance from the Marianas to the Ryukyus appeared logical. It was also considered necessary to secure a foothold in the Nanpo Shoto. The island finally selected for invasion within the Nanpo Shoto was barely more than a speck of dust and volcanic ashes in the Pacific. Little known to the outside world until 1945, its name was destined soon to be on the lips of thousands of men and women throughout the free world and Japan. That island was Iwo Jima.

HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE BONIN ISLANDS²

From the entrance to Tokyo Bay, a chain of islands, known as the Nanpo Shoto, extends southward for about

750 miles to within 300 miles of the Mariana Islands. The Nanpo Shoto consists of three major groups of islands: the Izut Shoto, the Bonin Islands, also known as the Ogasawara Gunto, and the Volcano Islands, known to the Japanese as the Kazan Retto. Among the latter group of islands lies Iwo Jima, located about 670 miles south of Tokyo, 700 miles north of Guam and nearly halfway between Tokyo and Saipan.

Iwo Jima, translated into English, means Sulphur Island, named for the sulphur deposits that extend to the very surface of the island. Iwo's shape has alternately been compared to that of a pork chop, a dripping ice-cream cone, or an elongated sea shell of the type commonly found on ocean beaches of the mid-Atlantic and southern United States. From northeast to southwest, the island measures less than five miles across; the width varies from approximately two and a half miles in the northern part to only one-half mile in the southern portion. Altogether, Iwo Jima occupies less than eight square miles.

There was little about Iwo Jima or the remainder of the Volcano-Bonin Islands to make them attractive to foreigners in search of areas that could be colonized. In the mid-Sixteenth Century a Spanish navigator sighted the Volcano Islands but thereafter Europeans paid little attention to them. As the century drew to a close, a Japanese explorer dis-

² Additional sources for this section include: Amphibious Forces South Pacific G-2 Study, *Information on Iwo Jima (Kazan Retto)*, n.d.; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1944 Edition, "Ogasawara Jima" and "Volcanic Islands"; Foster

R. Dulles, *America in the Pacific* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932); Philip T. Terry, *Terry's Japanese Empire* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914); Willard Price: *Japan's Islands of Mystery* (New York: John Day Company, 1944).

covered the Bonin Islands and found them to be uninhabited. They remained this way until the early part of the Nineteenth Century, when an assortment of British and American whaling captains sailed into the waters surrounding the islands. A group of colonists, consisting of Englishmen, Portuguese, Italians, Hawaiians, and an American named Nathaniel Savory, who hailed from New England, set out from Hawaii and settled on Chichi Jima under British sponsorship.

In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry stopped at Chichi Jima and, impressed by the possible use of the island as a coaling station for U. S. Navy vessels, urged the government to purchase a strip of land on the island on which warehouses could be erected. Congress at the time showed little interest in such a venture, and in the end the project was abandoned.

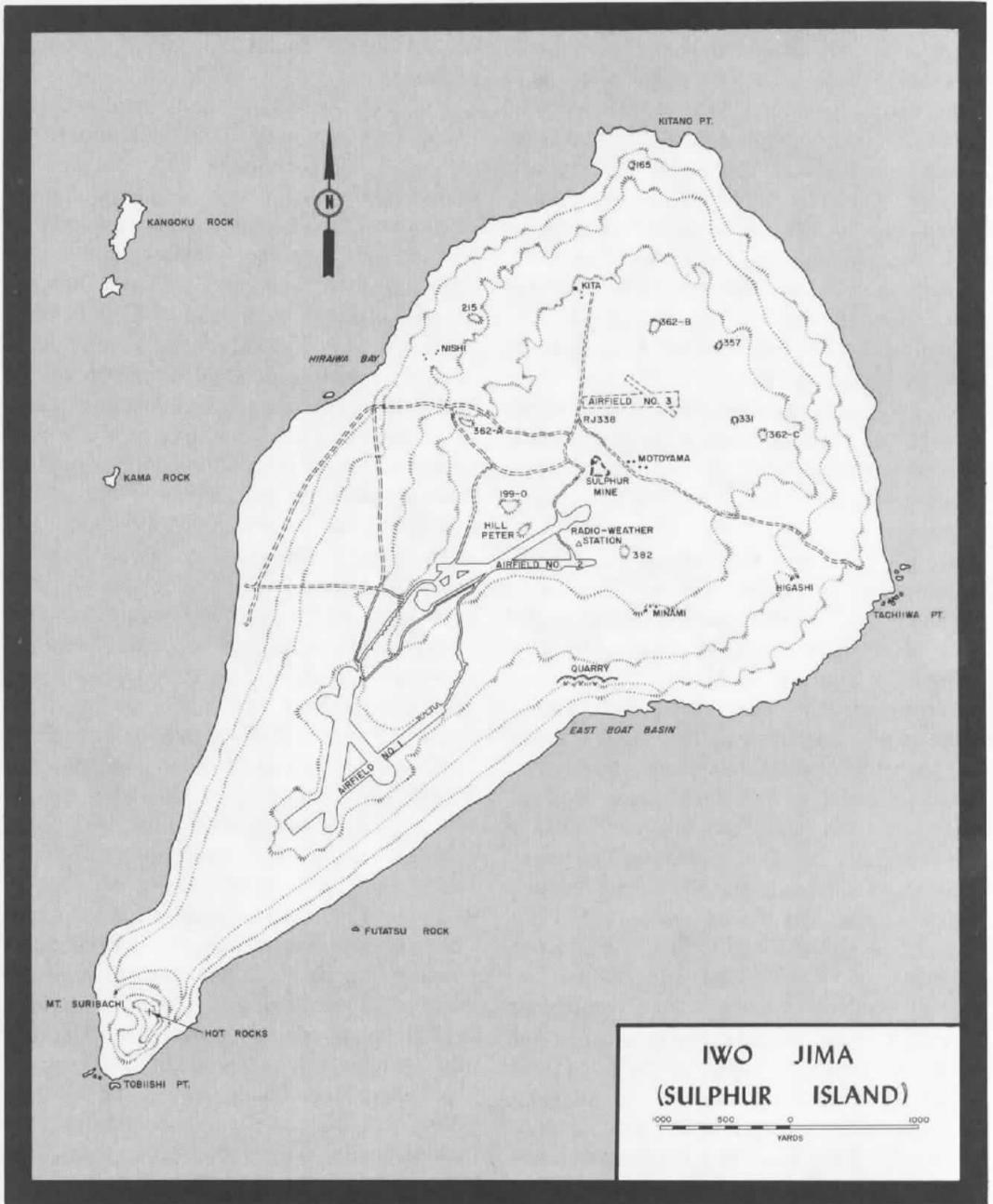
While none of the European powers showed any interest in the largely barren and forbidding island of Iwo Jima, the Japanese had different ideas. Shortly after Perry's visit to Japan in 1853, the Japanese sent officials and colonists to the Volcano-Bonins. Eight years later, Japan laid formal claim to these islands. By 1891, following increased colonization, all of the islands in the Nanpo Shoto had come under the direct jurisdiction of the Tokyo Prefecture and thus became an integral part of the Japanese homeland. A ban on foreign settlement all but stamped out outside influence in the islands with only one exception: on Chichi Jima, the descendants of Nathaniel Savory and his group still celebrated Washington's Birthday and the Fourth of July; on these occa-

sions they proudly displayed Old Glory, an act hardly in keeping with Japanese policy.³

By 1943, Japanese colonization of Iwo Jima had resulted in the settlement of almost 1,100 Japanese civilians on the island. Most of these Japanese were either employed at a sugar mill located in the northeastern portion of the island or a sulphur mine and refinery located in the same general area. The inhabitants of Iwo Jima lived in five villages or settlements scattered over the northern half of the island. The northernmost of these was Kita, located in the north central part of Iwo. The village of Nishi was situated in the northwestern part of the island, while Motoyama, the largest built-up area on Iwo, was located in close proximity to the sulphur mine and refinery. The remaining two villages, Higashi and Minami, were located in the northeastern part of the island. (See Map 24).

Only the northern part of Iwo Jima had soil permitting some gardening. Vegetables, sugar cane, and dry grains were raised for local consumption. Rice and all other manufactured consumer items had to be obtained from Japan proper. The inhabitants of Iwo were able to supplement their diet through fishing. In this connection it must be pointed out that one of the most serious impediments to large-scale settlement of the island was the total absence of any source of fresh water, such as a lake or a river. Since the island also lacked wells, water had to be obtained

³ Maj John N. Rentz interview with HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 29Nov51, in *Iwo Comments*.



Map 24

E.L. Wilson

exclusively from rain carefully collected in concrete cisterns. At times, Iwo Jima was supplied with potable water by tankers. Some effort was also made to augment precious water supplies through the distillation of sea water.

While the northern part of the island was hardly designed to become a tourist attraction, the southern half of Iwo Jima was ugly beyond description. Near the narrow southern tip of Iwo, dominating the entire island, stands Mount Suribachi, an extinct volcano, which rises to an elevation of about 550 feet. To the north of Suribachi, inland from the beaches, the ground terraces successively upward to form a broad tableland occupying most of the central section of the island. The area between the northern base of Suribachi and the dome-shaped northern plateau is covered by a deep layer of black, volcanic ash so soft and so much subject to drifting that even walking becomes a problem. Wheeled vehicles cannot negotiate such ground; tracked vehicles can move across it only with difficulty.

The northern plateau consists of several elevations; the highest of these is Hill 382, located just east of Motoyama Airfield No. 2, halfway between Motoyama and Minami; two other hills reach a height of 362 feet. Much of this terrain consists of rough and rocky ground, interspersed with deep gorges and high ridges. Sulphur vapor permeates the entire area with a characteristic smell of rotten eggs. The ground itself is hot in this part of the island; the veils of vapor only serve to accentuate the impression of a ghostly landscape.

The beaches of Iwo Jima from Kitano Point, the northernmost tip of the is-

land, to Tachiiwa Point, two miles to the southeast, are steep and narrow with many rocky shoals offshore. They border terrain that rises sharply towards the northern plateau. Rough and broken ground is typical of all beaches on northern Iwo Jima, in numerous instances with cliffs that drop off sharply towards the water's edge. Beaches along the southwestern and southeastern shores of the island vary in depth from 150 to 500 feet and generally are free from rocks offshore. The terrain would be level, rising gradually towards the interior, if it were not for the existence of sand terraces created by the action of waves. These terraces, which differ in height and width, are undergoing a constant change depending on the surf and winds. Surf conditions at Iwo are unfavorable, even under normal conditions. The island does not possess any anchorage or other inlets to protect ships from the fury of the sea. Steep beaches bring breakers close to the shore, where they can mete out severe punishment to small craft that are inward bound or beached. Winds hitting the shore from the sea serve to increase the fury of the waves.

The climate of Iwo Jima is subtropical with a cool season extending from December through April and a warm season from May through November. Temperatures are moderate, with an average ranging between 63 and 70 degrees during the cool period and 73 through 80 degrees during spring, summer, and autumn. Annual rainfall averages 60 inches, with February the driest month and May the wettest.

The desolation of the island is further accentuated by the sparse vegetation.

A few coarse grasses and gnarled trees are engaged in a perennial struggle for survival. An officer in the *Imperial Japanese Army*, formerly stationed on Iwo, has described it as an "island of sulphur, no water, no sparrow, and no swallow."⁴ The only living thing on Iwo, aside from the Japanese, was a bird resembling the American rail, a wading bird related to the cranes, but of medium size.

The above description of Iwo Jima, hardly complimentary in essence, may easily give rise to the question how an island of such poor proportions could assume the strategic importance that both the Japanese and Americans placed on it by the summer of 1944. At least one American, speaking to a Navy Chaplain, expressed the sentiment that "after God got through making the world, he must've took all the dirty ash and rubble left over and made Iwo Jima."⁵ Yet the island was destined to witness one of the epic amphibious assaults of World War II, followed by a month-long running battle that cost the assault force heavily in men and equipment and at the same time resulted in the complete destruction of the enemy garrison. The factors that made this otherwise worthless pile of rock and black sand such a prize to friend and enemy alike, require a detailed explanation. Only then can the struggle between 23,000 Japanese and an assault force initially of 60,000 men, combatting each other at

closest quarters on this inhospitable island, be readily understood.

JAPANESE DEFENSIVE PREPARATIONS IN THE BONIN-VOLCANO ISLANDS⁶

Japanese military interest in the Volcano-Bonin Islands first arose in 1914, coincident to the outbreak of World War I. Even though the Japanese home islands were never threatened during that war, which Japan entered on the side of the Allies, a few defenses were prepared on Chichi Jima, an island in the Bonin-Volcano Group about 175 miles north-northeast of Iwo Jima. On 10 August 1920, the *Chichi Jima Branch, Army Fortification Department*, was formally established, followed by the construction of fortifications beginning in June 1921. As a result of the Naval Arms Limitation Agreement, concluded on 6 February 1922, work on the fortifications was halted.⁷ Since all of the action had occurred elsewhere, the Japanese garrison on Chichi Jima led a peaceful existence and never fired a shot in anger.

During the postwar period and

⁶ Additional sources for this section include: Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*; Richard F. Newcomb, *Iwo Jima* (New York, Chicago, and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), hereafter Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, quoted with permission; Richard F. Newcomb notes for *Iwo Jima*, hereafter *Newcomb notes*; Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*; Sakai, Caidin, and Saito, *Samurai!*; Hayashi and Coox, *Kogun*; Capt Raymond Henri, et al, *The U. S. Marines on Iwo Jima* (Washington: The Infantry Journal, 1945), hereafter Henri et al, *Marines on Iwo Jima*.

⁷ War History Office, Defense Agency of Japan ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 21Aug69 in *Iwo Comments*, hereafter *Japanese Defense Agency Comment*.

⁴ Major Yoshitaka Horie, IJA, "Explanation of Japanese Defense Plan and Battle of Iwo Jima," dtd, 25Jan46.

⁵ Capt Raymond Henri, USMC, *Iwo Jima—Springboard to Final Victory* (New York: U. S. Camera Publishing Corporation, 1945), hereafter Henri, *Springboard to Final Victory*.

throughout the twenties and thirties, the status of Chichi Jima did not undergo any appreciable change. Though a small garrison remained on the island, no additional installations were constructed. On Iwo Jima, the presence of any military installation was even less conspicuous, though by 1937 a wooden sign had been erected by the *Imperial Navy*, bearing a legend in both Japanese and English, clearly cautioning the careless trespasser from recording or photographing such installations as he might encounter on the island.

At the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor an Army force of about 3,700–3,800 men garrisoned Chichi Jima. In addition, about 1,200 naval personnel manned the Chichi Jima Naval Base, a small seaplane base, the radio and weather station, and various gunboat, subchaser, and minesweeping units.⁸ On Iwo Jima, the *Imperial Navy* had constructed an airfield about 2,000 yards northeast of Mount Suribachi. Initially stationed on this field were 1,500 naval aviation personnel and 20 aircraft.⁹

In the wake of the American seizure of the Marshalls and devastating air attacks against Truk in the Carolines during February 1944, the Japanese military leadership was forced to con-

duct an agonizing reappraisal of the military situation. All indications pointed to an American drive towards the Marianas and Carolines. To counter such a move, it became necessary to establish an inner line of defense extending generally northward from the Carolines to the Marianas, and from thence to the Volcano-Bonin Islands. In March 1944, the *Thirty-First Army*, commanded by General Hideyoshi Obata, was activated for the purpose of garrisoning this inner line. The commander of the Chichi Jima garrison was placed nominally in command of Army and Navy units in the Volcano-Bonin Islands.

Following the American seizure of most of the Marshalls, both Army and Navy reinforcements were sent to Iwo Jima. Five hundred men from the naval base at Yokosuka and an additional 500 from Chichi Jima reached Iwo during March and April 1944. At the same time, with the arrival of reinforcements from Chichi Jima and the home islands, the Army garrison on Iwo Jima had reached a strength of over 5,000 men, equipped with 13 artillery pieces, 200 light and heavy machine guns, and 4,552 rifles.¹⁰ In addition, the defense boasted 14 120mm coast artillery guns, 12 heavy antiaircraft guns, and 30 25mm dual-mount antiaircraft guns.¹¹

The loss of the Marianas during the summer of 1944 greatly increased the importance of the Volcano-Bonins for the Japanese, who were fully cognizant

⁸ *Japanese Defense Agency Comment.*

⁹ To the Japanese, this first of two airstrips on Iwo Jima to be completed prior to the American invasion was known alternately as Chidori Airfield or Motoyama Airfield No. 1. A second airfield, located about 2,000 yards northeast of the first one, in the very center of the island, was known to the Japanese as Motoyama No. 2. A third airfield north of the village of Motoyama was still under construction at the time of the American landings.

¹⁰ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 9652, "A Report from the Chief of Staff of the Thirty-First Army to the Chief of Staff, Central Pacific Fleet," dtd 31May44.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

that the loss of these islands would facilitate American air raids against the home islands. Such raids, beyond any doubt, would raise havoc with the entire Japanese war production program, and deal a severe blow to civilian morale. Final Japanese plans for the defense of the Volcano-Bonins were overshadowed by the fact that the *Imperial Navy* had already lost most of its naval strength and no longer constituted a major factor in frustrating possible American landings. Moreover, aircraft losses throughout 1944 had been so heavy that, even if war production was not materially slowed by American air attacks, combined Japanese air strength was not expected to increase to 3,000 aircraft until March or April of 1945. Even then, these planes could not be used from bases in the home islands against Iwo Jima because their range did not exceed 550 miles; besides, all available aircraft had to be hoarded for possible use on Formosa and adjacent islands where land bases were available in close proximity.¹²

In a postwar study, Japanese staff officers described the strategy applied in the defense of Iwo Jima in the following terms:

In the light of the above situation, seeing that it was impossible to conduct our air, sea, and ground operations on Iwo Island toward ultimate victory, it was decided that in order to gain time necessary for the preparation of the Homeland defense, our forces should rely solely upon the established defensive equipment in that area, checking the enemy by delaying

tactics. Even the suicidal attacks by small groups of our Army and Navy airplanes, the surprise attacks by our submarines, and the actions of parachute units, although effective, could be regarded only as a strategical ruse on our part. It was a most depressing thought that we had no available means left for the exploitation of the strategical opportunities which might from time to time occur in the course of these operations.¹³

Even before the fall of Saipan in June 1944, Japanese planners knew that Iwo Jima would have to be reinforced materially if it were to be held for any length of time, and preparations were made to send sizable numbers of men and quantities of materiel to that island. In late May, Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi was summoned to the office of the Prime Minister, General Hideki Tojo, who informed the general that he had been chosen to defend Iwo Jima to the last. Kuribayashi was further apprised of the importance of this assignment when Tojo pointed out that the eyes of the entire nation were focused on the defense of Iwo. Fully aware of the implications of the task entrusted to him, the general accepted. By 8 June, Kuribayashi was on his way to his toughest and final assignment, determined to convert Iwo Jima into an invincible fortress that would withstand any type of attack from any quarter.

The Japanese could hardly have selected an individual better qualified to lead the defense of Iwo Jima. As a member of a *Samurai* family, the 54-year-old Kuribayashi already had a distinguished military career behind him at the time he received the Iwo as-

¹² USA, FEC, HistDiv, "Operations in the Central Pacific"—Japanese Studies in World War II (Japanese Monograph No. 48, OCMH), p. 62.

¹³ *Ibid.*

signment. In the 30 years in which he had served the Empire, the general had seen much of the world. During the late twenties, as a captain, Kuribayashi had spent two years in the United States performing attache duties. In the course of his travels in America, he gained a keen appreciation of American economic power, as expressed in a letter to his wife:

The United States is the last country in the world that Japan should fight. Its industrial potentiality is huge and fabulous, and the people are energetic and versatile. One must never underestimate the American's fighting ability.¹⁴

Following his travels in the New World, Kuribayashi served in the Japanese cavalry. In August 1936, as a lieutenant colonel, he commanded a cavalry regiment. For the next two years, by then a colonel, he served in the Ministry of War. In 1940, he was promoted to brigadier general and given command of a cavalry brigade. Following the Pearl Harbor attack, he participated in the occupation of Hong Kong as chief of staff of the *Twenty-Third Army*. In 1943, General Kuribayashi, by then a major general, was recalled to Tokyo, where he commanded the *Imperial Guards* until his appointment as commander of the Iwo Jima Garrison.¹⁵

General Kuribayashi arrived on Iwo Jima between 8 and 10 June. As a result, he was on the island when TG 58.1 and TG 58.4, consisting of seven

aircraft carriers under the command of Rear Admiral Joseph J. Clark, unleashed their first strike against the Bonins, which resulted in the destruction of 10 Japanese fighters in the air and a possible 70 planes on the ground in two days of operations. In addition, 21 seaplanes were destroyed on Chichi Jima. On 24 June 1944, the American carriers under Admiral Clark again struck at Iwo. This time, 80 Japanese fighters rose to challenge the intruders. When the smoke of battle over Iwo cleared nearly half of the Japanese fighters had been destroyed. One of the Japanese fighter pilots who survived the fierce dogfights over Iwo Jima that day commented:

The loss of forty planes and pilots in a single action staggered me. Equally disturbing was the sight of our inexperienced pilots falling in flames, one after the other, as the Hellcats blasted our outmoded Zeros from the Sky. How much like Lae the battle had been! Except that now the obsolescent planes were Zeros, and the inexperienced pilots were Japanese. The war had run full circle.¹⁶

The loss of the 40 sorely needed fighters on 24 June was not the only disaster that befell Rear Admiral Teiichi Matsunaga, commanding the Japanese naval forces on Iwo. Not one of 20 torpedo bombers he sent out against the American carriers returned to the island. A third wave of 41 aircraft dispatched against the task force not only failed to inflict any damage on the carriers, but in the process nearly half of the Japanese planes were shot out of the sky.

On the evening of 2 July, Japanese radio monitors on Iwo Jima noted a sudden increase in their adversary's

¹⁴ Tadamichi Kuribayashi ltr to Yoshii Kuribayashi, as cited in Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵ For a detailed breakdown of General Kuribayashi's military assignments, see *Japanese Defense Agency Comment*; Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*.

¹⁶ Sakai, Caidin, and Saito, *Samurai!*, p. 213.

radio traffic. Though the Japanese were unable to decipher the code, the strength of the signals indicated to experienced monitors that an American force was in fairly close proximity to Iwo Jima. Early the following morning, American carrier-based aircraft once again raided the island. While the 40 Japanese fighters remaining on Iwo took to the air to intercept the attacking American planes and soon became engaged in heavy dogfights, a squadron of bombers pounced on the island and bombed the airstrip in five waves. Not a single fighter opposed them, since all of the Zeros had been diverted by the American fighters. At the end of the day it became apparent that once again the Japanese had lost half of their remaining fighters, which left only 20 of the original 80. The air battle over Iwo continued on 4 July. At the end of the day, only nine Zeros, most of them badly damaged, returned to Iwo. This left Japanese aviation on the island with nine damaged fighters and eight torpedo bombers which had somehow escaped the holocaust in their revetments.

On the following day, this remnant of Japanese naval aviation on Iwo was dispatched on a final mission: to seek out the American naval task force and destroy as many carriers as possible. The fighter pilots were admonished to stay with the eight torpedo bombers and avoid combat with intercepting American fighters at all costs. It was made clear to both fighter and bomber pilots that they were engaged in a one-way mission from which they were not expected to return. When the attack force approached Admiral Clark's carriers it

proved no match for the intercepting fighters. The slow, sluggish Japanese bombers, heavily loaded with their torpedoes, were shot down one after the other by the attacking Hellcats. One of the few Japanese pilots to survive this action reported that in less than a minute seven of the bombers had been destroyed by American fighters. Late on 5 July, four dispirited Japanese fighter pilots and one bomber pilot returned to Iwo.

In addition to the annihilation of virtually all Iwo-based aircraft, another ordeal was in store for the Japanese garrison. On the day following the unsuccessful bombing mission, a U. S. naval force boldly appeared within sight of the island and subjected the Japanese to a naval bombardment from point-blank range. What it felt like to be on the receiving end of such a bombardment has been recorded by one of the Japanese:

For two days we cowered like rats, trying to dig ourselves deeper into the acrid volcanic dust and ash of Iwo Jima. Never have I felt so helpless, so puny, as I did during those two days. There was nothing we could do, there was no way in which we could strike back. The men screamed and cursed and shouted, they shook their fists and swore revenge, and too many of them fell to the ground, their threats choking on the blood which bubbled through great gashes in their throats. Virtually every last structure on Iwo Jima was torn to splintered wreckage. Not a building stood. Not a tent escaped. Not even the most dismal shack remained standing. Everything was blown to bits. The four fighter planes which had returned from our last sortie were smashed by shells into flaming pieces of junk.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

For several days the survivors of the bombardment remained in a state of shock from their ordeal and frantic calls for reinforcements went out in view of what appeared to be an imminent invasion of the island. When several Japanese transport ships appeared on the horizon, the garrison rejoiced, only to fall into deeper gloom and frustration when American submarines torpedoed these ships before their very eyes. Lookouts posted atop Mount Suribachi scanned the ocean for signs of the approaching invasion fleet, and false alarms were frequent.

Much to the surprise of the Japanese garrison on Iwo, an American invasion of the island did not materialize during the summer of 1944. There was little doubt that in time the Americans would be compelled to attack the island. General Kuribayashi, who had personally witnessed Admiral Clark's second air strike against Iwo, as well as the naval bombardment in early July, was more determined than ever to exact the heaviest possible price for Iwo when the invaders came. Without naval and air support, it was a foregone conclusion that Iwo could not hold out indefinitely against an invader possessing both naval and air supremacy.

As a first step in readying Iwo for a prolonged defense, the island commander ordered the evacuation of all civilians from the island. This was accomplished by late July. Next came an overall plan for defense of the island. Lieutenant General Hideyoshi Obata, Commanding General of the *Thirty-First Army*, early in 1944 had been responsible for the defense of Iwo prior to his return to the Marianas. At the

time, faithful to the doctrine that an invasion had to be met practically at the water's edge, Obata had ordered the emplacement of artillery and the construction of pillboxes near the beaches. General Kuribayashi had different ideas. Instead of a futile effort to hold the beaches, he planned to defend the latter with a sprinkling of automatic weapons and infantry. Artillery, mortars, and rockets would be emplaced on the foot and slopes of Mount Suribachi, as well as in the high ground to the north of Chidori airfield.

A prolonged defense of the island required the preparation of an extensive system of caves and tunnels, for the naval bombardment had clearly shown that surface installations could not withstand extensive shelling. To this end, mining engineers were dispatched from Japan to draw blueprints for projected underground fortifications that would consist of elaborate tunnels at varying levels to assure good ventilation and minimize the effect of bombs or shells exploding near the entrances or exits.

At the same time, reinforcements were gradually beginning to reach the island. As commander of the *109th Infantry Division*, General Kuribayashi decided first of all to shift the *2d Independent Mixed Brigade*, consisting of about 5,000 men under Major General Kotau Osuga, from Chichi to Iwo. With the fall of Saipan, 2,700 men of the *145th Infantry Regiment*, commanded by Colonel Masuo Ikeda, were diverted to Iwo. These reinforcements, who reached the island during July and August 1944, brought the strength of the garrison up to approximately 12,700

men. Next came 1,233 members of the *204th Naval Construction Battalion*, who quickly set to work constructing concrete pillboxes and other fortifications.

On 10 August, Rear Admiral Toshinosuka Ichimaru reached Iwo, shortly followed by 2,216 naval personnel, including naval aviators and ground crews.¹⁸ The admiral, a renowned Japanese aviator, had been crippled in an airplane crash in the mid-twenties and, ever since the outbreak of the war, had chafed under repeated rear echelon assignments. More than pleased with finally having been granted a combat assignment, Ichimaru penned a poem which began:

Grateful to his Majesty for giving me
A chance to fight on the foremost front,
I depart with buoyant heart,
Filled with joy and exultation.¹⁹

Next to arrive on Iwo were artillery units and five antitank battalions. Even though numerous supply ships on route to Iwo Jima were sunk by American submarines and aircraft, substantial quantities of materiel did reach Iwo during the summer and autumn of 1944. By the end of the year, General Kuriyayashi had available to him 361 artillery pieces of 75mm or larger caliber, a dozen 320mm mortars, 65 medium (150mm) and light (81mm) mortars, 33 naval guns 80mm or larger, and 94 anti-aircraft guns 75mm or larger. In addition to this formidable array of large caliber guns, the Iwo defenses could boast of more than 200 20mm and

25mm anti-aircraft guns and 69 37mm and 47mm antitank guns. The fire power of the artillery was further supplemented with a variety of rockets varying from an eight-inch type that weighed 200 pounds and could travel between 2,000–3,000 yards, to a giant 550-pound projectile that had a range of more than 7,500 yards.²⁰ Altogether, 70 rocket guns and their crews reached Iwo Jima. As a result of American attacks against Japanese shipping, a number of artillery pieces were lost. Others reached Iwo, but their crews, travelling on other ships, drowned en route. In several instances, guns and crews arrived intact, only to discover that vital optical sights, shipped on other vessels, had been lost. Large shipments of barbed wire, essential for the defense of Iwo, never reached the island; the ships carrying this vital commodity were sunk en route.

In order to further strengthen the Iwo defenses, the *26th Tank Regiment*, which had been stationed at Pusan, Korea after extended service in Manchuria, received orders for Iwo. The officer commanding this regiment was Lieutenant Colonel Baron Takeichi Nishi. Like Kuriyayashi, he was a cavalryman, had travelled extensively abroad, and in the 1932 Olympics at Los Angeles had won a gold medal in the equestrian competitions. The regiment, consisting of 600 men and 28 tanks, sailed from Japan in mid-July on board

¹⁸ For a breakdown of Japanese naval units on Iwo Jima, see *Japanese Defense Agency Comment*.

¹⁹ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 14.

²⁰ Information on the Japanese artillery buildup on Iwo Jima was compiled from data contained in CinCPac-CinCPOA Bul 152-45, dtd 1Jul45, pp. 38, 76, 80, 84; CinCPac-CPOA Bul No. 6-45, Supplmt 4, dtd 4Jun45; VAC IntelRpt, Iwo Jima, p. 18.

the *Nisshu Maru*. As the ship, sailing in a convoy, approached Chichi Jima on 18 July 1944, it was torpedoed by an American submarine, the USS *Cobia*. Even though only two members of the 26th Tank Regiment failed to survive the sinking, all of the regiment's 28 tanks went to the bottom of the sea. It would be December before these tanks could be replaced, but 22 finally reached Iwo Jima. Initially, Colonel Nishi had planned to employ his armor as a type of "roving fire brigade," to be committed at focal points of combat. The rugged terrain precluded such employment and in the end, under the colonel's watchful eyes, the tanks were deployed in static positions. They were either buried or their turrets were dismounted and so skillfully emplaced in the rocky ground that they were practically invisible from the air or from the ground.

For the remainder of 1944, the construction of fortifications on Iwo also went into high gear. The Japanese were quick to discover that the black volcanic ash that existed in abundance all over the island could be converted into concrete of superior quality when mixed with cement. Pillboxes near the beaches north of Mount Suribachi were constructed of reinforced concrete, many of them with walls four feet thick. At the same time, an elaborate system of caves, concrete blockhouses, and pillboxes was established. One of the results of American air attacks and naval bombardment in the early summer of 1944 had been to drive the Japanese so deep underground that eventually their defenses became virtually immune to air or naval bombardment.

While the Japanese on Peleliu Island

in the Western Carolines, also awaiting American invasion, had turned the improvement of natural caves into an art, the defenders of Iwo literally developed it into a science. Because of the importance of the underground positions, 25 percent of the garrison was detailed to tunneling. Positions constructed underground ranged in size from small caves for a few men to several underground chambers capable of holding 300 or 400 men. In order to prevent personnel from becoming trapped in any one excavation, the subterranean installations were provided with multiple entrances and exits, as well as stairways and interconnecting passageways. Special attention had to be paid to providing adequate ventilation, since sulphur fumes were present in many of the underground installations. Fortunately for the Japanese, most of the volcanic stone on Iwo was so soft that it could be cut with hand tools.

General Kuribayashi established his command post in the northern part of the island, about 500 yards northeast of Kita village and south of Kitano Point. This installation, 75 feet underground, consisted of caves of varying sizes, connected by 500 feet of tunnels. Here the island commander had his own war-room in one of three small concrete-enclosed chambers; the two similar rooms were used by the staff. A communications blockhouse protruded above the ground level. This structure was 150 feet long, 70 feet wide; the roof had a thickness of 10 feet with walls five feet wide. The blockhouse was manned by 70 radio operators who worked in shifts.

Farther south on Hill 382, the second

highest elevation on the island, the Japanese constructed a radio and weather station. Nearby, on an elevation just southeast of the station, an enormously large blockhouse was constructed which served as the headquarters of Colonel Chosaku Kaido, who commanded all artillery on Iwo Jima. Other hills in the northern portion of the island were tunnelled out. All of these major excavations featured multiple entrances and exits and were virtually invulnerable to damage from artillery or aerial bombardment. Typical of the thoroughness employed in the construction of subterranean defenses was the main communications center south of Kita village, which was so spacious that it contained a chamber 150 feet long and 70 feet wide. This giant structure was similar in construction and thickness of walls and ceilings to General Kuribayashi's command post. A 500-foot-long tunnel 75 feet below the ground led into this vast subterranean chamber.²¹

Perhaps the most ambitious construction project to get under way was the creation of an underground passageway designed to link all major defense installations on the island. As projected, this passageway was to have attained a total length of almost 17 miles. Had it been completed, it would have linked the formidable underground installations in the northern portion of Iwo Jima with the southern part of the island, where the northern slope of Mount Suribachi alone harbored several thousand yards of tunnels.²² By the time the

Marines landed on Iwo Jima, more than 11 miles of tunnels had been completed.²³

A supreme effort was required of the Japanese personnel engaged in the underground construction work. Aside from the heavy physical labor, the men were exposed to heat varying from 90 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, as well as sulphur fumes that forced them to wear gas masks. In numerous instances a work detail had to be relieved after only five minutes. When renewed American air attacks struck the island on 8 December 1944 and thereafter became a daily occurrence until the actual invasion of the island, a large number of men had to be diverted to repairing the damaged airfields.

While Iwo Jima was being converted into a major fortress with all possible speed, General Kuribayashi formulated his final plans for the defense of the island. This plan, which constituted a radical departure from the defensive tactics used by the Japanese earlier in the war, provided for the following major points:

a. In order to prevent disclosing their positions to the Americans, Japanese artillery was to remain silent during the expected prelanding bombardment. No fire would be directed against the American naval vessels.

b. Upon landing on Iwo Jima, the Americans were not to encounter any opposition on the beaches.

c. Once the Americans had advanced about 500 yards inland, they were to be taken under the concentrated fire of automatic weapons stationed in the vicinity of Motoyama airfield to the north,

²¹ POW Interrogation Rpt, Iwo Jima, 3d MarDiv G-2 Language Sec, dtd 2Mar45.

²² VAC C-2 Rpt, Encl H.

²³ Japanese Defense Agency Comment.

as well as automatic weapons and artillery emplaced both on the high ground to the north of the landing beaches and Mount Suribachi to the south.

d. After inflicting maximum possible casualties and damage on the landing force, the artillery was to displace northward from the high ground near the Chidori airfield.

In this connection, Kuribayashi stressed once again that he planned to conduct an elastic defense designed to wear down the invasion force. Such prolonged resistance naturally required the defending force to stockpile rations and ammunition. To this end the island commander accumulated a food reserve to last for two and a half months, ever mindful of the fact that the trickle of supplies that was reaching Iwo Jima during the latter part of 1944 would cease altogether once the island was surrounded by a hostile naval force.

Opposition to General Kuribayashi's unorthodox defense plan, which reflected changes in earlier Japanese military doctrine, was not long in developing. It must be noted that the defensive form of combat in itself was distasteful to the Japanese, who early in the war had been loath to admit to themselves that the *Imperial Army* would ever be forced to engage in this form of combat. In fact, "so pronounced was their dislike for the defensive that tactical problems illustrating this type of combat were extremely rare."²⁴ According to standard Japanese doctrine, the object of the defensive was to inflict on the superior hostile forces such losses by

firepower—disposed appropriately on the terrain and behind man-made works—that the initial disparity of forces became equalized to the point of eventually permitting the defense force to go over to the offensive.

As far as the objective in defending Iwo Jima was concerned, General Kuribayashi's plan adhered closely to the prevalent doctrine. It was the manner of execution that aroused the displeasure of some of his subordinates, for during the period following the American capture of Guadalcanal and up until the end of the fighting on Saipan, it had become almost standard procedure for the Japanese to defend the beaches in an attempt to drive the invader back into the sea. Once the position of the defending force on an island had become untenable, a brave *banzai* charge, in which the defenders sought victory in death, usually terminated all organized resistance. Kuribayashi's intent of conserving his manpower and not staking all on a defense of the beaches or futile *banzai* charges was the epitome of the revised Japanese doctrine, already employed at Biak in the Southwest Pacific, to some extent in the Palaus, and very extensively on Luzon in the Philippines.

The most vociferous opposition to General Kuribayashi's plan of defense, strangely enough, came from his own chief of staff, Colonel Shizuichi Hori, a former instructor at the Japanese Military Academy. The latter was strongly supported by General Osuga, commander of the *2d Independent Mixed Brigade*. In an unusual display of solidarity between Army and Navy, Captain Samaji Inouye, commanding the *Naval Guard Force*, sided with the two

²⁴ MilIntelDiv, WD, Handbook on Japanese Military Forces, TM-E 30-480 (Washington, 1944), p. 99.

Army dissidents. According to one source who was stationed on Iwo during the summer of 1944:

Arguments raged in July, August, and September. Arguments were not confined to Iwo command alone, but taken to Tokyo's Army and Navy staffs. In August Tokyo asked Nazi German General Staff's opinion. Germany replied that waterfront repulse was unfeasible under overwhelming American shelling and bombings according to German experience. It was not that German reply was the decisive factor. But anyway, supporters of the waterfront idea gradually dwindled. Kuribayashi made some compromise and the hot arguments ended in September.²⁵

Finally, in December 1944, General Kuribayashi decided to restore unity to his command. He dismissed Colonel Hori as chief of staff of the *109th Division* and replaced him with Colonel Tadashi Takaishi. General Osuga, commander of the *2d Independent Brigade*, was succeeded by Major General Sadasue Senda, an experienced artilleryman who had seen combat in Manchuria and China. Altogether, a total of 18 officers were replaced.

During the final months of preparing Iwo Jima for the defense, General Kuribayashi saw to it that the strenuous work of building fortifications did not interfere with the training of units. As an initial step towards obtaining more time for training, he ordered work on the northernmost airfield on the island halted. In an operations order issued in early December, the island commander set 11 February 1945 as the target date for completion of defensive prepara-

tions and specified that personnel were to spend 70 percent of their time in training and 30 percent in construction work.

Despite intermittent harassment by American submarines and aircraft, additional personnel continued to arrive on Iwo until February 1945. By that time General Kuribayashi had under his command a force totalling between 21,000 and 23,000 men, including both Army and Navy units.²⁶

General Kuribayashi made several changes in his basic defense plan in the months preceding the American invasion of Iwo Jima. The final stratagem, which became effective in January 1945, called for the creation of strong, mutually supporting positions which were to be defended to the death. Neither large scale counterattacks, withdrawals, nor *banzai* charges were contemplated. The southern portion of Iwo in the proximity of Mount Suribachi was organized into a semi-independent defense sector. Fortifications included casemated coast artillery and automatic weapons in mutually supporting pillboxes. The narrow isthmus to the north of Suribachi was to be defended by a small infantry force. On the other hand,

²⁵ Available sources disagree as to the exact strength of the Iwo Jima garrison. Bartley, in *Iwo Monograph*, App VI, pp. 230-231, places Japanese strength on 19Feb45 at 20,530-21,060. Morehouse, in *Iwo Jima Campaign*, App C, p. 159C, estimates enemy strength at 21,000-22,000. A Japanese postwar report that mentions a figure of 17,500 Army and 5,500 Navy personnel is cited in Hayashi and Coox, *Kogun*, p. 137. Japanese postwar sources place the total of Japanese troops on Iwo Jima at 20,933, consisting of 13,586 Army and 7,347 Navy. *Japanese Defense Agency Comment*.

²⁶ Interview of Capt Tsunezo Wachi, IJN, Former CO, Iwo Navy Garrison, from Feb-Oct44, by Fred Saito, 25Jan64, in Saito ltr to Richard F. Newcomb, 25Jan64, p. 5, in *Newcomb Notes*.

this entire area was exposed to the fire of artillery, rocket launchers, and mortars emplaced on Suribachi to the south and the high ground to the north.

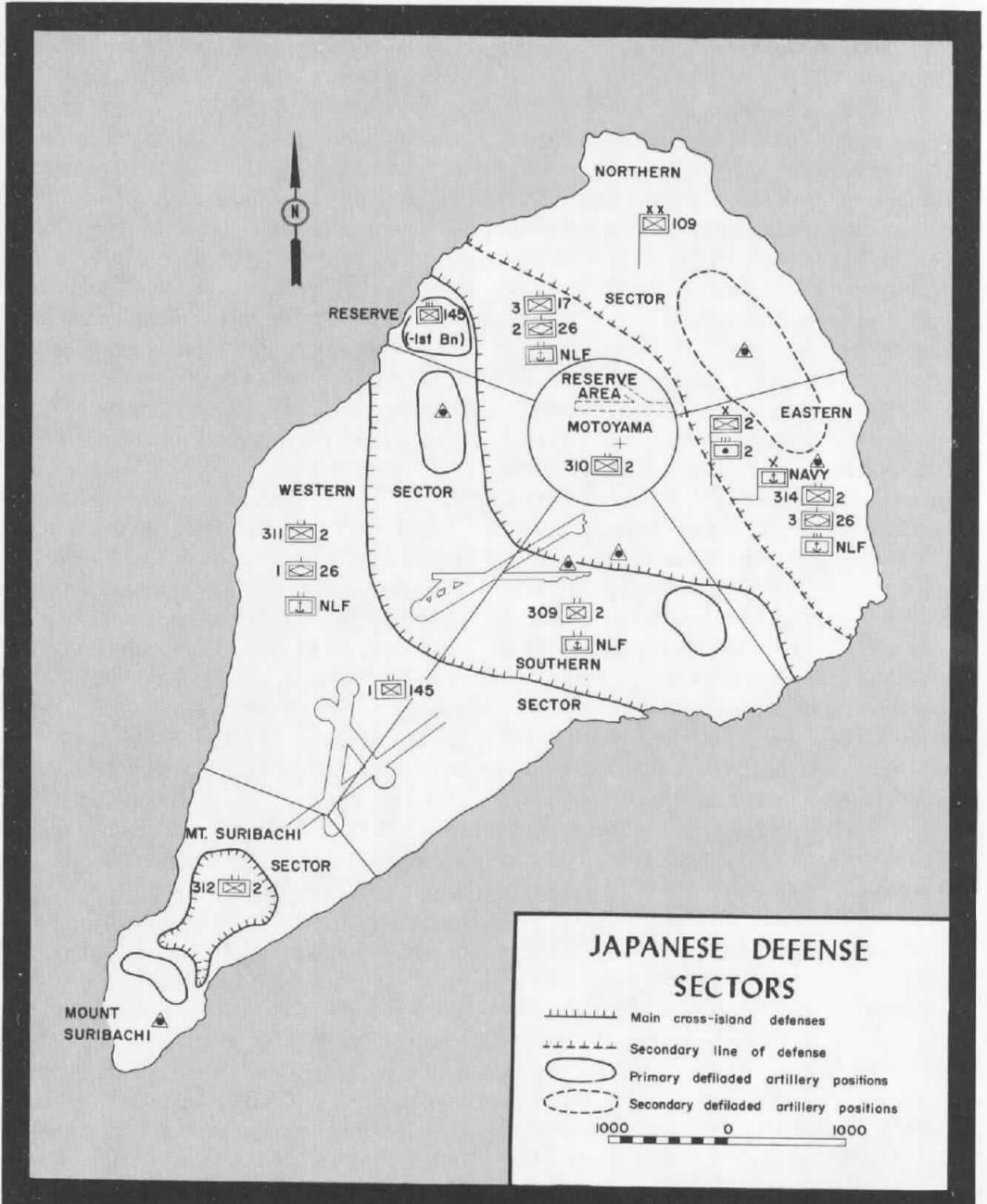
A main line of defense, consisting of mutually supporting positions in depth, extended from the northwestern part of the island to the southeast, along a general line from the cliffs to the northwest, across Motoyama Airfield No. 2 to Minami village. From there it continued eastward to the shoreline just south of Tachiiwa Point. (See Map 25). The entire line of defense was dotted with pillboxes, bunkers, and blockhouses. Colonel Nishi's immobilized tanks, carefully dug in and camouflaged, further reinforced this fortified area, whose strength was supplemented by the broken terrain. A second line of defense extended from a few hundred yards south of Kitano Point at the very northern tip of Iwo across the still uncompleted Airfield No. 3, to Motoyama village, and then to the area between Tachiiwa Point and the East Boat Basin. This second line contained fewer man-made fortifications, but the Japanese took maximum advantage of natural caves and other terrain features.

As an additional means of protecting the two completed airfields on Iwo from direct assault, the Japanese constructed a number of antitank ditches near the fields and mined all natural routes of approach. When, on 2 January, more than a dozen B-24 bombers raided Airfield No. 1 and inflicted heavy damage, Kuribayashi diverted more than 600 men, 11 trucks, and 2 bulldozers for immediate repairs. As a result, the airfield again became operational after only 12 hours. Eventually, 2,000 men were

assigned the job of filling the bomb craters with as many as 50 men detailed to each bomb crater. The end of 1944 saw American B-24 bombers over Iwo Jima almost every night while U.S. Navy carriers and cruisers frequently sortied into the Bonins. On 8 December, American aircraft dropped more than 800 tons of bombs on Iwo Jima, which shook the Japanese up but did very little real damage to the island defenses. Even though frequent air raids interfered with the Japanese defensive preparations and robbed the garrison of much badly needed sleep, progress of the work was not materially slowed.

Despite the air raids, which became a daily occurrence in December, and increasing isolation from the homeland, morale remained high among members of the Iwo garrison. Japanese national holidays, such as the birthday of Emperor Meiji on 11 February, were celebrated with rice cake and an extra ration of *sake*. At the same time, the Iwo Jima defenders, gathered in small groups near their battle stations, listened to a Tokyo broadcast in which a song, especially dedicated to the defense of Iwo, was released to the public. Many of the men wore white headbands, similar to the ones worn by *kamikaze* pilots, to demonstrate their determination to die in defense of the island. Inside the pillboxes, for all to see and burn into their minds, were copies of the "Courageous Battle Vow," which pledged all to dedicate themselves to the defense of Iwo, and to fight to the last with any and all weapons at hand. The pledge appropriately ended with the following words:

Each man will make it his duty to kill



Map 25

E.L. Wilson

ten of the enemy before dying. Until we are destroyed to the last man, we shall harass the enemy by guerrilla tactics.²⁷

As early as 5 January 1945, Admiral Ichimaru conducted a briefing of naval personnel at his command post in which he informed them of the destruction of the Japanese Fleet at Leyte, loss of the Philippines, and the expectation that Iwo would shortly be invaded. Exactly

one month later, Japanese radio operators on Iwo reported to the island commander that code signals of American aircraft had undergone an ominous change. On the 13th, a Japanese naval patrol plane spotted 170 American ships moving northwestward from Saipan. All Japanese troops in the Bonin Islands were alerted and occupied their battle positions. On Iwo Jima, preparations for the pending battle had been completed, and the defenders were ready.

²⁷ 4th MarDiv Translations, Iwo Jima, 24-Feb45.

Offensive Plans and Preparations¹

Preliminary planning for the seizure of an objective in the Volcano-Bonin Islands began as early as September 1943, when the Joint War Plans Committee, a planning agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advocated such a move.² However, because of impending military operations in the Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas no further preparation for any operations against the Bonins were made until the summer of 1944. The successful completion of the Saipan

operation in July brought the continuation of operations in the Central Pacific into sharper focus. In a conference held in Washington by top echelon U. S. military leaders from 13-22 July 1944, the senior members of the Joint War Plans Committee presented to the Joint Chiefs the possible courses of action in continuing the war against Japan. Plans for the bombing of the Japanese home islands figured prominently in these discussions. In this connection, the use of the Marianas as a base for long-range bombers was again discussed, as well as the need for seizing the Bonins to facilitate such air operations.³

In the course of a visit to Hawaii in mid-July 1944, Admiral Ernest J. King discussed with Admiral Chester W. Nimitz some of the decisions which the Joint Chiefs had reached. He apprised Nimitz of the fact that the Army Air Forces had been ordered to set up four B-29 groups in the Marianas for long-range bombing. In time, 12 groups of B-29s were to be based in the Marianas. In this connection, King brought up the desirability of establishing bases in the Bonins to furnish fighter escorts for the B-29s. With oper-

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: USPacFlt OpO 1-45, dtd 10Jan45; Fifth Flt OPlan No. 13-44, dtd 31Dec44; ComPhibPac OPlan A25-44, dtd 8Dec44; CinCPOA OPlan 11-44, dtd 25Nov44; VAC OPlan 3-44, dtd 23Dec44; TF 51 OPlan A25-44, dtd 27Dec44; TF 52 OPlan A101-45, dtd 1Jan45; VAC AR, Iwo Jima, Anx A, OPlan (Alt) 4-44, dtd 31Dec44, and OPlans and Orders, 20Feb-22Mar45; 4th MarDiv OPlan 49-44, Iwo Jima, dtd 26Dec44; 4th MarDiv OPlan 50-44, Iwo Jima, dtd 4Jan45; 5th MarDiv OPlan 2-44, Iwo Jima, dtd 31-Dec44; 3d MarDiv OPlan 1-45, Iwo Jima, dtd 22Jan45; *Iwo Comments*; Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*; Robert A. Aurthur and Kenneth Cohlma, *The Third Marine Division* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), hereafter Aurthur and Cohlma, *The Third Marine Division*; Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*; Howard M. Conner, *The Spearhead—The World War II History of the Fifth Marine Division* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1950), hereafter Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*.

² JWPC 91/D, dtd 13Sep43, "Seizure of the Bonins," in Bartley, *Iwo Monograph*, p. 19.

³ Early planners for operations against Iwo Jima and Chichi Jima referred to these islands as being part of the Bonin Islands even though they are actually located in the Volcano Group.

ations in the Carolines and the Philippines scheduled within the next few months, both naval commanders felt that no forces should be diverted to the Bonins at this time. Nevertheless, King instructed Nimitz to prepare plans for an assault against the Bonins, although he considered such an operation unwise unless it was shortly followed by an invasion of Japan.

Planning for an amphibious assault against the Bonins was inextricably interwoven with the development of the B-29 long-range bomber of the U. S. Army Air Forces, and for this reason an explanation of the development and characteristics of this aircraft appear warranted. The B-29 had its origin in 1939, when General H. H. Arnold, then Chief of the Army Air Corps, ordered the experimental development of a four-engine bomber with a range of 2,000 miles. As eventually developed, the B-29 or "Superfortress" had a wing span of slightly more than 141 feet, a length of 99 feet, and four Wright engines with turbo-superchargers developing 2,200 horsepower each at sea level. The giant bomber was armed with a dozen .50 caliber machine guns and a 20mm cannon mounted in the tail. The B-29 had a service ceiling of 38,000 feet and near that altitude had a maximum speed of 361 miles per hour. Without a load, the aircraft was estimated to have a range of 4,400 miles; it could move 3,500 miles when carrying a bomb load of four tons.⁴

During the latter half of 1944, about 100 B-29s operated from airfields in

China under the Army Air Forces XX Bomber Command. This command, for all practical purposes, constituted an experimental organization, designed to serve as a prototype for similar units to be activated later. Its mission was three-fold: to test the B-29 under combat conditions; to formulate and refine a tactical doctrine; and to perfect the administrative structure to support the B-29 strikes. By mid-October 1944, China-based B-29s had flown a total of 10 missions against a variety of industrial targets ranging from Bangkok in southeast Asia to Manchuria and the home islands.

Meanwhile, the progress of the American offensive in the Central Pacific had resulted in the capture of the Marianas. Preparations got under way for a sustained bomber offensive against the home islands by Marianas-based B-29s. It was anticipated that the first airfield in the Marianas capable of accommodating the big B-29s would be operational by October 1944. In connection with the initiation of very long-range bombing of the Japanese home islands from B-29 bases in the Marianas, the Volcano-Bonin Islands, situated halfway between the Marianas and Tokyo, assumed major strategic importance. As part of this island group, Iwo Jima appeared the logical choice for invasion because it was the only island suitable for the construction of airfields of sufficient size to handle the new Superfortresses. In this connection, it was not intended to use Iwo as a base or staging area for the B-29s, but as a forward air station from which fighters could fly escort missions for the big bombers. At the same time, crippled

⁴ Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, pp. 8-9.

B-29s limping back from raids over Japan would be able to make emergency landings on the island instead of ditching into the Pacific. Even while the battle for Saipan was in full swing, 500 of the giant bombers were ready for combat.

As increasing attention focused on bases in the Marianas, the strategic importance of the B-29 bases in China waned. As early as September 1944, General Arnold had seriously considered transferring the XX Bomber Command to a more profitable site. Japanese gains in China ultimately forced the abandonment of the B-29 bases and transfer of the B-29 combat groups and their supporting units to the Marianas.

In July 1944, the Army Air Forces advised the Joint Staff Planners that Iwo was a potential base for fighter planes, since Tokyo would be within the range of P-51 Mustangs based on Iwo.⁵ On 12 August, the Joint War Plans Committee recommended the seizure of the Volcano-Bonins, listing as major reasons their availability for bases from which fighter cover could be provided to support the air effort against Japan; denial of these strategic outposts to the enemy; furnishing air defense bases for American positions in the Marianas; and providing fields for staging heavy bombers against Japan.⁶

In a study of naval personnel requirements prepared by the Joint Planning Staff in late August 1944, a list of projected operations included an assault

against the Volcano-Bonin Islands with a target date of mid-April 1945. It was estimated that three divisions would be required for these operations.⁷ While planning an invasion of Formosa, Admiral Nimitz also was attracted to the Volcano-Bonin Islands. In September 1944, he informed Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, that the 2d and 3d Marine Divisions should be retained in the Marianas as an area reserve for Formosa. In addition, they were to make up the bulk of the landing force once an attack was mounted against Iwo Jima.

By this time, key service commanders were beset by serious doubts with respect to a major operation against Formosa. Lieutenant General Millard F. Harmon, Commanding General, Army Air Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas, advocated that Formosa be bypassed in favor of the Volcano-Bonins and Ryukyus. His superior, Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson, Jr., Commanding General, Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas, likewise failed to see any advantage in seizing Formosa and expressed himself in favor of advancing through the Nanpo Shoto. Admiral Nimitz felt that the capture of Formosa could serve a useful purpose only if it was a preliminary step towards subsequent landings on a coast of China, where recent Japanese military gains made such a move of questionable value.

Despite an increasing rejection of Formosa as an invasion target by the military leaders concerned, Admiral

⁵ AAF Memo to JPS, dtd 21Jul44, "Fighter Escort for VLR Bombers," in Bartley, *Iwo Monograph*, p. 20.

⁶ JWPC 91/3, dtd 12Aug44, "Plan for the Seizure of the Bonins," as cited in *Ibid.*

⁷ JLC 67/4m "Memorandum of Request, Naval Personnel Requirements," dtd 23Aug44, as cited in *Ibid.*

King, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Fleet, consistently adhered to the projected operation against that island, at least until early October 1944. However, on 11 and 12 July, when Admirals King and Nimitz visited Saipan, King asked Admiral Raymond A. Spruance what objective he would recommend for his next operation. Spruance replied that he would like to take Okinawa.⁸

Admiral Spruance has described his participation in the early planning and the final change of objectives in the following words:

After the completion of the Marianas Operation I turned my command over to Admiral Halsey on 28 August 1944 and returned to Pearl Harbor early in September. On reporting to Admiral Nimitz, he advised me that my next operation would be the capture of Formosa and Amoy. I said that I thought Iwo Jima, followed by Okinawa, would be preferable, but was told that the orders from Cominch called for Formosa.⁹

Following this conversation, Admiral Spruance went on leave. He was about to return to Pearl Harbor during the latter part of September, when he was ordered to attend a conference between Admiral King and Admiral Nimitz which was to be held towards the end of the month at San Francisco. Admiral Spruance recalled the focal points of this meeting as follows:

At this Conference Admiral Nimitz presented a paper—prepared, I believe, by Captain Forrest Sherman, U.S.N., head of Fleet War Plans Division—recommending the substitution of Iwo Jima and Okinawa for Formosa and Amoy. The

reason for this change was that Lt.Gen. S. B. Buckner, U.S.A., Commander 10th Army, who was to command the Landing Force for Formosa, said that he had insufficient Service Troops for an objective so large as Formosa; but that he could take Okinawa. Admiral King, after considerable discussion, was convinced of the necessity for the change and so recommended to the JCS who approved it.¹⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff lost little time in issuing a new directive on 3 October ordering Admiral Nimitz to provide fleet cover and support for General MacArthur's forces in the occupation of Luzon, scheduled for 20 December 1944; to occupy one or more positions in the Nanpo Shoto, with a target date of 20 January 1945; and to occupy one or more positions in the Nansei Shoto by 1 March 1945.¹¹

Subsequently, delays encountered in operations in the Philippines affected planning for the Iwo Jima and Okinawa Operations, which were designated DETACHMENT and ICEBERG, respectively. Target dates had to be readjusted to 19 February for the Iwo operation, and to 1 April for the invasion of Okinawa.

On 7 October Admiral Nimitz and his staff issued a staff study for preliminary planning, which clearly listed the objectives of Operation DETACHMENT. The overriding purpose of the operation was to maintain unremitting military pressure against Japan and to extend American control over the Western Pacific. In American hands, Iwo Jima could be turned into a base from which

⁸ Admiral Raymond A. Spruance ltr to CMC, dtd 5Jan52, in *Iwo Comments*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ JCS 713/19, 30Oct44, "Future Operations in the Pacific," in Bartley, *Iwo Monograph*, p. 22.

we could attack the Japanese home islands, protect our bases in the Marianas, cover our naval forces, conduct search operations of the approaches to the Japanese home islands, and provide fighter escort for very long-range operations. Three tasks specifically envisioned in the study were the reduction of enemy naval and air strength and industrial facilities in the home islands; the destruction of Japanese naval and air strength in the Bonin Islands, and the capture, occupation, and subsequent defense of Iwo Jima, which was to be developed into an air base.

On 9 October, General Holland Smith received the staff study, accompanied by a directive from Admiral Nimitz ordering the seizure of Iwo Jima. This directive designated specific commanders for the operation. Admiral Spruance, Commander, Fifth Fleet, was placed in charge as Operation Commander, Task Force 50. Under Spruance, Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, Commander, Amphibious Forces, Pacific, was to command the Joint Expeditionary Force, Task Force 51. Second in command of the Joint Expeditionary Force was Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill. General Holland Smith was designated Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, Task Force 56.

It was not accidental that these men were selected to command an operation of such vital importance that it has since become known as "the classical amphibious assault of recorded history."¹² All of them had shown their mettle in previous engagements. One

¹² Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 432.

chronicler of the Iwo Jima operation put it in the following words:

The team assigned to Iwo Jima was superb—the very men who had perfected the amphibious techniques from Guadalcanal to Guam. Nearly every problem, it was believed, had been met and mastered along the way, from the jungles of Guadalcanal up through the Solomons, and across the Central Pacific from the bloody reefs of Tarawa to the mountains of the Marianas.¹³

For General Smith, who was 62 years old, the Iwo Jima operation was to be his last. In mid-October 1944, Smith issued a letter of instruction designating Major General Harry Schmidt, Commanding General, V Amphibious Corps, as Commander of the Landing Force, Task Group 56.1. General Schmidt, 58 at the time, was a veteran of nearly 26 years of military service, who had commanded the 4th Marine Division during the invasion of Roi-Namur in the Marshalls and during the Saipan operation in the Marianas. His experienced staff, headed by Colonel William W. Rogers,¹⁴ was responsible for the preparation and execution of all Landing Force plans for the operation. When completed, plans for the execution of the landing had to be submitted by the commander of the landing force to General Smith for the latter's approval. On 20 October 1944, VAC received a directive from FMFPac, assigning troops to the corps for training, planning, and operations. Initially, the

¹³ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 27.

¹⁴ Promoted to brigadier general for duty as corps chief of staff about 1 Mar 1945. MajGen William W. Rogers ltr to HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 26Jun69 in *Iwo Comments*, hereafter *Rogers ltr*.

corps was to be ready in all respects for combat by 15 December.¹⁵

The major units assigned to the Landing Force were the 3d, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions. The 3d Marine Division had already distinguished itself on Bougainville in the Solomons and on Guam in the Marianas. While planning for Operation DETACHMENT was in progress during the late autumn of 1944, the division was still reorganizing on Guam after the heavy fighting for that island and was actively engaged in rounding up or dispatching Japanese that continued to infest the island. At the age of 47, the division commander, Major General Graves B. Erskine, was one of the youngest generals in the Marine Corps with a well-established reputation for toughness. Joining the Marine Corps Reserve in 1917 as a second lieutenant, Erskine had distinguished himself in France during World War I. Following the war, he had seen service in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and China.

At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, he served as Chief of Staff of the Amphibious Corps, Atlantic Fleet. In 1942, he was assigned as Chief of Staff of the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, under Holland Smith, who was then a major general. After taking part in the amphibious training of Army troops for the Kiska and Attu operations in the Aleutians, Erskine became Deputy Corps Commander and Chief of Staff of the V Amphibious Corps when it was organized in 1943. He had an active part in planning the seizure of Tarawa and accompanied the assault forces which

took Kwajalein, Saipan, and Tinian. When the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, was organized after the capture of Saipan, General Erskine became Chief of Staff of that organization. Promoted to the rank of major general in October 1944, he assumed command of the 3d Marine Division at that time.¹⁶

The 4th Marine Division, commanded by Major Clifton B. Cates, also had seen considerable action. During the invasion of Roi-Namur in the Marshalls, it had been the first Marine division to go directly into combat from the United States.¹⁷ In less than a year's time, the division had taken part in three landings. In addition to the Roi-Namur operation, the 4th had also made assault landings on Tinian and Saipan. The forthcoming invasion of Iwo Jima would be the division's fourth landing in less than 13 months.

General Cates had assumed command of the division on 12 July 1944, when General Schmidt became the Commanding General of the V Amphibious Corps. Cates already had a long and distinguished Marine Corps career behind him, having served in France during World War I as a company grade officer. During his 20 months of service with the 6th Marines he had been wounded in action twice and had earned the Navy Cross, in addition to other decorations. At Guadalcanal early in World War II, he had commanded the 1st Marines, one of the two assault regiments that landed on the island.

¹⁵ VAC AR, App 3 to Anx B, GenStaff Sec Rpts, dtd 31Mar45, p. 3.

¹⁶ For further details concerning the operations of the 3d Marine Division and its commanders, see Aurthur and Cohlma, *The Third Marine Division*.

¹⁷ Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*, p. 15.

In contrast to the 3d and 4th Marine Divisions, the 5th Division had not seen combat as a unit prior to the Iwo Jima operation. Organized at Camp Pendleton, California, on 11 November 1943, the division was commanded by Major General Keller E. Rockey. Like his counterparts in the 3d and 4th Marine Divisions, General Rockey had seen combat action at Chateau Thierry in 1918. Even though the 5th Marine Division had no previous combat experience, nearly half of the men comprising the unit had served with other combat units. In speaking of the division after the end of World War II, General Rockey made the following comment:

From its earliest days to the hour of its disbandment, I found the 5th to possess and maintain a high standard of military performance and an esprit exceptionally fine. And when the 5th Division entered combat, it acted from the first hour like a unit of veterans. It fought that first fight with the utmost vigor, courage, and intelligence.¹⁸

At the time that final plans and preparations for Operation DETACHMENT were being made, the 3d Marine Division was still stationed on Guam, following the recent recapture of that island. As commander of VAC, General Schmidt had also located his command post on that island. The 4th Marine Division, upon completion of operations on Saipan and Tinian in the Marianas, had returned to its permanent camp site on Maui in Hawaii. In August 1944, the 5th Marine Division had moved from California to Hawaii, where it underwent final training. The close proximity in which the 4th and 5th Ma-

rine Divisions found themselves in Hawaii during the latter part of 1944 was to have a favorable effect on joint planning between the divisions. When General Schmidt moved VAC headquarters to Pearl Harbor on 13 October, the major planning staffs concerned with Operation DETACHMENT, except for the 3d Marine Division, now were functioning close to each other, a circumstance that resulted in better coordination of efforts.

Of the three divisions scheduled to participate in DETACHMENT, the 3d Marine Division was the only one still actively engaged in military operations during the planning phase for Iwo Jima. Even though Guam had been officially declared secure by 10 August 1944, Marines continued to round up or annihilate stragglers until mid-December. The situation on Guam was not without effect on the planning for Iwo Jima and resulted in one of the changes in the basic operations plan. As General Holland Smith was to reminisce at a later time, with reference to the status of the 3d Marine Division:

It had been proposed to hold the division in reserve, alerted at Guam. On further study, I considered it much sounder for this division to arrive with the other troops in the target area on D-Day, available as a floating reserve. This decision proved sound because we ran into a larger garrison and far stronger defenses than we had anticipated.¹⁹

General Schmidt issued the first blueprint for Operation DETACHMENT on 19 October 1944, to be used as a guide by subordinate commanders. On the following day, General Smith directed him to have the VAC ready for

¹⁸ Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*, Preface.

¹⁹ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 242.

Operation DETACHMENT by 15 December.²⁰

During the two remaining months of 1944, VAC evolved tactical and logistical plans in joint conferences with all commanders concerned. As increasing intelligence became available, alternate plans were drafted and changes were incorporated into the original plan.²¹ All commanders issued tentative drafts of their respective operation plans, and continual adjustments were made to achieve maximum support with the forces available and to organize the most effective assault force possible. Planning remained flexible right up to D-Day, which itself was postponed twice because the naval forces required for the invasion of Iwo Jima were still engaged in the Philippines. As a result, on 18 November D-Day was postponed to 3 February 1945; on 6 December, an additional postponement to 19 February became necessary.²²

When Admiral Spruance assumed command of all forces assigned to the Central Pacific Task Force on 26 January, CinCPOA Plan 11-44 was in full effect. Designated for the beach assault were the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions, less the 26th Marines, which was to be held in Landing Force reserve. For training purposes prior to the operation, the 26th Marines would remain

with the 5th Division. The 3d Marine Division was to stage on Guam and would remain as reserve on board ship in the objective area until D plus 3.

The VAC scheme of maneuver for the landings was relatively simple. The 4th and 5th Marine Divisions were to land abreast on the eastern beaches, the 4th on the right and the 5th on the left. When released to VAC, the 3d Marine Division, as Expeditionary Troops Reserve, was to land over the same beaches to take part in the attack or play a defensive role, whichever was called for. The plan called for a rapid exploitation of the beachhead with an advance in a northeasterly direction to capture the entire island. A regiment of the 5th Marine Division was designated to capture Mount Suribachi in the south.²³

Since there was a possibility of unfavorable surf conditions along the eastern beaches, VAC issued an alternate plan on 8 January 1945, which provided for a landing on the western beaches. However, since predominant northerly or northwesterly winds caused hazardous swells almost continuously along the southwest side of the island, it appeared unlikely that this alternate plan would be put into execution.²⁴

The eastern beaches over which the landings were to be made extended for about 3,500 yards northeastward from Mount Suribachi to the East Boat Basin. (See Map 26). For purposes of organization and control of the invasion force, these beaches were divided into seven

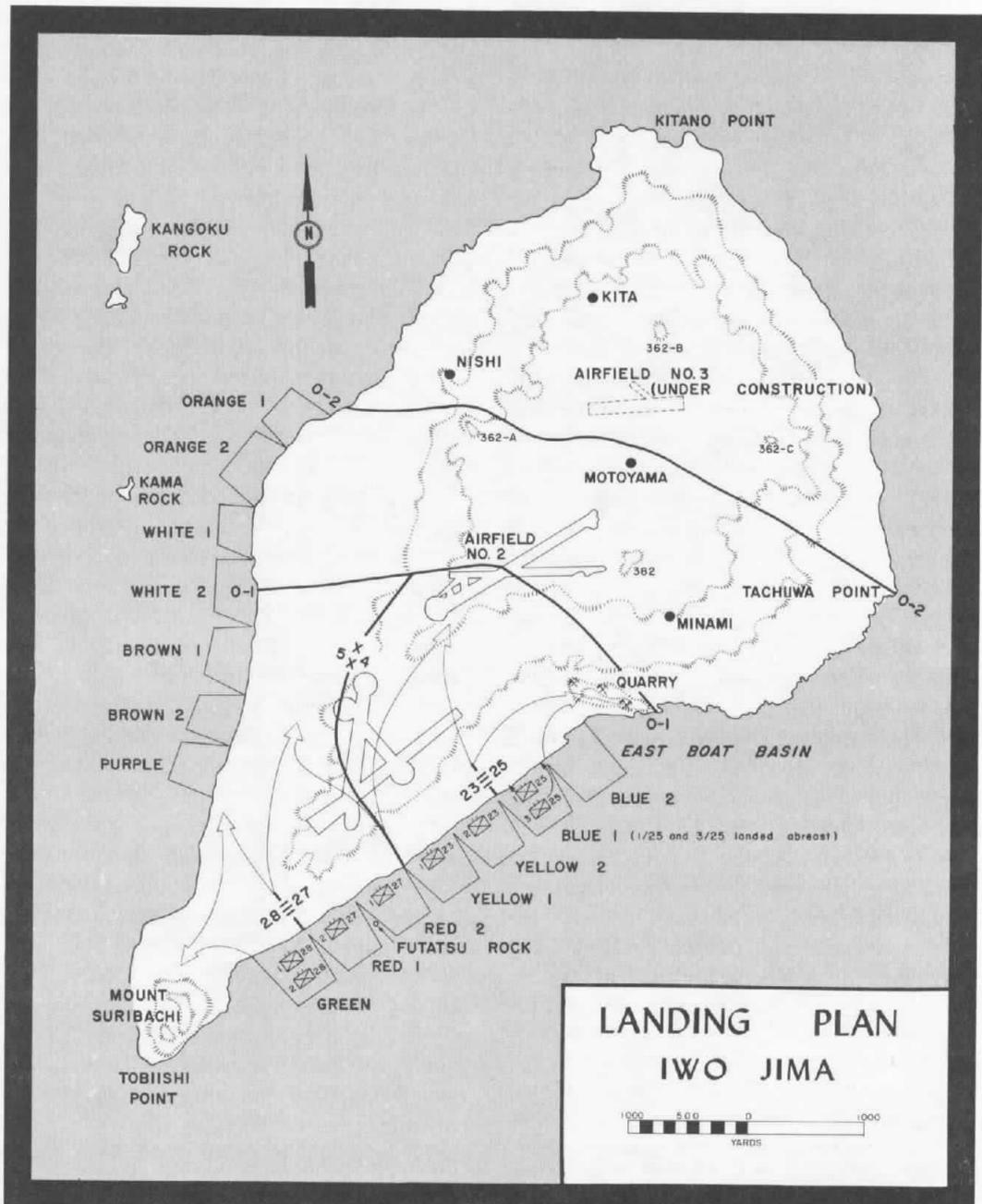
²⁰ For Task Organization of VAC Landing Force, see App G.

²¹ Final drafts for Operation DETACHMENT were published on the following dates: CinCPOA OPlan 11-44, 25Nov44; VAC OPlan no. 3-44, 23Dec44; Joint Exped Force OPlan no. A25-44, 27Dec44; and ComFifthFlt OPlan no. 13-44, 31Dec44.

²² *TF 56 AR*, Encl B, G-3 Rpt, Planning and Ops, Iwo, dtd 27Mar45.

²³ VAC OPlan no. 3-44, dtd 23Dec44, in *TF 56 AR*, Encl A, p. 5.

²⁴ VAC OPlan no. 4-44, dtd 8Jan45, in *TF 56 AR*, Encl A, p. 6.



Map 26

E. L. Wilson

500-yard segments, which, from left to right, were designated as Green, Red 1 and 2, Yellow 1 and 2, and Blue 1 and 2. The 5th Marine Division, landing over Green, Red 1, and Red 2 beaches, was to advance straight across the island, which at this point formed a narrow isthmus, until it reached the west coast. At the same time, it was to hold along the right, while part of the division wheeled to the south to capture Mount Suribachi. The 4th Marine Division had the specific mission of moving into the center of the isthmus, while its right flank swerved to the north to seize Motoyama Plateau, the high ground above the East Boat Basin. Unless this vital ground to the north of the invasion beaches and Mount Suribachi to the south—terrain features which overlooked the beaches and permitted the enemy to fire at the exposed Marines at will—were quickly seized, the landing force could be expected to take very heavy casualties.

Once the southern portion of Iwo Jima had been secured, the two divisions could join in a combined drive to the north. At this time, the 3d Marine Division, initially in Expeditionary Troop Reserve on board ships near the beachhead, could be disembarked and landed to assist in maintaining the momentum of the VAC attack.

The detailed scheme of maneuver for the landings provided for the 28th Marines of the 5th Marine Division, commanded by Colonel Harry B. Liveridge, to land on the extreme left of the corps on Green 1. On the right of the 28th Marines, the 27th, under Colonel Thomas A. Wornham, was to attack towards the west coast of the island,

then wheel northeastward and seize the 0-1 Line. Action by the 27th and 28th Marines was designed to drive the enemy from the commanding heights along the southern portion of Iwo, simultaneously securing the flanks and rear of VAC. As far as the 4th Marine Division was concerned, the 23d Marines, commanded by Colonel Walter W. Wensinger, was to go ashore on Yellow 1 and 2 beaches, seize Motoyama Airfield No. 1, then turn to the northeast and seize that part of Motoyama Airfield No. 2 and the 0-1 Line within its zone of action. After landing on Blue Beach 1, the 25th Marines, under Colonel John R. Lanigan, was to assist in the capture of Airfield No. 1, the capture of Blue Beach 2, and the 0-1 Line within its zone of action.²⁵ The 24th Marines, under Colonel Walter I. Jordan, was to be held in 4th Marine Division reserve during the initial landings. The 26th Marines, led by Colonel Chester B. Graham, was to be released from corps reserve on D-Day and prepared to support the 5th Marine Division.

Division artillery was to go ashore

²⁵ The initial VAC LanFor plan had called for the use of Blue Beach 2 as a landing beach. Because of the proximity of Blue 2 to the commanding high ground on the right, and in order to provide a safety factor while maintaining adequate neutralization fires on this high ground during the landing, the 4th Marine Division had requested that the landing of the 25th Marines be limited to Blue 1. This permission was granted, and the 25th Marines was ordered to land on Blue Beach 1 and seize Blue 2 as quickly as possible to enable succeeding units and supplies to use this beach. *4th MarDiv OpRpt, Iwo Jima, dtd 18May45, Sec. I, p. 2.*

on order from the respective division commanders. The 4th Marine Division was to be supported by the 14th Marines, commanded by Colonel Louis G. DeHaven; Colonel James D. Waller's 13th Marines was to furnish similar support for the 5th Marine Division.

The operation was to be so timed that at H-Hour 68 LVT(A)4s, comprising the first wave, were to hit the beach. These vehicles were to advance inland until they reached the first terrace beyond the high-water mark. The armored amphibians would use their 75mm howitzers and machine guns to the utmost in an attempt to keep the enemy down, thus giving some measure of protection to succeeding waves of Marines who were most vulnerable to enemy fire at the time they debarked from their LVTs. Though early versions of the VAC operations plan had called for tanks of the 4th and 5th Tank Battalions to be landed at H plus 30, subsequent studies of the beaches made it necessary to adopt a more flexible schedule. The possibility of congestion at the water's edge also contributed to this change in plans. In the end, the time for bringing the tanks ashore was left to the discretion of the regimental commanders. Company A of the 5th Tank Battalion attached to the 27th Marines was scheduled to land on the Red Beaches at the prearranged time of H plus 30 minutes.²⁶

In the event that the landings took place on the western beaches of Iwo, the alternate plan made provision for a company of the 24th Marines, reinforced by a platoon of armored amphib-

ians from the 2d Armored Amphibian Battalion, to seize Kangoku Rock, a 600-yard-long island lying about 2,200 feet northwest of Iwo Jima. The island could be used as an artillery site and for this reason a contingency plan was prepared to land the 105mm howitzers of 4/14 there.

INTELLIGENCE PLANNING²⁷

The scheme of maneuver for the Iwo Jima operation, as well as the preliminary planning, was largely based on available intelligence. Enemy documents seized on Saipan during the summer of 1944 gave a fair indication of enemy strength in the Volcano-Bonin Islands. Captured Japanese maps, supplemented by aerial photographs obtained by U.S. Navy carrier pilots during the air strikes of June and July 1944, were utilized in the preparation of situation maps and beach studies. During the planning phase for the operation, pilots of Navy Photographic Squadrons 4 and 5 and the Army Air

²⁷ Additional material in this section is derived from: Amphibious Forces Pacific, Information on Iwo Jima, n.d., hereafter *PhibForPac G-2 Rpt*; Hq, US Army Forces, POA, IntelRpt, n.d.; Nanpo Shoto Info Bulletin No. 122-44, Supplmt 1, dtd 10Oct44; CinCPac-CinCPOA Bulletin No. 9-45, dtd 10Jan45; TF 56 AR, Encl C, Rpt of Intelligence, Iwo Jima, dtd 1Apr45, hereafter *TF 56 G-2 Rpt*; TF 51 AR, Iwo Jima, 27Dec44-26Mar45, hereafter *TF 51 AR*; VAC C-2 Special Study of Enemy Sit, Iwo Jima, dtd 6Jan45, hereafter *VAC G-2 Study*; VAC Rpt on Beaches, Iwo Jima, dtd 30Oct44; VAC Estimate of Enemy Sit and Strength, dtd 7Mar45; VAC G-2 Jnl, 11Jan-24Mar45; 4th MarDiv D-2 Tactical Study, Iwo Jima, dtd 20Jan65, hereafter *4th MarDiv G-2 Study*; 5th MarDiv D-2 Study, Iwo Jima, dtd 16Nov44, hereafter *5thMarDiv G-2 Study*.

²⁶ *5th MarDiv AR*, Sec. VII, p. 10.

Forces 28th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron flew 371 sorties. Liberators of the Seventh Air Force obtained additional photographic coverage of the island in the course of their bombing missions.

Significantly, during the preparatory phase, representatives of the 3d, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions, the Commander, Amphibious Forces, Pacific, and VAC combined their efforts in preparing a Joint Situation Map which was completed on 6 December 1944. Representative officers from Navy and Marine units were ordered to report to Photographic Interpretation Squadron 2, based on Guam, in late January 1945. There, the most recent photographs were available. On the basis of the most current information then available, a final enemy installations map was prepared that was to play a major part in the pre-D-Day naval and aerial strikes, as well as during the actual assault phase.²⁸

Between 29 November and 2 December 1944, the submarine USS *Spearfish* conducted a reconnaissance off Iwo Jima. Approaching as close to the island as he could without being detected, the submarine commander gave a running account of the view that presented itself to his eyes as he watched through his periscope. This commentary was transcribed. So close did the submarine approach the shore of Iwo that at one point the skipper spotted a cave going into the base of Mount Suribachi "with a dejected looking individual sitting right in the entrance sunning him-

self."²⁹ Additional observations included construction work at various parts of the island, an armored car in motion, and various earthworks and blockhouses on different parts of the island. The submarine reconnaissance failed to discover any guns or emplacements on the slopes of Mount Suribachi itself, nor could individual pillboxes be identified, though a number of caves were visible.³⁰

Beach studies indicated that movement over the loose sand would be difficult for wheeled vehicles; tracked vehicles were not expected to bog down. Partially buried gasoline drums, observed at the edge of the water both on the eastern and western beaches, gave rise to considerable speculation. It was thought that these drums might be wired for electrical ignition, so that burning gasoline would run out over the water to check landing craft, or that they would ignite at the moment the amphibious tractors or tanks reached land to raise a wall of fire before them. It was also possible that the drums had been converted into mines, equipped with pull-type detonators, with attached trip wires, which would ignite when either personnel or tanks came into contact with the wire.³¹

In any case, Marines were warned to expect the widespread employment of antitank mines and obstacles, combined with "close quarter attack units" using hand-placed charges. No change in

²⁸ Extracts from CG, VAC Landing Force Rpt, Iwo Jima, 013/124, Ser. 02848, dtd 20May-45, p. 3.

²⁹ USS *Spearfish* ReconRpt, Iwo Jima, 1Dec-44, p. 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³¹ 1st Supplement to Nanpo Shoto Info Bulletin No. 122-44, dtd 10Oct44; CinCPac-CinCPOA Bulletin No. 9-45, 10Jan45, p. 10.

Japanese artillery tactics was anticipated. Even though the presence of a large number of artillery pieces on the island was a foregone conclusion, there was no reason to believe that the Japanese would employ massed fires in larger than battery concentrations.

From a thorough study of aerial photographs and a captured map showing the scheme of the enemy's defense, it was known that the Japanese had established an elaborate defense in depth. Gun positions were sited to place withering fire on the selected beaches; defensive works such as pillboxes, blockhouses, antitank trenches, and mines were located where they could repel the American advance once the invasion force had landed. Numerous antiboat gun positions as well as coast defense guns were discovered. Unless these guns were neutralized, it was more than likely that the enemy would use them to fire on the leading waves and transport areas of the invasion force.

Planners for the invasion of Iwo Jima further deduced from documents captured on Saipan that the enemy would adhere to his older tactics of attempting the destruction of the invasion force before an adequate beachhead had been established. The most likely time for this counterattack was considered the early morning of the day following the initial landing.³²

Further study of aerial photographs and captured documents indicated that Iwo had probably been divided into four defense sectors with one infantry battalion manning each sector. Since

the Japanese were believed to have nine infantry battalions on the island, this would leave five battalions to be held in reserve. Photographs taken in January 1945, as the invasion date was drawing closer, indicated that the number of field fortifications, pillboxes, and covered artillery positions was increasing despite intensive aerial bombardment. A most significant development noted in these photographs was the construction of a line of defense across the island from a point near Hiraiwa Bay on the northwest coast to high ground north of the East Boat Basin.

During the period from 3 December 1944 to 10 February 1945, it was noted that the number of enemy coast defense guns on the island increased from 3 to 6; the number of dual purpose guns rose from 16 to 42. Automatic anti-aircraft guns showed an increase from 151 to 203, and covered artillery positions rose from 39 to 67. There was a decrease in openly emplaced artillery, antitank and antiboat guns, and machine guns, but in the words of the Expeditionary Troops G-2, Colonel Edmond J. Buckley, the apparent reduction in observed machine guns could be offset by the heavy increase in field fortifications, including blockhouses and pillboxes. The blockhouses could contain fixed artillery, and, in numerous instances, their construction was such as to permit mobile artillery pieces to be wheeled into them. It also appeared likely that each pillbox was equipped with one or more machine guns, whose presence could not be ascertained by aerial observation.

Prelanding reconnaissance had shown that the Japanese had established nu-

³² VAC C-2 Study, p. 17.

merous antiboat gun positions, as well as coast defense guns. It was imperative that these guns be neutralized. Such neutralization, of course, depended upon the ability of the invasion force to detect targets and destroy them by naval gunfire and aerial attack prior to H-hour.³³

Even though planners of the Iwo Jima invasion were generally correct with reference to the enemy's intentions and capabilities, their intelligence estimate erred in two important respects. First among these was an underestimation of enemy strength on the island. Intelligence officers had estimated that the Iwo garrison numbered between 13,000 and 14,000 troops.³⁴ Names and background of Japanese commanders in the Bonins were known, though the intelligence estimate mistakenly assumed that General Kuribayashi exercised overall command of the Volcano-Bonin Defense Sector from his *109th Division Headquarters* on Chichi Jima, and that a Major General Osuka was in charge of the defense of Iwo Jima. Information on the Japanese naval guard and air base units on Iwo was lacking.

The second serious shortcoming of preinvasion intelligence was the mistaken assumption that the enemy defensive tactics to be expected on Iwo Jima would conform to tactics employed in earlier operations. In describing Japanese capabilities, the intelligence estimate voiced the following expectations:

The enemy may be prepared to attempt small local counterattacks prior to the establishment of our beachhead in order to annihilate our forces at the beach. His

doctrine specifies that the enemy must not gain a foothold on shore and that in order to combat this all troops must be prepared to attack with the mission of splitting our forces and destroying them by local counterattacks.³⁵

At the latest, the enemy could be expected to throw all available reserves against the beachhead prior to dawn on D plus 1.

In addition to their task of accumulating and analyzing all information available to them about the enemy's strength, capabilities, and dispositions during the planning period, American planners were faced with the formidable problem of maintaining complete secrecy with reference to the movement of such a large force as was to take place in the Iwo Jima assault. This was not an easy undertaking in view of the tremendous size of the force assigned to capture and develop the island. Admiral Turner's command alone consisted of 495 ships, including, among others, 4 command ships, 8 battleships, 12 aircraft carriers, 19 cruisers, 44 destroyers, 43 transports, 63 LSTs, and 31 LSMs. The addition of Task Force 58, together with supply and auxiliary ships, brought the invasion fleet to more than 800 vessels. The Marine assault troops numbered 70,647 officers and men.³⁶ This force was further augmented by Marine and Army garrison units, as well as three Army amphibian truck companies in the assault phase, and Navy personnel assigned to shore duty, bringing the total of the expeditionary force to 111,308 men.³⁷ If one further adds the crews of Turner's

³³ VAC C-2 Study, p. 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁶ TF 51 AR, pt. I, p. 4.

ships and of Task Force 58, more than 250,000 men on the American side were involved in the Iwo operation.³⁸

Intelligence officers had a few bad moments on 22 December 1944, when a Pearl Harbor newspaper printed two pictures of Iwo Jima under aerial attack. The pictures bore a startling resemblance to pictures and maps of "Island X," which VAC had issued for training purposes. In order to prevent the Japanese from learning of the assembly and destination of the invasion force, General Schmidt recommended a counterintelligence diversion. Word was spread in the bars and hotels of Honolulu that the command would shortly depart for an attack on Formosa. Whether the diversion had any effect in deceiving the enemy could not be determined.³⁹

A serious breach of security occurred on 14 February 1945, while the invasion convoy was en route to the objective. In the course of a radio transmission, someone in the vicinity of Saipan was overheard making the following statement:

We are going to Iwo Jima. It's a Jap island not far from here. The B-29s bomb it from here every day. It's about 600 miles from Japan. We'll make it hot for them Japs when we get there. We're leaving for there in the next day or so.⁴⁰

Such a breach of security was more than enough to make experienced intelligence officers quake in their boots. The

intelligence officer of Amphibious Group 2 reported the incident to VAC. There is no indication that this information ever reached the Japanese, though under different circumstances this compromise of vital information could have had disastrous consequences.

LOGISTICS AND ADMINISTRATION⁴¹

Another major responsibility accruing to the staff of the VAC was logistical planning, which had already begun even before VAC staff officers reached Pearl Harbor on 13 October. Special staffs of FMFPac conducted preliminary conferences and executed logistical planning for the assault on Iwo Jima. As in other areas, logistics required the harmonious teamwork of different levels of command, and between the armed services.

The Quartermaster, U. S. Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas, was responsible for supplying rations (Class I) to all personnel taking part in the operation, as well as clothing, special equipment, and supplies (Class II), and ammunition (Class V), for participating Army troops. Fuel and lubricants (Class III) were to be supplied

⁴¹ Additional material in this section is derived from TF 56, AdminO 1-44, 8Nov44; VAC C-1 PersRpts, Iwo Jima, 20Feb-24Mar45, hereafter *VAC G-1 Rpt*; VAC C-4 Jnl, 29Jan-21Feb45; 3d MarDiv D-1 Jnl, 14Feb-12Apr45; 3d MarDiv Breakdown of Ammunition and Fuel, Iwo Jima, 1Feb45; 3d MarDiv C-4 Jnl, 23Feb-8Apr45; 3d MarDiv G-4 Log, 8Dec44-9Aug45; 3d MarDiv G-4 Periodic Rpts, 3Jan-20Mar45; 4th MarDiv AdmO 44-44, 24Dec44; US PacFlt Logistics Plan for Land-Based Forces, 14Oct44.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, pp. 27-28.

³⁹ *VAC G-2 SAR*, Iwo Jima, 30Apr45, p. 8, in *VAC AR*, Anx B, GenStaffSecRpts.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

by the Navy's Service Force, Pacific. The Supply Service, FMFPac, was to furnish ammunition (Class V) and special supplies, and equipment (Class IV) for the Marines. The latter supplies were to be distributed initially by the 6th Base Depot in Hawaii and the 5th Field Depot on Guam.

Administrative planning, including service and support to the VAC Landing Force, was the responsibility of the G-4 Section, V Amphibious Corps. Prescribed levels for Class I supply were two days' rations for the assault troops plus a 30-day backup supply. Water was to be carried in cans, drums, or other organizational equipment at the ratio of two gallons per man per day for five days.⁴² Class II and IV supplies were to be stockpiled for 30 days. Ammunition for ground forces (Class V) was to be provided in quantities of seven units of fire (U/F) for artillery, mortars, and antiaircraft guns, and five units of fire for all other types of weapons.⁴³

Special preloads on LSTs were made to provide a balanced initial supply of rations, fuel, and ammunition for the assault troops. These supplies were loaded in LST tank decks and were designed to provide initial priority combat supplies close in to beaches on D-Day and D plus 1. A total of 38 LSTs were to be preloaded at Pearl Harbor, Hilo, and Guam prior to the embarkation of the assault units. In addition, 42 2½-ton Amphibian Trucks (DUKWs) were to

be preloaded at Pearl Harbor with assorted small arms and mortar ammunition, rations, fuel, medical supplies, and flamethrower fuel. These vehicles were scheduled to provide an early replenishment supply on the beaches on D-Day.

Resupply plans and preparations were performed by the Marine Supply Service. Initial resupply ships were to be loaded at Oahu with 30 days Class I, II, and IV supplies and 15 days Class III supplies (except for aviation gasoline) for two reinforced Marine divisions and for all garrison troops estimated to be located on Iwo Jima at D plus 35. Class V was to be loaded in this shipment on board one ammunition ship at the rate of 9 U/F for one Marine division, 7 U/F for one 155mm howitzer battalion, 8 U/F for one Army heavy antiaircraft battalion, 4 U/F for one Army light antiaircraft battalion, and 90 tons of engineer and Chemical Warfare Service demolitions.

The Commander, Forward Area, Central Pacific was instructed to hold available in the Marianas for shipment on call in an emergency, a stock of 30 days supplies of Classes I, II, III, and IV and two units of fire for one reinforced Marine division and one reinforced Army division. Supplies were to be provided by the Commanding General, Pacific Ocean Areas, the Commanding General, FMFPac, and ComServPac. ComAirPac was to maintain a 45-day stock of aviation supplies, except for Class V, in floating storage in the forward area for Navy and Marine aircraft employed in that area. Aviation supplies at Guam and on Roi-Namur were to be held available for emergency shipment. ComGenPOA was to maintain

⁴² VAC G-4 SAR, Iwo Jima, dtd 30Apr45, p. 2, hereafter *VAC G-4 SAR*.

⁴³ A unit of fire is a predetermined quantity of ammunition a weapon can be expected to fire in an average day of combat.

a 45-day stock of aviation supplies in floating storage in the forward area for Army aircraft. ComServPac was to provide the necessary storage if space and facilities assigned to ComGenPOA proved inadequate. ComServPac was to shift Service Squadron 10 to Ulithi to furnish support to fleet units and emergency supply for land-based forces. Elements of the above squadron were to be located in the Marshalls and Marianas for support of small task forces.

Pre-packaged supplies were stockpiled by the VAC Air Delivery Section on Saipan for emergency deliveries by air. If needed, the Commander, Expeditionary Troops, could draw from similar stockpiles in Hawaii and elsewhere in the Marianas. For the Iwo Jima operation, VAC organized the 8th Field Depot, commanded by Colonel Leland S. Swindler. The depot was designed to serve as the nucleus of the shore party organization; the depot commander had a dual designation as Shore Party Commander of the Landing Force, in which capacity he was responsible for coordinating the activities of the division shore parties.

Since Iwo Jima was not surrounded by reefs, all types of landing craft could proceed directly from the transport area to the beachhead without becoming involved in time-consuming transfer operations that had been characteristic of many previous landings in the Central Pacific. This circumstance led VAC to authorize subordinate units to mount up to 50 percent of their supplies on pallets.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Pallets was the designation for wooden platforms on which supplies were strapped or fastened. Palletization facilitated loading and

Planners of the Iwo operation were aware of the fact that the soft volcanic ash along the beaches, as well as the steep terraces en route inland, would impede the movement of wheeled vehicles. To insure a steady flow of supplies from the beaches inland, runner sleds were improvised that could be loaded with needed items and pulled inland by tracked vehicles. Another improvisation designed to overcome the soft sand or volcanic ash was the use of Marston matting at the beaches. Even though this material was originally used for the construction of airfield runways, it likewise could be employed to great advantage in bridging strips of sand along the beaches that would otherwise be impassable.

In addition to the large variety of supplies and equipment normally used for an amphibious operation, VAC employed two items for the first time. One was the two-wheeled Clever-Brooks 3½-ton amphibion trailer, the other the M-29C light cargo carrier, subsequently known as the "Weasel." This boat-like, tracked vehicle resembled a miniature LVT without ramps. The amphibian trailers reached the three assault divisions during November and December 1944.⁴⁵ The Weasels arrived in November and were subjected to extensive tests which revealed that the cargo carriers were capable of excellent performance under conditions anticipated at Iwo.

unloading when cranes and other lifting devices were available to handle such convenient but heavy loads.

⁴⁵ The 3d Marine Division was issued the trailers in November; the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions received theirs in December.

Three Army and two Marine DUKW companies were assigned to VAC for the operation, as were the 31st and 133d Naval Construction Battalions.⁴⁶ In addition, a Marine engineer battalion, a topographic company, an Army bomb disposal company, and the 62d Naval Construction Battalion were attached to VAC and placed under operational control of the Corps engineer. These units would be responsible for clearing minefields, bomb disposal, road construction and maintenance, water supply, and the restoration of airfields on Iwo Jima. Following the beach assault, and as soon as conditions permitted, the 62d Naval Construction Battalion was to begin to ready Motoyama Airfield No. 1 for observation and fighter aircraft. Target date for completion of this assignment was D plus 7. The 31st Naval Construction Battalion was to restore Airfield No. 2 for use by the B-29 bombers. Making the latter field operational for this purpose involved not only restoration of facilities that were already in existence, but called for extension of existing runways to 7,000 feet to accommodate the giant aircraft. Airfield No. 2 was to become operational at D plus 10.⁴⁷

In view of the size and scope of the impending operation, the handling and evacuation of casualties required special planning. Initially, it was assumed that seizure of the objective would require 14 days. It was estimated that five percent of the assault force would be-

come casualties on each of the first and second days; three percent on the third and fourth days; and one and one-half percent on each of the remaining 10 days. It was further estimated that 20 percent of all casualties would be dead or missing.⁴⁸

For the evacuation of casualties from Iwo Jima, two hospital ships, the *Samaritan* and the *Solace* were assigned, as well as the auxiliary hospital ship *Pinckney*, and LSTs 929, 930, 931, and 1033. These LSTs, especially equipped to handle casualties close to the beach, were to be stationed 2,000 yards offshore and serve as evacuation control centers. There, the casualties would be logged, given additional emergency treatment, and transferred to other ships for further care. One of the LSTs was equipped with a blood bank.

As in so many other instances of operations in the Pacific Theater, the adaptation of existing equipment to a new use was due to the efforts of one individual who not only conceived the idea but also had to sell it at the right time and place. In this instance the conversion of LSTs for the evacuation of casualties was the brainchild of Lieutenant Commander George J. Miller, Medical Corps, USNR, who prepared blueprints of the LSTs showing the plan of operating tables, beds, and other equipment. In December 1944 he presented his idea to several high ranking naval medical officers who initially vetoed it. In the end, the persistent lieutenant commander was able to sell the idea to an even higher ranking personage who immediately recognized the

⁴⁶ The 133d Naval Construction Battalion was attached to the 4th Marine Division, the 31st to the 5th Marine Division.

⁴⁷ VAC OPlan 3-44, dtd 23Dec44, Anx M, Eng Plan.

⁴⁸ VAC Surgeon, SAR, Iwo Jima, dtd 24Mar-45, hereafter *VAC MedRpt*.

merit of the plan and gave his unqualified approval of it.⁴⁹

In addition to the hospital ships and the specially converted LSTs, long range dispositions had to be made from Iwo Jima for the reception of casualties. In addition to the hospitals that were to be set up on the island itself, once the situation following the landings had stabilized to some extent, 5,000 beds were available in hospitals on Saipan and Guam. Air transportation of casualties was scheduled to begin as soon as airstrips were ready to accommodate transport planes.⁵⁰

These preparations only give a bare outline of the time and effort required to bring logistics and administration into line with the operational planning. At least one account has briefly summed up the diverse items involved and the thought that had to be given to their transport and storage:

It was necessary to think of everything—pencils, blood, toilet paper, 'this item,' said the orders, 'will be stowed under tarpaulin at the rear of all landing vehicles to protect it from spray,' matches, gasoline, socks, bullets, wooden crosses (pre-painted), water, welding rods, garbage cans, splints, food, spark plugs, blankets, flares, dog food, maps, holy water, smoke pots, paint, shoelaces, fingerprint ink, batteries, rock-crushers, bulbs, cigars, asphalt machines, carbon paper. The Fifth Division alone carried 100 mil-

⁴⁹ "This use of LSTs saved many, many lives of wounded men who received treatment on the LSTs. If they had not received this treatment and had had to be taken from the beach all the way to the hospital ships, many would have died before they reached the ships." BGen John S. Letcher ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 12Jun69, in *Iwo Comments*, hereafter *Letcher ltr*.

⁵⁰ *VAC G-1 Rpt*, p. 13.

lion cigarettes and enough food to feed Columbus, Ohio, for thirty days.

Ships began loading as early as November, every parcel stenciled, weighed, sized, and stowed in a particular spot. Marked photos showed where the cemetery would be located, orders specified the exact depth of burial and space between bodies (3 feet from centerline to centerline of body, fifty bodies to a row, 3 feet between rows.) The graves registration team would land on D-Day, equipped with its own bulldozers to bury the bodies exactly 6 feet deep. Then men would mound each grave with a special wooden form.⁵¹

Nor was the multiplicity of supplies all that the planners had to consider; there was one more commodity whose importance transcended all others. This was the flow of men towards the scene of action to replace those who would become casualties. During the last months of 1944, long before the first Marines were scheduled to hit the beaches of Iwo Jima, the complex machinery of administration was already set in motion when six replacement drafts embarked from the United States to join VAC. Each draft was composed of about 1,250 officers and men. Each of the three Marine divisions slated to participate in the operation received 2,500 replacements, some of whom were incorporated into the divisions before they left their staging areas. The bulk of the replacement units was kept intact; their personnel were assigned to shore parties, to be employed on the beaches until they were needed to replace combat losses.⁵²

Launching an amphibious operation on the scale of the contemplated assault

⁵¹ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 37.

⁵² *VAC G-1 Rpt*, pp. 13-15.

against Iwo Jima required far more than merely assembling men and materiel and shipping them to the objective. The real planning effort had only begun at the point when the objective had been decided upon and the means to seize it were being made available. The efforts of various arms and services had to be combined until the gigantic machine of war functioned as an instrument of precision. Each man, each weapon, each unit, every ship, tank, and airplane had a very definite part in the scheme of things. In this respect, an assembled invasion armada can be likened to an orchestra. The finest musicians, well skilled in their profession and equipped with the best instruments that money can buy, still must learn to work with one another. Few among the audience are aware of the tremendous effort that went into writing the score, the seemingly endless rehearsals, the continuous and often painful planning and rehonoring that must take place before all meshes into an integrated whole.

It is no different with the orchestra of war. A plan is made, followed by the assembly of men and supplies.

Only then can the vital and difficult process begin of forging the whole into an instrument of such power and precision that it continues to function even in the face of the most adverse conditions that climate, weather, and enemy opposition can impose. When the curtain rises, the spectator is awed by the booming of the big naval guns, the columns of dirt and smoke rising over the objective from naval shells or aircraft dropping their lethal cargo, as rockets swoosh towards the target. Once this orchestra has begun to play, any flaw still remaining can be measured in the lives of assault troops who are separated from the enemy bullets and shells by no more than a few cubic feet of air, often protected only by the thickness of a uniform.

The forging of the precision instrument of war, under way months before Marines went ashore on Iwo, determined in large measure how many men of the landing force would go on to seize the objective and return home; the number whose fragile and mangled bodies would be carried off Iwo for salvage and repair; and those destined to remain on the island forever.

The Preliminaries¹

In his capacity as Commanding General, VAC Landing Force, Major General Harry Schmidt was directly responsible for the preparation and training of all units placed under his command for the Iwo Jima operation. Such training, in addition to a routine program, not only featured the participation of VAC units in tests and demonstrations of new types of amphibious equipment such as the Clever-Brooks amphibian trailer and the M-29C cargo carrier

(Weasel), but also familiarized personnel with new weapons and techniques scheduled for employment during Operation DETACHMENT. Division training programs stressed attacks against fortified positions; the reduction of pillboxes; detection, marking, and removal of mines; and the employment and coordination of supporting arms.

During the last two weeks of November, the 4th Marine Division carried out amphibious maneuvers on Maui, and a field exercise on the division level. Two command post exercises followed. The 5th Marine Division conducted training exercises at Camp Tarawa on Hawaii Island. At Hilo, the men practiced the embarkation and debarkation of troops and loading and unloading of equipment onto LSTs. The artillery battalions of the 13th Marines went to Maume beach for special loading exercises with DUKWs, LSTs, and LSMs. Using the big amphibious trucks, the artillerymen learned how to load and unload their howitzers and practiced moving in and out of the great jaws of the LSTs, causing at least one Marine to comment: "This reminds me of Jonah and the whale."²

Within the 5th Marine Division, the 28th Marines, scheduled to spearhead the assault, received special training.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 AR*; *TF 52 AR*, Iwo Jima, 10-19Feb45, 22Feb45, hereafter *TF 52 AR*; *TF 54 AR*, 10Feb-10Mar45, hereafter *TF 54 AR*; *TF 56 AR*; VAC Landing Force AR, Iwo Jima, Oct44-Mar45, 13May45, hereafter *VAC AR*; *PhibGru 2 AR*; 3d MarDiv AR, Iwo Jima, 31Oct44-16Mar45, 30Apr45, hereafter *3d MarDiv AR*; 5th MarDiv AR, Iwo Jima, 19Feb-26Mar45, 24Mar45, hereafter *5th MarDiv AR*; ComPhibPac TrngO A29-44, Iwo Jima, 18Dec44; TF 31 Rpt of Trng, 31-Jul44; TF 52 OpO No. A105-45, 3Feb45; TG 53.2 AR, Iwo Jima, 31Oct44-4Mar45; TransDiv 32 AR, Iwo Jima, 10Feb-6Mar45; TransDiv 45 AR, 27Jan-19Feb45, hereafter *TransDiv 45 AR*; 3d MarDiv EmbO 1-44, 18Dec44; 3d MarDiv EmbO 1-45, 19Jan45; 3d MarDiv TrngO 1-45, 5Jan45; 4th MarDiv TrngOs, 27Oct44-22Jan45; 4th MarDiv Trng Memo 82-44, 10-Dec44; 5th MarDiv TrngO 64-44, 31Dec44; *Iwo Comments*; Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*; Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*; Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*; Heintz, *Soldiers of the Sea*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Morison, *Victory in the Pacific*; Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*; Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*.

² Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*, p. 21.

Each battalion of that regiment conducted exercises that involved landing on beaches resembling those of Iwo, right down to soft volcanic ash. The maneuvers also included the envelopment of a hill that could pass for a fairly close duplicate of Mount Suribachi. Without those in the ranks being aware of it, elements of the division actually executed the scheme of maneuver called for in the Iwo operations plan. The division conducted three command post exercises in Hawaii, including one problem calling for the coordination of air, naval gunfire, and artillery support.

On Guam, the men of the 3d Marine Division trained for the impending operation in accordance with the mission assigned to them. Training stressed the phases a reserve unit had to pass through upon landing and moving up into the interior of the island. Since the division was not scheduled to take part in the amphibious assault, no assault landing exercises were conducted. The 3d Division was to utilize the shore party facilities of the two assault divisions preceding it ashore.

The replacement drafts did not join their divisions until late November. Even though the replacements had received basic individual training in the United States, they had to learn basic small unit tactics and had to exercise in them before qualifying as combat ready. Since the men were to serve with shore parties prior to being assigned to combat duty, they also had to be initiated into cargo-handling duties.

Owing to the advanced state of training in the divisions and the high level of experience of their Marines, VAC training directives were concerned with

refinement of combat techniques and provision for supervision and support of divisions and corps troops. Otherwise, training was left to the divisions. A late delivery of DUKWs caused some delay in training the newly activated amphibian truck companies with their vehicles. Considerable retraining was required to familiarize tank crews and maintenance personnel with the operation and servicing of new M4A3 Sherman tanks.

Upon the conclusion of amphibious exercises, the Hawaii-based assault forces began staging on 24 December 1944; by 9 January, all troops had embarked. Individual units proceeded to Oahu, where they assembled with other elements of the Joint Expeditionary Force for rehabilitation. This period lasted from 19-26 January 1945. During this time, all men received some liberty ashore and took part in supervised recreation.

From 27 December 1944 to 8 January 1945, the 4th Marine Division moved on board its transports off Maui. The 5th Marine Division loaded at Hawaii from 25 December to mid-January. The men of the 3d Marine Division on Guam were not scheduled to begin embarkation for another month.

Final rehearsals for the remainder of the landing force were held in the Marianas during the second week of February. Also participating in these rehearsals were aircraft and ships of the Amphibious Support Force (TF 52), commanded by Admiral Blandy, and the Naval Gunfire and Covering Force (TF 54), under Rear Admiral Bertram J. Rodgers. The final exercises had the primary aim of testing coordi-

nation between the attack force and the supporting arms. Shore fire control parties actually landed on Tinian and tested communications in connection with a simulated bombardment. Sea conditions made it impractical to boat the troops during that part of the exercises conducted on 12 February; on the following day, however, the troops debarked, waves were formed, and landing craft were taken to within 300 yards of the beaches on the west coast of Tinian.

On 15 February, the combat-loaded LSTs (tractor groups) departed for the target area; during the afternoon of the following day, Transport Squadrons 15 and 16, carrying the landing force assault troops moved out, screened by cruisers and destroyers. On the same day, ships carrying the 3d Tank Battalion, corps engineers, naval construction battalions, one corps artillery and two U. S. Army antiaircraft artillery battalions left Guam. On 17 February, Transport Squadron 11 departed Guam, carrying the 3d Marine Division as Expeditionary Troops Reserve. During the voyage to Iwo Jima, RCT 26 was released from Corps Reserve to the 5th Marine Division. RCT 21, which was embarked in Transport Division 32, left Guam on the evening of 16 February, to be released from Expeditionary Troops Reserve to Corps Reserve when it reached Iwo in midmorning of 19 February.

As the invasion fleet silently moved towards the objective, Admiral Turner's flagship, the USS *Eldorado*, carried a distinguished passenger, who on 15 February had boarded the ship with such little fanfare that a large number

of the crew initially was unaware of his presence. It was James V. Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy, intent on witnessing the imminent operation as an observer. Dressed in khakis without insignia of any kind, he might easily have been mistaken for one of the civilian war correspondents on board the command ship.³

The Japanese were aware of the armada's departure from Saipan almost as soon as it had gotten under way. Whether the fleet was spotted by an enemy aircraft or submarine has never been clearly established, though at least one source credits a naval patrol plane with having reported on 13 February that 170 ships were moving northwest from Saipan.⁴ As a result, all Japanese troops in the Volcano-Bonins were placed on a state of alert.

The reaction to the news that an American invasion force was moving towards the Bonins or the Volcano Islands was nothing short of explosive in the home islands, where emotions had already been whipped to a fever pitch:

Uniformed schoolboys stormed into Perry Park at Kurihama, near Yokohama, the site where Commodore Perry had come ashore nearly a century before to reopen Japan to the Western world. The boys, rallying under the banner of the Imperial Rule Assistance Youth Corps, rushed the granite shaft and in a frenzy of patriotism toppled it to the ground and spat upon it.⁵

No such hysteria gripped General Kuribayashi and his Iwo Jima garrison. The Japanese defenses on the island had progressed as far as they ever would. In the time available to fortify

³ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 251.

⁴ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 59.

⁵ *Ibid.*

the island, all that could possibly be done had been accomplished. Filled with great fighting spirit, reverence for the Emperor, and determination to drive the invaders back into the sea, the enemy sat in his dugouts and waited.

PRELIMINARY AIR AND NAVAL BOMBARDMENT⁶

Actually, the battle for Iwo Jima had opened long before the first ships of the American invasion fleet hove into view off the island. Following the first large-scale carrier raid of June 1944, regularly scheduled air strikes against the target began in August. Air operations against Iwo passed through two stages. First, there was the strategic phase prior to 16 February 1945, carried out mainly by Marianas-based B-24 bombers of the Seventh Air Force.

⁶ Additional material in this section is derived from: FMFPac, Naval Gunfire Section, Rpt on NG Support in Operations, hereafter *FMFPac NGS*; FMFPac, Naval Gunfire Section, The Bargaining Phase, Iwo Jima Bombardment, 24Oct44-20Jan45, hereafter *Iwo Preliminary Gunfire Requirements*; FMFPac, Naval Gunfire Section, Preliminary Rpt on NGF in Iwo Jima Operation, 1Apr45; Amphibious Forces, U. S. Pacific Flt, Amphibious Gunnery Bulletin No. 1, Capture of Iwo Jima, 11Mar45; Fifth Flt, NGF Support, Exp Trps Rpt, 16Jun45, hereafter *Fifth Flt NGF Rpt*; TF 56, Sp Rpt on Air Ops in Support of the Capture of Iwo Jima, n.d.; *VAC AR*, Anx C, Apps 2 and 3, NGF and Air Rpts, 30Apr45 and 30May45, hereafter *VAC NGF and Air Rpts*; Col Robert D. Heinl, Jr. "Target Iwo," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, v. 89, no. 7, (Jul63), pp. 71-82, hereafter, Heinl, *Target Iwo*; Col Donald M. Weller, "Salvo-Splash!—The Development of NGF Support in World War II," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, Pt 1, v. 80, no. 8 (Aug54), pp. 839-849; Pt 2, v. 80, no. 9 (Sep54), pp. 1011-1021.

Beginning on 8 December, and continuing for 74 consecutive days, the bombers rained death and destruction on the Volcano-Bonin Islands. Iwo Jima received special attention.⁷ Marine PBJs (B-25 medium bombers) of VMB-612 participated in this bomber offensive from early December 1944 until the last days of January 1945. Operating from the Marianas under the Army Air Forces VII Bomber Command, the Marine aviators flew night missions over the Volcano-Bonin Islands with special emphasis on the disruption of enemy shipping, since it was known that the Japanese, vulnerable to American air attack during the daytime, were making a frantic effort to rush supplies to Iwo and nearby islands at night.

As of 31 January 1945, all air missions were executed in accordance with the Iwo Jima Air Support Plan.⁸ During the last three weeks preceding the invasion, B-24s from the Marianas flew 30 sorties a day or more against the island.⁹ The overall purpose of the bombing was to neutralize the airfields and installations on Iwo, destroy gun positions and fixed defenses, and unmask additional targets.¹⁰ Initially, the

⁷ AAF POA, Rpt of Participation in the Iwo Jima Op, 1945, p. 75.

⁸ CTF 51 OPlan, A25-44, dtd 27Dec44.

⁹ *TF 51 AR*, Pt V, Sec E, pp. 17-18.

¹⁰ "While it was true that the runways were not kept out of operation for any length of time, it was also true that after 2 January 1945 no enemy air raids were made from Iwo Jima fields against the B-29 bases in the Marianas. The B-24s used large quantities of 100-pound bombs and fragmentation bombs, which obviously were not intended to destroy fixed defense installations such as blockhouses, pillboxes, etc. The B-24 targets on Iwo Jima specified in VII Bomber Command mission

land-based missions against Iwo were executed under the Commander, Task Force 93, Lieutenant General Millard F. Harmon, USA. As the invasion date neared, the bomber raids were conducted in accordance with requests from the Commander, Joint Expeditionary Force.

Beginning 16 February, air attacks against Iwo increased in frequency until a daylight attack hit the island at least once every 24 hours. In addition, Iwo was exposed to night harassing missions and fighter sweeps. Photographic reconnaissance flights attempted to obtain a last-minute picture of enemy defenses prior to the invasion.

At numerous times prior to D-Day, aerial photographic reconnaissance attempted to estimate the effectiveness of both aerial and naval bombardment of the target with particular emphasis on the study of selected target areas which had been the subject of specific strike requests. Among the last of these studies was one submitted to the Chief of Staff (C/S) of VAC on 9 February 1945. The first paragraph of this report poignantly stated:

Photographic coverage of Iwo Jima to 24 January 1945 indicates that damage to installations resulting from bombing strikes between 3 December 1944 and 24 January 1945 was, on the whole, negligible. These strikes have apparently not prevented the enemy from improving his defensive position and, as of 24 January 1945, his installations of all categories had notably increased in number. The island is now far more heavily defended by gun

reports for February 1945 were generally AA defenses and radio/radar installations." Dr. Robert F. Futrell ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 7Jul69, hereafter *Air Force Comment*, in *Iwo Comments*.

positions and field fortifications than it was on 15 October 1944, when initial heavy bombing strikes were initiated.¹¹

This information was corroborated in a special memorandum submitted by the G-2 to the C/S on 13 February.¹² This memorandum compared the enemy's static defenses between 3 December 1944 and 10 February 1945, and noted significant increases in the number of heavy weapons and field fortifications, particularly blockhouses and pillboxes.

A further evaluation of the constant bombing indicated that it was not altogether ineffective: the destruction of aircraft on the ground and the temporary neutralization of the Iwo airfields was accomplished. On the other hand, gun emplacements, blockhouses, pillboxes, shelters, and other strong points proved far less vulnerable owing to the thorough preparation of such installations against attack from the air and naval gunfire. The rugged terrain with its countless caves afforded excellent protection from high level bombing.¹³

Even the bomber attacks against the Iwo Jima airfields could not prevent their use by the enemy for any appreciable length of time. In evaluating the effectiveness of the air strikes, the Army Air Forces had to concede "that at no time were all of Iwo's strips rendered inoperational and no single strip was

¹¹ Encl C, Extract from Bomb Damage Assessment, G-2 Rpt no. 2, 9Feb45, p. 4, in *TF 56 AR*.

¹² State of Enemy Defenses, Iwo Jima, dtd 13Feb45, in *ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³ TF 56 SpRpt, Air Operations in the Support of the Capture of Iwo Jima, n.d., p. 3.

out of service for a whole day: the destructive Christmas raid on Saipan was run the day after a heavy air-sea bombardment of Iwo.¹⁴

As D-Day for Operation DETACHMENT approached, the Army Air Forces stepped up the assault against Iwo. Between 1 and 16 February, Seventh Air Force bombers flew 283 daylight sorties, dropping 602 tons of bombs and 1,111 drums of napalm; in the same period, B-24s flew 233 night snooper missions, dropping 504 tons of bombs. On 12 February, 21 B-29s of the 313th Bombardment Wing dropped 84 tons of bombs on carefully pinpointed gun emplacements on Mount Suribachi as well as on antiaircraft positions and radio and radar installations elsewhere on the island. Again results were disappointing because the bombers flew at moderately high altitudes and frequently released their bombs by radar because of cloudy weather. In any case, the bomber crews found it extremely difficult to score square hits on the cleverly concealed and deeply dug-in targets. Napalm was dropped for the purpose of burning off the camouflage, but this method was unsuccessful, partly because of inaccurate drops and partly because the rocks and ashes used as cover would not burn.

In view of the failure of the bombing assault to inflict crippling damage on the Japanese on Iwo, the preliminary naval gunfire bombardment of the island, a vital and indispensable prelude to the operation, was bound to grow

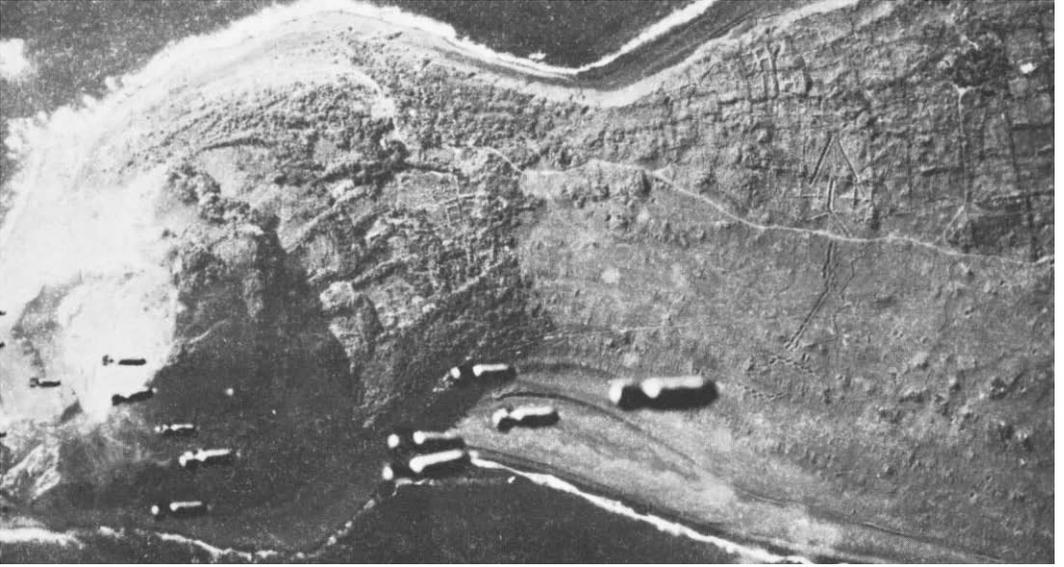
in importance. The very nature of an amphibious assault against a strongly fortified enemy bastion, largely devoid of the element of surprise, made it mandatory for the preliminary gunfire to eliminate a sizable portion of the enemy defenses. Without this shore bombardment, the very success of the assault could become imperiled or severe casualties could result among the Marines slated to go ashore. It was in this vital realm of naval gunfire support that Marine and Navy leaders of the Iwo expedition failed to achieve complete accord; the former, represented by General Holland Smith, had seen in previous assaults what fire from an enemy not sufficiently subdued could do to Marine assault waves nearing the shore of a well-defended island.

General Smith's anxiety increased the closer D-Day approached. This experienced Marine leader compared Iwo to a worm that became stronger the more it was cut up, for the island seemed to thrive on the American aerial bombardment. The leader of the expeditionary troops was to recall his feeling of what was ahead:

My own study of early air photographs indicated that a situation of an incredible nature existed on the island. It was plain that Iwo Jima had fortifications the like and extent of which we had never encountered. Mindful of Tarawa, where most of the fortifications were above ground and were still standing when the Marines landed, my opinion was that far more naval gunfire was needed on an island five times the size of Tarawa, with many more times the number of defenses, most of them deep under ground.

I could not forget the sight of Marines floating in the lagoon or lying on the beaches at Tarawa, men who died assaulting defenses which should have been taken

¹⁴ Hist Air War POA, III, Anx to p. 129, pp. 143-150, p. 159. AAF Eval Bd POA, Rpt no. 7, cited in Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*, pp. 584-585.



PREINVASION BOMBING of Iwo Jima by the U.S. Seventh Air Force. Note Mt. Suribachi in left foreground. (USAF 54717 AC)



AERIAL VIEW OF IWO JIMA LANDINGS as assault waves head for the shore. Mt. Suribachi looms in the background. (USN 80-G-415308)

out by naval gunfire. At Iwo Jima, the problem was far more difficult. If naval guns could not knock out visible defenses, how could they smash invisible defenses except by sheer superabundance of fire?¹⁵

General Smith and his staff were in agreement that the softening up of Iwo Jima would have to be preceded by an especially lengthy period of intense naval gunfire. The type of guns, as well as the amount and type of ammunition required to do a thorough job, hinged on the intelligence on the kind and number of targets. Based on such intelligence, the number of ships to be employed in the bombardment force could be computed with some degree of accuracy. The guaranteed destruction of a target required visual identification by a spotter on board ship or in the air, followed by precision adjustment. In addition to competence in surface gunnery, the men directing this shore bombardment required special training and experience. On the basis of previous operations at Tarawa, Guam, Saipan, and Peleliu, Marine planners knew that the process of preliminary gunfire could not be hurried.

As early as September 1944, the staff of VAC, supported by members of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, had begun the preparation of detailed planning for the naval gunfire required for the assault on Iwo Jima. This planning was carried out under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Donald M. Weller, who had been designated Naval Gunfire Officer for both VAC and FMFPac. Since, even at this early stage of the planning effort,

it was known that Iwo Jima represented one of the most heavily fortified strong-points on earth, Marine planners stipulated that a force of battleships and cruisers would require 10 days to reduce point targets on the island that could bring direct fire to bear on either of the two landing beaches then under consideration. On 24 October 1944, VAC submitted to Admiral Turner its naval gunfire requirements, which called for a preliminary bombardment force of seven battleships, seven heavy cruisers, and two light cruisers.¹⁶

Meanwhile, Admiral Turner's gunnery officers had also worked on the naval gunfire requirements for Operation DETACHMENT. Their conclusions differed materially from those of the Marines. In this respect, the naval officers' viewpoint was influenced by a number of factors that unintentionally were to work to the disadvantage of the Marine assault force. Foremost among these was the consideration that the initial surface bombardment had to be closely coordinated with the first carrier attack against Tokyo by the Fast Carrier Force (TF 58). Admiral Spruance initially had planned that a carrier strike on Tokyo was to coincide with the opening of the prelanding bombardment of Iwo Jima. Once the naval bombardment started, all tactical surprise at Iwo would be lost. The longer the prelanding bombardment continued, the more it became likely that enemy aircraft from the home islands would interfere with the landings. A two-day carrier strike against Japan would detract enemy attention from Iwo. At the same

¹⁵ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, pp. 243-244.

¹⁶ CG, VAC ltr to ComPhibPac, dtd 24Oct44, in *Iwo Preliminary Gunfire Requirements*.

time, naval aviation could strike a blow at the enemy's aircraft manufacturing plants, which thus far had escaped crippling damage from landbased aircraft. Sustained air attacks would be required to reduce enemy aircraft production. Admiral Spruance observed, nevertheless, that he could see no object in combatting these aircraft around the perimeter if accurate bombing could wreck the factories that produced the enemy planes. As a result, carrier aircraft were to be employed against a strategic, rather than a tactical objective.¹⁷

Somewhere in the course of the naval planning process, the air strike against Honshu began to loom ever larger in importance until what had started out as a diversionary maneuver began to turn, in the minds of the naval planning staff, into the major attraction. More and more emphasis was placed on the importance of the naval air strike against Japan; the imminent assault on Iwo gradually began to recede further into the background. Naval planners, in reaching their own conclusions as to what could be made available by way of preliminary gunfire, had to consider limitations on the availability of ships, difficulty in replenishing ammunition, and a tight schedule that made it necessary to launch and complete the Iwo operation with all possible dispatch to avoid any delay in the assault on Okinawa, which was to follow closely at the heels of Operation DETACHMENT.

The two widely varying viewpoints of Marine and Navy naval gunfire planning staffs soon found their expression

in the times recommended for preliminary naval gunfire by the Navy commanders and those of the Marine landing force. The initial VAC request for naval gunfire not only asked for a minimum of 10 days' bombardment, but also stipulated that D-Day be made dependent on "the successful prosecution of the destruction of enemy defensive installations."¹⁸

Marine Corps naval gunfire requirements, strongly endorsed by General Holland Smith, were forwarded to the Commander, Amphibious Forces, Pacific Fleet. The expectation was that the Navy would generally concur with what was considered a carefully prepared and reasonable estimate of the naval gunfire required to ensure the quick seizure of the objective with a minimum of casualties. To the surprise and consternation of Marine planners, Admiral Turner informed VAC on 15 November that "a methodical and thorough bombardment would be instituted by the Amphibious Support Force on Dog minus three."¹⁹

Faced unexpectedly with a reduction of the vital naval gunfire support from 10 days to 3, General Schmidt had a special staff study prepared, consisting of detailed tabulations, and an appended interpretation and evaluation of these very detailed statistics. As a concession, the study pointed out that the overall time for preliminary fires of all types, including support of Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) and minesweep-

¹⁸ CG, VAC ltr to ComPhibPac, dtd 24Oct44, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁹ ComPhibPac ltr to CG, VAC, dtd 15Nov44, in *Iwo Preliminary Gunfire Requirements*.

¹⁷ Forrester, *Admiral Spruance*, p. 171.

ing operations, as well as the systematic preparatory missions, should not be less than nine days.²⁰

Admiral Turner countered the VAC recommendations with a letter that praised the Marine planners and at the same time dashed icy water on any hopes that VAC would receive anything approaching the nine days of naval gunfire. In Turner's words:

... the preliminary Naval Gunfire Estimates for the assault of Iwo Jima given in the basic letter are much the best such analysis ever submitted to this command. It is desired not only to meet the wishes expressed in the letter as far as limitations of ships, ammunition, and time permit, but also to furnish even more support than asked for, up to the limit of naval capabilities.²¹

Attached to the basic letter were comments supporting the naval viewpoint. Once again, the efforts of VAC to obtain what it considered a minimum amount of naval gunfire preparation had been thwarted. Nevertheless, General Schmidt was not yet ready to accept the inevitable. By way of another proposal, this one a severe compromise, he asked that the preliminary bombardment begin on D minus 4.

In this request, the Commanding General, VAC, was strongly seconded by General Holland Smith, who pointed out that from lessons learned in previous operations and from continued study and analysis of Operation DETACHMENT, he considered four full days for

the preliminary bombardment the absolute minimum necessary for success. General Smith went on to warn that unless the strong Japanese defenses were destroyed or at least neutralized, casualties far beyond any heretofore suffered in the Central Pacific had to be expected; in fact, the success of the entire operation might be jeopardized.²²

On 30 November, it appeared that Admiral Turner was willing to go along with four days of naval gunfire, provided both that the Commander Fifth Fleet agreed, and that the fast carrier strike force could deliver its blow against Japan on D minus 4.²³ Upon being apprised for the recommended extra day of naval gunfire, Admiral Spruance disapproved the request. The rejection was based on three reasons. First, Spruance insisted that the initial surface bombardment had to coincide with the initial carrier attack upon the Tokyo area. Second, the Commander, Fifth Fleet, thought that the situation on Iwo Jima differed from that previously encountered on Saipan for the reason that by D-Day the enemy personnel and fixed defenses at Iwo would have been under heavy shore-based air attack for a considerable period of time. According to Spruance, this prolonged air bombardment, which was not undertaken at Saipan, had to be considered at least as effective as the recommended additional day of ship bombardment. Third, the admiral pointed out that there would be no early opportunity for

²⁰ CG VAC ltr to CG, FMFPac, dtd 8Nov44, in *ibid.*

²¹ ComPhibPac ltr to CG, VAC, dtd 26Nov44, in *ibid.*

²² CG, FMFPac ltr to ComPhibPac, dtd 26-Nov44, in *ibid.*

²³ ComPhibPac ltr to ComFifthFlt, dtd 30Nov-44, in *ibid.*

replacement of naval ammunition, a large proportion of which had to be saved for support on D-Day. There was a limit to the quantity of ammunition available for pre-D-Day bombardment and no advantage was seen in delivering that quantity in four days rather than in three.²⁴

Still, the last word on the subject of naval gunfire support had not yet been spoken, and during the first week of January the Marines tried again. On the 2d, General Schmidt once again pleaded for an extension of the preliminary bombardment period. On this occasion, he suggested that either the time allotted for the preliminary bombardment be increased or the fire be concentrated against the main landing beaches, leaving other parts of the island for later. Once again, General Holland Smith supported the VAC request adding that since the overall time element was an important factor in the capture of Iwo Jima, a preliminary bombardment of sufficient time would actually reduce the duration of the operation. Smith reiterated that the effects of the horizontal bombing attacks on the objective had thus far been negligible and that the final result of the air offensive against the island could not be expected to measure up to the benefits derived from an additional day of naval bombardment. The Commanding General, FMFPac, warned that only an adequate, methodical preliminary bombardment could reduce the island defenses to a point where a quick capture was assured. The preliminary bombard-

ment then planned not only would increase the overall time necessary to complete the operation, but also would require an unnecessary expenditure of lives during the initial assault phase.²⁵

In his memoirs, General Smith conceded with some bitterness that his warning did not fall on fertile ground:

Limited, against our better judgment, to only three days' preliminary bombardment there seemed nothing to do but make the best of the situation . . . Thus we were defeated—a group of trained and experienced land fighters, our full realization of the necessity for naval gunfire based on many previous island operations—again overridden by the naval mind. Finding ourselves in this dilemma, we had tried our best to enlighten the high command, feeling that our judgment would be respected, but naval expediency won again.²⁶

Even while the duration of the preliminary naval bombardment was still under discussion, the force required to deliver this fire was being organized. The Amphibious Support Force (TF 52), commanded by Rear Admiral Blandy, consisted of a Gunfire and Covering Force (TF 54) under Rear Admiral Rodgers; a Support Carrier Group (TG 52.2) under Rear Admiral Calvin T. Durgin; a Mine Group (TG 52.3), commanded by Rear Admiral Alexander Sharp; an Underwater Demolition Group (TG 52.4), commanded by Captain B. Hall Hanlon; Gunboat Support Units One and Two (TUs 52.5.1 and 52.2.2), headed by Commander Michael J. Malanaphy; and an Air Support Unit (TU 52.10), under Captain Elton C. Parker.

²⁴ CG, FMFPac ltr to ComFifthFlt, dtd 6Jan45, in *ibid.*

²⁵ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, pp. 246–247.

²⁴ ComFifthFlt, ltr to ComPhibPac, dtd 2-Dec44, in *ibid.*

The limitation of the preliminary bombardment to three days placed a heavy burden on the support ships of TF 54, whose mission it was to knock out or neutralize the most powerful and menacing enemy defenses prior to D-Day. There were no less than 724 Type A and B priority targets²⁷ to be destroyed during 16, 17, and 18 February. The mission was to be executed by 6 battleships, 4 heavy cruisers, 1 light cruiser, and 16 destroyers. The battleships were the *Tennessee*, *Idaho*, *Texas*, *New York*, *Nevada*, and *Arkansas*; the *Chester*, *Salt Lake City*, *Tuscaloosa*, and *Pensacola* made up the heavy cruiser force; the light cruiser was the *Vicksburg*. The *Arkansas*, *Texas*, and *Nevada* were veterans of the Normandy invasion in June 1944; the *New York* had seen previous service during the invasion of North Africa in 1942. Two new battleships, the *North Carolina* and the *Washington*, each equipped with 16-inch guns, were the most powerful ships initially slated to take part in the preinvasion bombardment. They were withdrawn, however, to take part in the strike of Task Force 58 against Tokyo.

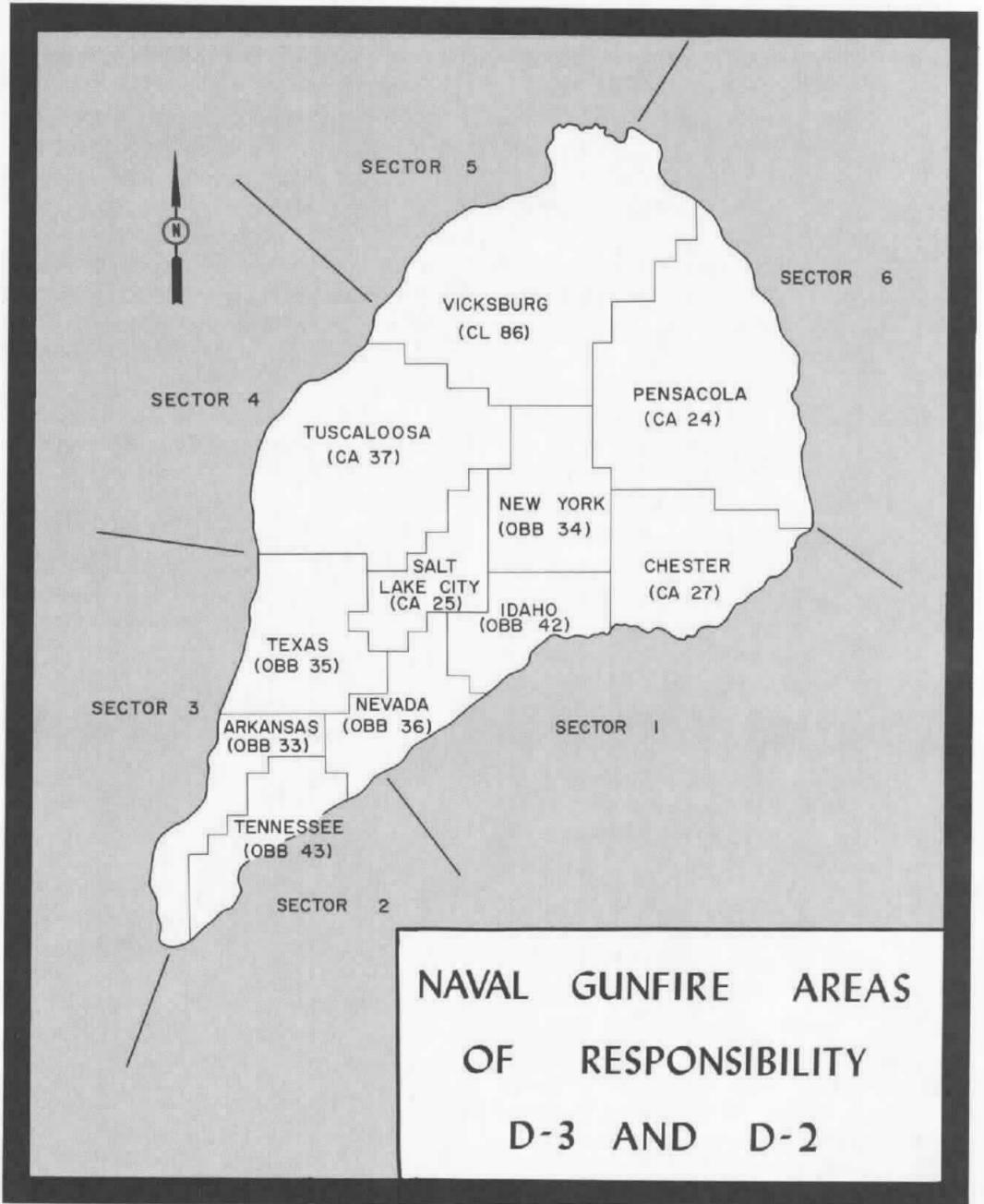
On board the AGC *Estes* were Admiral Blandy and his staff, responsible for all operations against Iwo during

the preassault period. Lieutenant Colonel Weller was also on board the *Estes*, heading the Marine gunfire team. Marines under his command were stationed on board each ship participating in the preassault firing. The bombardment plan incorporated lessons learned in the European and Pacific Theaters of Operations. Iwo Jima had been divided into numbered squares and each square was assigned to a specific ship. (See Map 27). Every target was numbered, and on board the *Estes* was a master card index which consisted of a card with appropriate information for each target. Carrier pilots, with special training as gunfire spotters, were ready to take to the air from the carrier *Wake Island* to act as eyes for the bombardment ships. An elaborate radio net had been set up to coordinate the efforts of the various gunfire teams. Since area bombardment had been found wasteful and inefficient in previous operations, all fire support units had been ordered to fire only when specific targets could be identified and the effects of the shelling could be observed from the air.²⁸

Early on 16 February, just as Admiral Mitscher was launching his planes against the Japanese homeland, Admiral Blandy's bombardment fleet appeared off Iwo Jima in plain view of the Japanese garrison. Aware of the approach of the invasion force, General Kuribayashi had on the previous night dispatched to Tokyo an urgent request for the *Imperial Japanese Fleet* to come out and engage the American forces. The reply to his urgent plea was negative; the *Imperial Fleet* would not

²⁷ Target priorities for the preliminary bombardment were: *Priority A*: Installations threatening ships, aircraft, and UDT operations (coast defense and antiaircraft guns, artillery emplacements and antitank guns). *Priority B*: Installations threatening the landing force in the ship to shore movement (blockhouses, covered artillery, pillboxes, machine guns, and command posts). *Priority C*: Installations such as caves, ammunition and fuel dumps, and bivouac areas.

²⁸ Adm W. H. P. Blandy ltr to CMC, dtd 20Jan53, in *Iwo Comments*.



Map 27

E.L. Wilson

come out now, but on 1 April, when it would sally forth and push the Americans back all the way to the mainland.²⁹

The shore bombardment began at 0800, with support vessels following the minesweepers. It became apparent almost at once that prevailing weather conditions precluded the execution of scheduled firing. A low ceiling made it impossible for observers and spotters to perform their duties. Each ship fired in its assigned sector only when the weather permitted. On those infrequent occasions, intensive anti-aircraft fire from the island forced observation planes to maintain an altitude above 3,000 feet, too high for an accurate assessment of the effects of the naval gunfire.

Despite the unfavorable weather, the air offensive against Iwo continued on D minus 3, though on a vastly reduced scale. Eight Navy fighters attacked Airfield Number 1 with rockets, while other carrier aircraft attacked gun emplacements on Mount Suribachi. During the afternoon, 42 B-24 bombers arrived from the Marianas, but by this time the overcast had thickened, so Admiral Blandy ordered them back home with their bombs still aboard. Altogether, on 16 February, carrier aircraft from Rear Admiral Calvin T. Durgin's Support Carrier Group (TG 52.2) flew 158 sorties. Until the airfields on Iwo were secured, carrier-based aircraft would have to furnish all the close air support for the combat troops ashore.³⁰

During the afternoon of the 16th, little more was accomplished as far as the destruction of primary targets on Iwo Jima was concerned. During one tense moment, the pilot of one of the spotter planes from the *Pensacola*, an OS2U Kingfisher, reported that there was a Zero on his tail. To everyone's surprise, the much faster Zero missed the slow moving target, and as he roared by, the pilot of the spotter plane fired into the Japanese fighter's tail, causing the plane to crash. The appearance of this Zero marked the only aerial opposition the Japanese offered throughout the day.

During the late afternoon, members of UDT 13 proceeded in small boats to Higashi Rock, about 1½ miles off the eastern beaches, where they placed a marker which flashed at two-second intervals, to be used as a guide for the assault troops. The Japanese observed the men on the rock and fired at them, but failed to inflict any casualties. Their mission completed, the frogmen withdrew. At 1800, the bombardment ships sailed further out to sea for the night. An undetermined number of the several hundred priority targets on Iwo had been destroyed by the first day's bombardment. Poor visibility precluded an accurate assessment of the results. It was not an auspicious beginning for the Marines.

Six hundred miles to the north, Admiral Mitscher's Fast Carrier Force had also gone into action on the 16th. From a launching position only 60 miles off the Japanese mainland, TF 58 unleashed its carrier planes against the Tokyo area in the early morning hours, spe-

²⁹ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 67.

³⁰ USS *Makin Island* Action Report, Iwo Jima, 10Feb-11Mar45, pp. 2-3.

cifically against aircraft plants that previous Army Air Forces B-29 raids had failed to obliterate. Despite a low ceiling and bad weather, the carrier pilots, in two days of pounding the Japanese homeland, inflicted heavy damage on enemy war plants. In addition, TF 58 claimed 341 enemy planes shot down, 190 destroyed on the ground, at a cost of 60 aircraft lost in combat and 28 operationally.³¹ When weather conditions deteriorated on 17 February and temperatures dropped so low that a considerable number of guns of carrier aircraft froze, Admiral Mitscher cancelled further strikes. After recovering its planes, TF 58 began retiring towards Iwo Jima during the afternoon of the 17th, a day sooner than had been planned. During the night from 17-18 February, destroyers of TF 58 en route to the landing force objective destroyed several small enemy picket boats and rammed a fourth. In passing Chichi Jima and Haha Jima to the north of Iwo, carrier planes attacked the airfield on the former and destroyed several small vessels offshore. TF 58 approached Iwo Jima during the afternoon of the 18th and prepared to lend direct support to the landings scheduled for the morning of the 19th.

The activities of Admiral Blandy's bombardment force off Iwo Jima on 17 February were to be of decisive importance, particularly in view of the fact that little damage on the Japanese defenses had been inflicted by the shell-

ing of the previous day. All indications were that the second day of the prelanding bombardment would be more successful than the first, for the morning's weather had brought clear skies and excellent visibility. The schedule for 17 February called for fighter sweeps against Chichi Jima, minesweeping off Iwo Jima, and beach reconnaissance by Underwater Demolition Teams, closely supported by the large ships, destroyers, and LCI gunboats. During the early afternoon, B-24s were slated to give the island another going over.

Shortly after 0800, a dozen minesweepers approached to within 750 yards of the island, searching for mines and obstacles and probing the reefs and shoals. The tiny wooden vessels drew small arms fire from Mount Suribachi, but refused to be deterred from their mission. No mines or shallows were discovered. At 0840, the battleships *Nevada*, *Idaho*, and *Tennessee* moved to within 3,000 yards from shore to provide close support for the UDT team operations scheduled for 1100 that morning. The three vessels opened fire at almost point blank range. It quickly became apparent that the Japanese did not intend to take this bombardment lying down, and the covering fire support vessels drew heavy fire from enemy shore batteries. First to receive a hit was the *Tennessee*, which had four men injured shortly before 0900, though the ship itself suffered no damage.³²

Around 0930, the *Pensacola* came close in under the cliffs of the east coast of Iwo in order to provide cover for the minesweepers. Even though the Japa-

³¹ TF 58 OpRpt, 10Feb-4Mar45, hereafter *TF 58 OpRpt*; cf. ComAirPac "Analysis of Air Operations, Tokyo Carrier Strikes, Feb45," dtd 28Apr45, cited in Morison, *Victory in the Pacific*, p. 25.

³² *TF 52 AR*, p. A-38.

nese had received specific orders to hold their fire, the temptation for one gun crew of having such a juicy target pass within 1,500 meters of its gun proved too much; the enemy gunner opened fire at the heavy cruiser with the 150mm gun. The first round was 50 yards short. The *Pensacola* took immediate evasive action, but by this time the Japanese had the range and in a matter of three minutes scored six hits on the vessel. The shells wrecked the combat information center, set fire to a plane on the starboard catapult, punctured the hull, and killed 17 and wounded 120 of the ship's crew.³³ Among the dead was the executive officer. Despite the heavy damage and the extensive casualties, the *Pensacola* continued to fire as she withdrew to extinguish the fire and repair damage. She continued to carry out her mission, ceasing fire from time to time while casualties were being operated on and given blood transfusions.³⁴

Shortly before 1100, nearly 100 UDT swimmers headed for the island. The hazardous mission of these daredevil frogmen was to check beach and surf conditions, look for underwater obstacles both at the approaches to the landing beaches themselves and on the beaches, and to destroy any such impediments while in plain view of the enemy. As the swimmers neared the island, they came under heavy mortar and small arms fire. Covering them were 12 LCIs, stationed about 1,000 yards offshore, from where they directed a steady barrage of rockets and 40mm

gunfire against the beaches. This fire, and particularly the launching of the rockets, presumably led the enemy to believe that an assault against Iwo Jima was under way. In any case, contrary to the orders they had received to hold their fire until the assault force had landed, Japanese heavy artillery to the north of the eastern beaches and at the foot of Suribachi opened fire on the lightly armored gunboats. In the course of this uneven contest, which continued for 45 minutes, the LCIs absorbed a severe pounding. An official report noted:

The personnel of these little gunboats displayed magnificent courage as they returned fire with everything they had and refused to move out until they were forced to do so by material and personnel casualties. Even then, after undergoing terrific punishment, some returned to their stations amid a hail of fire, until again heavily hit. Relief LCI(G)s replaced damaged ships without hesitation.³⁵

During the furious though unequal exchange of fire, all of the 12 gunboats were hit. The Japanese damaged LCI 474 so badly that the crew had to abandon the ship; when it capsized later, friendly shells sent it to the bottom. Intensive fire from destroyers and fire support ships, and a smoke screen laid by white phosphorus projectiles, were used to cover this operation. Fire support ships took on board casualties from the LCI(G)s as they withdrew. Altogether, 7 men had been killed and 153 wounded in the LCIs; the destroyer *Leutze* also had received a direct hit which killed 7 and wounded 33. Only 6 of the 12 gunboats, LCIs 438, 449,

³³ *TF 51 AR*, Pt V, Sec H, MedRpt, Table II, p. 6.

³⁴ *U. S. Fleet OpRpt*, Iwo Jima, pp. 1-13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

450, 466, 457, and 469 made it back to Saipan under their own power.

By 1220 all of the frogmen, with one exception, had been recovered; the fate of the missing man was to remain unknown. The members of the four UDT teams had accomplished their mission. Their reconnaissance had disclosed that there were no underwater or beach obstructions or minefields. Beach and surf conditions were found to be favorable for a landing. In fact, some of the swimmers actually had crawled out of the water to collect soil samples for examination on board ship.³⁶

While the badly damaged LCIs were withdrawing out to sea, the *Nevada* delivered a heavy and concentrated counterbattery fire against the enemy artillery positions until 1240. At the same time, the battleship *Tennessee* and two others, the *Idaho* and the *Nevada*, put down a smoke screen along the entire eastern beach area to cover the withdrawal of the frogmen. The smoke screen also obscured the view of supporting destroyers and battleships, which experienced difficulty in picking out enemy weapons because of the smoke screen over the water and the dust kicked up by shells bursting on the island.

The work of the UDTs was not completed with the exploration of the eastern beaches; a reconnaissance of the western beaches was scheduled for the afternoon of the 17th. As elements of the UDTs were preparing for the second reconnaissance, heavy bombardment

ships began to pound top priority targets on the east coast. The heavy enemy fire from hitherto unsuspected positions had brought home to officers conducting the preliminary bombardment the fact that a large amount of damage remained to be inflicted on the enemy installations. Admiral Blandy revised ammunition allotments upward to permit heavier concentrations of fire against the eastern beaches, particularly those areas sheltering the recently spotted enemy coast defense guns. Admiral Rodgers, commanding the Gunfire and Covering Force (TF 54), recommended to Admiral Blandy that all available fire power be brought to bear against top priority installations around Mount Suribachi and on the high ground north of the eastern beaches. This recommendation was approved, and for the remainder of the 17th, Fire Support Units One and Two, including the *Nevada*, *Idaho*, *Tennessee*, *Vicksburg*, and *Salt Lake City* executed close range fire missions against those areas.

The UDT reconnaissance of the western beaches got under way at 1615, under the protection of three battleships and a cruiser. Once again, the swimmers drew Japanese automatic weapons and rifle fire, but on this occasion there were no casualties and at 1800 the frogmen, having completed the reconnaissance, returned to their APDs. One mine was discovered and destroyed. No minefields or water obstacles blocked the approach to the western beaches. Both beaches and surf conditions were thought to be suitable for landing. Twenty-two Marines from the reconnaissance companies of the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions had accompanied the

³⁶ *TF 52 AR*, Pt C, p. 1; Cdr D. L. Kauffman, USN, ltr to HistBr, HQMC, dtd 13Jan53, in *Two Comments*.

UDT teams on both beach reconnaissance exploits. Upon completion of these missions, the Marines returned to their units on board command ships at sea. The intelligence collected by the reconnaissance men provided assault unit commanders with current information about the area they were soon to encounter.

As a result of good weather throughout 17 February, aviation also carried out destructive raids on Iwo Jima during the day. Carrier pilots flew a total of 226 sorties, not counting search and patrol missions. The main targets of these attacks were dual-purpose guns and anti-aircraft automatic weapons around the airfields and beach areas. Napalm dropped by eight Navy fighters during the day had only limited success. Some of the bombs did not release; others failed to ignite upon hitting the ground. In any case, there was little left to burn on Iwo. The Japanese did not remain passive in the face of the continuous air attacks, for heavy anti-aircraft fire met the attacking planes. A force of 42 Army Air Forces B-24 bombers dropped bombs from an altitude of 5,000 feet, scoring hits in the target area. As far as could be ascertained, however, this bombing inflicted little or no known damage to enemy installations.³⁷

Late on the 17th, it became apparent that the Japanese really believed that they had repulsed an invasion of Iwo earlier that day. Radio Tokyo reported that the American landings had been frustrated and that five warships, including a battleship, had been sunk.

In a similar vein, Admiral Soemu Toyoda, Commander in Chief of the *Combined Fleet*, sent the following message to Rear Admiral Ichimaru on Iwo:

Despite very powerful enemy bombings and shellings, your unit at Iwo coolly judged the enemy intentions and foiled the first landing attempt and serenely awaits the next one, determined to hold Iwo at any cost. I am greatly elated to know that, and I wish you to continue to maintain high morale and repulse the enemy, no matter how intense his attacks, and safeguard the outer defenses of our homeland.³⁸

Even as the Japanese were rejoicing at the thought of having driven an assault force back out to sea, the top echelon of the American invasion force met in Admiral Blandy's cabin on board the *Estes*. The atmosphere was not a joyful one, for only one more day remained, and two days of bombardment had inflicted comparatively little damage on enemy installations on shore. In fact, following two days of heavy shelling, the Iwo defenses looked more formidable than ever. In Blandy's presence, Commander W. P. Chilton, the gunnery officer, and Lieutenant Colonel Weller, representing the landing force, discussed what should be done. Weller urged that on the last day remaining, all available fire-power be brought to bear against the defenses commanding the beaches. Admiral Blandy approved this recommendation at once.³⁹

According to the modified plan drawn up on the evening of 17 February, four

³⁸ Adm Soemu Toyoda msg to RAdm Toshinosuke Ichimaru n.d., in Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, pp. 82-83.

³⁹ *VAC NGF and Air Rpts*, p. 15.

³⁷ *TF 52 AR*, Encl I, p. 1.

battleships, the *Tennessee*, *Nevada*, *New York*, and *California*, as well as the heavy cruiser *Chester*, were to concentrate their entire armament of 5-, 8-, and 14-inch guns in a blanket bombardment of the landing areas. The ships received permission to fire all unexpended ammunition, except that needed for D-Day, provided the weather permitted it.

Promptly at 0745 on the morning of the 18th, Admiral Rodgers ordered his Gunfire and Covering Force to "close beach and get going."⁴⁰ These ships immediately moved to within 2,500 yards offshore and opened fire. In line with Blandy's special order, the *Tennessee* and *Idaho* were to concentrate their fire against the batteries sited at the foot of Mount Suribachi, as well as against the coast defense guns emplaced on the rim of a quarry about 400 yards north of the East Boat Basin. In executing this vital mission in somewhat less than five hours, the *Tennessee* expended a total of 333 rounds; the *Idaho* fired 280 rounds during the same period of time.⁴¹

Unfortunately, the weather on 18 February was not nearly so favorable as on the preceding day. Visibility, only fair throughout most of the day, was reduced to poor during the frequent light rains on D minus 1. Despite the handicap imposed by poor observation, the massive bombardment was having its effect. When the last day of the preparatory fire ended shortly before 1830, vital enemy installations had sustained massive damage. Among 201 major targets in the main landing area, 11

coast defense guns, 22 out of 33 five-inch dual-purpose guns, 16 of 20 large blockhouses, and nearly half of the 93 pillboxes had been destroyed or heavily damaged.

While Iwo was receiving a final going over by the bombardment group, Seventh Air Force bombers arrived over the island after a long flight from the Marianas. Once again the weather failed to cooperate, and the air strike had to be cancelled. Naval aviators of the Support Carrier Group, commanded by Rear Admiral Calvin T. Durgin, flew 28 sorties against positions flanking the landing beaches. These were the last of 612 sorties flown by carrier planes against ground targets on Iwo Jima prior to D-Day. Only three of the naval aircraft fell victim to enemy ground fire, and their air crews were rescued.⁴²

Late on 18 February, a low-flying enemy plane was to strike a brief but vicious blow against the invasion force. At 2130, the *Blessman* (APD-48) was hit by an enemy bomb which exploded in the troop space above the forward fireroom. In addition to serious material damage, 2 of the courageous frogmen of UDT 15, who had emerged from the hazardous beach reconnaissance missions of the previous day unharmed, were killed, and 20 were wounded. The crew of the *Blessman* suffered 11 wounded.⁴³ This attack on the evening of 18 February was the only action by enemy aircraft to inflict any damage on American units at or near Iwo during the preinvasion operations.

⁴⁰ *TF 52 AR*, p. 11.

⁴¹ *VAC NGF and Air Rpts*, p. 15.

⁴² *TF 52 AR*, Encl D, p. 9.

⁴³ *TF 51 AR*, Pt IV, p. 13; *TF 52 AR*, Encl H, p. 1.

All that remained now before Marines would hit the Iwo beaches the following morning was the execution of the D-Day fires in preparation for the landings. This pre-H-Hour bombardment would be the Navy's final opportunity to pound the enemy defenses before the assault. In fact, when the heavy support units withdrew from Iwo on the evening of the 18th, the softening-up phase had already come to an end. On the eve of D-Day, Admiral Blandy sent this message to Admiral Turner:

Though weather has not permitted complete expenditure of entire ammunition allowance and more installations can be found and destroyed with one more day of bombardment, I believe landing can be accomplished tomorrow as scheduled if necessary. I recommend, however, special attention before and during landing to flanks and East Coast of island with neutralizing fire and white phosphorus projectiles immediately available if required.⁴⁴

The final night before the landings was one of deep soul-searching for General Holland Smith, who found that "the imminence of action and the responsibility for the most appalling operation we had yet undertaken weighed heavily."⁴⁵ This veteran Marine commander was filled with apprehension by the gravity of the coming battle. Weeks earlier, Smith recalled, when the Navy had overruled the Marines' request

for nine days of preparatory gunfire and then withdrew two of the 16-inch gun ships to provide antiaircraft fire for Task Force 58, Admiral Spruance had told him: "I regret this confusion caused in your carefully laid plans, but I know you and your people will get away with it."⁴⁶ Smith realized even then that any curtailment in the duration and volume of preparatory naval gunfire would be paid for with the lives of many Marines. Years later, the general was to recall:

I felt certain we would lose 15,000 men at Iwo Jima. This number was the absolute minimum calculated in our plans made at Pearl Harbor, although some of my officers wistfully predicted a lower figure. So far as the Marines were concerned, we had made every preparation humanly possible to capture the island as expeditiously and as economically as possible. We were to land 60,000 assault troops, and the estimate that one in every four would be dead or wounded never left my mind.

I was not afraid of the outcome of the battle. I knew we would win. We always had. But contemplation of the cost in lives caused me many sleepless nights.⁴⁷

As night descended upon Iwo Jima and its surrounding dark waters on the evening of the 18th, the preliminary bombardment phase came to an end. Early on the 19th a new phase, the assault would begin. The invasion of Iwo Jima would take place without modification of the carefully laid plans.

⁴⁴ CTF 52 msg to CTF 51, NCR 60303, dtd 18Feb45, as cited in Bartley, *Iwo Monograph*, p. 49.

⁴⁵ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 253.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 253-254.

D-Day on Iwo Jima¹

PRE H-HOUR BOMBARDMENT²

Early on 19 February, the assault ships of Task Force 53 under Admiral

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: U. S. Flt Ops Rpt, 16Feb-16Mar45; TF 51 AR; TF 52 AR; TF 56 AR; TF 56 G-3 Jnl, 26Jan-14Mar45, hereafter TF 56 G-3 Jnl; TG 53.2 AR, 19Feb-4Mar45, hereafter TG 53.2 AR; PhibGru 2 AR; VAC AR; VAC G-2 Rpts; VAC C-3 Jnl, 25Jan-27Mar45, hereafter VAC C-3 Jnl; VAC C-3 PerRpt, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter VAC C-3 Rpt; VAC C-4 Jnl, 6-13Mar45, hereafter VAC C-4 Jnl; 4th MarDiv OpRpt; 4th MarDiv G-2 PerRpts, 19-25Feb45, hereafter 4th MarDiv G-2 Rpts; 4th MarDiv D-3 PerRpts, 8Feb-17Mar45, hereafter 4th MarDiv D-3 Rpts; 4th MarDiv D-4 PerRpts, 3Jan-19Mar45, hereafter 4th MarDiv D-4 Rpts; 5th MarDiv AR; 5th MarDiv G-1 Jnl, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter 5th MarDiv D-1 Jnl; 5th MarDiv D-2 PerRpts, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter 5th MarDiv D-2 PerRpts; 5th MarDiv D-3 Jnl, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter 5th MarDiv D-3 Jnl; 5th MarDiv D-4 Jnl, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter 5th MarDiv D-4 Jnl; Iwo Comments; Bartley, *Iwo Monograph*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*; Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*; Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*; Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*; Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*; Morehouse, *The Iwo Jima Campaign*; T. Grady Gallant, *The Friendly Dead* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), hereafter Gallant, *The Friendly Dead*, quoted with permission.

² Additional material in this section is derived from: *Fifth Flt NGF rpt*; *Iwo Preliminary Gunfire Requirements*; TF 53 AR; TF 56 AirRpt; TF 56 Preliminary NGF Rpt; VAC NGF and Air Rpts; Henri et. al., *Marines on Iwo Jima*.

Hill arrived off Iwo Jima and joined Admiral Blandy's Amphibious Support Force. As dawn rose over Iwo Jima, more than 450 ships of the Fifth Fleet lay offshore, the largest armada ever assembled thus far for a military operation in the Pacific Theater.

Included in Admiral Hill's Attack Force were the troop ships carrying the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions. The huge vessels headed towards the transport area about 10,000 yards offshore. On board the ships, 50,000 Marines ate a hearty breakfast and went topside for a glance at the island which they would shortly assault. There was little to see. Almost totally obscured by the darkness, the island appeared as a shadowy mass of land, dominated by Mount Suribachi which "gave thousands of straining eyes aboard ship only periodic glimpses of its sharp, vertical-cone."³

It was apparent by early morning that the landing force would encounter favorable weather. The sea was relatively smooth and surf conditions were satisfactory. The sky was clear; visibility was virtually unlimited, and the temperature was 68 degrees. Wind velocity was eight to ten knots from the north.

Promptly at 0640, the heavy support ships launched the pre-H-Hour bombardment, as Admiral Rodgers' Gunfire

³ Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*, p. 43.

and Covering Force hurled tons of high explosives into the island. This was the last chance to silence the heavy enemy guns that dominated the boat lanes and beaches, and the gun crews of the *North Carolina*, *Washington*, *New York*, *Texas*, *Arkansas*, and *Nevada* turned to with grim determination. As shell bursts flicked flame, smoke, and chunks of Iwo into the air, it appeared as if the bombardment were intended to blow the very island out of the sea. Even the dead crater of Mount Suribachi seemed to come to life as it steamed from successive hits along its lip. Blasts, following one another in close succession, rocked the beaches, the airfields, and the northern portion of Iwo with its numerous hills and gullies.

In addition to the heavy gunfire ships, the gunboat and mortar support groups participated in the preparatory fire. The latter groups consisted of 42 LCI gunboats. Twelve of the LCIs were armed with 4.5-inch rockets and 40mm guns; 18 carried 4.2-inch mortars, and 9 were equipped with 5-inch rocket launchers.⁴ The LCIs joined the bombardment by the big ships at 0730 and, throughout the morning, expended nearly 10,000 rockets and large quantities of mortar ammunition while showering the slopes of Mount Suribachi and the high ground to the north of the beaches with rocket and mortar fire.

At the same time, initial preparations for boating the assault force got under way. LSTs and troop transports eased into the areas assigned to them and prepared to discharge their cargo of troops and equipment. The transports

lowered the landing craft, which circled as they waited to be boarded by the Marines. On the tank decks of the LSTs, the engines of the LVTs were started, and Marines took their places in the vehicles assigned to them to await the launching signal. The signal was given at 0725; less than half an hour later, 482 amtracs were churning the water, ready to carry eight battalions into battle.⁵

The prelanding bombardment proceeded exactly as scheduled. A few minutes after 0800, the naval guns lifted their fire and 120 fighters and bombers of TF 58 swept over the island in two waves. The aircraft concentrated their attack against the slopes of Mount Suribachi, the landing beaches, and the high ground to the north of the landing beaches. Following the bombing and strafing by the first wave, the second arrived over the island and unleashed napalm, rockets, and machine gun fire against the defenders. Included in the second wave were 24 Marine F4U Corsairs under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William A. Millington, commanding VMF-124 on board the *Essex*.

The squadron commander led his flight over Iwo Jima to attack the flanks and high ground along the landing beaches. From H minus 45 to H minus 35, the planes remained over the island and launched their attacks in accordance with a plan previously worked out between Millington and Colonel Vernon E. Megee, Commander of the Landing Force Air Support Control Unit and Deputy Commander, Aircraft, Landing Force. Prior to the mission,

⁴ VAC NGF Rpt, pp. 25-26.

⁵ Bartley, *Iwo Monograph*, p. 51.

Megee had admonished the fighter squadron commander to "go in and scrape your bellies on the beach"⁶ and that is precisely what Millington proposed to do.

While these air strikes were under way, the gunfire support ships moved closer to the shore and assumed positions from which they would deliver the final neutralization fires. A strike by 44 Army Air Forces bombers had also been scheduled prior to H-Hour, but over half of the Liberators failed to complete the trip from the Marianas; only 15 arrived to drop 19 tons of 100-pound bombs on the eastern defenses of Iwo.⁷

At 0825, the naval bombardment resumed. Since only a half hour remained before the first assault wave would hit the beaches, all available fire was directed against the landing sites. As the last phase of the pre-assault bombardment got under way, air bursts were employed to annihilate any Japanese that might be caught out in the open. The naval gunners subsequently shifted to impact rounds as time for the approach of the first assault wave grew near. During the final 15 minutes of the bombardment, the naval vessels offshore blasted the invasion beaches with everything they had. The thunderous roar of the 16-inch guns was supplemented by the sharper bark of the 5- and 8-inch guns of the destroyers and cruisers. Rocket craft unleashed their fire, and mortar boats shelled inland to a depth of about 1,000 yards. As the

⁶ Colonel Vernon E. Megee, as quoted in Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 347.

⁷ Craven and Cate, *the Pacific*, pp. 591-592.

assault troops approached the shore, the naval bombardment shifted ahead to provide the mightiest preinvasion shelling thus far experienced in the Pacific Theater. In less than 30 minutes, more than 8,000 shells smashed into the beach area.

In other amphibious assaults in the Pacific Theater, naval gunfire had sometimes lifted too far inland when the troops came ashore. This lack of adequate fires close to landing areas had resulted in heavy casualties early in the operation, notably at Saipan. In order to prevent this situation from arising at Iwo Jima, VAC recommended the use of a rolling barrage reminiscent of the massive artillery concentrations of World War I. Such a barrage had to be precisely timed to keep the fire just ahead of the advancing troops; infantry commanders had to exercise maximum care to keep their men from advancing faster than the scheduled time for lifting the barrage forward. The rolling barrage was to be delivered by the 5-inch batteries, whose gunners were to maintain a 400-yard margin of safety ahead of the friendly troops. If, for any reason, the attack bogged down and did not move forward as rapidly as anticipated, certain prearranged fires were to be repeated.⁸

Only minutes remained to H-Hour. None of the officers responsible for the preliminary bombardment could fathom the effect of the damage inflicted on the enemy defenses; at best they could hope that the naval bombardment and the aerial bombing and strafing had seriously diminished the enemy's ability

⁸ VAC NGF and Air Rpts, p. 23.

to frustrate the imminent landings. The Marines about to hit the hostile beaches would be the first to know for certain how strongly the enemy could still react to their amphibious assault.

*THE AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT*⁹

For the Marines in the assault waves, D-Day had started with the traditional meal of steak and eggs. Shortly after 0800, while naval shells were rocking Iwo, the amphibian tractors carrying eight Marine battalions to the Iwo beaches were churning in the water. A line of departure had been established about two miles offshore and parallel to the beach. At each end of this line, a control vessel was stationed to mark its boundaries. A central control vessel occupied the middle of the line. Along the line, at regular intervals, small vessels marked the boat lanes. The assistant division commanders, Brigadier General Franklin A. Hart for the 4th Marine Division, and Brigadier General Leo D. Hermle for the 5th, stationed themselves at each end of the line of departure as observers.

Boated and circling, the first three waves were ready to cross the line of departure by 0815. It was from here that the Marines watched the island take a severe pounding from the naval shelling and cheered as the supporting aircraft unloaded their lethal cargo over the island. The men approaching

⁹ Additional material in this section is derived from: *TransDiv 45 AR*; 2d Armd Amtrac Bn AR, 17Apr45; 1st SP Bn UJnl, 19-24-Feb45; 2d SP Bn UJnl, 19Feb-3Mar45; 5th SP Rgt. AR, n.d.; LSM Gru 13 AR, 19Feb-14Mar-45, hereafter *LSM Gru 13 AR*; 31st NCB AR, 9Mar45, in *5th MarDiv AR*, Anx U, hereafter *31st NCB AR*; 1st JASCO OpRpt, 5Apr45.

Iwo Jima were fully aware of what lay ahead; there had been no attempt at concealing the fact that a tough and costly battle awaited them. Men of the 4th Marine Division were going in with the prayer of their commander, General Cates, that as many of them as possible might be spared. General Schmidt felt that it would be a bitter but short fight.

The men in the assault waves hoped that the Navy could come up to its expectation of knocking out all defenses on the beaches, as well as most other targets further inland. Their mood varied from incredulity that any of the defenders could survive the heavy naval bombardment to skepticism born out of past experience. Many Marines remembered how many of the Japanese had survived similar bombardments on Tarawa, Guam, and Peleliu. There was also some wishful thinking; smaller islands in the Volcano-Bonins had been known to sink into the ocean, and there was hardly a Marine in the convoy who did not hope that Iwo might put on such a disappearing act under the weight of the explosives pouring upon it.¹⁰

At precisely 0830, the central control vessel dipped her pennant, releasing the first assault wave. Sixty-eight LVT-(A)s of the 2d Armored Amphibian Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Reed M. Fawell, Jr., crossed the line of departure and headed for the beaches. While hundreds of naval shells whistled overhead, the first wave followed the gunboats that poured rockets and 40mm shells into the beach before

¹⁰ Henri et al, *Marines on Iwo Jima*, p. 34.

turning right and left respectively to positions from where they continued to support the flank battalions.

The operations plan had allowed 30 minutes for each assault wave to travel the 4,000 yards from the line of departure to the beaches. Following the first, successive waves crossed the line at 250- to 300-yard intervals. The second assault wave, consisting of 1,360 Marines in LVTs, crossed the line of departure two minutes behind the first wave. Eight more waves formed behind the first two, to be landed at five-minute intervals. The plan called for 9,000 men to be ashore in somewhat less than 45 minutes.

When the leading wave had reached a point 400 yards offshore, the naval bombardment shifted to the interior of the island and to the flanks. At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Millington's fighters streaked down in magnificent strafing which continued relentlessly as the LVT(A)s approached the beaches. In accordance with their orders, the pilots, who earlier that morning had executed the napalm and rocket strike against Iwo, now hit the beaches in daring low-level attacks. Just as the first wave came ashore, the planes shifted their strafing runs about 500 yards inland.

The ship-to-shore movement of the assault waves was carried out according to schedule. The first wave landed between 0859 and 0903; the second and third waves came ashore at two-minute intervals. The defenders remained strangely silent as the first assault troops approached the beaches, and the initial waves were not subjected to any enemy antiboat fire during the final ap-

proach to the objective. For some of the Marines, a small sliver of hope began to emerge that the heavy bombardment had reduced the enemy to impotence.

Up to the point where the first LVT(A)s emerged from the water and ground forward, the entire maneuver had been executed with parade-ground precision. For the incoming Marines, the only indication of the enemy's presence on the island thus far had been confined to the air. One moment, a 5th Marine Division observation aircraft was circling lazily overhead; the next, enemy antiaircraft fire scored a direct hit and the small airplane spiraled into the surf. The first tractors had no sooner reached the beach and commenced heading inland than it was discovered that the 15-foot terrace directly behind the beach blocked their fields of fire. The height and steepness of the terrace was the first unpleasant surprise that the Marines were to encounter on Iwo. A second one was not long in coming. As the Marines of the 4th and 5th Divisions swarmed from their vehicles, it became evident that the composition of the volcanic sand was not what had been expected. Instead of sand with sufficient consistency to support at least tracked vehicles and men on foot, Marines of the landing force, many of them weighted down with more than 100 pounds of weapons and other gear, found themselves floundering in a sea of soft volcanic ash that all but precluded their ascending that 15-foot seawall. Almost immediately, the Marines sank up to their ankles into the loose ash that tugged at their feet and made all forward movement a strenuous undertaking.



ASSAULT TROOPS of the 4th Marine Division go ashore on Iwo Jima. (USMC 110109)



MARINES OF 2/27 hit the beach in the shadow of Mt. Suribachi. (USMC 111688)

Some of the amphibian tractors never slackened their speed upon reaching the beaches but pushed their way straight inland, up the first terrace and beyond it until they had advanced between 50 and 75 yards. Those LVT(A)s failing to negotiate the incline headed back out to sea, where they turned around and fired inland. At 0907, the third wave of 1,200 men went ashore, followed about five minutes later by another 1,600 men of the fourth wave. Successive assault waves followed closely behind the first ones. There still was no organized enemy opposition though a few isolated artillery and mortar shells began to fall in the surf as the later waves neared the shore. Except for a number of land mines, the beaches were found clear of man-made obstacles.

The eight battalions of the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions that landed abreast on the southeastern shore of Iwo Jima were 1/28, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jackson B. Butterfield, and 2/28, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Chandler W. Johnson, on Green 1; 2/27, under Major John A. Antonelli, on Red 1; 1/27, under Lieutenant Colonel John A. Butler, on Red 2; 1/23, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Haas, on Yellow 1; 2/23, under Major Robert Davidson, on Yellow 2; 1/25, headed by Lieutenant Colonel Hollis U. Mustain, on Blue 1; and 3/25 under Lieutenant Colonel James Taul, on the southern edge of Blue 2.

As the men headed inland, the Japanese gradually came to life. The first among the landing force to feel the enemy reaction were the men of Major Davidson's 2/23 on Yellow 2 in the 4th Division sector. A moderate amount

of mortar fire hit the beach within two minutes after the first wave had landed. Within 15 minutes, Marines on the Yellow and Blue beaches were reporting heavy enemy mortar fire. To the south, on the Red Beaches and Green 1, 5th Division Marines started to advance inland against initially light opposition. By 0930, 1/28 had moved 150 yards inland. Ten minutes later, the battalion reported receiving heavy mortar fire from the left flank. By the time the advance had covered 300 yards, the men were sprinkled, showered, and ultimately deluged by mortar and artillery fire from Mount Suribachi, as well as from the high ground to the north of the landing beaches. The loose, slipping sand offered poor cover; foxholes filled in almost as fast as a man could shovel, and urgent requests for sandbags began to fill the air waves. By 0935, Green 1 and the Red Beaches were on the receiving end of a heavy mortar barrage. Marines moving inland drew intense machine gun and rifle fire from well-concealed pillboxes, blockhouses, and caves as soon as they left the protective cover of the first terrace.

While the Marines advancing into the interior of Iwo were being swamped by enemy fire that was still increasing both in volume and accuracy, congestion among the additional waves along the shore began to mount. The Japanese meanwhile had begun to concentrate their fire on LVTs and landing craft on and near the beaches. Enemy mortars and artillery soon scored numerous direct hits on the hapless vessels. Jeeps and trucks emerging from those landing craft that had been fortunate enough to survive the trip ashore rolled

out on the beaches only to become bogged down in the treacherous volcanic ash even before they had cleared the ramp. Many of the small craft, their bows pinned to the beach, broached and swamped.

Despite the enemy fire, congestion at the water's edge, and initial confusion accompanying the landings, men and supplies continued to pour ashore. Within an hour and a half from the time that the Marines of the first wave had set foot on the island, all of the eight assault battalions were ashore. At 1005, three LSMs carrying 16 tanks of Lieutenant Colonel Richard K. Schmidt's 4th Tank Battalion hit the Yellow Beaches. The tanks encountered considerable difficulty in getting ashore. Even then, their troubles were far from over, and three tanks struck mines less than 150 yards in from the water.

While the naval barrage was still providing cover, the four newly landed Marine regiments prepared to reorganize and begin the push inland. From north to south these regiments were the 25th Marines, commanded by Colonel John R. Lanigan, and the 23rd Marines under Colonel Walter W. Wensinger, both belonging to the 4th Marine Division. The 5th Marine Division was represented by the 27th Marines, led by Colonel Thomas A. Wornham, and the 28th Marines under Colonel Harry B. Liversedge.

THE ADVANCE INLAND¹¹

As troop strength built up ashore, the time had come to put the basic plan

of attack into effect. Along the northern part of the beachhead, the 25th Marines was to advance towards a quarry just north of the East Boat Basin, which formed the eastern anchor of the O-1 Line denoting the objectives to be seized by the end of D-Day. This line, bisecting Motoyama Airfield No. 2, curved across the center of the island to the western shore at a point approximately 1,200 yards west of the airfield. Moving inland from the Yellow Beaches, the 23d Marines was to advance across the northern portion of Motoyama Airfield No. 1 towards Airfield No. 2. To the 27th Marines fell the task of advancing inland in a northwesterly direction, slicing across the southern tip of Airfield No. 1 and then pivoting more to the north, to reach a point west of Airfield No. 2. The 28th Marines had the mission of isolating Mount Suribachi and assaulting this formidable obstacle. To this end, the 1st Battalion, landing at H-Hour, was to cut across the narrow neck of the island, a distance of only 700 yards. The 2d Battalion was to

9Apr45, 4th MarDiv OpRpt, Anx F, hereafter *23d Mar OpRpt*; 24th Mar OpRpt, 19Feb-18Mar45, Anx G to 4th MarDiv OpRpt, hereafter *24th Mar OpRpt*; 25th Mar UJnl, 18Feb-23Mar45, hereafter *25th Mar UJnl*; 25th Mar OpRpt, 15Apr45, 4th MarDiv OpRpt, Anx H, hereafter *25th Mar OpRpt*; 28th Mar UJnl, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter *28th Mar UJnl*; 5th Tank Bn AR, Feb-Mar45, hereafter *5th Tank Bn AR*; 1/13 UJnl, 19Feb-17Mar45, hereafter *1/13 UJnl*; 1/24 OpRpt, 20Apr45, hereafter *1/24 OpRpt*; 2/24 AR, 19Feb-16Mar45, hereafter *2/24 AR*; 1/27 UJnl, 19Feb-18Mar45, hereafter *1/27 UJnl*; 2/27 UJnl, 19Feb-23Mar45, hereafter *2/27 UJnl*; 3/27 UJnl, 19Feb-23Mar45, hereafter *3/27 UJnl*; 471st Amph Truck Co (Army) OpRpt, 17Mar45, hereafter *471st Amph Trk Co OpRpt*.

¹¹ Additional material in this section is derived from: 13th Mar UJnl, 19Feb-21Mar45, hereafter *13th Mar UJnl*; 23d Mar OpRpt,

advance about 350 yards inland, then turn southward towards Mount Suribachi.

At 0935, 2/28 started to land on Green 1 behind 1/28. Its mission was to take up positions facing Mount Suribachi, protecting the left flank of the landing force. By this time, heavy mortar and artillery fire was enveloping the beaches, making reorganization of the companies difficult.

As the 1st Battalion launched its 700-yard sprint for the western shore with Companies B and C abreast, accurate enemy small arms fire from concealed positions began to rake the advancing Marines. It soon became evident that the advance would prove costly. The intensity of the enemy fire all but precluded a coordinated movement. Men advanced in small groups, heedless of security to their flanks; some units were temporarily pinned down by an enemy who remained largely invisible. Between the bursts of artillery and mortar shells all around them, the Marines strained to get a glimpse of the defenders. What they saw was not reassuring, for halfway across the island a maze of mutually supporting blockhouses and pillboxes extended across the entire front.

In a situation where movement threatened to bog down in the heavily fortified area, the courage of individual Marines kept the attack rolling. Among the first to distinguish himself was Captain Dwayne E. Mears, commanding Company B. Armed with only a pistol, the company commander personally assaulted a pillbox that was retarding the advance of his company. Despite a wound that later proved to be fatal,

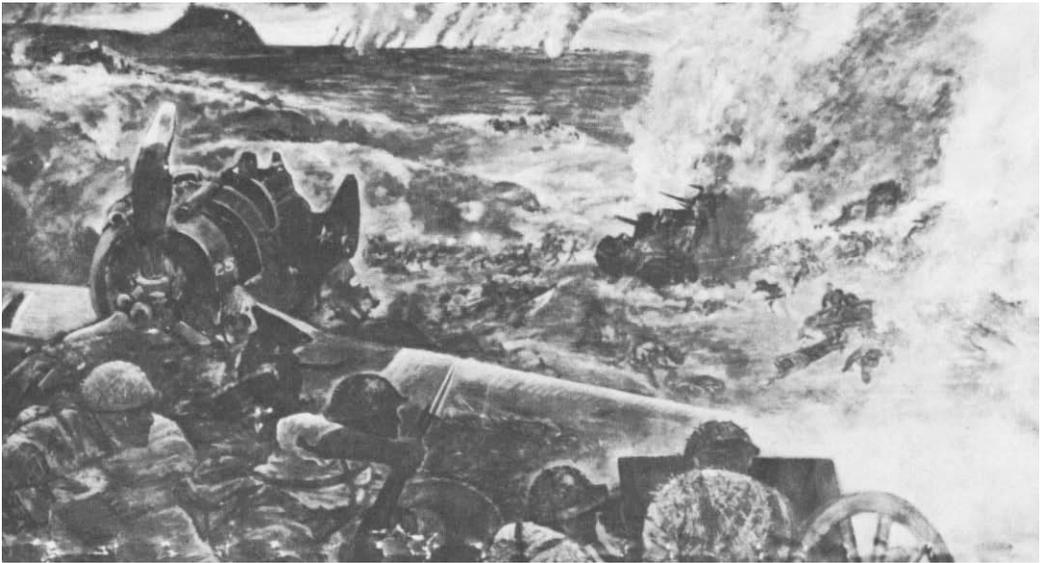
Captain Mears continued to attack successive enemy positions until he became too weak to move.¹² On the right, Captain Phil E. Roach led the advance of Company C across the island, carefully maintaining the same rate of progress as Company B. While assaulting a heavily fortified position, Captain Roach also became a casualty. Many men who found themselves separated from their platoons during the dash across the island formed small groups that continued to advance independently, thus helping to preserve the momentum of the attack.

The success of the 28th Marines' attack owed much to the support provided by the 60mm mortars which maintained continuous fire against groups of Japanese that had been flushed out of their emplacements. This fire kept the enemy on the run and out in the open, where he presented a visible target to the advancing riflemen. Lieutenant Richard H. Sandberg, commanding Company A's mortar platoon, spotted an enemy 90mm mortar squad and concentrated his fire on the Japanese until they were forced to abandon their weapon. Even more remarkably, in the heat of the engagement this platoon leader was observed firing a 60mm mortar with amazing accuracy, though it was without a base plate.¹³ Before noon, Lieutenant Sandberg became a casualty and had to be evacuated.

At 1035, elements of Company B reached the western shore of Iwo. Enemy fire had inflicted so many casualties and made control so difficult that

¹² *5th MarDiv AR*, Anx S, p. 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*



THE INVASION OF IWO JIMA as seen through the eyes of a Japanese artist. (USA SC 301128)



DOBERMAN PINSCHER of the 6th War Dog Platoon and handler approach enemy cave. (USAF 58252 AC)

only the platoon leader, Lieutenant Frank J. Wright, and four men of the 1st Platoon, Company B, made it all the way across the island. Lieutenant Wesley C. Bates, leading the 2d Platoon, and six of his men reached the western beach around 1100 and joined forces with Lieutenant Wright.

Even though elements of the 1st Battalion had now crossed the island, bypassed enemy positions continued to offer fierce resistance. Company A, which had landed in 1/28 reserve and faced south towards Mount Suribachi to protect the battalion's left flank, was now relieved by 2/28 and joined the remainder of the 1st Battalion in mopping up. Because of the heavy casualties 1/28 had sustained, Colonel Liversege requested the release of 3/28, the division reserve, to his control. General Rockey granted this request. The battalion, boated and prepared to land on any 5th Division beach, received the order to land at 1210. Ten minutes later the first boats crossed the line of departure. As the leading wave approached the shore, heavy fire from Mount Suribachi and the high ground north of the landing beaches was directed at the boats. This unit suffered many more casualties during the ship-to-shore movement than had the 1st and 2d Battalions. Shortly after 1300, all elements were ashore, though it was not until late afternoon that the battalion was able to edge its way into the line. Following a naval gunfire preparation, and with adequate air support, the 2d and 3d Battalions were to jump off jointly at 1545 to attack south towards Mount Suribachi.

For such an attack, the support of armor was necessary. Company C of the 5th Tank Battalion was therefore ordered to land in direct support of the 28th Marines. This company had 14 Sherman M-4 tanks, two flametanks, one tankdozer, and one retriever. When they landed on Red One Beach about 1130, the tanks found it rough going because soft sand and storm terraces made exit difficult and the first terrace was mined. By the time additional elements of the 5th Tank Battalion got ashore, the beach was congested by stranded wheeled vehicles disabled by enemy fire. The increasing concentration of men and equipment in a restricted area was beginning to cause considerable confusion.

An eye witness had this to say about Company C's arrival on Iwo Jima:

An infantryman picked up one of the first tanks to land and started to guide him off the beach; the route he used was marked with white tape. When the tank reached the top of the first terrace, he was guided to the right, across the tape and immediately struck a horn mine. One casualty was suffered, the driver having both legs broken, the remainder of the crew was badly shaken up. The interior of the tank was so badly damaged no attempt was made to repair it. Later it was turned into spare parts.¹⁴

Altogether, eight of the battalion's tanks were unable to get off the beaches. Five threw tracks, one hit a mine, one stuck in the sand, and one stalled.¹⁵ Even less fortunate were other sup-

¹⁴ Co C, 5th Tank Bn AR, Encl C, p. I, to 5th tank Bn AR.

¹⁵ 5th Tank Bn AR, p. 4.

porting arms units, such as the regimental rocket section of RCT 28 which landed during the morning. Enemy artillery smashed three of the four truck-mounted rocket launchers immediately after landing. When the remaining launcher finally got into action and opened fire, a terrific explosion rocked the target area bringing loud cheers from Marines nearby.¹⁶

The tanks of Company C eventually exited the beach by a road between Red Beach 1 and 2, arriving in the zone of action of 1/28 about 1400. Lieutenant Colonel Butterfield's battalion at the time was pinned down, suffering casualties from Japanese fire coming from pillboxes and blockhouses bypassed earlier. It was decided to use the entire tank company in cleaning up the area. Because of minefields and tank traps, the tanks advanced in a column which came under antitank fire immediately after moving out. Armor-piercing shells penetrated the turrets of two tanks, each of which suffered three casualties. Shortly thereafter, the enemy scored a hit on a third tank, rendering the turret inoperative. The tankers ultimately knocked out the hostile gun. This completed their mission with 1/28.

About 1600, the tanks formed up to support 2/28 and 3/28 in the planned attack towards Mount Suribachi but enemy fire was so heavy that the attacking battalions could not get into their proper positions. The 3d Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles E. Shepard, Jr., was unable to get into

jumpoff positions alongside the 2d Battalion. The tanks of Company C had moved out about 200 yards when it was observed that the troops on the right were not moving. By the time the 3d Battalion did get on line, it was considered too late to launch the attack, and Shepard's men began to dig in for the night.

Shortly before 1700, 2/28 launched an attack of its own, supported by tanks of Company C. By 1730, the battalion had advanced only 150 yards and even this slight gain, obtained at the cost of many casualties, had to be relinquished when 2/28 was ordered to fall back and tie in with the 3d Battalion for the night. The tanks of Company C thereafter found themselves in the unusual role of remaining forward of the lines, firing at pillboxes and covering the infantry units as they prepared for the night. Company C was released from this assignment about 1845. One tank, bogged down in a shell crater, had to be abandoned after the crew removed the gun mechanism and destroyed the radio. The company withdrew to a point about 300 yards from the front lines and dug in for a first night marked by almost continuous mortar fire.

At the same time that the 28th Marines was advancing inland from Green Beach, Colonel Wornham's RCT 27 was preparing to advance inland from Red 1 and 2, where 2/27 and 1/27 had landed abreast. On the left, 2/27 pushed inland, initially meeting only scattered resistance. Both battalions advanced rapidly against stiffening resistance, bypassing numerous enemy positions along the way. By 1130, 1/27

¹⁶LtCol Oscar F. Peatross ltr to CMC, dtd 23Dec52, in *Iwo Comments*.

was infiltrating the southern end of Motoyama Airfield No. 1 and consolidating along the western edge of the field. Company C had passed the field and occupied a line extending for about 250 yards from its southwestern part to the northwest. The 2d Battalion was generally abreast of the 1st, maintaining contact with it. The 27th Marines also was receiving its share of enemy mortar and artillery fire, and casualties mounted as the advance continued. Among those wounded at this time was the executive officer of the regiment, Colonel Louis C. Plain, who was hit in the arm and subsequently evacuated.

The support of armor was needed to overcome the stubborn enemy resistance, so Company A of the 5th Tank Battalion was attached to 1/27. Earlier that morning, this company had been the first tank unit ashore, landing on the Red beaches at 0925. In attempting to get off the beaches, four tanks broke their tracks in the loose sand; the engine of another Sherman malfunctioned so that it could no longer move. The remaining tanks finally found a way off the beach and proceeded towards Motoyama Airfield No. 1. With their support, 1/27 was somewhat better able to reduce the strongly defended enemy positions, although the presence of armor in the front lines proved a mixed blessing to the hard pressed Marines who found that the Shermans attracted enemy antitank fire. Even with tank support, however, the 1st Battalion was unable to make any significant advance for the remainder of the day.

It was a different story with Major

Antonelli's 2d Battalion, hell-bent on driving to the opposite side of the island. Moving inland from Red Beach 1, the battalion ran into heavy fire from light machine guns and rifles; progress was further impeded by the enemy's use of hand grenades.

About 50 yards inland, the battalion encountered its first pillbox, one of many carefully camouflaged in this area. In accordance with their orders to cross the island as quickly as possible, Companies E and F bypassed many enemy installations, eliminating only those directly in their path. Assault teams equipped with flamethrowers and hand grenade-throwing riflemen neutralized the Japanese inside while engineer teams blew up the pillboxes with explosive charges.

Leading a machine gun platoon of 1/27 past the southern end of Motoyama Airfield No. 1 was Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone, know as "Manila John" and famous for his exploits on Guadalcanal in October 1942 that had won him the Medal of Honor. On Guadalcanal he had thwarted a Japanese assault by alternately firing two machine guns and a pistol. His presence on Iwo Jima was his own choice; he had previously turned down a commission in favor of remaining an enlisted man. As Manila John rushed for the west coast of Iwo, a few steps ahead of his men, a mortar shell suddenly burst close behind him, mortally wounding this great fighting Marine and four of his men.

Although the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines could not advance to the north, 2/27 was able to push its attack west-

ward and seized the cliffs overlooking the west coast by mid-afternoon. The regimental reserve, 3/27 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Donn J. Robertson, had landed at 1130 and, moving up behind 2/27, assisted in mopping up positions bypassed by the 2d Battalion.

Despite heavy Japanese shelling of the entire beachhead on D-Day, additional units arrived on shore throughout the day. At 1500, 1/26, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Daniel C. Pollock, completed its landing and moved into an assembly area about 300 yards inland from Red Beach 1. Shortly thereafter, the battalion was attached to the 27th Marines and ordered to take up defensive positions behind 2/27. Company B, 5th Tank Battalion, began landing on Red Beach 1 at 1300. As in the case of the armor that had landed earlier, the tanks encountered trouble in getting off the beach, but by 1600 they had reached the western side of the island, where they were attached to the 27th Marines.

Meanwhile, the 26th Marines, under Colonel Chester B. Graham, had spent most of the day on board ship in corps reserve. Just before 1000, General Schmidt released the regiment, less the 1st Battalion, to its parent division; the 21st Marines of the 3d Marine Division became the corps reserve. The 26th Marines was ordered to proceed to the line of departure shortly after 1100, but the crowded condition of the beaches and limited space inland precluded a landing until late afternoon. It was 1730 before Colonel Graham's regiment finished coming ashore over

Red Beach 1. The regiment moved into an assembly area just south of Motoyama Airfield No. 1, where it took up defensive positions.

The four artillery battalions of the 13th Marines, commanded by Colonel James D. Waller, were also preparing to go ashore. Reconnaissance parties sent to the beaches as early as 1030 had discovered that the previously selected battery positions were still in enemy hands. As a result, 3/13, under Lieutenant Colonel Henry T. Waller, did not reach the island until 1400. Half an hour later, 2/13, commanded by Major Carl W. Hjerpe, went ashore, to be followed at 1645 by 1/13 under Lieutenant Colonel John S. Oldfield. Major James F. Coady's 4th Battalion reached Iwo between 1930 and 2000. The darkness and enemy fire took their toll of 4/13. Three DUKWs swamped; their cargo, consisting of two guns and badly needed radio equipment, was lost.

Major Hjerpe's 2d Battalion had been scheduled to land on Red Beach 2, but just as the first DUKWs approached the shore, they were hit by a heavy enemy barrage. One 105mm howitzer was destroyed by enemy fire; another was slightly damaged. The landing of 1/13 took place under more favorable conditions. One hour after landing, despite the same beach conditions that had slowed up the other battalions, the first battery was in position and ready to fire, a state achieved by the entire battalion at 2245. Last to go ashore, 4/13 was able to emplace eight howitzers by 0440 on D plus 1; two of the 105s and other equipment did not reach the position until later in

the morning because their access road was blocked by crippled LVTs.

Landing four artillery battalions on beaches that were still exposed to incessant enemy fire was a hazardous undertaking. When the DUKWs of the Marine 5th and the Army 471st Amphibian Truck Companies reached the beaches with their cargo of 75mm and 105mm guns, they found it difficult to negotiate the deep sand. The wheeled vehicles could not get over the steep terrace behind the beaches until bulldozers and LVTs were pressed into service to pull them over the crest. Inland, the cargo was unloaded amidst heavy mortar and machine gun fire, while many furiously working artillerymen used their helmets and whatever else they could lay hands on to dig gun pits.

The arrival of the artillery on Iwo Jima underscored the fact, if any such emphasis was required, that the Marines had come to stay. To the men pinned down by heavy enemy fire, the presence of friendly artillery had additional implications:

The 13th's guns got over the south beaches somehow, and up the terraces. Within thirty minutes the crack of artillery, clearly recognizable to the foot soldiers, gave heart to the men on both fronts. Sergeant Joe L. Pipes' "Glamor Gal" was first to fire on Suribachi. At about the same instant, Sergeant Henry S. Kurpoat's 75 let go from behind Yellow 2, firing north.

They never settled the argument over which gun fired first, and it really didn't matter. Other guns were right behind them. The Marines shouted as the shells went over them. Dukws of the Army's 471st Amphibian Truck Company, their Negro drivers pressing ashore through

the wreckage, landed the field pieces of the 13th Marines in a steady column.¹⁷

Most of the artillery managed to get ashore. From that time on, the Japanese no longer had it all their way, though they retained the capability of inflicting major punishment on the assault force for some time to come.

The experience of the 13th Marines is typical of what was accomplished on D-Day and of the difficulties all Marines were to encounter on Iwo Jima. The 3d Battalion, going ashore at the northern end of Green Beach, went into position close to the water's edge. Within 20 minutes, one section of the 105mm guns was registered; by 1745, all guns were in position and ready to support the 28th Marines.

Throughout D-Day, reinforcements poured ashore as the organizational component of the landing force began to build up. At 1430, General Hermle went ashore with the ADC group and a headquarters reconnaissance party and established an advanced 5th Division command post. The assistant division commander, the first American general officer to set foot on the island, crossed Motoyama Airfield No. 1 while it was still under heavy enemy fire and gained first-hand information from units in the front lines.

The picture that presented itself to the observer at the beaches during the afternoon of D-Day was not a pretty one:

At the water's edge amtracs, LCMs and LCVPs were hit, burned, broached, capsized, and otherwise mangled. The loose, black volcanic cinders, slid past the churn-

¹⁷ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 119.

ing tires of wheeled vehicles, miring them axle-deep; the steep terraces blocked egress from the beach and extensive minefields took a heavy toll. Debris piled up everywhere.

Wounded men were arriving on the beach by the dozen, where they were not much better off than they had been at the front. There was no cover to protect them and supplies of plasma and dressings ran low. The first two boats bringing in badly needed litters were blown out of the water. Casualties were being hit a second time as they lay helpless, under blankets, awaiting evacuation to ships.¹⁸

A similar situation prevailed on the 4th Marine Division beaches. There also, men's feet sank to the ankles in the loose, coarse, volcanic ash and jeeps sank to the hubcaps. Trucks could not operate at all, and supplies had to be manhandled from the water's edge to the front. On the congested beaches, the enemy laid down a sustained fire along the water's edge that at times caused heavier casualties among Seabees and engineers and in evacuation stations than those suffered by combat units. One account likened operating in such terrain to "trying to fight in a bin of loose wheat."¹⁹

While 5th Division Marines struggled for the southern portion of Iwo Jima, fierce action developed on the northern beaches, where General Cates' 4th Division had gone ashore. Precisely at H-hour, Colonel Walter W. Wensinger's 23d Marines had landed on the Yellow beaches with two battalions abreast. The 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Haas, landed over Yellow 1; the 2d Battalion, under Major

Robert H. Davidson, landed to the right over Yellow 2. As in the 5th Division sector to the south, RCT 23 encountered little initial resistance until the two assault companies reached the second terrace. At this point, they began to draw heavy and accurate fire from the front and flanks, where the enemy was very much alive and firmly entrenched in pillboxes, ditches, and spidertraps. Squarely astride the regiment's front were two huge blockhouses and 50 pillboxes. Even though the blockhouses had sustained massive damage from the pre-landing bombardment, they still afforded cover for the enemy. Before an advance inland could get under way, the formidable enemy obstacles had to be eliminated, a task requiring the employment of armor.

Shortly before 1000, Company C of the 4th Tank Battalion was dispatched from the line of departure for Beaches Yellow 1 and 2, in three LSMs, carrying a total of 16 tanks. The first tank to leave LSM 216 bogged down after getting off the end of the ramp. Discharge of the armor from the remaining landing ships proceeded more smoothly, but after moving inland less than 150 yards from the water's edge, three tanks were immobilized by mines or the terrain.²⁰ After attempting for half an hour to recover the tank that had bogged down just off the ramp, LSM 216 withdrew to the line of departure. At 1100, another attempt was made to land the tanks, this time on Yellow 1, but none succeeded in getting ashore. Instead, LSM 216, having received a number of hits, proceeded to the hospital LST to

¹⁸ Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*, p. 53.

¹⁹ Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*, p. 149.

²⁰ *4th MarDiv OpRpt*, Anx F, p. 9.

discharge casualties. At 1245, LSM 216 finally succeeded in landing its tanks on Yellow 1. These tanks proceeded inland, but were unable to locate a route to the hard pressed 2/23. Nor was such a route ever found on D-Day.

Thus, only 1/23 received any tank support on 19 February, and due to difficult terrain and heavy enemy resistance, this support was relatively ineffective. Colonel Wensinger eventually requested that two tank retrievers be landed to assist the assault tanks which were in trouble along the beach. Some progress was made, but the nature of the terrain and heavy mortar and artillery fire from the flanks severely hindered retrieving operations.

RCT 23 had to fight its way forward with limited armored support. A hail of shells and small arms fire took a heavy toll of casualties. It was generally agreed that of all the unpleasant beaches on Iwo that day, those of the 4th Division were the hottest. At 0930, 1/23 reported that its forward elements had advanced 250 yards inland. Continued progress was slow. Ten minutes later, 2/23 sent word that it had advanced inland a similar distance, but that its leading elements were pinned down by machine gun fire from pillboxes to its front and flanks.

At noon, 1/23 had advanced 500 yards further inland to within 200 yards of Airfield No. 1. The advance of the 2d Battalion, still meeting intensive resistance, was lagging. In fact, 2/23 had made only 250 yards since its earlier report. The absence of tank support for the 2d Battalion was beginning to make itself felt; at the same time, it became

apparent that such support would not be available for some time. In view of this situation, the regimental commander decided to land 3/23, the reserve battalion, commanded by Major James S. Scales. The battalion received orders at 1300 to land along Yellow 1 Beach, move 200 yards inland, and support the attack of 2/23 with 81mm mortars.

Upon going ashore, the reserve battalion came under very heavy mortar and artillery fire. Fortunately, none of the landing craft received direct hits during the approach to the beach. Once they had come ashore, it was a different story; enemy shells could not help but hit something on the congested beaches, and casualties and destruction of materiel caused serious disorganization.

More trouble for the landing force on the beaches was in the offing, and for a time it appeared as if nature had joined hands with a stubborn and determined enemy to thwart the invasion of Iwo. At the same time that the intensity and accuracy of enemy fire on the beaches reached a climax, the surf began to rise. As LVTs bogged down or were hit, the congestion and confusion on the beaches grew immeasurably. But no real trouble developed until the arrival of the LCVPs. As the light boats hit the beaches, the surf broke over them, broaching some and swamping others. Other boats, some already disabled, piled in behind the first ones and were soon hurled on the beach by the waves.

Despite this combination of unfavorable surf and deadly resistance, Marines continued to advance inland, though

often every yard gained was paid for in blood. In the zone of attack of RCT 23, tanks finally reached the front lines during the afternoon. The left flank of 1/23 had advanced to the edge of Airfield No. 1 shortly after 1400, but heavy antitank fire forced the armor to beat a hasty retreat behind the revetted edge of the field. In order to get 3/23 off the congested beaches, Colonel Wensinger ordered the battalion to pass through 1/23 and carry the attack across the airfield. This order was partly carried out despite casualties and confusion, and, by 1700, 3/23 had reached the airfield boundary. The 2d Battalion derived little benefit from the arrival of armor in its zone of attack, where enemy mines, the soft volcanic ash, and accurate enemy fire precluded effective tank support. By 1730, Company F was barely able to reach the apron of Airfield No. 1, and there halted its advance for the remainder of the night.

As a result of the heavy resistance encountered by the 23d Marines, General Cates shortly after 1400 committed two battalions of the division reserve, the 24th Marines, commanded by Colonel Walter I. Jordan. The 1st and 2nd Battalions were to be attached to the 25th and 23d Marines respectively. At 1615, 2/24, under Lieutenant Colonel Richard Rothwell, was ordered to land on Yellow Beach 2 to relieve 2/23. Shortly before 1700, the battalion landed and moved inland about 700 yards to the front line. By 1800, it had relieved 2/23 and dug in for the night just short of the airfield, tying in between 2/23 and 1/25.

Among all of the Iwo beaches, the one most exposed to enemy fire was Blue

Beach 1, the northernmost of the invasion beaches, located right below a cliff that was held by the enemy in great strength. It was the unenviable task of the 25th Marines to secure the Blue Beaches. The regiment, under Colonel John R. Lanigan, landed two battalions abreast over Blue Beach 1 and the southern edge of Blue Beach 2. As on the remaining beaches, the first waves, landing shortly after 0900, reported only light enemy fire until the troops disembarked and moved approximately 25 yards from the LVTs, when they came under very heavy machine gun, mortar, artillery, and rocket fire.

At 0935, 1/25, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hollis U. Mustain, reported that the battalion was still under heavy fire of all types but had moved inland 300 yards.²¹ Half an hour later, 3/25, under Lieutenant Colonel Justice M. Chambers, reported that elements of the battalion had moved 350 yards northeastward along the beach and that the battalion's left flank was inland 400 yards and in contact with 1/25. The continuous, well-aimed enemy fire caused some disorganization along the beach and the men sought cover in large bomb craters along the shore. Casualties were heavy. By midafternoon, Company K had lost eight officers; Company L had lost five by 1630, and Company I lost six.²²

At 1020, Company A, 4th Tank Battalion, which had been attached to 3/25, went ashore on Blue Beach 1. Almost at once the enemy concentrated the fire

²¹ *4th MarDiv OpRpt*, Anx H, p. 1.

²² Colonel Justice M. Chambers ltr to CMC, dtd 5Nov52, in *Iwo Comments*.

of his mortars, artillery, and antitank guns on the tank landing ships (LSMs). All three of the LSMs were hit and damaged while unloading. The enemy fire could not prevent the LSMs from landing, but caused a delay in launching the tanks. After having discharged the tanks, the LSMs retracted from the beach. A tank dozer cut a road from the first terrace inland from Blue Beach 1, but became a total loss when it hit a mine and turned into a sitting target for Japanese mortars and artillery.

The remaining tanks formed a column and gingerly proceeded inland for about 100 yards. At that time, the column came to a halt when it encountered an enemy minefield. Though immobilized for the time being, while engineers cleared the mines, the tanks supported the Marine riflemen with their 75mm guns, which fired on enemy positions and pillboxes behind the beach and in the cliffs to the north.

Meanwhile, the withering enemy fire had inflicted very heavy casualties on the 25th Marines, which doggedly continued its advance against a continuous mortar barrage and intense rifle and machine gun fire both from the front and the flanks. By noon the attack of the two assault battalions had become so channelized that a 100-yard gap had opened between 1/25 and 3/25. At this time, Colonel Lanigan decided that it was imperative for RCT 25 to seize the high ground northeast of Blue Beach 2. To this end, he ordered Lieutenant Colonel Lewis C. Hudson to land 2/25, which constituted the regimental reserve, on Blue Beach 1. The battalion was to attack in a column of companies astride the boundary between

1/25 and 3/25, seize the high ground to the northwest near a quarry, and assist the advance of 3/25.²³

By 1400, 2/25 had moved one company into the line between the other two battalions and a coordinated attack to the north got under way. From the very outset, the regimental attack moved slowly because of heavy enemy resistance. The 3d Battalion advanced for about 300 yards along the beach, then headed for the quarry about 400 yards north of the East Boat Basin. On the battalion's left, elements of 2/25 and 1/25 advanced 100 yards, but were driven back by intense small arms fire. By 1730, casualties and disorganization of 3/25 had assumed such proportions that Colonel Lanigan requested and received permission to commit one company of 1/24. An hour later, 2/25 and 3/25 had seized the high ground on top and inland of the quarry, but this advance had been paid for with extremely heavy casualties. At 1900, Lieutenant Colonel Chambers reported that the combat strength of 3/25 had diminished to only 150 men.²⁴

In order to compensate for the heavy losses his regiment had sustained on D-Day, and because the Japanese were expected to counterattack along the right flank of the regiment, Colonel Lanigan requested from division the use of one company of 3/24, the division reserve, which was in position directly behind 3/25. This request was denied, but the regimental commander received permission to use one more company of 1/24. As a result, Company B of 1/24

²³ *4th MarDiv OpRpt*, Anx H, p. 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

was attached to 3/25. Units began digging in at 1700 and firm contact was established along the front of RCT 25 except on the left flank where a 75-yard gap remained. This gap was covered by fire and observation during the night. In the course of the evening, the depleted 3/25 was relieved by 1/24 and took up defensive positions to the rear of 1/24. The relief, which took place under occasional enemy fire, was not completed until close to midnight.

The last battalion of the 24th Marines to go ashore was 3/24, under Lieutenant Colonel Alexander A. Vandegrift, Jr. The battalion landed before 1900 and moved inland a short distance from Blue Beach 2. All of the 4th Marine Division's infantry battalions were now ashore, and Marines were busily making preparations for an enemy counter-attack they felt sure would develop during their first night ashore.

As in the 5th Marine Division sector on the southern beaches, additional units reached Iwo on the northern beaches during D-Day. With most of the infantry ashore, the time had also come for the artillery regiment of the 4th Division, under Colonel Louis G. DeHaven, to land on the island. Reconnaissance parties from the artillery battalions had already debarked early in the afternoon in order to select positions for their batteries. In doing so, they faced difficulties similar to those encountered by the 13th Marines on the southern beaches. The front lines had advanced more slowly than planned; no routes had been cleared to enable the DUKWs to carry artillery pieces inland. One of the first members of the reconnaissance teams to become a casualty

was Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. McFarlane, commanding the 3d Battalion.

At 1405, General Cates ordered 1/14 under Major John B. Edgar, Jr. to land in direct support of the 25th Marines; Major Clifford B. Drake's 2/14 was to lend direct support to RCT 23. Upon hitting Blue Beach 1, the DUKWs of the 4th Amphibian Truck Company with their cargo of 75mm Pack Howitzers of 1/14, became immobilized at once. They quickly bogged down and settled in the volcanic ashes. Bulldozers attempting to get the DUKWs mobile again tugged and strained, but more often than not cables snapped and towing cleats sheered. One howitzer was lost when the DUKW in which it was loaded sank immediately after being discharged from its LST.²⁵ Nevertheless, by 1715 the 1st Battalion had succeeded in getting 11 howitzers into position after wrestling them up the terraces by hand. Half an hour later, all batteries of 1/14 were registered and ready to fire.

An even more difficult feat was to get the 105mm howitzers of 2/14 ashore. Because of the increased weight of these guns, it proved impossible to manhandle them up and over the terrace. The only feasible expedient was to keep each howitzer in the DUKW and then attempt to get the loaded DUKWs over the terrace. Surf conditions, the slippery sand, and continuous enemy fire combined to make this movement a miserable undertaking that took hours to complete. None of the DUKWs received a direct hit, though several casualties resulted from near misses.

²⁵ *14th Mar OpRpt*, App. 6, p. 3.

Shortly before dusk, all 12 howitzers of Major Drake's 2/14 were in position near Yellow Beach 1.

The 3d Battalion, under Major Harvey A. Feehan, was ordered to launch its DUKWs shortly after 1500. At this time, for unknown reasons, several DUKWs could not be started and more than an hour elapsed before all of the vehicles were in the water. Because of the congestion ashore and approaching dusk, Colonel DeHaven decided that the 3d and 4th Battalions were to delay going ashore until the following day, and 3/4 was reembarked on board the LST. During the reembarkation, a howitzer and a DUKW were lost when the amphibian truck's motor failed as it headed back up the ramp.

As D-Day on Iwo Jima came to an end, Marines all along the VAC front lines braced for a major Japanese counterattack they felt sure would come before the night was over.²⁶ The carnage which had taken place on the island on D-Day differed from anything the Marines had encountered elsewhere in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Despite the enemy presence, which made itself felt everywhere and continuously on the island, and to which the numerous dead and wounded could attest, few of the men who had landed

on Iwo that day had actually seen a live Japanese. No prisoners had been taken that first day, and only an occasional enemy corpse was visible.

Nevertheless, a steady flow of American casualties from the front to the beaches underscored the ferocity of the enemy resistance. Along the surf line, the litter of war continued to pile up in an almost unimaginable jumble: smashed landing craft surged upward and forward with every wave, crashing headlong into trucks, crates, and bodies at the edge of the water. Nearby, the wounded were gathered in small groups sitting or lying, just as exposed to the incessant enemy shelling as anyone else on the island and even more helpless in the face of it. For the remainder of D-Day, and into the night, boats approached Iwo Jima, loaded with reinforcements and supplies; having unloaded these, they took on a new cargo: the wounded, for whom surgeons would be waiting in transports and hospital LSTs especially prepared for this purpose.

*FIRST NIGHT ON IWO JIMA*²⁷

As D-Day on Iwo Jima came to an end and darkness descended over the island, Marines could take well justified pride in having seized a solid foothold on a heavily fortified bastion, where both the advantage in terrain and troop disposition rested with the defending

²⁶ "It was realized by VAC that there was much confusion and congestion on the beaches as D-Day wore on, but it was considered essential to avoid confusion afloat also, and Divisions were requested to get as many troops ashore as possible on D-Day, and to prepare for the anticipated banzai attack that night. We had more troops on the island by nightfall than the enemy had all told." *Rogers ltr.*

²⁷ Additional material in this section is derived from: 28th Mar AR, 19Feb-26Mar45, in *5th MarDiv AR*, Anx S, hereafter *28th Mar AR*; *28th Mar UJnl*; VAC Rpt on Night Operations, Iwo Jima, 12Aug45, hereafter *Iwo Jima Night Ops Rpt.*

garrison. Even though the advance nowhere came near to reaching the 0-1 Line, VAC had succeeded in getting six infantry regiments and six artillery battalions—nearly 30,000 men and thousands of tons of equipment—ashore. (See Map 28).

From General Holland Smith down through the ranks, it was generally believed that according to their earlier tactics, the Japanese would throw all the manpower they had against the vulnerable Marines during their first night ashore. The enemy was known to have a large reserve force of infantry and tanks available for such an all-out counterattack.²⁸ None of the intelligence personnel of VAC could suspect at the time that General Kuribayashi planned to conserve his manpower and would find other means to decimate the Marines that were crowded into the narrow beachhead.

The burden of battle was not only borne by the Marine assault units who had gone ashore on D-Day. Throughout the day, the supporting arms of the Amphibious Support Force had done all they could to assist their hard pressed comrades in arms. Carrier pilots of TF 58 and the escort carriers of TF 52 flew missions as long as daylight prevailed; airborne observers and spotters kept a continuous vigil over the target area. More than 600 aircraft flew 26 missions in the course of the day, including strikes prior to H-Hour, dropped 274,500 pounds of bombs, not including more than 100 napalm bombs. Offshore, naval guns continued to shell

enemy positions on Iwo in response to Marine requests. Gunfire support ships shelled enemy gun emplacements on the high ground north of the beaches and did their best to destroy the concealed enemy mortars whose fire was causing so many casualties on the beaches.²⁹

The heavy enemy fire on the beaches, as well as unfavorable surf conditions, precluded the landing of all but highest priority cargo on D-Day. In order of importance, this cargo was limited to ammunition, rations, water, and signal equipment. Once this equipment had been unloaded on the beaches, the shore party teams could do little more than stack the supplies. LVTs and weasels carried these supplies inland and returned with a cargo of wounded.

As night fell, most of the transports and other vessels retired from Iwo, but some of the command ships, preloaded LSTs, and hospital LSTs remained behind. The work of stacking supplies on the beach and terraces continued after nightfall. Offshore, mortar boats concentrated their fire against the enemy positions on the high ground overlooking the 4th Marine Division beaches. Bulldozers continued hauling vehicles inland, and whenever possible, pulled equipment out of the sand. Under cover of darkness, critical items, especially 81mm ammunition, were brought in. The 81mm shells that had been hand-carried ashore with these mortars had lasted for only one hour after the mortars opened fire. With the 81mm mortars out of ammunition, the assault battalions lost the services of a large

²⁸ VAC G-2 PerRpt No. 1, dtd 19Feb45.

²⁹ TF 54 OpRpt, p. 13.

portion of high trajectory weapons support during most of the violent action on D-Day.³⁰

While the Marines anxiously awaited the big *banzai* charge that would finally bring the enemy out into the open, General Kuribayashi cannily began to employ his plan which would destroy the Americans and their supplies on and near the beaches without his risking many of his own men. In short, his plan consisted of a few attempts at infiltration, while at the same time stepping up the fire of his deadly artillery and mortars against the crowded American beachhead. As the night progressed, the rain of enemy shells mounted in intensity, as did the number of American casualties.

By 2300, the enemy shelling of the Yellow and Blue Beaches had become so heavy that both beaches were ordered closed. Elsewhere, it proved to be a sleepless night for most of the Marines on Iwo. On the southern beaches, a few vessels still attempted to bring in cargo, as runners crawled in and out of command posts, bearing reports and orders. Other men were shuffling around in the darkness looking for their units and their equipment. Because of the disorganization of units, it proved impossible at this time to obtain an accurate account of D-Day casualties, though it was known that they were heavy. It was to be determined later that 501 Marines had died on this first day of the invasion; 1,775 had been wounded in action; an additional 47 died of wounds, and 18 were missing in action;

³⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Fenton J. Mee ltr to CMC, dtd 15Dec52, in *Iwo Comments*.

99 of the assault force suffered from combat fatigue.³¹

Despite the heavy casualties, on the evening of D-Day VAC still rated the combat efficiency of the assault force as very good to excellent.³² As the day ended, the 5th Marine Division had established a beachhead approximately 1,500 yards wide and 1,000 yards in depth, dividing the enemy forces in the northern and southern part of the island and effectively isolating Mount Suribachi. The 4th Marine Division had reached a line extending northward and inland from Blue Beach 2 for about 200 yards on low ground, then from the Quarry on top of the ridge for about 300 yards, then south across the low ground which led off the beach towards Motoyama Airfield No. 2, and from there to a line which was roughly a projection of the main runway of Airfield No. 1. It was clear that the landing had been successful. The Marines were dug in and occupied positions that were difficult but tenable. Supplies were scanty but sufficient for immediate needs.

As the night progressed, there was movement of all kinds on and around Iwo Jima. Offshore, transports carrying the 3d Marine Division were arriving in the reserve area 80 miles southeast of the island. Amidst the steady thump-

³¹ Casualty figures taken from statistics prepared by the Casualty Section, HQMC. It should be noted that in the confusion of D-Day, casualties were thought much more severe than was actually the case. 1/28 alone reported 600 missing. However, many of these men had returned by D plus 2. They had been fighting with other companies and in some cases other regiments. *28th Mar AR*, p. 17.

³² *VAC AR*, Anx B, Encl A, p. 12.

ing and crashing of the enemy artillery and mortar shells deluging the 30,000 Marines that had gone ashore, there was stealthy movement as some of the enemy, their guns near Mount Suribachi rendered useless by American air and naval bombardment, moved through the lines and headed for northern Iwo. The enemy had lost a good part of his artillery, and within three hours after H-Hour, all of the heavy guns on the slopes of Mount Suribachi had been silenced.

There were several enemy attempts at infiltration. Shortly after 2300, a barge carrying 39 Japanese approached the west coast of Iwo and prepared to land them. The enemy was spotted by alert riflemen of 1/28, who picked the Japanese off one by one as they tried to get ashore, until all had been killed.³³ On the east coast of Iwo a member of a naval construction unit had a strange experience. He was watching a log in the surf which the current bore south along the shore. Suddenly, the log made a sharp turn. The Seabee fired 13 rounds and at dawn found a riddled Japanese body at the water's edge.

What it felt like to be a member of the VAC assault force during that first eerie night on Iwo Jima has been graphically described as follows:

Bunched in foxholes along the perimeter, the Marines took turns on watch, fighting to stay awake, waiting, waiting for the crazy *banzai*. Now and then, shouting and ragged fire broke out in hysterical patches as the rocks and bushes seemed to move in the eerie light of the star shells. Still the rush didn't come.³⁴

Japanese artillery kept pounding the American positions. Shortly after midnight, the enemy scored a direct hit on the command post of 1/23 on Yellow Beach 1, killing Lieutenant Colonel Haas and the regimental operations officer, Captain Fred C. Eberhardt. Minutes later, one of the giant spigot mortar shells, which many Marines first thought to be a P-61 night fighter because of the peculiar sound it made while passing over, came wobbling down from the north and exploded on one of the Green Beaches near Mount Suribachi. Around 0400, the 25th Marines ammunition and fuel dump went off with a terrifying roar. Two full boatloads of 81mm mortar shells, gasoline, and flamethrower fuel exploded, caving in foxholes for yards around.

Initially, these disasters were attributed to lucky enemy hits on these vulnerable targets. It remained for a Japanese postwar history to clear up this point. According to the Japanese version:

Instead of all-out desperate *banzai* charges, Kuribayashi organized small packs of prowling wolves—three or four in a pack—which sneaked in at night to enemy depots or concentration of fuel and ammunition and attacked with demolition charges and hand grenades. This new tactic again proved quite successful at the nights of February 19 and 20. For instance, heaps of 81mm mortar shells of the 4th Marine Division blew up at the southern coast; flamethrower fuel and gasoline at the same coast also burned.³⁵

³³ 28th Mar AR, p. 17.

³⁴ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 135.

³⁵ Excerpts from Masanori Ito, *Fall of the Imperial Army* (Teikoku Rikugun No Saigo) v. IV, pp. 55-110), in *Newcomb Notes*, hereafter Ito, *Fall of the Imperial Army*.

As dawn rose over the island on 20 February, less than 24 hours had passed since the first Marines hit the Iwo beaches. A newspaper correspondent, looking at the scene surrounding him, made this comment:

The first night on Iwo Jima can only be described as a nightmare in hell. About the beach in the morning lay the dead. They died with the greatest possible violence. Nowhere in the Pacific have I seen such badly mangled bodies. Many were cut squarely in half. Legs and arms lay 50 feet away from any body. All through the bitter night, the Japs rained heavy mortars and rockets and artillery on the entire area between the beach and the airfield. Twice they hit casualty stations on the

beach. Many men who had been only wounded were killed.³⁰

It appeared that General Kuribayashi's strategy was paying off. There had been no *banzai* that first night; but from dusk to dawn Japanese shells had steadily killed off Marines on the congested beaches at no cost to the enemy. As the new day dawned, it would be up to the tired Marines to strip the enemy of his excellent observation posts and firing positions, their only means of eliminating the deadly fire in which the entire landing force was engulfed.

³⁰ Robert Sherrod, as cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

The Struggle for Suribachi ¹

SECURING THE BASE²

Dawn on 20 February saw VAC Marines engaged in two distinct operations. One was the capture of Mount Suribachi whose forbidding slopes glowered down on the Americans on the exposed ground beneath. The other was a prolonged drive to the north, intended to seize the vital airfields and eliminate all enemy resistance.

The story of the capture of Suribachi is basically that of the 28th Marines. After landing on D-Day, Colonel Liver- sedge's men were facing southward, prepared to tackle the mountain, while the remainder of the 5th Division

and all of the 4th had wheeled to the right to complete the capture of Air- field No. 1, and then continue the ad- vance to the northeastern part of Iwo.

The assault on the extinct volcano promised to be difficult. To some of the Marines, gazing at the mottled, bare mountain, "Suribachi resembled the head of a fabulous serpent, with fangs ejecting poison in all directions from its base."³ Between Colonel Liver- sedge's men and the base of Suribachi lay a wasteland of broken rock and stubble. This wasteland, guarding the one approach to the volcano, was studded by hundreds of caves, pillboxes, blockhouses, bunkers, spider traps, mines, and every other conceivable de- fense. It was in the slow and costly approach to the mountain that many Marines were to die or be wounded.

On the mountain itself, 1,600 Japa- nese were occupying well-camouflaged defensive positions with orders to hold out to the very end. That the Marines had cut the southern portion of Iwo off from the northern part on D-Day had little effect on General Kuribaya- shi's dispositions and plans. The wily enemy commander had foreseen that the island defenses would be split early in the operation. In relation to his over- all defensive plan, Mount Suribachi was

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 AR*; *TF 56 AR*; *VAC AR*; *VAC G-2 Rpts*; *5th MarDiv AR*; *5th MarDiv D-2 PerRpts*; *5th MarDiv D-3 Jnl*; *5th MarDiv D-4 Jnl*; *28th Mar R-2 Jnl*, 19Feb-25Mar45, hereafter *28th Mar R-2 Jnl*; *28th Mar UJnl*; *28th Mar AR*; *2/28 Op- Rpt*, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter *2/28 OpRpt*; *5th Tk Bn AR*; *5th Tk Bn UJnl*, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter *5th Tk Bn UJnl*; *5th EngBn OpRpt*, 9Mar45, hereafter *5th Eng Bn OpRpt*; *Bart- ley, Iwo Monograph*; *Iwo Comments*; *Henri et al, Marines on Iwo Jima*; *Conner, The Fifth Marine Division*; *Newcomb, Iwo Jima*; *New- comb Notes*; *Morehouse, Iwo Jima Campaign*; *Morison, Victory in the Pacific*; *Isely and Crowl, U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*.

² Additional material in this section is de- rived from: *Richard Wheeler, The Bloody Battle for Suribachi* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1965), hereafter *Wheeler, Suribachi*, quoted with permission.

³ *Isely and Crowl, U. S. Marines and Am- phibious War*, p. 488.



37MM GUN firing on Japanese positions on the slopes of Mt. Suribachi. (USMC 110139)



DEBRIS OF BATTLE litters Iwo beaches on D plus 2. (USMC 110252)

but one of several semi-independent defense sectors capable of resisting the American assault with their own resources.

Colonel Liversedge's plan of attack was for the 28th Marines to surround the base of the mountain, maintain a steady pressure on enemy positions that could be identified in the cliffs, and seek out suitable routes to the summit. The regiment was to advance towards Suribachi with the 2d Battalion on the left, the 3d on the right, and the 1st in reserve. H-Hour was 0830, 20 February.⁴

At first light, carrier planes attacked the mountain with bombs and rockets. Napalm was dropped at the foot of the slopes, since most of the enemy fire seemed to come from that area. A destroyer stood offshore close to the west coast to support the advance of the 3d Battalion; a minelayer stood off the east coast to assist 2/28. The weather had changed for the worse; a light rain was falling and it had turned chilly. Four-foot waves were pounding the beach and the wind from the south was rising.

As Colonel Liversedge's men waited to jump off, they felt far from rested. The exertions of the previous day had been followed by a night of continuous enemy bombardment. The sense of gloom and foreboding felt by many men on the morning of D plus 1 was due not only to lack of sleep and the weather, but to the nature of the objective. Mount Suribachi itself imposed a mental hazard on the assault troops similar to that faced by the Allies in

Italy a year earlier when they suddenly found themselves confronted by Mount Cassino. The impact of such a terrain feature, known to be held in strength by the enemy, can be formidable. As one account of the Iwo operation was to report:

On this day, and increasingly as days went by, Suribachi seemed to take on a life of its own, to be watching these men, looming over them, pressing down upon them. When they moved, they moved in its shadow, under its eye. To be sure, there were hundreds of eyes looking at them from the mountain, but these were the eyes of a known enemy, an enemy whose intent was perfectly clear. In the end, it is probable that the mountain represented to these Marines a thing more evil than the Japanese.⁵

The assault of the 28th Marines against Suribachi began on schedule, preceded by a bombardment of the mountain by destroyers, rocket gunboats, and artillery. This bombardment destroyed a few enemy emplacements and at the same time unmasked many concrete structures buried in the scrub and rocky ground leading to the base of Suribachi. It soon became evident that the caves on the lower slopes and at the base of the mountain were as formidable as its pillboxes and blockhouses. The caves had from two to five entrances with interconnecting tunnels. Prior to the invasion they had served as air raid shelters and living quarters. They were linked with supply and command caves containing food, water, and ammunition. From the entrances to the caves, 6-inch guns, protected by five-foot walls, pointed down the island.

⁴ *5th MarDiv AR*, Sec VIII, p. 19.

⁵ Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*, p. 57.

Almost immediately, the advancing Marines came under heavy fire from small arms, mortars, and artillery. Working against the success of the attack was the lack of needed tank support. The 5th Tank Battalion had been scheduled to support RCT 28. Even though eight tanks were available, no fuel or ammunition was at hand. The tankers finally salvaged some from disabled tanks and divided it up. During this redistribution, the enemy put a heavy mortar barrage on the vehicles, forcing them to move to another position. Almost immediately, the mortar fire shifted to the new position. This occurred three times; there was no place where the tankers could move that was not under direct enemy observation.

During the morning, the Marines advanced only 50 to 70 yards. Support from aircraft and ships helped, as did the artillery support from 3/13. However, even the best efforts of these combined arms failed to neutralize enemy fire, particularly that coming from the well-camouflaged pillboxes hidden in the scrub around the base of the mountain. Once the Marines advanced into these formidable enemy defenses, they would be too close for support from aircraft and artillery. Assault demolition teams, using flamethrowers and explosive charges, would have to do the job. Once again, the continuation of the advance depended on the skill and bravery of the individual Marine.

At 1100, the tanks were finally ready to support the advance. The 37mm guns and 75mm half-tracks of the regimental

weapons company were also moved up in support. In the face of bitter enemy resistance, only split-second teamwork by every unit could gain any ground. The procedure employed was for infantry and tanks to take each pillbox under fire, while a flamethrower team worked up to one of the entrances. After several bursts of flame had been squirted at the fortification, the remainder of the assault squad closed in to finish the job with grenades. Once the occupants had been eliminated, engineers and demolition teams blasted the positions to ensure that they would not be reoccupied by the Japanese after nightfall. Whenever the rugged terrain permitted, flamethrowing tanks were employed against the pillboxes.

By 1700, RCT 28 had laboriously moved 200 yards closer to the objective, at the cost of 2 officers killed and 6 wounded, and 27 men killed and 127 wounded.⁶ The advance had taken the Marines of 2/28 and 3/28 close to the base of the mountain; in the course of the afternoon, they had closed off nearly 40 caves with demolitions. As the men prepared to dig in for the night, they found themselves surrounded by the debris of the heavy enemy coastal guns which the naval bombardment had smashed prior to and during D-Day. Moving towards Mount Suribachi along the western shore of Iwo, 3/28 killed 73 of the enemy. The Japanese corpses presented an encouraging sight in an operation where, thus far, little had been seen of the enemy, dead or alive.

⁶ *28th Mar AR*, 19-20Feb45, p. 18.



FLAME THROWERS *in action at the base of Mt. Suribachi. (USMC 110599)*



LONE MARINE *protects flank of patrol headed for summit of Mt. Suribachi. (USMC A419741)*

As the 28th Marines pressed their assault, the enemy situation on Suribachi steadily deteriorated. The American naval and air bombardment on D-Day had knocked out all of the 140mm guns. Inside the mountain, the commander of the Suribachi Sector, Colonel Kanehiko Atsuchi,⁷ pondered his mounting casualties and dispatched a message to General Kuribayashi asking the latter's permission to go out and seek death through a *banzai* charge, rather than sitting it out in his present position. Shortly thereafter, the advancing Marines found and cut the buried cable linking Suribachi with the northern sector. Colonel Atsuchi never received a reply from the island commander, either because communications were now disrupted or simply because General Kuribayashi felt that his sentiments regarding the outdated *banzai* charge were sufficiently well known to his subordinates to require no repetition.

Some postwar Japanese sources, emphasizing that Atsuchi was actually in charge, have implied that the island commander was not happy with having entrusted Atsuchi, then 57 years old, with command of the crucially im-

portant batteries on Suribachi.⁸ One of the Japanese officers, initially stationed on Iwo, who was familiar with the enemy command organization, later was to refer to the *Suribachi Sector* commander as "a poor superannuated amateur," adding "that it was the Army's mistake to send such an aged and rusted character to Iwo, who was simply a misfit for leading many people."⁹ Other accounts were somewhat more charitable towards Atsuchi. In any case, there can be no doubt that a *banzai* attack was precisely what General Kuribayashi did not want. He much preferred to force the Americans to fight for the mountain foot by foot, and to inflict heavy losses as a price for seizing the strongly defended elevation.

Loss of telephone communications with the command post in the northern part of Iwo did not mean that Atsuchi's men had been abandoned by their comrades. As darkness fell, the Japanese on Suribachi fired white and amber flares as a signal that artillery and mortar support were desired from the northern sector. For the second night in succession, artillery and mortar fire from Suribachi and northern Iwo pounded the Marine positions. American guns, ashore and afloat, answered this barrage, as the din of battle echoed and resounded well into the night.

As on the eve of D-Day, the men of the 28th Marines peered into the dark-

⁷ Mistakenly referred to as Navy Captain Kanehiko Atsuchi in Ito, *Fall of the Imperial Army*, pp. 55-110. There is some disagreement as to who was in charge at Mount Suribachi. According to one Japanese source, Major Nagahiko Matsushita, commanding the *10th Independent Antitank Battalion*, was the unit commander in the Mount Suribachi area, while Colonel Atsuchi (also spelled Atsuji) was dispatched from the *109th Division* headquarters to provide operational guidance. *Japanese Defense Agency Comment*.

⁸ Major Yoshitaka Horie comments on Iwo Jima operation, in Fred Saito ltr to Richard R. Newcomb, dtd 27Jan64, in *Newcomb Notes*.

⁹ *Ibid*.

ness, ever watchful for signs of an enemy counterattack. Tired eyes strained to the south in an effort to detect enemy activity, but for the second night the expected counterattack failed to develop. Division orders for D plus 2 called for a continuation of the 28th Marines attack towards Mount Suribachi. Despite enemy artillery and mortar fire, the tired men tried to obtain what little sleep they could get in anticipation of the rigors that awaited them on the following day.

On the morning of 21 February, the rough weather of the previous day showed no signs of abating. The wind had risen to 19 knots from the northeast and six-foot waves were pounding the landing beaches. Since the distance between the forward elements of the 28th Marines and the base of Mount Suribachi was still significant for air strikes, naval gunfire, and artillery support, the combined force of air and artillery was again brought to bear against the Japanese before the Marines jumped off.

Prior to the scheduled jumpoff at 0825, 40 aircraft struck at the enemy with bombs and rockets, and, strafing within 100 yards of the forward Marine lines, concentrated against an area inaccessible to tanks. This was the closest air support thus far provided and possibly the last, since another day's advance would bring the men too close to their objective.

The 1st Battalion was assigned a one-company front on the regimental right. When the regiment jumped off for the attack at 0825, the units and boundaries assigned to it were identical

to those of the previous day. Once again, the tanks were unable to meet H-Hour because of delays in rearming and refuelling, and the attack had to get under way without them.

Under cover of fire from warships and land-based artillery, the 1st Battalion attacked towards Mount Suribachi along the west coast. Because the terrain there precluded effective employment of tanks, their absence at the beginning of the attack was immaterial. On the left, it was a different story; even with naval gunfire support no gains were made until the tanks arrived. By 1100, the attack gained momentum when armor, 37mm guns, and half-tracks mounting 75mm guns, as well as rocket detachments, joined in pounding the enemy positions. By noon, the 1st Battalion had reached the western base of Suribachi.

During the advance it became apparent that the enemy was particularly vulnerable to the heavy explosive blast of the rockets and retaliated by concentrating his fire on the rocket launching trucks which were unprotected by armor-plate. When caught in such a concentration of fire, the crews withdrew to cover and ran up singly to load the rocket platform. When the order to fire was given, one Marine would scamper forward, dive under the truck, then reach his arm around the side to push the firing button. The resulting explosion when the rocket hit the target usually meant that the Marines had one less enemy position to contend with.

Advancing in the center, the 3d Battalion encountered heavy resistance from the same positions that had

blocked the advance on the previous day. Nevertheless, the attack of this battalion also was gaining momentum by 1100. Within the hour, an enemy counterattack struck the front of 3/28; this action failed to halt the advancing Marines, and by 1400 the forward elements had reached the foot of Mount Suribachi. There, 3/28 spent the remainder of the day.

The attack of the 2d Battalion down the eastern shore also got under way slowly. At first, there was little resistance and for a few moments, the hulking natural fortress remained quiet, but enemy reaction was not long absent. First came the crack of rifles and the chatter of machine guns. The chatter turned into a heavy clatter and bullets began to snap and whine around the advancing Marines. Some of them found their mark. Then the Japanese began firing their deadly mortars. Some of the Marines could see the high arc of the mortar rounds. Soon the area was blanketed by roaring funnels of steel and sand. The noise and fury increased until the hearing of the attacking Marines was numbed and their thinking impaired. It seemed as if the volcano's ancient bowels had suddenly come to life and the men were advancing into a full-scale eruption. One of the Marines, speaking of the holocaust, was to remark later:

It was terrible, the worst I can remember our taking. The Jap mortarmen seemed to be playing checkers and using us as their squares. I still can't understand how any of us got through it.¹⁰

Not all of the attacking Marines did

get through the lethal curtain of fire, but there were enough of them to carry the advance forward. The feelings of these men, as they faced what seemed to them almost certain death, were expressed by one of their number who lived to tell about it:

We were now part of a real hell-bent-for-leather attack, the kind the Marines are famous for. But there was nothing inspiring about it. None of our ex-raiders shouted "Gung Ho!" . . . and none of our southerners let go the rebel yell. We felt only reluctance and enervating anxiety. There seemed nothing ahead but death. If we managed somehow to make it across the open area, we'd only become close-range targets for those concealed guns. I myself was seized by a sensation of utter hopelessness. I could feel the fear dragging at my jowls.

It is in situation like this that Marine Corps training proves its value. There probably wasn't a man among us who didn't wish to God he was moving in the opposite direction. But we had been ordered to attack, so we would attack. Our training had imbued us with a fierce pride in our outfit, and this pride helped now to keep us from faltering. Few of us would have admitted that we were bound by the old-fashioned principle of "death before dishonor," but it was probably this, above all else, that kept us pressing forward.¹¹

Two uncommon acts of heroism, among many, were to occur during the day, indicative of the caliber of the men who had gone ashore on Iwo Jima. The first one was unpremeditated, nor was there time for lengthy thought. It took place in 2/28 when Private First Class Donald J. Ruhl deliberately threw himself on a hand grenade that had landed

¹⁰ Wheeler, *Suribachi*, p. 108.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

next to him and his platoon guide, Sergeant Henry O. Hansen, sacrificing his own life in order to save the sergeant. The second involved the rescue of two Marines who lay wounded for more than 24 hours at the eastern base of Mount Suribachi. A hospital corpsman had been keeping them alive by creeping up to them and treating their wounds under fire. One of the wounded was breathing through a glass tube in his neck. Since evacuation by land was out of the question because of enemy fire, a group of Marines, headed by Staff Sergeant Charles E. Harris, manned a raft, landed it on the rocky shore in a heavy surf, and succeeded in evacuating both men under the noses of the enemy. Both casualties survived the ordeal.

By evening of 21 February, the 28th Marines occupied a line which formed a semicircle just north of Mount Suribachi. The 1st Battalion was halfway around the mountain on the western shore; 2/28 had advanced an equal distance along the eastern base of the mountain; the 3d Battalion was squarely facing the volcano in the center of the semicircle. During this third day ashore, the 1st Battalion had advanced 1000 yards, the 2nd Battalion 650 yards, and the 3d, 500 yards. These gains were made at a cost of 34 Marines killed and 153 wounded. Due to these heavy additional casualties, by evening of 21 February the combat efficiency of the 28th Marines had declined to 75 percent.¹²

Much of the success of the day's advance had been due to the tank support available on D plus 2. Altogether, seven

tanks supported the advance towards Mount Suribachi. Two of them were put out of action by the enemy and one by the terrain. One ran over a mine, one was hit by antitank fire, and one broke a track. About 1630, after the advance halted for the day, the tanks were released. To avoid any delay when the attack resumed on the following morning, the tanks were rearmed and refueled before dark. Despite the damage sustained by the three vehicles, the tankers engaged near Mount Suribachi had suffered no casualties on this third day of the invasion.¹³

As the afternoon of 21 February wore on, a cold rain began to fall on Iwo, greatly increasing the discomfort of the Marines holding positions around the base of Suribachi. Behind them, and all around them were the remnants of the main defenses guarding the volcano. Some of the pillboxes and bunkers had been crushed like matchboxes by naval gunfire; others had been seared black by napalm flames. The entire area was pervaded by the smell of death and burned flesh, where flamethrowers had done their deadly work. The expenditure of flamethrower fuel had reached such proportions that a temporary shortage developed — overcome only when versatile Weasels carried additional supplies to the front lines.

In the gathering dusk, many Marines could clearly hear the enemy talking inside the mountain. They succeeded in killing a large number of Japanese by pouring gasoline down the fissures and setting it aflame. Inside the volcano, Colonel Atsuchi was dying from a shell

¹² *28th Mar AR*, 20-21Feb45.

¹³ *Co C, 5th Tk Bn AR*, p. 3.

fragment wound incurred during the day.¹⁴ His last order was that a squad of men attempt to break through to General Kuribayashi's headquarters to report the situation on Suribachi. Many of the enemy felt extremely bitter at their own lack of air support while American aircraft filled the sky. Nevertheless, enemy morale remained unshaken and nearly all were determined to go down fighting.

Actually, air support for the Japanese garrison on Iwo was closer at hand than anyone, friend and foe alike, might have suspected. At dusk, as the Marines were digging in for the night, the enemy made one effort from the air. About 50 *kamikazes* had left an airfield near Tokyo early in the day and, after refuelling at Hachijo Jima in the Bonins, headed towards Iwo Jima. Each member of the Special Attack Unit had but one objective: to hurl his aircraft and himself at the invasion fleet that was gathered around Iwo.

Radar equipment on the *Saratoga*, about 35 miles northwest of the island, picked the aircraft up when they were still 100 miles away, but they were first mistaken for friendly planes. At 1700, interceptor aircraft reported that the approaching formation was Japanese and that they had downed two of the intruders. Shortly thereafter, two *kamikazes* struck the *Saratoga* and set her on fire. These fires had barely been put out when another Japanese plane grazed the flight deck and crashed over-

board, its bomb blowing a hole in the flight deck. Nevertheless, shortly after 2000, the *Saratoga* once again was able to recover planes. Losses were 123 killed and missing and 192 wounded; in addition, the carrier lost 36 planes by burning and jettisoning, and six by water landings in the choppy seas.¹⁵ The *Saratoga*, once her fires had been extinguished, limped back to Pearl Harbor for repairs.

Another carrier, the *Bismarck Sea*, was in position 20 miles east of Iwo when, shortly before 1900, a *kamikaze* hit the ship square abeam. Gassed planes on board caught fire and ammunition exploded in the rapidly spreading blaze. As a 22-knot wind fanned the fires, it became necessary to abandon ship. Following a tremendous explosion, the *Bismarck Sea* turned over and sank. Many of the men who had gone overboard were picked up by the escort vessels; others succumbed to the cold waters. Altogether, 218 men of the *Bismarck Sea* were lost, out of a crew of 943 officers and men.¹⁶

Other ships attacked by the *kamikazes* were the escort carrier *Lunga Point*, which fought off four torpedo bombers without loss; the net tender *Keokuk*, set afire, losing 17 men killed and 44 wounded; and LST 477 carrying artillery for the 3d Marine Division. The LST was struck a glancing blow by a *kamikaze*, which failed to do any major damage. None of the Japanese pilots survived the attack.

As 21 February came to an end, the hospital ship *Samaritan* sailed from

¹⁴ Official Japanese sources claim that Colonel Atsuchi was killed during the daylight battle on 20 February. *Japanese Defense Agency Comment*.

¹⁵ Morison, *Victory in the Pacific*, p. 54.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Iwo Jima to Guam. Her cargo consisted of 623 seriously wounded Marines. The care given to these wounded was in stark contrast to the little attention the Japanese received from their own medical personnel. Japanese defense plans for Iwo Jima had made no provision for the evacuation of any wounded. Those Japanese who were wounded either crawled back or were carried to aid stations behind the lines. There, they might be placed in niches in the walls of tunnels, where their comrades would look after them as best they could. Some of the Japanese bound up their wounds and remained with their units, either to fight again if physically able or else perform other work behind the lines.

For the Marines dug in around the base of Mount Suribachi, another restless night was in the offing. The rain was still coming down, increasing their discomfort. Some of the Japanese inside the mountain were moving around and talking, but no *banzai* charge developed. Enemy artillery and mortar fire continued to fall in the area, though its effect was not as deadly as during the preceding night. The enemy confined himself to two attempts at infiltrating the American lines in the 28th Marines sector. Men of the regiment's 81mm mortar platoon killed some 60 Japanese in front of 2/28 during one of these efforts. Company C accounted for 28 more who, in accordance with Colonel Atsuchi's final orders, attempted to infiltrate north along the western beaches.

The following morning, 22 February, began with all the earmarks of a miserable day. The cold, hard rain had turned

Iwo's loose soil and cinders into a sloshy gumbo. At 0800 the enemy scored a mortar hit on the regimental CP which killed the regimental surgeon, Lieutenant Commander Daniel J. McCarthy. The rain, driven from the southeast by a strong wind, not only caused great discomfort to the Marines, but the wet volcanic ash clogged automatic weapons, which could fire only single rounds. Nevertheless, the 28th Marines continued their attack at the foot of Mount Suribachi. Because of the bad weather and the Marines' proximity to the mountain, no air support was available, and artillery support was severely curtailed. Once again, it became the task of individual Marines to pick a path through the rubble, blasting and burning their way through the enemy defenses. The Japanese within the mountain and isolated pillboxes around the base still resisted with heavy mortar and small arms fire.

Once again, seven tanks of Company C, 5th Tank Battalion, supported the attack of the 28th Marines. Two were attached to 2/28 to work around the east side of Suribachi; three were sent to 1/28 to advance around the right, and two remained in support of 3/28 in the center. The heavy rainfall that continued throughout the day severely limited the operation of the tanks. At one time during the afternoon, the rain became so heavy that the crews, unable to see where they were going, had to be guided by men on foot.

Poor weather and enemy resistance to the contrary, 22 February marked the day on which Mount Suribachi was neutralized and surrounded. The men of 3/28 cleared out the base of the north

face of the volcano during the day and sent a patrol around the west coast down to Tobiishi Point, Iwo Jima's southernmost extremity. There, the men of 3/28 encountered a patrol from 2/28 which had advanced down the east coast. By 1630, the 28th Marines halted operations for the day. One sergeant of Company I who scrambled part way up the north face of Mount Suribachi reported seeing no Japanese. He asked whether he should continue up the mountain, but Colonel Liversedge felt that it was too late in the day, and the final advance to seize the mountain was delayed until the following morning.

By the end of D plus 3, the fight for Mount Suribachi was virtually over. Substantial numbers of the enemy, perhaps 300 in all, still occupied caves and other places of concealment within the volcano. But in the course of the 28th Marines' advance, hundreds of the enemy had been killed, and the pernicious power of the fortress was now broken. As Marines, shivering from the cold and wetness, huddled at the foot of Suribachi, the enemy survivors within debated whether they should stay or attempt to fight their way north. Only half of them decided to remain and fight it out. The remainder crawled out into the murky darkness and tried to make their way north through the American lines. Most of them fell victim to accurate fire from alert Marines, determined to halt any infiltration. About 20 of the enemy made it across the lines and reached General Kuribayashi's headquarters near Motoyama in the northern part of the island where they were reassigned.

For the Marine survivors of the drive

to Mount Suribachi, the final act in the drama was about to open. The time had come to start climbing. On the evening prior to that venture, no one could guess what the following day would bring.

*SEIZING THE HEIGHTS*¹⁷

Friday, 23 February, marked the day on which the Marines climbed to the top of the craggy 550-foot rim of Mount Suribachi. The steep slopes of the mountain fortress all but precluded a converging ascent from various directions. When it was discovered that the only practical route to the crater lay up the north face of the mountain, in the zone of the 2d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Johnson became directly involved in planning the climb. The battalion commander's decision was to send several small reconnaissance patrols to the top before ordering a platoon-size combat patrol to make the ascent.

At 0800, Sergeant Sherman B. Watson of Company F led a four-man patrol up the mountain. On top of Suribachi this patrol encountered a battery of heavy machine guns with ammunition stacked alongside around the rim of the crater. There was no sign of the enemy. The bald, gray rock was now surrounded by silence; the caves and underground chambers seemed devoid of life. Uprooted blockhouses and pillboxes offered mute testimony to the destructive power of the heavy naval

¹⁷ Additional material in this section is derived from: 5th EngBn UJnl, 19Feb-24Mar45, hereafter *5th EngBn UJnl*; Maj Yoshitaka Horie (IJA) Rpt, Iwo Jima, dtd 11Feb46, hereafter *Horie Rpt*.

guns; most of the tunnels on the slopes were closed and smoking. Unaccustomed to the silence, the men wondered why they drew no fire. They slid and scrambled down Suribachi to report to the battalion commander.

Even before the first reconnaissance patrol returned from its climb, Lieutenant Colonel Johnson dispatched two three-man patrols from Companies D and F at 0900 to reconnoiter other suitable routes up the mountain and probe for enemy resistance. None drew any fire. While the small reconnaissance patrols were still executing their mission, Colonel Johnson assembled the combat patrol that was slated to seize Mount Suribachi in force and hoist the American colors over the mountain. The 3d Platoon, Company E, was selected for this mission. The Company executive officer, 1st Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier, led the patrol. A member of the patrol was to recall later:

The 25 men of the 3d Platoon were by this time very dirty and very tired. They no longer looked nor felt like crack combat troops. Although they had just had a relatively free day, their rest had been marred by a chilling rain. They hardly yearned for the distinction of being the first Marines to tackle the volcano. But the colonel didn't bother to ask them how they felt about it.²⁸

Lieutenant Schrier assembled the platoon at 0800 and bolstered its thin ranks with other men of Company E until it totalled 40 men. Before starting the ascent, he led the men back around the base of Suribachi to battalion headquarters just northeast of the base. Johnson's final orders were simple and

to the point: the patrol was to climb to the summit, secure the crater, and raise the flag. As the patrol prepared to move out, the battalion commander handed Schrier a folded American flag that had been brought ashore by the battalion adjutant, 1st Lieutenant George G. Wells. The flag, measuring 54 by 28 inches, had been obtained from the *Missoula*, the transport that had carried 2/28 from its staging area to Iwo Jima.

Forming an irregular column, the patrol headed straight for the base of Suribachi. They moved at a brisk pace at first. When the route turned steep and the going became more difficult, the patrol leader dispatched flankers to guard the vulnerable column against surprise attack. The men, heavily burdened with weapons and ammunition climbed slowly, stopping occasionally to catch their breath. At times, the route became so steep that they moved upward on their hands and knees. Along the way, they passed close to several cave entrances, but the caves appeared deserted and no resistance developed. The only Japanese encountered were the dead. Friendly eyes were observing the patrol's laborious ascent: Marines near the northeast base of Suribachi and men of the fleet, who, cognizant of the drama unfolding before them, were watching through binoculars.

Higher and higher the patrol picked its way, avoiding heavily mined trails and keeping men out on the flanks to thwart any enemy ambush. Within half an hour after leaving battalion headquarters, the patrol arrived at the rim of the crater. There, Schrier called a halt while he sized up the situation. He

²⁸ Wheeler, *Suribachi*, p. 128.



MEN OF THE 28TH MARINES raise *Old Glory* on Mt. Suribachi, morning of 23 February 1945 (USMC 112720)

spotted two or three battered gun emplacements and several cave entrances, but no sign of the enemy. He signalled the men to start filing over the rim. As the patrol entered the crater, the men fanned out and took up positions just inside the rim. They were tensed for action, but the caves along the rim and the yawning floor below remained silent.

While half the patrol deployed around the rim, the remainder pressed into the crater to probe for resistance. Part of their mission had been executed. It now remained for them to locate something to serve as a flagpole. Scouting along the rim of the crater, a couple of men located a 20-foot section of pipe. Lashing the flag to one end, they thrust the other into soft ground near the north rim. At 1020, the Stars and Stripes rose over the highest point of the island, where it fluttered in a brisk wind. Small though it was, the flag was clearly visible from land and sea, proof that Suribachi had fallen.

Far below, on the sandy terraces and in foxholes, still exposed to deadly fire from enemy artillery and mortars in the north of Iwo Jima, exhausted and unshaven men openly wept, while others slapped each other on the back and shouted. Out at sea, ships' whistles, horns, and bells rang out in jubilation. On deck of the hospital ship *Solace*, badly wounded Marines raised themselves on their elbows to look up at the tiny speck on the summit.

Not far from the CP of the 28th Marines, a group of men stood on the beach near the surf. They had just stepped ashore from a Higgins boat to be-

come fascinated spectators of the most dramatic moment of the Iwo operation. Deeply moved by the sight was Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, accompanied by General Holland Smith and an assortment of Navy and Army personnel including two admirals. Turning towards General Smith, Forrestal said gravely: "Holland, the raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years."¹⁹

Atop the mountain, the men of Lieutenant Schrier's patrol had little time for rejoicing. The sight of the American flag waving over Suribachi was too much for the remnants of Colonel Atsuchi's garrison to take lying down. Sergeant Louis R. Lowery, a Marine photographer, had just clicked the shutter of his camera, taking pictures of the flag raising on the rim of the crater, when two Japanese charged out from a cave near the summit. One of the Japanese, running towards the flag and waving his sword was promptly shot down. The other heaved a hand grenade at the Marine photographer who escaped injury or death by vaulting over the rim and sliding about 50 feet down the mountain before his fall was broken. His camera was smashed, but the negatives inside remained safe. The second Japanese was also killed. Other Japanese, frenzied by the sight of the American flag, started to emerge from caves near the crater and met the same fate.

Three hours later, a larger flag, almost twice the size of the first one, was raised over Mount Suribachi. It was the raising of this second flag, obtained

¹⁹ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 261.

from LST 779, that resulted in photographer Joe Rosenthal's picture of the flag raising that became perhaps the most famous photograph of World War II and that has since served as an inspiration to countless Americans.

Proportionate to the elation of Americans at the fall of Suribachi, the Japanese on Iwo Jima and elsewhere felt great consternation. Upon receiving the news of the fall of the volcano, one Japanese staff officer, once himself stationed on Iwo, but subsequently reassigned to Chichi Jima, later recalled that "he was bursting with emotion."²⁰ Equally shocking to this officer was the fact that the mountain fortress had fallen in only three days. According to the Japanese timetable, Suribachi was to have been held for at least two weeks.²¹

For the remainder of the afternoon, 2/28 continued to mop up on and around Mount Suribachi. Marines annihilated enemy snipers and, together with the engineers, blasted shut a large number of cave entrances. Many Japanese were sealed in and though undoubtedly some later managed to dig their way out of these tombs, an unknown number succumbed from their wounds or were asphyxiated. A few Japanese who survived the fall of Suribachi managed to get back to their own lines in the northern part of Iwo where they faced yet another ordeal. As the survivors from Suribachi entered the Japanese lines, the following incident took place, to be remembered long after by a Japanese petty officer who survived the operation:

I remember a very dramatic scene I

²⁰ *Horie Rpt*, p. 8.

²¹ Ito, *Fall of the Imperial Army*.

saw February 24, 1945. A Navy lieutenant, whose name I don't recollect, and several of his men—all blood stained wearing torn uniforms, reached the command post and said they broke through the enemy encirclement of Suribachi and managed to reach the command post for a report. When I showed the lieutenant up to Captain (IJN) Inouye's desk, Inouye became furious and bellowed: "Why did you come, you son of a bitch? Wasn't your assignment to hold that fortress at any cost? Shame on you to come here. Shame, shame, shame! Don't you know what shame is? I tell you that you are a coward and deserter!" His aides tried to calm the Captain down. But Inouye was madder and howling more profanity, and finally said: "Under any military regulations, a deserter is executed summarily. I shall condescend myself to behead you."

So the Captain drew his sword and pulled it up. The wounded lieutenant knelt down silent, immobile. Presently, the aids clung to the captain and physically wrested his sword away. Inouye burst into tears, mumbling: "Ugh, ugh, Suribachi's fallen! Suribachi's fallen!" The aides took the lieutenant away to the sick bay for first aid treatment.²²

While the reinforced platoon of Company E scaled Suribachi, part of the same company patrolled down around the eastern end of the island until it made contact with elements of 1/28 advancing down the west side.²³ Temporary contact between patrols in this

²² Fred Saito interview with Riichi Koyatsu, former Intendance Petty Officer 3/c, in Saito ltr to Richard F. Newcomb, dtd 10Feb64, in *Newcomb Notes*.

²³ "My recollection is that, on my way down the mountain (I was up there between the two flag raisings) I met the rest of E Company, its commander at its head, marching up with the second flag." BGen Robert H. Williams ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 25Jun69, in *Iwo Comments*.



THE SECOND FLAG RAISING, *afternoon of 23 February 1945. (USMC 113062)*

area had already been made on the previous day. The two patrols met near Tobiishi Point at 1015, just a few minutes before the first flag raising. There was no enemy resistance, though a mine killed two men of 1/28.

To garrison the summit of Mount Suribachi during the coming night, 40 men from Company E remained on the crest; the rest of the regiment occupied positions around the base of the mountain. During the night, 122 Japanese were killed trying to infiltrate the American lines. Many of them had demolitions tied to their bodies and probably were trying to blow up Marine command posts and artillery positions along with themselves.²⁴

During one predawn breakthrough attempt early on 24 February, 30 grenade-throwing Japanese assaulted the command post and aid station of 1/28. Personnel of battalion headquarters, corpsmen included, used whatever weapons were at hand to kill the infiltrators while protecting wounded Marines who lay helpless on stretchers amidst the turmoil.

There were to be no easy victories on Iwo Jima, and the cost of seizing Mount Suribachi was high. The operation from D plus 1 to D plus 4 cost the 28th Marines 519 casualties. Of these, 3 officers and 112 men were killed and 21 officers and 354 men were wounded.²⁵ These figures do not include the 385 casualties sustained by the regiment on D-Day.²⁶

It proved impossible to obtain an accurate figure of Japanese killed on and around Suribachi, though 1,231 enemy were counted and hundreds more were sealed inside caves and blockhouses.²⁷ Except for a handful of men that succeeded in getting through to northern Iwo, the entire garrison of Mount Suribachi was virtually killed to a man. In the days following the fall of the fortress, an occasional Japanese might succeed in digging his way out of a cave or tunnel that had been blasted shut, only to be shot by the alert Marines stationed on and around the mountain for the purpose.

Working together with the infantry, members of the 5th Engineer Battalion had destroyed 165 concrete pillboxes and blockhouses, some with walls 10 feet thick. They had blasted 15 strong bunkers and naval gun positions; destroyed thousands of enemy shells, grenades and land mines; and had sealed 200 caves, some of them three stories high and equipped with heavy steel doors. In addition, the supporting troops evacuated several hundred wounded Marines and bulldozed 1,500 yards of roads and tank paths up to the crater.

Immediately after it was secured, Mount Suribachi was put to practical use. The 14th Marines rushed echo and flashranging equipment to the top in order to spot Japanese artillery and fortifications in the northern end of the island from this vantage point, which thus was turned into a vital observation post. Colonel Liversedge's regiment remained in corps reserve in the Suri-

²⁴ *28th Mar AR*, p. 22.

²⁵ *5th MarDiv AR*, Sec VII, pp. 17-22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁷ Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*, p. 68.

bach area for the next five days, picking off occasional enemy survivors, salvaging arms and equipment, and training new replacements.

As vital and dramatic as the capture of Mount Suribachi was, it marked but one step in the conquest of the stubbornly defended island. A grim and deadly battle was being fought to the

north. Few Marines at this stage suspected the strength of the enemy defenses and the cost to be exacted in advancing to the northern end of the island. For the Marines on Iwo, the capture of Suribachi marked the end of a beginning; for General Kuribayashi's well entrenched main force it was the beginning of the end.

Drive to the North ¹

CAPTURE OF AIRFIELD NO. 1²

While the 28th Marines was engaged in the epic assault on Mount Suribachi during the first four days of the invasion, a bloody slugging match involving the main body of General Schmidt's VAC was developing to the north. The

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 AR*; *VAC AR*; *VAC C-1 PerRpts*; *VAC G-2 Rpts*; *VAC C-3 Jnl*; *VAC C-3 PerRpts*; 3d MarDiv AR, 19Feb-25Mar45, hereafter *3d MarDiv AR*; 3d MarDiv D-2 Jnl, 14Feb-27Mar45, hereafter *3d MarDiv D-2 Jnl*; 3d MarDiv G-3 Jnl, 6Feb-3Apr45, hereafter *3d MarDiv G-3 Jnl*; 3d MarDiv G-1 PerRpts, 14Feb-11Apr 45, hereafter *3d MarDiv G-1 PerRpts*; 3d MarDiv D-1 Jnl, 14Feb-12Apr45, hereafter *3d MarDiv D-1 Jnl*; *4th MarDiv G-2 Rpts*; *4th MarDiv D-3 Jnl*; *4th MarDiv D-3 Rpts*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; *5th MarDiv D-1 Jnl*; *5th Mar Div D-2 PerRpts*; *5th Mar Div D-3 Jnl*; *5th MarDiv AR*; *5th MarDiv Casualty Rpts*, 17Feb-26Mar45, hereafter *5th MarDiv Casualty Rpts*; *5th TkBn AR*; *Iwo Comments*; Bartley, *Iwo Monograph*; Morehouse, *Iwo Jima Campaign*; Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*; *Newcomb Notes*; Aurthur, Cohlma, and Vance, *The Third Marine Division*; Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*; Conner, *The Fifth Marine Division*; Morison, *Victory in the Pacific*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*.

² Additional material in this section is derived from: 1/24 OpRpt, 19Feb-18Mar45, hereafter *1/24 OpRpt*; 2/24 AR, 19 Feb-16Mar45, hereafter *2/24 AR*; 25th MarRgt UJnl, 18Feb-23Mar45, hereafter *25th MarRgt UJnl*; 26th MarRgt UJnl, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter *26th MarRgt UJnl*; 3/27 UJnl, 19Feb-23Mar45, hereafter *3/27 UJnl*.

battalions in line for the offensive were, from west to east, 1/26, 3/27, 3/23, 2/24, 1/25, 2/25, and 3/25. Two companies of 1/24 were attached to the latter battalion. The seven battalions were deployed along a 4,000-yard front extending from the western shore just north of Mount Suribachi northeastward across the southern end of Airfield No. 1. From there, the line followed the eastern fringes of the field and then pivoted sharply to the east, meeting the coast at the East Boat Basin. (See Map II, Map Section).

It had already become evident on D-Day that, despite extensive naval gunfire and air support, numerous enemy positions had survived the preliminary bombardment completely unscathed. At this juncture, the depth of the enemy defense system on the island was still a matter of conjecture. The dramatic drive of the 28th Marines towards Mount Suribachi had initially captured the limelight; but it was in the central and northern part of Iwo that General Kuribayashi had concentrated the bulk of his forces. The wily enemy commander had left nothing undone to make his defenses in the northern and central sectors impregnable. In this, he was aided by the topography of the island, for the entire area comprised a weird looking array of cliffs, ravines, gorges, crevices, and ledges. Jumbled rock, torn stubble of small

trees, jagged ridges, and chasms sprawled about in a crazy pattern. Within this maze, the enemy sat deeply entrenched in hundreds of carefully constructed positions, ranging from blockhouses to bunkers, pillboxes, caves, and camouflaged tanks. All fields of fire were well integrated.

One of the reasons for the failure of American naval gunfire and aircraft to neutralize or destroy an appreciable number of enemy positions prior to the landings was the masterful use of camouflage by the enemy. So skillfully had the Japanese hidden their positions that American ships and aircraft failed to detect them. Even those that were spotted and became targets of American naval gunfire and bombs frequently escaped major destruction because of their structural strength.

In the northern part of Iwo Jima, just as in the south, the first night ashore proved to be a restless one. Damage and casualties to the 1/23 command post on Yellow 1, as well as the explosion of the 25th Marines ammunition dump during the early morning hours, have already been recounted. Elsewhere, it was a similar story. At 0230, about 500 Japanese formed in front of the 27th Marines but were dispersed by artillery fire from the 13th Marines. Shortly after 0700, the enemy scored a mortar hit squarely on the command post of 2/25 above Blue Beach 1. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis C. Hudson, Jr., the executive officer, Major William P. Kaempfer, and the operations officer, Major Donald K. Ellis, were badly wounded. The commander of Company B, 4th Tank Battalion, who had stopped

by to obtain further details about the impending attack, scheduled to be launched within the hour, was killed. The executive officer of 3/25, Lieutenant Colonel James Taul, took over the command of the 2d Battalion.

The initial objective of the assault on D plus 1 was to seize the 0-1 Line extending eastward from Iwo's west coast to the southern tip of Airfield No. 2, whence it curved southward in the form of a horseshoe and continued generally east to the coast northeast of the East Boat Basin. In order to reach the 0-1 Line, VAC units would have to complete the northward pivot from west to east, which had already begun on D-Day. Units along the left flank of VAC and those in the center were to sweep across Airfield No. 2 and straighten the sagging portions of the line until they had advanced generally abreast of the 25th Marines, with 1/24 attached, which occupied the hinge position on the right.

For many of the Marines preparing to jump off on the morning of D-plus 1, daylight brought with it a most depressing sight. At least one observer was to record:

. . . it was not until the next morning, when Marines along the airfield could look back on the beach, that the full extent of our losses was apparent. The wreckage was indescribable. For two miles the debris was so thick that there were only a few places where landing craft could still get in. The wrecked hulks of scores of landing boats testified to one price we had paid to put our troops ashore. Tanks and half-tracks lay crippled where they had bogged down in the coarse sand. Amphibian tractors, victims of mines and well aimed shells, lay flopped on their backs. Cranes, brought ashore to unload cargo, tilted at

insane angles, and bulldozers were smashed in their own roadways.

Packs, gas masks, rifles, and clothing, ripped and shattered by shell fragments, lay scattered across the beach. Toilet articles and even letters were strewn among the debris, as though war insisted on prying into the personal affairs of those it claimed.

And scattered amid the wreckage was death. An officer in charge of an LCT had been hit while trying to free his boat from the sand and was blown in half; a life preserver supported the trunk of his body in the water. Marines, killed on the beach, were partially buried under the sand as the tide came in. Perhaps a hand stretched rigidly out of the sand, and that was all.³

In the face of all this death and destruction, the battle continued and, following an intensive artillery, naval gunfire, and air preparation, the VAC attack to the north jumped off as scheduled at 0830. Along the 1,000-yard front in the 5th Division zone of attack, Colonel Wornham committed 1/26 and 3/27 abreast, keeping 1/27 and 2/27 in reserve. General Rockey had designated the 26th Marines, less 1/26 which had been attached to RCT 27, as division reserve, standing by in positions near the southwestern tip of Airfield No. 1.

The advance of 1/26, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Daniel C. Pollock, and 3/27, under Lieutenant Colonel Donn J. Robertson, soon was seriously slowed down by numerous enemy pillboxes and land mines; even more deadly was the well-aimed enemy mortar and artillery fire and particularly a heavy concentration of air bursts from Japanese anti-aircraft guns fired from their minimum angle of elevation. West of

the airfield, Colonel Wornham's men had to move through relatively open terrain that offered neither cover nor concealment from an enemy who enjoyed both excellent observation and fields of fire. Supported by Companies A and B of the 5th Tank Battalion, the 5th Division Marines moved forward steadily, taking heavy losses as they advanced. At 1800, when Colonel Wornham ordered the two battalions to halt and consolidate, the advance had gained 800 yards. However, 1/26 on the left had to pull back about 200 yards to more favorable ground for night defense. As D plus 1 came to a close, the two 5th Division battalions dug in along an east-west line extending from the northwestern edge of Airfield No. 1 to the west coast. For the night, 2/27 backed up 1/26 while 1/27 dug in behind 3/27 to provide a defense in depth.

For the attack on D plus 1, the 4th Marine Division committed two regiments abreast. On the left of the division zone of attack, the 23d Marines, with 2/24 attached, jumped off at 0830 and almost immediately encountered intense enemy machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. In attempting to pinpoint the source of this fire and silence it, Colonel Wensinger's men temporarily lost contact with Lanigan's 25th Marines. Even though the terrain in this area was unfavorable for the employment of armor, a reinforced platoon from Company C, 4th Tank Battalion was able to support the advance of the 23d Marines. By noon, an aggressive attack had carried past the northern fringes of Airfield No. 1. This thrust breached an important portion of the Japanese defensive system and at the same time

³ Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division*, pp. 152-153.

reduced a number of well-concealed pillboxes and infantry strongpoints. The attacking Marines also had suffered severe casualties. Movement, both on the airfield flats and on the slopes from the beaches, was almost entirely under enemy observation, and the Japanese made the most of their favorable situation.

During the afternoon, the 23d Marines continued the advance. However, minefields and increasingly rough terrain all but precluded effective armored support. The enemy directed deadly rocket, artillery, and mortar fire against the advancing Marines, and after the morning's gains little more ground was taken for the remainder of the day. Altogether, in crossing the airfield, Colonel Wensinger's men had advanced roughly 500 yards. At 1630, the reserve of the 23d Marines, consisting of 1/23 and 2/23, moved forward to positions along the seaward edge of the airfield to form a strong, secondary line of defense. The 23d Marines linked up with the 27th Marines on the left and the 25th Marines on the right before nightfall.

The attack of Colonel Lanigan's 25th Marines on D plus 1 was to be carried out by three battalions abreast. On the left, 1/25 under Lieutenant Colonel Hollis U. Mustain, was to make the main effort; the 2d Battalion in the center, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James Taul, was to seize the high ground directly to its front and, after taking it, give fire support to 1/25. On the extreme right flank, the attached 1/24 under Major Paul S. Treitel, was to remain in place until 1/25 and 2/25 could come abreast. Because of heavy

casualties sustained on D-Day, 3/25 was pulled out of the lines and held in regimental reserve.

The 25th Marines jumped off on schedule. Tanks of Company B, 4th Tank Battalion, supported the attack, but the exceptionally rough terrain made this support practically worthless. In addition, each time that a tank reached a firing position, it immediately attracted accurate enemy mortar and artillery fire. Crossfire from enemy machine guns mounted in concealed emplacements, combined with a heavy volume of well-aimed rifle fire, seriously interfered with the advance of Colonel Lanigan's regiment and inflicted heavy casualties.

In discussing the advance on D plus 1, a survivor of the Iwo battle later was to remark:

There was no cover from enemy fire. Japs deep in reinforced concrete pillboxes laid down interlocking bands of fire that cut whole companies to ribbons. Camouflage hid all the enemy installations. The high ground on every side was honeycombed with layer after layer of Jap emplacements, blockhouses, dugouts, and observation posts. Their observation was perfect; whenever the Marines made a move, the Japs watched every step, and when the moment came, their mortars, rockets, machine guns, and artillery, long ago zeroed-in—would smother the area in a murderous blanket of fire. The counter-battery fire and preparatory barrages of Marine artillery and naval gunfire were often ineffective, for the Japs would merely retire to a lower level or inner cave and wait until the storm had passed. Then they would emerge and blast the advancing Marines.⁴

The deadly effectiveness of the enemy fire was not limited to the front lines. At

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

1100, Japanese artillery scored a direct hit on the aid station of 1/25, killing six Navy corpsmen and wounding an additional seven. It was apparent that General Kuribayashi had so sited his artillery that all the beaches and routes into the interior of the island were covered. Japanese gunners could search out various supply dumps, evacuation stations, and command posts at will. Normally, LVTs had the task of bringing supplies to the front lines. In the zone of attack of the 25th Marines, however, even these versatile vehicles were unable to get through and work details from units in reserve had to manhandle critically needed materiel.

Colonel Lanigan's Marines continued to press the attack throughout the afternoon of D plus 1, but progress was woefully slow. At 1600, the exhausted men were cheered by the arrival of friendly aircraft which, it was hoped, might lend some impetus to the advance. This joy, however, soon, turned into terror when .50 caliber machine gun bullets, rockets, and bombs from a friendly air strike hit men of Company B, 1/24, standing upright on the southern slope of the quarry about 400 yards inland from the eastern shore. This strike, neither called for nor controlled by 1/24, was delivered without a preliminary run and placed on the front lines despite the fact that yellow front-line marking panels had been displayed prior to and during the attack. In consequence of this error, 1/24 suffered five killed and six wounded.⁵ As if attempting to advance under heavy enemy fire and being strafed, bombed, and rocketed

by friendly aircraft were not enough, the hapless company also was shelled by naval gunfire and found friendly artillery registering on its positions.⁶ This misguided naval gunfire, consisting of two complete salvos fired by an unidentified cruiser, landed in the front line of 1/24 and resulted in approximately 90 casualties.⁷

By 1800, 1/25 and 2/25 had made gains of 200-300 yards. The left flank of 1/25, on the other hand, had been unable to move at all throughout the day because of extremely heavy fire received from the left front in the zone of action of the 23d Marines. At 1800, orders were issued to all units to consolidate, dig in, and establish firm contact with each other.

As night descended over bitterly contested Iwo Jima on 20 February, the capture of Airfield No. 1 had been completed and the 4th Division front had advanced between 200 and 500 yards. For these gains, the Japanese had exacted a heavy price. As the second day ended, the 5th Marine Division had lost 1,500 men killed and wounded and the 4th Division about 2,000.⁸ The first prisoners, a total of three, had been taken during the day, but two of them died. A total of 630 enemy dead had been counted, but it was assumed that many others had been killed.

Early on D plus 1, General Schmidt had ordered the corps reserve, the 21st Marines, commanded by Colonel Hartnoll J. Withers, to boat and prepare to

⁵ *4th MarDiv OpRpt*, Anx G, p. 121.

⁷ LtCol Paul S. Treitel ltr to CMC, dtd 5Feb53, in *Iwo Comments*.

⁸ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 146.

⁵ *4th MarDiv OpRpt*, Anx H, p. 4.

land on order. The regiment began debarking before noon, in rain and rough water. Dozens of men missed the drop into the bobbing boats and after they had been fished out, the boats went to the rendezvous area. There the LCVPs circled for six hours, the Marines cold, wet, and miserable. The congestion at the beaches which was steadily increasing, combined with a rising surf that made landing conditions hazardous, precluded their landing. In the end, General Schmidt ordered the regiment back to its transports to be landed later when conditions had improved.

At the same time, on D plus 1, there was a desperate need for artillery, whose landing could not be postponed. As a result, the 4th Marine Division landed the 3d and 4th Battalions of the 14th Marines during the day. Shortly after 1000, 3/14 had launched all of its DUKWs, but the landing was delayed by enemy fire. Finally, in midafternoon, the amphibian trucks carrying 3/14 began to land over the southernmost portion of Yellow 1. The battalion's 105mm howitzers moved into positions prepared by the 3/14 reconnaissance party just inland from the boundary separating Yellow 1 and Red 2. Around 1730, the howitzers opened fire and reinforced the fires of the 1st Battalion of the division artillery.⁹

The landing of the 105s of 4/14 turned into a disaster. The first DUKW to emerge from LST 1032 remained afloat only for a moment. Then waves surged over the side, the engine stopped, and the DUKW sank, taking the

105 down with it. Seven more DUKWs waddled out of the LST and sank in succession. As a result, a total of eight 105s were lost, as well as a dozen officers and men. It was subsequently determined that motor failure of the DUKWs was caused by water in the gasoline, and by insufficient freeboard resulting from extremely heavy loads and choppy water. Thus, 4/14 had lost 8 out of 12 howitzers before firing a round on Iwo Jima.¹⁰

The disaster for Lieutenant Colonel Youngdale's battalion did not end here. The remaining four DUKWs headed for the beach late in the evening and two of them broached at the surf line while attempting to go ashore at 2230. Out of a dozen DUKWs and howitzers, only two finally made it to shore. The guns, having gone into position, began firing northward into the inky darkness.

In order to offset the critical artillery shortage, some of the big 155mm howitzers also were ordered to land. In late afternoon, LST 779 forced its way through the wreckage littering Red Beach 1 and discharged Battery C of the 2d 155mm Howitzer Battalion. Despite extremely difficult beach conditions, the four howitzers were hauled up the steep bluffs by tractors and were in position by 1840 in the 5th Marine Division sector near the west coast. The two remaining batteries of Major Earl J. Rowse's battalion were not landed for another two and four days respectively. Even those artillery battalions that did make it ashore encountered unusual problems from the

⁹ *14th Mar OpRpt*, App. 3, pp. 8-10.

¹⁰ *14th Mar OpRpt*, App. 5, p. 3.

very outset. Before the 28th Marines put the Japanese artillery on Mount Suribachi out of action, artillerymen firing to the north received enemy fire from the south that proved more troublesome than enemy rounds from the front.¹¹

ADVANCE TOWARDS THE 0-1 LINE¹²

At the cost of heavy casualties, the Marines at the end of D plus 1 controlled nearly one-third of Iwo Jima and occupied a two mile-wide beach-head extending along the landing area and 2,000 yards up the southwest coast. Motoyama Airfield No. 1 was completely in American hands. Marine lines stretched in an east-west direction from the west coast opposite the end of the airstrip, past the end of the airfield, with a slight curve to the quarry. Just beyond that point the line curved at right angles to face east with the right flank resting on the shore along the ridge facing the East Boat Basin. The 0-1 Line had not yet been reached at any point, but positions were well knit and more artillery and serviceable tanks were available for support. Even though

enemy resistance on 20 February was even heavier than that encountered on D-Day, both Marine divisions were holding the ground they had seized.

Beach conditions remained extremely difficult throughout the day, both because of a high surf and the continuous enemy artillery fire. The shore party battalions were raked by artillery, mortar, and small arms fire as they desperately attempted to clear the beaches and unload incoming landing craft. They stacked supplies well above the high-water mark, but gear piled up there faster than it could be moved inland. In order to cope with this crisis, the entire logistical plan of establishing shore-party dumps had to be abandoned. Without pausing on the beaches, incoming amtracs—the only vehicles that could climb the terraces and reach firm ground unassisted—waddled up the slopes into the front lines, where they delivered ammunition, rations, and water directly to the combat units. The tractors freed weapons and vehicles that had bogged down and hauled supply-laden DUKWs over the terraces, thus enabling the latter vehicles to move supplies right up to the front lines. In addition to the vehicles shuttling back and forth between the beaches and the lines, Marine working parties hand-carried ammunition forward in order to alleviate critical shortages.

In view of the overall situation, it became apparent to Generals Smith and Schmidt at the close of D plus 1, that the strength of enemy resistance dictated the necessity of employing the 3d Marine Division, still afloat, before long. The requirement of furnishing food and

¹¹ LtCol Roland J. Spritzen ltr to CMC, dtd 7Nov52, in *Iwo Comments*.

¹² Additional material in this section is derived from 13th MarRgt UJnl, 19Feb-21Mar45, hereafter *13th MarRgt UJnl*; 14th MarRgt OpRpt, 22Feb-14Mar45, hereafter *14th MarRgt OpRpt*; 5th EngBn UJnl, 19Feb-24Mar45, hereafter *5th EngBn UJnl*; 5th Shore Party Rgt AR, 19-28Feb45, hereafter *5th Shore Party Rgt AR*; 2/26 UJnl, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter *2/26 UJnl*; 3/26 UJnl, 19Feb-26Mar45, hereafter *3/26 UJnl*; VAC Transl of Jap Docs, Iwo Jima, hereafter *VAC Translations*.

ammunition to an additional 20,000 Marines would impose an added strain on available beach facilities, but the dwindling combat strength of the two Marine divisions already on the island left no other choice. As a result, the 21st Marines of the 3d Marine Division were again ordered to land on D plus 2, to be placed at the disposal of General Cates.

The night of 20-21 February was punctuated by loud explosions as the Japanese exchanged artillery fire with the Americans. At the same time, U.S. Navy gunfire support ships and LCIs mounting 4.2-inch mortars delivered counterbattery and harassing fires. Early in the evening, around 2000, a group of Japanese was observed massing opposite the 27th Marines. Immediate fire by the 13th Marines and attached corps artillery killed a number of the enemy and dispersed the rest. Shortly before 0500, about 100 Japanese attempted to pierce the lines of the 4th Marine Division in the 1/25 sector, but were driven off with heavy losses.

As 21 February dawned, 12 destroyers, 2 cruisers, 68 aircraft, and 33 howitzers took turns at battering the enemy-held portion of Iwo before VAC resumed the attack on D plus 2. At 0810, both the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions jumped off. On the left flank of VAC, the 27th Marines met immediate and violent resistance from the enemy's main defensive positions, which consisted of a belt of caves and concrete-and-steel emplacements. This defense system had a depth of a mile and a half and extended from the west coast to the east coast of Iwo. It featured in-

numerable pillboxes and around 1,500 caves.

The terrain in the 27th Marines' zone of advance was suitable for the employment of armor; elements of the 5th Tank Battalion moved forward just ahead of the infantry. By 1340, 1/26 on the left and 3/27 on the right had advanced nearly 1,000 yards and had reached a point just south of the 0-1 Line. Because of the relative speed of the advance and heavy enemy shelling, a sizable gap had developed by this time between the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions. Company B, 1/27 was committed from regimental reserve to fill this gap between 3/27 and the 23d Marines. Under continuous enemy fire, the 5th Marine Division spent the remainder of the afternoon reorganizing, evacuating casualties, and consolidating its lines. In the course of the afternoon, General Rockey and his staff came ashore and established their headquarters near the southern end of Airfield No. 1.

At the same time that the 5th Marine Division jumped off on D plus 2, the 23d and 25th Marines continued their attack. The 23d, with 2/23 on the left and 2/24 on the right slowly pushed forward with 1/23 and 2/23 following at a 600-yard interval. Almost immediately, the advancing Marines encountered severe mortar, machine gun, and artillery fire, as well as a number of minefields. The advance through the minefields and against numerous pillboxes was very time-consuming and costly. Engineer units went forward to remove the mines. The only significant advance made was on the left flank in the 23d Marines zone of advance, where slightly deflated areas permitted local

and restricted envelopment. But even the progress of the 23d Marines averaged only slightly more than 100 yards during the entire day. After reestablishing contact with the 27th Marines on its left, the 23d dug in for the night shortly before 1800.

On the extreme right, the 25th Marines attacked with 1/25, 2/25, and 1/24 in line, and 3/25 in reserve. Even though the enemy had laid minefields in front of the 25th Marines, the terrain here was so rocky and irregular that the enemy had not been able to mine all avenues of approach. Tanks of Company A, 4th Tank Battalion, supported the advance of 1/25 and 2/25, while tanks of Company B fired on pillboxes and dugouts on the cliff facing 1/24, driving the enemy from the heights of the quarry and cliff areas. Howitzers of 1/14 placed counterbattery and supporting fire across the regimental front. Resistance in the center of the regimental zone gradually weakened and fair progress was made on the right along the shore of the East Boat Basin. Altogether, the 25th Marines gained from 50-300 yards in the course of the morning. Casualties were heavy throughout; at 1000, while checking his frontline positions, Lieutenant Colonel Hollis U. Mustain, commanding 1/25, was killed by enemy shellfire. The battalion executive officer, Major Fenton J. Mee, assumed command.

The irregular advance of units over difficult terrain caused a serious gap to develop between the 1st and 2d Battalions, 25th Marines; in midafternoon Colonel Lanigan committed his 3d Battalion between the two. Since all units were under heavy enemy fire, 3/25 en-

countered major difficulty in moving into the line. By 1700, the move had been accomplished and the regiment consolidated for the night. Similarly, in order to fill a sizable gap between the right flank of the 5th Marine Division and the left flank of the 4th, 1/27 was moved into position along the 5th Division's right flank. Lines of General Rockey's division had to be extended about 400 yards into the 4th Division zone of attack.

Throughout the day, the two-divisional advance towards Airfield No. 2 received effective air and naval gunfire support. More than 800 aircraft flew direct support missions with a total of 32 strikes carried out by 14-20 planes each. Eleven destroyers stood by offshore to provide direct support and illuminating fires for VAC; 1 destroyer, 2 LCI mortar support units, and 2 cruisers fired deep support missions.¹³ Naval gunfire and artillery air spotters continued to use carrier-based aircraft, since Airfield No. 1 was still unable to accommodate VMO units.

A pressing need for reinforcements made it necessary to land more troops on Iwo as soon as possible. Improved beach and landing conditions on the morning of D plus 2 finally permitted the 21st Marines of the 3d Marine Division to come ashore. The regiment, commanded by Colonel Hartnoll J. Withers, was ordered to land at 1130 over the Yellow Beaches; it was to be attached to the 4th Marine Division to assist in the capture of Airfield No. 2.¹⁴ Colonel Withers landed his battalions through-

¹³ VAC AR, Anx B, p. 16.

¹⁴ 4th MarDiv OpRpt, Sec IV.

out the afternoon of 21 February. Despite a heavy surf, the regiment did not incur any casualties and by 1800 all three battalions and the regimental command post were ashore. After being attached to the 4th Marine Division, RCT 21 assembled near the edge of Airfield No. 1.

Shortly after noon, the assistant commander of the 4th Marine Division, Brigadier General Hart, also went ashore in order to report on beach conditions and select an appropriate site for the division command post. Finding the beaches under heavy fire and littered with the debris of the invasion, General Hart recommended that division headquarters remain afloat at least until 22 February. The assistant division commander also recommended, after consultation with the regimental commanders, that the 21st Marines, instead of relieving the 25th Marines as previously planned, would relieve the 23d Marines on D plus 3. His recommendation was approved.

As 21 February drew to a close, VAC held a very irregular line which passed between the two airfields. When units consolidated their positions for the night, a total of eight battalions was facing the enemy across the island. The slow Marine advance during D plus 2 had forced the Japanese back yard by yard. Once again, for the gains made in the course of the day, VAC Marines had paid with heavy casualties. During the first 58 hours ashore, the landing force had sustained more than 4,500 casualties, and combat efficiency of the 4th Marine Division had been reduced to 68 percent.

The night from 21-22 February proved to be a bad one for men of the landing force, who felt extremely uncomfortable in the cold drizzle. Within the overall scope of General Kuribayashi's prohibition of any major *banzai* charges, the Japanese did all within their power to make their unwanted guests as miserable as possible.

At dusk, enemy aircraft attacked American shipping offshore and scored hits on the outer ring of the warships surrounding Iwo Jima. Taking advantage of the commotion resulting from the sudden air attack, the enemy executed local counterattacks and infiltration against both the 4th and 5th Divisions. Along the left front of VAC, an enemy counterattack in undetermined strength hit the 27th Marines at 2100. No penetration resulted from this attack, which was stopped within the hour. At 0245, the exhausted men of Colonel Wornham's regiment repulsed an attempted infiltration. An hour later, the enemy tried his luck once again, and at 0400, RCT 27 reported 800 enemy massing in front of its lines.¹⁵ As the long night finally ended, the regiment's lines were still intact, though an undetermined number of the enemy had managed to infiltrate.

It also proved to be a restless night for Marines of the 4th Division. Shortly before midnight, an enemy force of about 200 men massed on Airfield No. 2 and headed for the lines of 3/23. Before this attack could get organized, the enemy was hit by naval gunfire and artillery and was forced to withdraw.

¹⁵ 5th MarDiv AR, p. 21.

During the long night, the 25th Marines reported that an enemy aircraft had bombed Blue Beach behind its lines. Almost as steady as the rain was the volume of enemy mortar and artillery fire that covered the Marine front lines, beaches, and rear areas throughout the night.

D plus 3 was, if anything, even worse than the three days that had preceded it. A cold, heavy rain pelted the island, coating Marines and their weapons with a sort of grayish paste on top of the layer of volcanic ash they had already acquired. The front lines of VAC, on the morning of 22 February, bent back in the form of a horseshoe in the center of the 3,400-yard line, where elements of the 23d Marines still were 1,200 yards short of the 0-1 Line. Fatigue and heavy casualties both had left their imprint on the men in the lines, and the three days and nights of incessant, nerve-shattering action were beginning to have an adverse effect on combat efficiency. Without rest or sleep, subsisting solely on a diet of K rations and water, occasionally supplemented by unheated C rations, the men were beginning to show a marked drop in morale.

In order to provide added impetus for the attack on this fourth day of the operation, both Generals Rockey and Cates decided to relieve some of the frontline units, notably the 23d and 27th Marines. Along the left flank of VAC, the 26th Marines under Colonel Chester B. Graham moved out at daybreak with the mission of relieving the 27th Marines and continuing the attack to the north. Once RCT 26 had passed the lines, 1/26, which previously had

been attached to RCT 27, was to revert to its parent regiment. The 27th Marines reserve, 2/27, would become attached to the 26th Marines.

At 0500 the 21st Marines prepared to relieve RCT 23 with the attached 2/24. Upon being relieved, the 23d Marines, less two mortar platoons, was to be held in VAC reserve near the north-eastern edge of Airfield No. 1. The mortar platoons were to remain in position to support the attack of RCT 21. The 25th Marines, with 1/24 attached, was to remain on the 4th Division right, while the 24th Marines, less 1/24, would continue in division reserve.

The relief of the 27th Marines took place in a heavy downpour of rain, which turned the ground into gumbo. Mortar fire, coming from the higher ground ahead and in the center of the island, fell as steadily as the rain, and both combined to create confusion and disruption. The 26th Marines, with 2/27 attached, passed through the lines of the 27th Marines with the mission of attacking to the northeast, following the western contour of the island. At the same time to the right, the 21st Marines moved in on the left of the 4th Marine Division.

The zone of attack of the 5th Division extended from the western beaches to a formidable terrain obstacle which ran from northeast to southwest down the west center of the island, curving west across the division's front near Airfield No. 2. This obstacle was a bluff almost 100 feet high, whose slopes dropped almost vertically towards the American lines. The high ground above the bluff provided the enemy with perfect obser-

vation into the division area and enabled him to effectively block any advance from both the front and the right flank.

At 0835, following preparatory naval gunfire and air strikes, both divisions jumped off. In the zone of attack of the 5th Marine Division the 26th Marines attacked with three battalions in the line. Almost immediately, the advancing Marines drew heavy fire from the front and right flank. Enemy shells and bullets were no respectors of rank; around 0940, Lieutenant Colonel Tom M. Trotti, commanding 3/26, and his operations officer, Major William R. Day, were killed by a mortar shell. Captain Richard M. Cook, commanding Company G, took over until noon, at which time Major Richard Fagan, the division inspector, assumed command. Despite heavy losses, the 26th advanced for about 400 yards. In the course of the day, the weather turned from bad to worse. Rain was falling in torrents and visibility became extremely poor. Because of the heavy rain, no air support could be made available. The poor weather even handicapped the tanks, whose drivers could see but a few yards ahead.

During the afternoon it became apparent that the attack by 3d Division Marines against the bluff itself had stalled, leaving the 26th Marines exposed to heavy fire from the front, the right flank, and the right rear. In addition, the Japanese were beginning to launch several thrusts against the regiment's left flank and center. As if to mock Colonel Graham's drenched and dispirited Marines, Japanese artillery and mortars on the bluff directed heavy fire into the 26th Marines' lines. At

1400, the exhausted and severely mauled Marines were forced to relinquish the 400-yard gain they had made earlier in the day and pulled back to the line of departure. Japanese mortar and artillery fire harassed the men for the remainder of the afternoon during the withdrawal and continued after the Marines had occupied defensive positions for the night.

In the sector occupied by the 4th Marine Division, things had gone little better during D plus 3. At 0500, the 21st Marines began the relief of the 23d. The newly arrived 3d Division Marines faced very rough going from the outset. In the heavy downpour and continuous enemy fire, the relief of the 23d Marines required nearly six hours. Even before the relief was completed, Colonel Withers committed his 1st and 2d Battalions, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Marlowe C. Williams and Lieutenant Colonel Lowell E. English, respectively, against an intricate network of mutually supporting pillboxes on the high ground between the two airfields. The 3d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Wendell H. Duplantis, remained in reserve.

As the 21st Marines advanced northward, with 1/21 on the right and 2/21 on the left, it had to push its attack uphill against mutually supporting pillboxes and bunkers with mined approaches. These pillboxes were well protected on the flanks and only direct hits by large caliber weapons appeared to have any effect on them. In the taxiways between the airfields, bunkers blocked the advance, and the area adjoining the runways of Airfield No. 2 was dotted with pillboxes that were

covered with sand and often protruded only a foot or so above the ground. This was the beginning of the enemy main line of resistance. The restricted nature of the area and the excellent defensive system precluded any maneuver but a frontal assault.

Bad weather and a well-entrenched enemy who took full advantage of the terrain with prearranged fires, presented the 21st Marines with an exceedingly brutal introduction to Iwo Jima. By afternoon of D plus 3, 2/21 had advanced 250 yards in places; 1/21 had gained about 50 yards. Casualties had been out of all proportion to the gains made. Lieutenant Colonel Williams was wounded by a mortar shell but refused evacuation until nightfall, at which time he turned command of 1/21 over to the battalion executive officer, Major Clay M. Murray.¹⁶ At about 1700, the attack halted for the day and all units began to prepare positions for the night.

To the right of the 21st Marines, the 25th, with three battalions and the attached 1/24 in the line, was to have attacked on D plus 3 in order to straighten its regimental front in conjunction with the advance of the 21st Marines. Once the lines had been straightened out, both the 21st and 25th Marines were to launch a coordinated drive to the north to seize the 0-1 Line. Failure of the 21st Marines to make

any sizable gains had an adverse effect on operations of the 25th Marines, which was unable to launch a full-scale attack. Nevertheless, in the course of the morning, 1/25 advanced about 200 yards, only to find its left flank completely exposed. As a result, the advance had to be halted until the battalion could tie in firmly with the 21st Marines. In the center of the 25th Marines line, the 3d and 2d Battalions found themselves marking time. The only cheerful note for the day was sounded when 3/25 requested and received rocket support against a hill some 800 yards northwest of the quarry. Two salvos fired against enemy positions on this hill drove about 200 Japanese from their emplacements. Caught out in the open by well-placed machine guns of 3/25, a large part of the enemy force was wiped out.

Around 1530, the Japanese struck back. While leaving his forward observation post, Lieutenant Colonel Chambers was severely wounded by enemy machine gun fire, when a bullet struck his left collarbone. Since Lieutenant Colonel James Taul, the battalion executive officer, had assumed command of 2/25 on 20 February, when the commander of 2/25 had been wounded and evacuated, Captain James C. Headley assumed command of 3/25.

The 2d Battalion of the 25th Marines, meanwhile, remained largely stationary during the day. Even so, it took its share of casualties. In midmorning, the Japanese laid a heavy and accurate mortar barrage on the battalion lines; an attempted enemy counterattack was quickly smashed. At 1830, Japanese were observed moving towards the bat-

¹⁶ Major Murray himself was wounded on the following day and forced to turn command of the battalion over to Major Robert H. Houser, who led 1/21 for the duration of the Iwo operation. LtCol Robert H. Houser ltr to CMC, dtd 3Apr53 and Col Marlowe C. Williams ltr to CMC, dtd 9Feb53, in *Iwo Comments*.

talion lines. Before an attack could get under way, infantry heavy weapons fire and artillery support from the 14th Marines dispersed the Japanese.

At the right end of the VAC lines, 1/24 spent most of the day in mopping up along the east coast above the landing beaches. Major Treitel's men blasted caves and pillboxes in an attempt to reduce the heavy enemy mortar and sniper fire originating in the bluffs around the quarry. In its operations during D plus 3, the battalion fared better than the 25th Marines on its left and casualties were comparatively light. At 1700, the battalion consolidated its positions and established contact between units.

The ferocious battle raging between the airfields took its toll not only of men but also materiel. Thus, at the end of D plus 3, the 4th Tank Battalion reported that 11 of its tanks had been destroyed and 8 were under repair, leaving 28 operational.¹⁷ The 5th Tank Battalion reported 34 tanks operational, 4 under repair, and 13 destroyed.

Even though the advance towards the north of Iwo had made little headway during 22 February, the command organization and activities on the Iwo beaches became somewhat better coordinated. Headquarters of the 9th Naval Construction Brigade, commanded by Captain Robert C. Johnson, CEC, USN, was set up ashore, and initial work was started on preparing Iwo to serve as a giant aircraft carrier. In the course of the day, burials began in the Fourth Division cemetery halfway between Yellow 1 and Airfield No. 2.

Burials in the 5th Division cemetery, located just south of the airfield, had already commenced during the afternoon of D plus 1.¹⁸ Provision was made for those Marines who died on board ship to be buried at sea, provided that this took place in water more than 100 fathoms deep.

Evacuation of the numerous casualties became a critical problem on D plus 3 because of poor beach conditions. LST 807 voluntarily remained on the beach under fire and acted as a hospital ship during the hours of darkness, while the remaining LSTs withdrew for the night. As darkness descended over the battle area, a steady stream of casualties arrived on the 807, where doctors performed emergency operations in the wardroom. Before morning, more than 200 casualties had been treated on the LST; of this number only 2 died.¹⁹

At sundown on 22 February, Task Force 58 set sail for its second raid against Tokyo. On board the *Indianapolis*, Admiral Spruance accompanied this strike force. A task group of this fast carrier force, TG 58.5, consisting of the *Enterprise*, two cruisers, and Destroyer Squadron 54, remained at Iwo to provide night fighter protection. The departure of TF 58 materially reduced the availability of aircraft for direct ground support; overall responsibility for providing this type of support for the Marines ashore now fell on the small carriers of the carrier support force under Admiral Durgin, in addition to its mission of conducting air searches for survivors, providing anti-

¹⁷ VAC AR, p. 18.

¹⁸ VAC C-1 PerRpts, p. 21.

¹⁹ 5th Shore Party Rgt AR, p. 6.

submarine and combat air patrols, and strikes against nearby Chichi Jima. As a result, the close air support for Marines fighting on the ground would henceforth have to be curtailed due to the shortage of aircraft.²⁰

Marines shivering from wetness and cold in the front lines, faced another restless night. The Japanese began to probe the American lines shortly after dusk. Following an extremely heavy mortar and artillery barrage around 1800, a strong enemy force attacked the northernmost lines of the 26th Marines and succeeded in driving back the outposts. The enemy counterattack was brought to a halt after heavy casualties had been inflicted upon the attacking force. During the early morning hours, enemy swimmers, who had infiltrated across the western beaches into the 5th Division area, had to be eliminated. Similarly, in the zone of action of the 4th Marine Division, there was sporadic enemy activity throughout the night. Around 0500, an estimated 100 Japanese attempted to infiltrate the lines of 2/25 and 3/25. Even though these enemy efforts were thwarted, the intermittent firing served to keep the weary Marines from getting some much-needed sleep. In addition to all this activity, Japanese artillery continued to hit friendly positions along the corps front, inflicting further casualties and adding to the sense of uncertainty.

Despite the continuous harassment by enemy infantry and supporting arms, VAC plans called for the continuation of the attack on 23 February. The objective for D plus 4 was to be

the 0-2 Line. Jumping off at 0730, the 4th Marine Division was directed to make the main effort on its left against Airfield No. 2. Since the strongly defended bluffs on the far left of the 4th Division's zone of advance dominated all of western Iwo, VAC authorized the 5th Marine Division to advance beyond the boundary separating the two divisions if such an advance promised to neutralize or eliminate these prominent obstacles.

At 0730 on 23 February, the VAC attack continued in the direction of Airfield No. 2 and the 0-2 Line. The 26th Marines, with 2/27 attached, moved forward against very heavy fire from the front and the right flank. After advancing for about 200 yards against bitter opposition, the regiment found the ground untenable and withdrew to its jumpoff positions. Shortly before noon, enemy artillery scored a direct hit on the command post of 2/26. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph C. Sayers, was wounded and had to be evacuated. Major Amedeo Rea, the battalion executive officer, assumed command. For the remainder of D plus 4, the 26th Marines attempted to advance, but it was driven back each time by heavy enemy fire. At the end of the day, the battalions dug in for the night in about the same positions they had occupied during the preceding night.

In the center of the VAC line, where the 4th Marine Division with the attached 21st Marines was to make the main effort against Airfield No. 2, events took a similar turn. Because of the importance of this airfield General Kuribayashi had assigned the 145th

²⁰ VAC Air Support Summary, p. 2.

Regiment commanded by Colonel Masuo Ikeda to defend this vital objective. This regiment was considered the best Japanese outfit on Iwo Jima; its 47mm antitank guns were sited to fire straight down the runways. In fact, the Marines were now encountering the enemy main defense line, which began in the west at the rocky cliffs to the north of the western beaches, stretched east across the island to skirt the southern end of Airfield No. 2, and terminated in the cliffs at the northern end of the eastern beaches. This line was organized in depth with all types of heavy weapons within and behind it, capable of delivering fire upon both the isthmus and beach areas. It was also heavily organized with a series of mutually supporting pillboxes, bunkers, blockhouses, tunnels, and other dug in positions. In addition, all approaches to the airfield were mined; enemy dead, saki bottles, helmets, and ammunition dumps were found booby trapped.

It became the lot of the 21st Marines to advance into this cauldron of enemy fire. Typical of the fighting which this regiment was to see at the approaches to Airfield No. 2 on D plus 4 were the experiences of some of the members of this unit:

Major Clay Murray taking over 1/21 for his first day, figured that if he could find the weakest point and destroy it he could then knock off the supporting positions one by one. He lifted the telephone to give an order and a machine gun burst smashed the phone in his hand. Two bullets tore through his left cheek and out his open mouth, taking five teeth with them, and the rest of the burst sheared the knuckles of his left hand and ripped

open his left ear. Major Robert H. Houser became 1/21's third commander in two days.

Private First Class George Smyth, 18, of Brooklyn, had never seen such Japanese. They were six footers, and they never retreated. Smyth's buddy fell beside him, a pistol bullet through his head, dead center. It came from a captured Marine .45. On the other side, a Japanese came down with his sword, both hands grasping the hilt. The Marine put up his right hand to ward off the blow, and his arm was sliced down the middle, fingers to elbow. As Smyth ran forward, a Japanese disappeared before him into a hole. Smyth dropped at the hole to finish him off, but the Japanese was already rising from a tunnel behind him. Smyth turned just in time to kill him. The ground was giving Ikeda's men every advantage, and they were using them all.²²

In the end, 1/21 was unable to make any gains for the day and had to consolidate for the night in its jumpoff positions. The 2d Battalion, now commanded by Major George A. Percy, had already become engaged in a sharp fire-fight at daybreak and, as a result, did not jump off until 0935. The heavy curtain of enemy fire prevented any advance until a second artillery preparation had neutralized some of the known targets on Airfield No. 2. The assault companies reached the southwest approaches to the airfield, but every effort to get troops onto the field itself failed, despite heavy support from naval gunfire and a rocket barrage. Finally, some of the advance elements succeeded in crossing the lower end of the north-east-southwest runway following an air strike, only to be driven back later by

²² Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, pp. 175-176.

heavy machine gun and direct antitank fire. The 21st Marines consolidated its lines for the night at the southern edge of the field. For all practical purposes, gains for the day were nil, though the regiment had sustained heavy casualties.

On the right flank of the 4th Marine Division zone of attack, the 24th Marines, now in line with three battalions abreast, was to make the only sizable gains for the day. Advancing against moderate to heavy enemy resistance, Colonel Jordan's men gained as much as 300 yards. Since units along the regiment's left flank failed to advance, the regiment halted around 1500 and dug in for the night.

Even though two air strikes, artillery, and naval gunfire had supported the VAC attack on D plus 4, gains made for the day remained negligible. Before the morning attack opened, the *Idaho* had fired 162 rounds of 14-inch fire within 400 yards of the Marine lines; the *Pensacola* fired 390 rounds of 8-inch ammunition, all apparently without seriously affecting the enemy's power to resist. Discouraging as this tenacious enemy defense was to the frontline troops, there was a brighter side to the picture along the beaches, where, almost imperceptibly, order was beginning to emerge out of chaos. More exits from the beaches were being opened, permitting a steady flow of supplies inland. On 24 February, 2,500 rounds of 81mm mortar ammunition, of which there had been a critical shortage, were brought ashore, as were 25 tanks of the 3d Marine Division. When an eastward shift of the wind made it ap-

parent that Iwo's eastern beaches would have a high surf on the following day, preparations were made to shift the unloading of cargo to the western beaches in the 5th Division sector for the next few days.

At the same time that supplies were coming ashore at a more steady pace, the command organization on Iwo Jima also became more stabilized. During the morning of D plus 4, General Cates came ashore and established his command post just east of the northwest-southwest runway of Airfield No. 1. Now that the headquarters of both the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions had been set up on the island, General Schmidt made an inspection of activities ashore while an advance party of the VAC Landing Force under the corps chief of staff made preparations for the establishment of a command post.²² In the course of a meeting between General Schmidt and the division commanders it became apparent that more pressure against the enemy would have to be applied if any appreciable progress was to be made on the following day. In consequence, an intermediate objective south of the O-2 Line was established. The new line roughly corresponded at both ends with the O-1 Line; however, in the center it protruded nearly 800 yards to include all of Airfield No. 2. On 24 February, a concerted attack was to be launched against the bluffs that stood squarely in the center of the VAC line. The assault was to be preceded by the heaviest concentration of aerial bombardment, naval gunfire, and artillery

²² VAC AR, p. 20.

that could be mustered. Tanks of the 3d, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions were to support the main effort. Lieutenant Colonel William R. Collins, Tank Officer of the 5th Marine Division, was charged with responsibility for coordinating the armored support. At the same time, the remainder of the 3d Marine Division, except for the 3d Marines, was to land and move into position, prepared to take over the center of the VAC line on the following day.²³

As D plus 4 drew to a close, one phase of the Iwo Jima campaign had ended. The Stars and Stripes had been hoisted above Mount Suribachi; Task Force 58 had already pulled out on the previous day, and Secretary of the Navy Forrestal departed for Guam during the late afternoon of 23 February. The Marines of VAC had established a solid foothold ashore, and there no longer was any chance for the Japanese on the island to dislodge them. Yet the most bitter and bloody part of the campaign was just about to begin. No one knew this better than the Japanese who, poised in their massive defenses, somberly awaited the American onslaught. During the night from 23-24 February, Admiral Ichimaru cabled to Admiral Toyoda his apologies for not having annihilated the Marines at the water's edge, adding:

Real battles are to come from now on. Every man of my unit fully realizes the importance of this battle for the future of the nation and is determined to defend this island at any cost, fulfilling his honorable duty.²⁴

Even as the Japanese naval commander was composing this message, small groups of Japanese once again attempted to infiltrate the lines of both the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions. In the 5th Division sector the enemy attempted to infiltrate both from the north and the south. In addition, the enemy shelled the rear areas and beaches during the night, thus assuring another miserable night for the Marines, who were dug in as best they could on the fringes of the enemy's main defense line.

On Saturday, 24 February, Iwo Jima resembled a giant beehive as the strong winds of the previous day diminished and moderate wind and surf under partly cloudy skies favored the unloading of men and supplies. On the beaches, a steady stream of men, machines, and supplies was pouring ashore, heedless of sporadic enemy mortar fire that was still hitting the beaches. At 1000, General Schmidt landed and assumed command ashore; shortly after noon, the VAC command post opened near the western beaches.²⁵ On Airfield No. 1, men of the 31st Naval Construction Battalion began the hazardous job of restoring the field. With riflemen covering them, they had to crawl up the runways on hands and knees, probing for mines and picking out shell fragments. Hidden Japanese still sniped at the Seabees and enemy artillery occasionally shelled the runways, but the work continued without interruption. By midafternoon, the 9th Marines, commanded by Colonel Howard N. Kenyon, and Headquarters,

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 176.

²⁵ VAC AR, *Anx B*, p. 21.

3d Marine Division, had come ashore.²⁶ General Erskine established his command post at the northern tip of Airfield No. 1, preparatory to taking over the central zone of action on the following day.

On the northern front D plus 5 got under way with a terrific bombardment of enemy positions just north of Airfield No. 2 from air, ground, and sea. Beginning at 0800, the *Idaho*, stationed off the western beaches, began to hurl 14-inch salvos at the heavily fortified area abutting the field; standing off the eastern beaches, the *Pensacola*, still bearing the scars of her previous duel with enemy artillery on Mount Suribachi, was firing her heavy guns against enemy positions lying east of the *Idaho's* target area. This destructive naval bombardment continued for more than an hour. At 0845, howitzers of the VAC artillery joined the bombardment in conjunction with the division artillery, which laid down a powerful preparation directly in front of the VAC line. At 0900, the naval bombardment ceased as aircraft from the escort carriers arrived over Iwo Jima to saturate the target area with bombs and rockets. Following the powerful preparation, VAC opened its attack at 0910 with the 26th Marines on the left, the 21st Marines in the center, and the 24th Marines on the right.

The Corps attack order²⁷ had placed

²⁶ "When the balance of the 3d Division less 3d Marines was released to VAC, a separate beach was assigned by contracting the 4th and 5th Division beaches at the junction, allowing some 700 yards for the 3d." *Rogers ltr.*

²⁷ OpO 4-45, dtd 23Feb45, in *VAC OpRpt*, Anx A.

the axis of the main effort in the zone of action of the 5th Marine Division. For all practical purposes, however, tanks advancing on Airfield No. 2 in the zone of advance of the 21st Marines, were to deliver the main stroke. Once this attack had gained impetus, the combined force of infantry, armor, and artillery was to be brought to bear against the enemy. The concentration of overpowering force at one point, in accordance with the maxims of war, could produce significant results.

It was evident from the outset that the success or failure of the day's operation would hinge largely on the performance of the tanks of the three Marine divisions, which had been placed under the overall control of Lieutenant Colonel Collins. The approach of the tanks to the front lines ran into considerable difficulty almost from the outset. The original plan for the employment of armor had stipulated that the 5th Division tanks, followed by those of the 3d Division, were to proceed to Airfield No. 2 by way of the westernmost taxiway which led from Airfield No. 1 to the second field. Tanks of the 4th Marine Division were to head for No. 2 airfield over the eastern taxiway.

This plan proved impossible to carry out when Company A, 5th Tank Battalion, which spearheaded the advance along the western route, ran into horned mines, buried aerial torpedoes, as well as heavy antitank fire. The first tank in the column struck a mine and was disabled. Shortly thereafter, the second tank in line, which had proceeded some distance beyond the first, ran over a buried aerial torpedo which demolished the vehicle and killed four members

of the crew.²⁸ In the midst of the confusion resulting from the explosion of the aerial torpedo, heavy artillery and mortar fire immediately hit the remaining tanks in the column, four of which were put out of action momentarily, though two of them were repaired under fire. Since the enemy had effectively blocked their route of advance, the remaining tanks returned to the bivouac area and prepared to advance on Airfield No. 2 by way of the eastern taxiway. There, the advancing armor also encountered mines and spent most of the morning in clearing a lane. Eventually, a dozen tanks reached the fringes of Airfield No. 2 and, having arrived there, opened fire on enemy emplacements to the north of the field.

Because of the delayed arrival of the supporting armor, the 26th Marines did not jump off until 0930 when, with three battalions abreast, it advanced making the main effort on its right in coordination with the assault by the 21st Marines. Progress was slow, and many tanks fell victim to mines and accurate enemy antitank fire. For the men of the 21st Marines, who were denied the expected armored support during the early part of the day, the going was extremely rough, and the regiment had to advance into intense enemy fire. Shortly after 1000, both Companies I and K lost their commanding officers in a matter of minutes. Nevertheless, and despite high casualties, the advance continued. By noon, elements of Company K, 21st Marines, had crossed the field and were attacking enemy po-

sitions on an elevation just north of the junction of the two runways.

It was rough going for the attacking Marines of 3/21 all the way, as they charged across Airfield No. 2 and uphill against a well-defended belt of interconnected pillboxes, trenches, tunnels, and antitank gun positions. Twice they were driven off the ridge, but they attacked again. Once within the enemy positions, the Marines assaulted Colonel Ikeda's men with rocks, rifle butts, bayonets, knives, pistols, and shovels. Around noon, just as it appeared that the ridge had been secured, heavy artillery fire began to hit the forward-most elements of 3/21 and the attack ground to a halt. Nevertheless, a gap had been made in the enemy line and through this gap tanks, bazookamen, mortarmen, and machine gunners were now able to advance.

The attack of 2/21 encountered considerable difficulty in moving towards Airfield No. 2 in its zone of advance. The arrival of supporting armor at 1000 proved to be a mixed blessing, since the armor attracted a heavy volume of artillery and mortar fire that pinned down the assault companies. When the supporting tanks tried to advance over the runways, Colonel Ikeda's antitank guns soon put a stop to this effort. Nevertheless, by inching northward around the end of the runway, elements of 2/21 were nearly abreast of the 26th Marines on their left shortly after noon. This advance served to erase the deep bulge which the enemy positions had previously made into the Marine lines.

At 1330, as soon as the 21st Marines

²⁸ Co A, *5th Tank Bn AR*, p. 2.

had consolidated the morning's gains, a second deadly preparation of naval gunfire and artillery, similar to that which had preceded the jumpoff in the morning, rained down on the Japanese positions north of Airfield No. 2. As aircraft joined in the preparation, the 26th and 21st Marines launched a coordinated tank-infantry attack against the high ground to the north of the airfield. Once again, vicious hand-to-hand combat broke out. By 1415, Companies I and K of 3/21 had occupied the high ground across the east-west runway and tied in with each other. The supporting tanks now were able to operate on the western half of both runways, from where they directed their fire against enemy gun emplacements and pillboxes. The enemy responded with heavy antitank fire and mortar barrages. The latter did little damage to the tanks, but proved extremely detrimental to the infantry advancing alongside the armor. By the time the attack halted in late afternoon, the most forward elements of the 21st Marines had to withdraw to the southern edge of the east-west runway. Companies I and K of 3/21, on the other hand, were determined to hold their hard-won positions north of the airfield and remained in place. Badly needed supplies for these men had to be brought up after dark across the airfield.

At the same time that the 21st Marines swept northward across the airfield during the afternoon, the 26th Marines, with 2/26 and 3/26 abreast, also jumped off. Colonel Graham's men moved forward without significant dif-

ficulty over the ground directly in front of the regiment until they pulled abreast of the forward lines of the adjacent 21st Marines. From that point on, they drew continuous fire from cave positions to their right front. As the Marines approached, the Japanese on the high ground lobbed down grenades on the exposed assault force. The Marines retaliated with flamethrowers and white phosphorus grenades. By 1600, 3/26 had advanced about 400 yards beyond the forward lines of the 21st Marines and secured for the day. The 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, was pulled out of reserve and moved up to positions along the foot of the ridge line on the right boundary which the 5th Marine Division shared with 2/21. As in the case of the 21st Marines, RCT 26 had paid for the day's advance with heavy losses. The enemy did not spare the stretcher bearers who were forced to run a gantlet of fire as they attempted to carry wounded Marines to the rear, and losses among these men were heavy.

The most difficult fighting and terrain, with the least gains on D plus 5 fell to Colonel Jordan's 24th Marines on the very right flank of the VAC line. Following the thunderous preparation prior to H-hour, the 24th Marines, with 2/25 attached, jumped off. Both 2/24 and 3/24 attacked alongside the 21st Marines towards Airfield No. 2. Initially, the two battalions made good progress and by 1100, 2/24 was approaching the eastern end of the east-west runway.

At this point the advancing Marines found themselves confronted by a nondescript hill which ran along the south-

east edge of the east-west runway. For lack of a better name, in accordance with military custom, this otherwise insignificant elevation was designated as Charlie-Dog Ridge, so named after the map grid squares in which it was located. To the southeast, a spur of this ridge culminated in a semicircular rise of ground soon to become infamous as the "Amphitheater." There, the Japanese had constructed some of the most formidable defenses on the island. The approach to this terrain feature from the south came squarely under the guns emplaced on the ridge. To the east, the route led across a weird series of volcanic outcroppings and draws.

Just before 1130, as the Marines were preparing to assault Charlie-Dog Ridge, only 150 yards from the eastern end of the east-west runway, the enemy on the ridge fired at point-blank range with heavy machine guns, rifles and antitank guns. At the same time, 2/24 and 3/24 were hit by antiaircraft airbursts and mortar and artillery fire that stopped them cold. The 24th Marines was approaching the core of General Kuribayashi's central island defense system, featuring Hill 382, highest elevation on northern Iwo just beyond the airfield, as well as the Amphitheater, Turkey Knob, and Minami village. A sensitive enemy nerve had been exposed, and the Japanese reacted accordingly. Once the pinned-down men had taken the measure of what confronted them, they called for support from the 105mm howitzers of the 14th Marines and brought fire from their 81mm and 60mm mortars to bear against the firmly entrenched enemy. While these weapons peppered the ene-

my positions, Marines of 2/24 were able to move four machine guns into positions offering a clear field of fire on some of the enemy emplacements on Charlie-Dog Ridge. At the same time, men of the weapons company moved a 37mm gun close to the front and succeeded in knocking out a number of enemy emplacements.

Under cover of this barrage, the Marines were able to inch their way forward. For the remainder of the afternoon, assault squads, burning and blasting their way to the top of the ridge, led the way, followed by the remainder of Company G. As elsewhere along the VAC line, casualties were heavy; at 1500, the mortars of 3/24 fired 80 white phosphorus smoke shells to screen the evacuation of wounded. Shortly after 1600, just as it appeared that all the enemy resisting on Charlie-Dog Ridge could be mopped up before nightfall, the Japanese unleashed a tremendous mortar barrage which drove 2/24 and 3/24 off the ridge that had been taken at such heavy cost. One of the mortar shells exploded in the command post of 3/24, killing three men and wounding the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander A. Vandegrift, Jr., the son of the Commandant. Wounded in both legs, the battalion commander had to be evacuated and the battalion executive officer, Major Doyle A. Stout, assumed command.

On the right of the 24th Marines, the 1st Battalion had also jumped off for the attack on D plus 5. However, from the very outset, the progress of 1/24 was seriously impeded by the broken terrain, which prevented the

battalion from playing any part in the main effort taking place to its left. Instead, Major Treitel's men crept and crawled forward, while an unseen enemy, operating from cleverly concealed emplacements and caves, poured a steady stream of fire into the attack force. In its attempt to keep the advance from bogging down altogether, 1/24 had the assistance of five LVT(A)s which had been attached to the regiment for fire support. Three of the vehicles went up the coast road a short distance beyond the East Boat Basin and fired on targets designated by infantry commanders; the remaining two fired inland from the water, giving the hard pressed infantry all possible support. At 1700, Colonel Jordan ordered all units of his regiments to consolidate for the night. During the day, the left flank of RCT 24 had advanced about 500 yards; the center approximately 50 yards, and the extreme right flank about 100 yards, thus straightening the line in the regimental sector.²⁹

On the whole, 24 February had been a gruelling day for all VAC units. As the day closed, General Schmidt was able to report that gains of 200 to 1,000 yards has been made in the attack and that the VAC objective had been reached on both flanks.³⁰ The price for the gains made in men and materiel continued to be very heavy. Since D-Day, the enemy had destroyed 32 friendly tanks.³¹ As D plus 5 ended, American casualties on Iwo Jima had risen to 7,758, an increase of 5,388 since

the end of D-Day. During the five-day drive to Airfield No. 2, 773 Marines had died; 3,741 had been wounded, of whom nearly 300 subsequently were to succumb to their injuries; 5 were missing, and 558 were suffering from combat fatigue.³² The combat efficiency of the 4th Marine Division at the end of the day had been reduced by casualties and battle fatigue to an estimated 60 percent.³³ The 5th Marine Division with a total of more than 3,000 casualties, had fared little better. The 26th Marines, in particular, had sustained very heavy losses. By evening of D plus 5, Colonel Graham's regiment had lost 21 officers and 332 enlisted men.³⁴

Nevertheless, the Japanese were beginning to feel the impact of the VAC assault. Late on 23 February, the commander of the *309th Independent Infantry Battalion* had already reported to Major General Sadasue Senda, commanding the *2d Mixed Brigade*, that communication to all units had been severed, and that his command post had been surrounded for the last three days and harassed by hand grenades and flamethrowers through the entrance. "Nevertheless," the battalion commander concluded, "the fighting spirit of all men and officers is high. We shall continue to inflict as much damage as possible upon the enemy until we are all annihilated. We pray for final victory and the safety of our country".³⁵

Japanese intentions for the continued

²⁹ Bartley, *Iwo Monograph*, p. 98.

³⁰ *4th MarDiv D-3 PerRepts*, 23-24Feb45.

³¹ *5th MarDiv AR*, Anx Q, p. 7.

³² Capt Awatsu Rpt to *2d Mixed Brigade*, 23Feb45, in *4th MarDiv Translations*, Iwo Jima, dtd 25Feb45.

²⁹ *4th MarDiv OpRpt*, Anx G, p. 11.

³⁰ *TF 51 AR*, 24Feb45.

³¹ *Ibid.*

defense of Iwo Jima were correctly formulated in a 4th Marine Division intelligence report which concluded that "lack of a large scale enemy counter-attack to date was an indication of conservation of forces for a continued stubborn defense in depth."³⁶ Since the enemy had a sizable force left, an eventual counterattack could not be discounted. In fact, since the

high ground held by the Japanese now was jeopardized, a counterattack by a large enemy force was a dangerous probability. In any event, the enemy was certain to continue his harassment of the invasion force with artillery and through air attacks launched from nearby islands. The scales of battle had not yet tilted fully in favor of the American assault troops. It was clear to all involved that much heavy fighting lay ahead before all of Iwo Jima was conquered.

³⁶ *4th MarDiv G-2 Rpts*, 23Feb45, p. 4.

3d Marine Division Operations on Iwo Jima¹

ADVANCE IN THE CENTER²

By the end of the first week on Iwo Jima, VAC had made important gains, though far more slowly than had been anticipated. The key to seizing the remainder of the island north of the two completed airfields was the flat, high

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *VAC AR*; *3d MarDiv AR*; *3d MarDiv Staff Memos*, 23Jan-17Mar45, hereafter *3d MarDiv Staff Memos*; *3d MarDiv G-1 PerRpts*; *3d MarDiv D-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv G-2 PerRpts*, 14Feb-4Apr45, hereafter *3d MarDiv G-2 PerRpts*; *3d MarDiv G-3 PerRpts*, 16Feb-27Mar45, hereafter *3d MarDiv G-3 PerRpts*; *3d MarDiv G-4 Jnl*, 16Feb-8Apr45, hereafter *3d MarDiv G-4 Jnl*; *3d Mar AR*, 5Nov44-8Mar45, hereafter *3d Mar AR*; *9th Mar URpts*, 26Feb-4Apr45, hereafter *9th Mar URpts*; *9th Mar UJnl*, 24Feb-11Mar45; *9th Mar AR*, 24Feb-4Apr45, hereafter *9th Mar AR*; *12th Mar AR*, 25Feb-16Mar45, hereafter *12th Mar AR*; *21st Mar UJnl*, 24Feb-16Mar45; *1st ProvFldArty Gru G-1 Jnl*, 9Jan-15Mar45; *Iwo Comments*; *Bartley, Iwo Monograph*; *Morehouse, Iwo Jima Campaign*; *Newcomb, Iwo Jima*; *Newcomb Notes*; *Aurthur and Cohlma, The Third Marine Division*; *Isely and Crowl, U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; *Benis M. Frank, A Brief History of the 3d Marines* (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1963), hereafter *Frank, Brief History of the 3d Marines*.

² Additional material in this section is derived from: *1/9 AR*, 15Jan-6Apr45, hereafter *1/9 AR*; *2/9 AR*, 24Feb-7Apr45, hereafter *2/9 AR*; *3/9 UJnl*, 24Feb-18Mar45; *3/21 URpts*, 25Feb-12Mar45, hereafter *3/21 URpts*; *3d TkBn AR*, 7Nov44-27Mar45, hereafter *3d TkBn AR*.

ground in the center of northern Iwo, commonly known as the Motoyama Plateau. The plateau itself was relatively level and unmarked by ravines. To the east and west, the ground was broken, descending to the shore in a very irregular pattern of gullies, canyons, and arroyos. The extensive shelling this part of the island had received prior to and since the landings had done nothing to improve the terrain, which was beginning to look like a lunar landscape. Cliffs, often with a sheer drop down to the waterline, were characteristic of the coast along the northwestern, northern, and northeastern shore of the island.

The frontal assault northward from Airfield No. 1 towards the second airfield had thrown the Marines squarely against the most heavily fortified part of the island. There was no way to bypass this area. On the west coast, the 5th Marine Division was confronted with one ridge after another. In each instance, men fought their way up the slope and over the top, only to run into another ravine with another ridge beyond. To the east, the 4th Marine Division was attempting to maneuver on a battlefield devoid of all cover. Where trees once had grown, all that remained was shattered rock, tangled brush, and defiles running to the sea. In the midst of this desolation, three terrain features stood out, each a formidable

obstacle in itself: Hill 382, highest elevation in northern Iwo; a bald knob designated as Turkey Hill, and the southeastern extension of Hill 382, known as the Amphitheater.

Since an advance up either coast did not appear promising the only way for VAC to take the remaining two-thirds of the island was to go up the high ground in the center. Since, from D plus 6 onward, the three Marine divisions on Iwo Jima fought jointly but in clearly defined areas, the narrative henceforth will deal separately with the day-to-day progress of each division as it forged a laborious trail across the island.

Fully aware of the limitations imposed upon the assault force by the terrain, General Kuribayashi had established his most elaborate defenses across Motoyama Plateau, right in the path of the 3d Marine Division. A detailed description of the plateau, therefore, appears in order:

. . . dangling ledges, and caves carved by nature as well as the Japanese. Fissures of steam spewed from cracks in the ground, and evil-smelling sulphur fumes vied with the repulsive odor of decomposing bodies. Everywhere were Japanese defenses, grottoes, bunkers, blockhouses, pillboxes, deep caves, antitank ditches and walls, minefields, and a profusion of flat-trajectory antitank guns, dual purpose automatic antiaircraft weapons, and small arms, all backed by lethal mortars and rockets firing from reverse slopes. At a loss for words to describe this devil's playground, correspondents and officers writing their action reports sometimes recalled a Goya sketch or Dore's illustrations for Dante's *Inferno*.³

In the midst of this rubble, Major General Sadasue Senda had deployed his *2d Independent Mixed Brigade*, consisting of the *310th*, *311th*, and attached *315th Independent Infantry Battalions*, plus an artillery and an engineer battalion. The top of Hill 382 harbored remnants of a thoroughly demolished radar station; on the far bluff of the Amphitheater, cave mouths and tunnel entrances could be seen, yet not a single gun barrel was visible. But, according to one account,

. . . at every turn and fold in the rock were crosslanes of fire for machine guns and mortars, automatic weapons and rifles, light artillery, and rapid-fire cannon. Behind them were the men, some with sabres or pistols, bamboo lances, and sacks of grenades, waiting.⁴

Since there was no way to bypass the strongest enemy defenses on the Motoyama Plateau, an advance into this veritable hornets' nest became unavoidable. The enemy had to be driven from the high ground in the center of Iwo Jima to permit opening up the western beaches. VAC was working under a tight deadline to clear the beaches, get the airfields back into operation, and unload with all possible dispatch so that ships could be made available for Operation ICEBERG, the invasion of Okinawa, now only five weeks away.

The same urgency applied to driving the Japanese from the high ground in the northeastern portion of the island, which enabled the enemy to place observed fires on VAC reserve areas and rear installations. Even though the Japanese had interfered with the American buildup on Iwo Jima, they had

³ Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, pp. 489-490.

⁴ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 188.

not done so to the extent that they were capable. Probably, they feared that such activity, if carried too far, would expose their guns and mortars to aerial observation, and that these mainstays of the defense would fall victim to American artillery and naval gunfire.

One of the problems facing General Schmidt at the end of D plus 5 was maintaining control of his advance up the island. Fresh in his mind was his experience on Saipan, where the 4th Marine Division had advanced so rapidly that at one point it was left with a 3,000-yard gap on its flank.⁵ Similarly, on Iwo Jima, if one division advanced significantly beyond the others, troops for flank security would have to be made available, and the exposed division could expect to receive fire from every direction. Even though the VAC commander was aware of the necessity of executing a frontal assault across the center of the Motoyama Plateau, he was determined, for the time being, to push the VAC front forward all along the line in what may appear to have been "a partial violation of the military principles of mass and economy."⁶

In any case, as of 25 February, General Schmidt still favored a coordinated advance across the island. Since the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions, which had thus far borne the brunt of the fighting, were already seriously depleted in men and materiel, General Schmidt decided to commit the 3d Marine Division for the assault against

the enemy's main defenses in the center of the island. Of the 3d Division's three infantry regiments, the 3d, 9th, and 21st Marines, the latter had already been landed and attached to the 4th Marine Division on 21 February. Three days later, the 9th Marines, commanded by Colonel Howard N. Kenyon, had gone ashore, together with division headquarters, leaving only the 3d Marines afloat. Attached to the infantry were units of the 12th Marines, the 3d Tank Battalion, the 3d Pioneer Battalion, and the 3d Engineer Battalion.

By the end of D plus 5, three battalions of the 9th Marines had moved into assembly areas ready to join in the attack. Elements of the 12th Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Raymond F. Crist, Jr., also came ashore on the 24th, followed by more batteries on the following day. It was 1 March before all of the 3d Division artillery had been landed. Several factors were responsible for the slow debarkation of the artillery. Foremost among these were the lack of landing ships and adverse beach conditions. Having anticipated that his troops would be employed piecemeal, General Erskine had decentralized his artillery while combat loading. Most of the men and equipment of the 3d Division were embarked in attack transport and cargo vessels. It had been planned to put them ashore as needed in landing craft, DUKWs, and amphibian tractors borrowed from the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions.

Participation in the drive to the north by the 3d Marine Division could not wait until all of the division artillery had come ashore. As a result, only one battery of the 12th Marines, and 1/14

⁵ General Harry Schmidt ltr to CMC, dtd 28Oct52, in *Iwo Comments*.

⁶ Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 491.

in direct support and 4/13 in a reinforcing role, would be available on the morning of D plus 6.

As of 0700, 25 February, the task of clearing the critical central portion of the Motoyama Plateau fell to General Erskine and his 3d Marine Division. The division's route of advance lay across Airfield No. 2, through the remains of Motoyama Village to Airfield No. 3, which was still largely unfinished. As soon as the 21st Marines was returned to its parent division, General Erskine passed the 9th Marines through the 21st to continue the attack, while the latter unit went to the rear to rest and reequip. On D plus 6, the line of departure for the 9th Marines skirted the southwest edge of Airfield No. 2, protruded across to the high ground due north of the center of the field, and then receded to the southern edge, where the regiment tied in with the 4th Division. On the left, 2/9, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Cushman, Jr., faced heavily defended positions along a line of bluffs that extended northward from the western edge of the airfield and the high ground just north of the east-west runway. On the right 1/9, under Lieutenant Colonel Carey A. Randall, was face to face with a low but strategically placed hill subsequently to become known as Hill PETER. (See Map III, Map Section).

Preparations for the 3d Marine Division attack on D plus 6 were similar to those of the previous day. A battleship and two cruisers fired for 20 minutes before the jumpoff. The naval bombardment was followed by a 1,200-round preparation fired by the VAC ar-

tillery. More than half of these shells hit the enemy in front of the 3d Marine Division, where the main effort was to be made. Carrier planes pounded the enemy positions with 500-pound bombs just prior to the jumpoff.

As soon as the attack got under way at 0930, both the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 9th Marines moved out, with 2/9 making the main effort. Lieutenant Colonel Cushman's men almost immediately drew heavy fire from enemy emplacements to their front and left flank and made little progress. The 1st Battalion made some headway and one platoon actually advanced to the base of Hill PETER, but was unable to hold the position. Since the main effort was to be made on the left, 26 tanks from Companies A and B, 3d Tank Battalion, under Major Holly H. Evans, had been attached to the 2d Battalion. Prior to the attack, Lieutenant Colonel Cushman had weighed the idea of having his infantry ride the tanks across the airfield. In view of the heavy enemy mortar and machine gun fire, this idea had to be abandoned, and the tanks moved out across the airstrip 200 yards ahead of the infantry. Almost immediately, the three leading tanks were hit by enemy antitank fire; two of them flamed, the third was immobilized. The heavy enemy mortar fire directed against the tanks did little damage to the vehicles but inflicted heavy losses on the infantry following in their wake. As the agonizingly slow advance of the 2d Battalion continued, nine tanks were knocked out before some of the enemy installations could be destroyed.

By 1400, the situation had reached a comparative stalemate. Both assault

battalions had made slight gains, the biggest one being made by 1/9, which in five hours of bitter fighting had advanced 100 yards. The battalions were now separated by a sizable gap which had developed during the intense fighting. As a result, at 1430, the 3d Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Harold C. Boehm, was ordered to pass through the right of 2/9 and attack to the north until it had bypassed the center of resistance that had thwarted the advance of 2/9.⁷ Once this had been accomplished, 3/9 was to effect a junction with the 26th Marines of the 5th Marine Division.

As soon as 3/9 began its advance, it started to receive a hail of rifle and automatic weapons fire from the front and the left flank. At the same time, the mortar and artillery fire increased in volume and accuracy. Casualties mounted with alarming speed. Unless the high ground to the battalion's front was quickly seized, the attack was in danger of bogging down. As the Marines crept ahead, the Japanese adjusted their artillery to keep pace with the advance. Within minutes, the two commanders of the assault companies were killed; many more officers and men became casualties. By 1700, losses had become so heavy that units were beginning to show signs of disorgan-

ization; the riflemen could not penetrate the curtain of fire thrown up by the enemy and some of the ground previously seized was being ceded.⁸ Despite the confusion of battle, Lieutenant Colonel Boehm succeeded in reestablishing contact with adjacent units, so that shortly after 1900 the situation had again stabilized and contact existed between all units along the regimental front. As D plus 6 came to a close, the 9th Marines had gained little ground, but, at any rate, the line had moved north of Airfield No. 2 at all points except for the extreme right tip. The regiment had seized a foothold on the rising ground north of Airfield No. 2 from where, on the following day, the attack could be continued.

Three additional batteries of the 3d Division artillery came ashore during 25 February and were ready to fire by 1700. The newly arrived units were organized into a provisional battalion under 1/12, and 1/14 was relieved of supporting the regiment. Additional help for the 9th Marines during the day had been furnished by the 21st Marines, which had fired heavy machine guns, 37mm guns, and light mortars at the stubborn enemy defenses. The 81mm mortars of the 21st Marines also had been attached to the 9th Marines during the day, but reverted to control of the parent regiment in late afternoon.

At 0800 on 26 February, the 9th Marines resumed the assault, following a

⁷ In commenting on this order, the CO, 3/9 had this to say: "2/9 reported being pinned down by heavy enemy fire—unable to move—and it was through this kind of fire that 3/9 was expected to execute a 'passage of lines'; a poor decision at best!" Col Harold C. Boehm ltr to Head HistBr, G-3 Division, HQMC, dtd 17Jul69 in *Iwo Comments*, hereafter *Boehm ltr*.

⁸ "The losses of key and seasoned personnel in this . . . attack manifestly reduced the battalion's effectiveness in later situations." *Boehm ltr*.

45-minute artillery preparation. The 1st and 2d Battalions attacked abreast, with 3/9 and newly attached 3/21 in reserve. The men of Colonel Kenyon's regiment knew that they were now up against the enemy's main defenses. In front of the regimental zone of attack, Hill PETER and 225 yards to the northwest, Hill OBOE, formed the most important obstacles to the advance.

Once again, the 1st and 2d Battalions bore the full brunt of the day's fighting. At the cost of heavy casualties, slight gains were made in the high ground beyond Airfield No. 2. The 3d Battalion remained in position, returning to regimental reserve after the attack jumped off. For the remainder of the day, 3/21 occupied a defensive position just north of the east-west runway. Several aircraft were on station throughout the day and executed four missions for the ground troops. Tanks were also available to support the assault. Naval gunfire was employed against deep targets spotted by aircraft; infantry units called for supporting fire against suspected gun and mortar positions. The effects of this support could not be accurately gauged by the assault units, for enemy resistance continued unabated. With respect to the air support received during this critical phase of the operation, the 3d Marine Division had this comment:

The number of planes on station daily for support of three divisions was eight fighters and eight torpedo bombers, a decidedly inadequate number. An average of two and a half hours was required before a mission could be executed. . . . Support aircraft, like artillery, should not be frittered away in the execution of piecemeal missions but should be employed in mass

in support of the main effort of the ground forces.⁹

In his operation order for 27 February, General Schmidt ordered the 3d Marine Division to continue the assault. The corps artillery was directed to devote half of its fire in support of this main effort, while the remaining 50 percent was to be equally divided between the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions.¹⁰

At 0800 on D plus 8, the 3d Marine Division continued its attack, which was preceded by a 45-minute artillery preparation in which corps artillery fired 600 rounds. Once again, the 9th Marines, with the 1st and 2d Battalions abreast and 3/9 and 3/21 in reserve, jumped off. The 1st Battalion on the right immediately encountered devastating enemy mortar, artillery, and small arms fire from well concealed emplacements on and around Hills OBOE and PETER. On the left, 2/9 made an initial advance of approximately 150 yards. The increased employment of armor, particularly in the 2/9 zone of advance, aided the attack materially, even though 11 tanks were knocked out. The infantry, using flamethrowers and rocket launchers to good advantage, made small gains throughout the morning. The 2d Battalion finally reached the base of Hill OBOE, while 1/9 took the top of Hill PETER and began working down the northern slope. At this point, 1/9 was pinned down by fire from well-concealed enemy positions on the reverse slope of the hill. Heavy fire from Hill OBOE also caused the advance of the 2d Battalion to grind to a halt.

⁹ *3d MarDiv AR*, p. 48.

¹⁰ VAC OpO 6-45, dtd 25Feb45.

Just as it appeared that the remainder of the day would pass without any major gains being made, the unexpected occurred. Following a 10-minute preparation by the entire 3d Division artillery, reinforced by the corps artillery, 1/9 and 2/9 jumped off in a coordinated attack. This time, the coordination of all arms brought results, and the Japanese, stunned by the massed artillery fire, were temporarily unable to halt the Americans. Following the preparation, the 2d Battalion moved forward rapidly for a distance of 700 yards. The 1st Battalion overran Hill PETER, continued down the reverse slope and drove up to the crest of Hill OBOE. Now that most of the enemy fire from the two important hills had been silenced, Lieutenant Colonel Cushman's 2nd Battalion moved forward rapidly for approximately 1,500 to 1,700 yards. For the first time since the beginning of the attack, the lines of 2/9 now were abreast of those of the 1st Battalion.

Thus, after three days of ramming headlong into the main enemy defenses, the 9th Marines had scored a major advance. All of Airfield No. 2 and the commanding terrain to the north were now in American hands, even though enemy troops, many of them bypassed in their caves, continued to offer stubborn resistance. Mopping up operations in the area would require two more days, but General Erskine's men were now coming out on the Motoyama Plateau, with relatively level terrain ahead. As D plus 8 came to an end, yet another phase of the heavy fighting for Iwo Jima had been brought to a close, at least in the 3d Marine Division zone

of advance. In summing up the overall results of this phase, the 9th Marines listed gains of 800-1,200 yards. Beyond that, the regiment stated that highlighted in this fighting were:

. . . the skill, determination and aggressiveness displayed by our troops; the unprecedented tenacity and defensive resourcefulness displayed by the enemy (in the left of the 2d Battalion 77 large pillboxes were counted); the decisive aid rendered infantry troops by tanks; and finally, the excellent coordination of all supporting units with infantry maneuvers.¹¹

ADVANCE TO MOTOYAMA VILLAGE¹²

On Wednesday, 28 February, the 3d Marine Division continued its drive to the north. The last day of February marked the tenth day since the Marines first had stormed ashore on Iwo Jima. Optimistic forecasts to the contrary, somewhat less than half of the island had been taken thus far. No one ashore doubted that fighting of the utmost severity still lay ahead.

Since the 5th Marine Division on the left also had made gains during the last days of the month, the center and western portion of the VAC front now was approaching the O-2 Line. As a result, in his operation order for 28 February, General Schmidt established an O-3 Line. This line started on western Iwo about 1,000 yards south of Kitano Point, then curved southeastward, generally following the northern and northeastern contour of the island

¹¹ 9th Mar AR, p. 5.

¹² Additional material in this section is derived from: VAC Arty Rpt; 21st Mar URpts, 26Feb-26Mar45, hereafter 21st Mar URpts.

until it reached the eastern shore just north of the eastern terminus of the O-2 Line near Tachiiwa Point.

Before dawn on D plus 9, the 21st Marines, with the 3d Tank Battalion and the 81mm mortar platoons of RCT 9 attached, relieved the 9th Marines. Enemy snipers and machine gunners interfered with these movements, but by 0815 the relief was essentially completed and the 9th Marines passed into division reserve.

Following a 30-minute preparation by the division artillery, reinforced by corps artillery, the 21st Marines continued the attack at 0900 with the 1st Battalion on the left and 3/21 on the right; the main effort was to be made by 1/21. The artillery preparation was followed by a seven-minute rolling barrage which lifted 100 yards every minute to extend 700 yards beyond the front lines. The 1st Battalion advanced about 500 yards when it was stopped by hostile mortar and small arms fire. On the right, 3/21 also made good progress, closely following the barrage and, within a half hour after the jump-off, had gained 400 yards. As the morning wore on, elements of 3/21 became intermingled with 4th Division troops near the division boundary.

Shortly after launching its attack, Company I of 3/21 was to have an eerie experience. As the men moved forward in the wake of the rolling barrage:

. . . Company I was confronted with tanks rising from the earth. These were Colonel Nishi's tanks, flushed at last from what had appeared to be hillocks. They churned forward, throwing off mounds of dirt, shrubbery, and rocks, and firing rapidly. The Marines faltered in shock before the heavy fire, and for moments the battle

teetered. Captain Edward V. Stephenson, who had fought at Guam with great valor, rushed forward and rallied his company. Massing flamethrowers and bazookamen, he led a counterattack that smashed the tanks. Three were destroyed on the ground, and planes caught two more of them with 20mm fire.¹³

Now there were only three tanks left out of the 22 which Colonel Nishi had been able to obtain the previous December, all of which had been carefully dug in. Shortly before noon, the attack bogged down all along the 3d Division front. At this time, 3/9 was attached to the 21st Marines and by VAC order, 4/13 reverted to the 5th Division control, after having been attached to General Erskine's division for several days.

At 1300, following a five-minute preparation by the corps and division artillery, the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 21st Marines launched a coordinated attack. The 1st Battalion bogged down almost at once, but 3/21, following closely behind an artillery barrage, advanced rapidly and seized the remnants of Motoyama Village and the high ground overlooking Airfield No. 3. The advance of 3/21 created a gap between the left of the 3d Battalion and the right of 1/21; into this gap, 2/21 was committed at 1530 with orders to attack. (See Map IV, Map Section). Following a five-minute preparation, the battalion moved out in an attempt to outflank the enemy positions which were holding up the advance of 1/21. Because of the heavy fire it received as it moved up to the line of departure, 2/21 was unable to launch its attack on time and consequently did not closely follow the

¹³ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, pp. 203-204.

rolling barrage. As a result, only small gains were made. At 1700, when the assault troops halted for the night, units held a winding but continuous line across the division front.

As night fell over the battle-scarred island, it appeared that the 3d Marine Division had burned and blasted its way through the center of the Japanese main line. To either side of the 3d Division, however, neither the 4th nor the 5th had kept pace with General Erskine's men. As a result, the VAC operation order for 1 March made a change in the quantity of supporting fires that would be made available. The lion's share of artillery support no longer would go to the 3d Marine Division; instead, the corps artillery henceforth was to divide its fires equally among the three divisions.

General Erskine believed that this division, in breaking through the enemy's main defenses in the center of Iwo Jima, had not received all of the neutralizing support it should have had. In commenting later on the Iwo Jima operation, he stated:

. . . that the zone of action assigned this division was the most suitable for making the main effort as it extended along the high ground in the center of the island. Had the bulk of all supporting weapons been allotted to this division instead of being more or less equally distributed between all three divisions, it is believed that penetration would have been effected sooner at less cost.¹⁴

¹⁴ 3d MarDiv AR, p. 38. In connection with this report the VAC chief of staff was to comment that: "It was essential that no substantial gaps occur, therefore it was necessary for the 4th and 5th Divisions to advance also, which necessitated adequate support"; and "Half of the Corps artillery was assigned to

By morning of 1 March, all battalions of the 12th Marines were ashore. For the remainder of the operation, until the 3d Marine Division reached the northeast coast, Erskine's *modus operandi* remained the same. He brought all the fire power available to him to bear against the enemy. Neutralization furnished by his own guns and by the corps artillery, when available, enabled him to push forward. As soon as he sensed a weak spot in the enemy defenses, he exploited the situation by committing reserves at the flanks and through the gaps that were created as his two assault regiments moved forward. The advance across Motoyama Plateau did not leave room for any additional maneuver.

The tactics employed by General Erskine during this critical phase of the operation have been explained as follows:

Erskine's zone of action was sufficiently narrow and his reserve sufficiently deep to permit him to employ these tactics more readily than could the other division commanders who were operating on wider fronts and across more difficult terrain. Cates and Rocky were equally competent, but the Third Division was in the pivotal position.

These tactics saw Erskine's men advance across the second airfield and up onto the Motoyama Plateau, through the stench of the sulphur refinery, and beyond the shambles that was Motoyama Village. No longer could the Japanese sit atop the central ridge and place observed fire on every inch of lower Iwo. The Third Division had cut its way through the main line of resistance into the guts of Iwo

the 3d Division as well as the bulk of the naval gunfire support, in addition to elements of the 12th ashore, and at least standby support from the 13th and 14th." *Rogers ltr.*

Jima. The evening of the 28th found these Marines looking down on the third airfield. It was believed that penetration to the coast would be easy, and the final airfield was quickly overrun, but then the secondary line of resistance was struck, and again the assault slowed and halted.¹⁵

At 0830 on 1 March, the 21st Marines continued the assault with 2/21 and 3/21 abreast, the latter making the main effort. Once again, the attack was preceded by a heavy artillery preparation. The 12th Marines fired a 15-minute preparation in support of the attack, reinforced by VAC artillery. Direct support destroyers fired a half-hour preparation from 0800 to 0830, deepening the fires of the 12th Marines. The heavy artillery preparation was followed by a rolling barrage which lifted 100 yards every eight minutes for 300 yards. The 1st Battalion remained behind on the left flank to mop up the enemy pocket that the regiment had bypassed on the previous day.

As the two battalions jumped off, the 2d Battalion, which had attacked to the north on 28 February, pivoted on its right and advanced towards the northeast. Initially, both battalions made good progress, particularly 2/21 which was receiving effective tank support. As a result, the 21st Marines was moving well ahead of elements of the 5th Marine Division to the left. In order to protect the left flank of 2/21 and seize the left boundary of the division's zone of action, at the same time encircling the enemy pocket, 3/9 was committed in support of 1/21 in the course of the morning.

The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, advanced against light resistance and prior to 1500 had arrived at the division's left boundary. By this time 1/21, attacking generally north to mop up the pocket of resistance to its front, had eliminated it and also had reached the boundary of the division to the left of 3/9. By VAC order, at 1500, the boundary between the 3d and 5th Marine Divisions was adjusted to shift the position held by 1/21 to the 5th Division sector. The latter division was ordered to extend to the northeast and relieve 1/21.

In mid-afternoon, 2/21 and 3/21 were unable to advance further in view of effective enemy opposition. After having broken through the center of the first line of resistance, Marines of General Erskine's division now had to advance into even more nightmarish terrain whose outstanding features are described below:

Beyond the low-lying final airfield, the ground rose again sharply into a saddle, and then fell off to the sea. The high points of the saddle were two additional hill masses of almost identical height, which represented the northwestern and southeastern corners of the Motoyama tableland. These terrain features were intermingled with caves and bunkers in deep criss-crossing crevices, and were studded with huge sandstone boulders, many outcroppings, and defensive weapons of all calibers and types. Their height gave the enemy full observation of the Marines to the east of the third airfield, and Erskine found it impossible to snake between them. The job was all the more difficult since there were no feasible ridge lines which could be followed onto their summits. On the contrary, just to the northwest of the right point of the saddle, commanding direct approaches to the high

¹⁵ Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 494.

ground in the center, was a third heavily fortified hill, almost as high as the other two.¹⁶

The three hills were situated in such proximity that the two on the right fell into the zone of advance of the 3d Division, while a portion to the left was just beyond the division boundary. Since the capture of this high ground was deemed essential for the further advance of General Erskine's division, it was shifted from General Rockey's zone to that of the 3d Marine Division. Even so, the Japanese would be able to delay any advance on General Erskine's left until the 5th Division had been able to pull up alongside. The center of the secondary line of resistance thus would have to be broken by a frontal assault against the southeastern hill mass.

Several days were to pass before this second line could be cracked. In the meantime, General Erskine, "his available infantry substantially weakened by the furious fighting of late February,"¹⁷ had little choice but to continue the assault. Thus, at 1545 on 1 March, he decided to launch a coordinated attack with both regiments abreast, while the 9th Marines took over a portion of the zone of action of the 21st Marines, with 3/21 and a tank company attached. The 3d Tank Battalion, less one company, was to remain attached to the 21st Marines. The attack actually got under way at 1645, the 9th Marine passing 1/9 through 3/21, which took up a reserve position in the vicinity of Motoyama Village. The 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, went into reserve.

The afternoon attack was preceded by a five-minute preparation fired by the division artillery and direct support destroyers, followed by a rolling barrage. Enemy resistance remained heavy, particularly in front of the 9th Marines, and little ground was gained. When lines were consolidated shortly after 1800, General Erskine had contact with both adjacent divisions. Even though the afternoon attack had brought little gain, some progress had been made during the day, and the 21st Marines, in the course of the morning, had advanced 500 yards to deepen the breach in the heavily fortified enemy defense line. On the evening of 1 March, the two 3d Division regiments faced northeast from positions about 600 yards east of Motoyama Village, along a line running north across the western portion of Airfield No. 3.

The peculiarities of the terrain within the 3d Marine Division's zone of attack dictated some changes in the division boundary. While Hill 362B did not physically block the advance of the 21st Marines, the division left flank was completely exposed to it. The decision to attack this hill was made on the evening of 1 March and permission to do so was obtained at that time. This decision departed from convention in that in attacking and seizing the hill, 3/9 which was still attached to the 21st Marines, would attack north across the division boundary to seize the ground vital to the division's progress.¹⁸

¹⁶ Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 496.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Boehm ltr.* There were three hills with an elevation of 362 feet on Iwo Jima. In order to avoid confusion, they were designated as A, B, and C. Hill 362A was located in northwestern Iwo in the 5th Division sector. Hill

On the morning of 2 March, the 3d Marine Division continued its attack with the 21st Marines and the 9th Marines abreast. The 21st Marines attacked with 3/9 attached on the left and 1/21 on the right, while the 9th Marines attacked with 2/9 on the left and 1/9 on the right. The attack, which jumped off at 0800, followed a 15-minute artillery and naval gunfire preparation. Again, a rolling barrage preceded the assault units. Tanks, using direct fire, participated in the advance.

Almost immediately, the 9th Marines ran into heavy small arms, mortar, artillery, and antitank gun fire. The supporting tanks were able to destroy one enemy gun and several emplacements; at the same time, it was becoming apparent that Colonel Kenyon's men were facing an exceptionally strong and well-organized enemy position.

The 21st Marines, advancing in a column of companies, made only small gains before the attack bogged down by heavy machine gun and antitank gun fire from Airfield No. 3. Only 3/9, supported by tanks firing directly on emplacements, was able to move forward. By 1300, 3/9, advancing against strong enemy resistance, had secured a foothold on the rising ground in front of Hill 362B. By this time, the battalion had advanced beyond the units on its right and left regardless of flank security. Using 60mm and 81mm mortars, the Marines slowly moved up to a ridge that would serve as the final jumpoff

position for a direct attack on the final objective.

As a result of heavy enemy resistance, the attack came to a standstill in early afternoon. A new assault, following a powerful artillery preparation, was launched at 1530. Eight artillery battalions took part in this preparatory fire. As had become customary by this time in 3d Marine Division attacks, the original preparation was followed by a rolling barrage. But even with such powerful support, the infantry was unable to score any notable gains. At 1730, the commanding officer of 2/21, Lieutenant Colonel Lowell E. English, was wounded, and the executive officer, Major George A. Percy, took over command. In tying-in for night defense, one company of 2/21 had to be pulled back a short distance from its exposed position. A slight withdrawal also became necessary for 3/9 to more favorable night positions.

As D plus 11 drew to a close, there had been some significant progress on the division left, but little gain elsewhere. The attack of 3/9 had driven a 700-yard salient into the enemy lines, and the battalion had occupied positions on the lower slopes of Hill 362B.¹⁰ At the same time, 2/21 had advanced northeast along the left boundary. However, the 9th Marines had gained almost nothing against the enemy stronghold in the right of the 3d Division zone of advance. In their exposed positions, the

362B, also in the 5th Division sector, was in the north-central portion of the island. Hill 362C, located to the northeast, was in the 3d Division zone.

¹⁰ "This enabled the 5th Division to occupy the hill with little difficulty the following day, which they hadn't previously been able to do at all. The majority of enemy gun emplacements on the 362B hill mass had been destroyed." *Boehm ltr.*

3d Division Marines were to spend a restless night. Throughout the hours of darkness, the enemy remained very active in the broken terrain in front of the 21st Marines. Since Airfield No. 3 was still covered by enemy fire, it was not possible to occupy a continuous line.

During the night 2-3 March, luck played into the hands of the 3d Marine Division. An enemy sketch of the defensive area facing the division, particularly the zone of action of the 9th Marines, fell into General Erskine's hands. This map had been captured by the 21st Marines and was immediately forwarded to the division command post, where it was translated. The captured sketch bore out the belief that the 9th Marines was in contact with a strongly organized enemy position, if there had been any doubt left. General Erskine now hoped that he might find a soft spot in the enemy defenses, through which a wedge could be driven, somewhere between the enemy holding up the 9th Marines and the strong enemy defenses near Hill 362B.

The VAC operation order for 3 March called for elements of the 5th Marine Division to relieve 3d Division units near Hill 362B by 1000. In line with this relief, General Erskine planned to adjust the boundary between his regiments so that the zone of attack of the division was again equally divided. In consequence, the 21st Marines once again would be attacking northeastward.

At 0800 on 3 March, the 3d Marine Division resumed the attack with the same formation but with a new boundary between the regiments. The assault was preceded by a 10-minute

preparation by the division artillery and direct support destroyers, followed by a rolling barrage. Almost immediately, the 9th Marines drew such heavy fire that it was unable to advance. In the zone of action of the 21st Marines, 3/9 maintained its position while waiting to be relieved by elements of the 5th Division. This relief was accomplished in the course of the day, but the maneuver was complicated by the fact that both the relief force and 3/9 became embroiled in time-consuming fire fights with the enemy.

In the zone of action of the 21st Marines, 2/21 advanced slowly under heavy fire and shortly before noon secured a foothold on Hill 357. At this time it was believed that no major resistance remained in front of 2/21, though it was still receiving heavy fire from the high ground to its left in the zone of action of the 5th Marine Division. General Erskine decided to change the direction of attack by assigning a new boundary between regiments in order to attack the flank of the enemy defensive area opposite the 9th Marines. Accordingly, an attack to the southeast was launched at 1500 with the main effort on the left.

At this time, 1/21 was pulled out of reserve and moved to the rear of 2/21 with orders to launch a drive towards the southeast with the mission of seizing Hill 362C. At the same time, 2/21 was to advance northeastward to the 0-3 Line. The 3d Battalion was to remain in 9th Marines reserve, but could not be committed without General Erskine's specific permission.²⁰

²⁰ *3d MarDiv AR*, p. 12.

The afternoon assault followed a five-minute artillery and naval gunfire preparation. The 1st Battalion, 21st Marines, initially made rapid progress and advanced for about 250 yards to its front. The 2d Battalion seized the high terrain on Hill 357 along the eastern edge of the Motoyama Plateau, but was unable to continue its drive because of heavy flanking fire from hills in the 5th Marine Division zone of action. The movements of 1/21 were facilitated by a platoon of tanks attached to the 21st Marines which, from positions in the vicinity of Motoyama Village, effectively supported the battalion's attack by placing direct fire on targets in front of 1/21.

In resuming its attack during the afternoon of 3 March, the 9th Marines once again ran into a stone wall and no gains were made. In an attempt to make some progress, Colonel Kenyon committed tanks singly and in small groups in the broken terrain. The armor did what it could and, in fact, reduced a number of enemy emplacements and some guns. Nevertheless, the tanks were unable to breach this enemy position sufficiently to permit an advance by the infantry.²¹ The Japanese emplacements, cleverly hidden in the chaotic jumble of torn rocks, could not be detected, because enemy artillery, mortars, and small arms firing from these positions were using smokeless powder as a propellant. In addition, the heavier weapons were not as active as they had been on previous days, but the fire from antitank guns and machine guns was devastating.

At 1800, the attack halted and the assault battalions consolidated for the night as best they could. In the zone of action of the 21st Marines, 2/21 and 1/21 made physical contact, but an open flank remained on the right of the 21st adjoining the 9th Marines. The gap was 250 yards wide and covered by fire. It would not take the combat-wise Japanese long to note the existence of this gap and take advantage of it.

Most of the action in the 3d Division zone of attack on D plus 12 had taken place in the northern half of the zone, where the 21st Marines had seized nearly all of the high ground northeast of the airfield. Beyond that, they had launched a drive to the southeast to envelop the enemy to the south. The 9th Marines, having made little headway, remained in substantially the same positions it had occupied all day.

At this point, an assessment of the situation from the Japanese point of view appears in order. In seeking to block General Erskine's drive to the sea, the Japanese resisted at every hill, rise, and rock. Every fold in the earth was cut with trenches and tank traps and covered by mortar and machine gun fire. Artillery had been sited across the unfinished runways of Airfield No. 3, and the roads and edges of the field were strewn with mines. From Hill 362B, north of the airfield, the fire came straight down into the flanks of units moving east. As one account of the battle was to sum up the situation:

The enemy was making a last organized stand, and doing it well. This was Kuribayashi's order. He had estimated that losses on both sides had been about equal until the end of February. He felt these early days of March to be the crucial ones

²¹ *Ibid.*

and believed that if he could apply enough force, possibly even a counterattack, the Americans might fall back, or at least halt. If not victory, he would buy time, which is all he really hoped for.²²

During the night of 3-4 March, General Kuribayashi decided that the time was ripe for a limited counterattack. How the Japanese learned of the existence of the gap between the 21st and 9th Marines is not clear, but at approximately 0300, 4 March, an estimated 200 enemy troops attempted to infiltrate the eastern end of Airfield No. 3 between 2/9 and 1/21. After a sharp fire fight, the brunt of which was borne by the left company of 2/9, the enemy was repulsed with 166 casualties; 2/9 also had heavy losses. Reports indicated that some of the enemy infiltrators had succeeded in crossing the lines and were observed moving along the airfield. Patrols were sent to intercept this enemy force and 3/21, which ordinarily would have moved out for the attack at dawn of 4 March, was directed to remain in place and continue patrolling until after daybreak, when the situation could be clarified. Around dawn, patrols of 3/21 killed two or three of the enemy and the situation was found to be under control.²³

The VAC attack on 4 March had been scheduled to jump off at 0815. General Erskine initially had issued orders for 3/21 to be released to the 21st Marines. The battalion was to have moved prior to daybreak, passing through 1/21 and continuing the attack to the southeast to seize Hill 362C. In view of the confusion caused by the enemy infiltration,

General Erskine had to secure permission from VAC to delay the 3d Division attack until 3/21 could complete its mopping up and get into position to attack. The battalion started to move shortly before 0700, at which time it reverted to its parent regiment. In crossing the area to the northwest and north of Airfield No. 3, the battalion drew heavy fire from enemy mortars and small arms. Extremely poor visibility further delayed and hindered preparations for the passage of lines, so that 3/21 did not reach its positions until 1100.

Forty minutes later, the division attack jumped off, again preceded by an artillery preparation and a rolling barrage. The same scheme of maneuver used on the previous day was employed, except that 3/21 passed through 1/21. Once again, the 9th Marines was unable to penetrate the enemy positions to its front. Similarly, the 21st Marines encountered heavy resistance, including direct fire from artillery pieces that were difficult to locate; little progress was made. Still unable to advance because of hostile flanking fire from the high ground to its left in the zone of action of the 5th Division, 2/21 suffered heavy casualties.

In the course of the morning, elements of the 5th Marine Division relieved 3/9, which, together with 1/21 withdrew to reserve positions near Motoyama Village. One company of 1/21 was employed to cover the gap between the 9th and 21st Marines when lines were consolidated for the night. At 1800, the units dug in with assault battalions just east of Airfield No. 3 and Motoyama Village. All of the assault battalions

²² Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 218.

²³ *3d MarDiv AR*, p. 12.

of the 3d Marine Division were tied in with each other, as well as with 5th Division units on the left and the 4th Division on the right.

Late in the afternoon of D plus 13, a welcome dispatch from VAC reached the exhausted troops of all three Marine divisions.²⁴ Except for limited adjustment of positions, no attacks were to be launched on 5 March. Instead, present positions were to be held and one battalion of each regiment was to be rested, reorganized, and prepared to resume the assault on the following day, when all three divisions were to launch a coordinated attack.

On 5 March, the 3d Marine Division held an irregular line with 2/21, 3/21, 1/9, and 2/9, while the other two divisions spent the day receiving replacements and equipment to strengthen their tired and depleted units for the attack on 6 March. Two companies of the 21st Marines were pulled back from their positions on the line to rejoin the 1st Battalion in an assembly area north of Airfield No. 2. The men of 3/9 remained in position as division reserve between the northeast-southwest runway and Motoyama Village.

The day of rest and rehabilitation passed without any major ground action, though artillery duels took place and naval guns continued their harassing fires throughout the day. One air strike was conducted in the area of Hill 362C. It appeared as if even the Japanese welcomed a respite, as shown by their lack of aggressiveness. On their part, the men of VAC also were badly in need of a rest. Their condition on

5 March has been described in the following words:

All were tired and listless, their key personnel were largely casualties, and it was little short of miraculous that they could advance at all. Some gained comfort and a much-needed lift from a powerful drink called "Suribachi Screamer," sick bay alcohol and fruit juice. But even where units were pulled back in corps or division reserve, there was only relative quiet and rest, because night infiltration and minor counterattacks were constant; and day and night, Japanese appeared from overrun caves and tunnels, necessitating mopping up of seized ground.²⁵

In military operations enemy opposition often surpasses all expectations. According to this maxim, after seeing most of its carefully scheduled and supported attacks frustrated day after day, VAC may have tended to overestimate the extent of the resistance of which the enemy on Iwo Jima was still capable. Actually the position of the Japanese during the first week of March was far from reassuring. According to at least one account:

The fact was the island defenders were in a bad way. Most of their artillery and tanks had been destroyed, and 65 percent of the officers had been killed. On Saturday, March 3, General Kuribayashi estimated that he had 3,500 effectives left. Communications had broken down to the point that General Senda was virtually isolated in the east. Captain Inouye still commanded a small remnant of sailors near Airfield No. 3. Admiral Ichimaru was in the north, in touch with Kuribayashi but no longer having effective control over Inouye. In the northern corner of the island, no organized force remained—only small groups of survivors of individual units, acting locally and almost

²⁴ VAC Dispatch, 1624, 4Mar45.

²⁵ Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 97.

independently. Spirit was still strong, however, and in no unit was there the thought of surrender.²⁶

VAC orders called for a resumption of the attack on 6 March. Since any further advance by 2/21 was dependent directly on the progress made by the adjacent 5th Division, the 2/21 attack was to be coordinated with that of General Rockett's men. The advance of 2/21 was so timed that the battalion would move out at 0800, one hour ahead of the remainder of the 3d Division, which would launch its assault in conjunction with that of the 4th Division. Except for the staggered timing, no other changes were made in the previous scheme of maneuver.

At 0600 on 6 March, 3/9 was attached to the 21st Marines in preparation for the attack. For ten minutes prior to the jumpoff of 2/21, three battalions of the 12th Marines, three battalions of the 14th Marines, and one battalion of the corps artillery laid down a heavy preparation, which was further supplemented by naval gunfire. However, no sooner had 2/21 attacked than it became apparent that the artillery preparation had been totally ineffective. The advance bogged down almost at once in the face of heavy enemy mortar and small arms fire coming from the high ground in the zone of action of the 5th Marine Division.

Prior to the jumpoff of 3/21 and the 9th Marines, three battalions of the 12th Marines and one battalion of the corps artillery fired two five-minute preparations, which were further supplemented by naval gunfire which con-

tinued for an hour and a half. A rolling barrage was also fired in support of the attack. Nevertheless, despite all this expenditure of ammunition, results remained negligible. As soon as the remainder of the 3d Division attacked at 0900, it drew such heavy fire from enemy small arms, mortars, artillery, and antitank guns that any advance was all but out of the question.

A second push was ordered for 1440, again preceded by a heavy artillery preparation. This time 1/21, having passed through 3/21, was able to score some gains against continued bitter enemy resistance, slowly advancing for 200 yards before lines were consolidated at 1800 for the night. Once again, the progress made was completely out of proportion to the ammunition and effort exerted. During the two preparatory fires on the morning of 6 March, 11 artillery battalions had expended 2,500 rounds of 155mm howitzer ammunition and 20,000 rounds of 75mm and 105mm shells.²⁷ In addition, a battleship and cruisers had fired an additional 50 rounds of 15-inch and 400 rounds of 8-inch ammunition. Carrier-based aircraft had bombed and strafed the Japanese positions, all apparently without eliminating the enemy's power to resist.

There was one bright note on this otherwise very discouraging day. During the bitter fighting, two platoons of Company G, 3/21, fought their way to the top of a ridge. Before enemy fire drove them off, they were able to get a glimpse of the sea, just 400 yards away. It was an inspiring view, for it indicated

²⁶ Newcomb, *Iwo Jima*, p. 224.

²⁷ VAC Arty Rpt, pp. 14-15.

to the weary Marines just how far they had come, despite all adversities. It also served as a distant promise that there would be an end to the ordeal all of them were undergoing.

*DRIVE TO THE SEA*²⁸

On the evening of 6 March it was apparent that the Japanese positions on northern Iwo would not yield to the tactics that had been thus far employed. At the same time, General Erskine was keenly aware of the heavy losses that were draining the offensive strength of his division. As a result, despite the known risk inherent in such an operation, he ordered an attack against Hill 362C under cover of darkness. It was hoped that employment of the element of surprise would yield results where all other conventional means had failed. Instead of attacking at 0730 on the morning of 7 March, as specified in VAC orders issued late on 6 March,²⁹ General Erskine requested and received permission to jump off at 0500. The 21st Marines was to make the main effort. Its objective was to seize Hill 362C, while the 9th Marines was to advance for about 200 yards in the darkness as a diversionary measure. Actual seizure of Hill 362C was to be executed by Lieutenant Colonel Boehm's 3/9, which was attached to the 21st Marines.

In reconstructing the events leading to this attack and the preparations

²⁸ Additional material in this section is derived from: 3d EngBn URpts, 26Feb-9Apr45, hereafter *3d EngBn URpts*; 3d Amtrac Bn, AR, dtd, 18Mar45, hereafter *3d Amtrac Bn AR*.

²⁹ VAC OpO 14-45, dtd 6Mar45.

made, Lieutenant Colonel Boehm later was to comment:

The order for the attack on Hill 362C, received verbally over the telephone from Colonel Eustace Smoak, executive officer of the 21st Marines, was simply to attack at 0500, using the present front lines of 1/21 as a line of departure, maintain maximum secrecy and silence, and seize the hill. My complaint that I had never seen the ground was countered by the assurance that Major Bob Houser, CO 1/21, would give me all the details on the lay of the land to the front, point out the objective, etc. etc., "Don't worry about a thing, Houser's been observing the ground all afternoon, he'll give you all the dope."

I had my company commanders meet me at the K Company CP, which was nearest 1/21's disposition, briefed them, then took them to the 1/21 CP. Major Houser accompanied us up to a point about the center of his lines, pointed to a hill mass about 300 yards to the front and said that was Hill 362, my objective. I told him it didn't seem possible that his position was so close to the hill. He assured me that it was, and his company commanders determinedly agreed, so we went back a short distance and, under cover, consulted a map. He confidently indicated the position of his front lines and, although highly skeptical, I had no alternative but to accept his description as an accurate picture.³⁰

There was a good chance that the surprise attack would succeed. As a rule, during previous World War II operations in the Pacific Theater, Marines had not carried out night attacks. Aside from night patrols, Americans had not ventured in front of the lines after dark on Iwo Jima. To prevent the enemy from learning of the proposed attack, special precautions had to be taken. No mention of the attack was

³⁰ *Boehm ltr.*

made in any radio traffic, nor was the assault to be preceded by any artillery preparation, except for white phosphorus shells fired around the objective five minutes before the jump-off. The men were ordered to move as quietly as possible. No one was to fire until it became certain that the enemy had discovered the main body of the assault force.

The assault companies moved out of their assembly areas at 0320 for the line of departure. A light rain was falling throughout the night, and the darkness that engulfed everything on the island was broken only by the naval gunfire illumination, which ceased before the attack was launched.

Minutes before H-Hour, the situation at the 3d Marine Division command post was tense. Even though there was a good chance that surprise would be achieved, there had been no opportunity for Lieutenant Colonel Boehm's battalion to carry out any detailed prior reconnaissance. In the inky darkness, his men would be stumbling into the unknown. The risks inherent in the venture were only too apparent. The atmosphere prevailing at General Erskine's command post during these crucial minutes has been recaptured as follows:

In the Division CP, the staff checked watches; it was 0430. Every few minutes someone would look outside through the foul and rainy weather. If a burst of fire or a stray round was heard, faces tensed. At 0450, the illumination slacked and ceased. Five more minutes, and there followed the familiar crack and swish of an outgoing harassing concentration from the artillery. You could set a watch by the 12th Marines. Then at King-hour, a star-shell burst. Hadn't all illumination been

checked? Get the naval gunfire officer! It was a 4th Division ship, he reported, and lunged to the field phone and radio. Meanwhile, word came back that the attack had jumped off. Still no sound. Were they moving at all? Had the steaming earth swallowed them?³¹

It had not. At 0500, the assault companies climbed out of their holes and silently headed southeastward towards Hill 362C assumed to be 250 yards away. The surprise attained was total and 3/9, catching the enemy asleep in his emplacements, took a heavy toll with flamethrowers and automatic weapons. Shortly after 0530, a Japanese machine gun came to life. It was quickly silenced by a flamethrower, and Lieutenant Colonel Boehm's battalion continued its slow but determined advance towards the objective. By this time, sporadic enemy resistance was making itself felt, but still the advance continued.

Shortly before daybreak, around 0600, 3/9 reported that it had taken Hill 362C. Japanese were being killed out in the open with flamethrowers as they stumbled out of their caves. The battalion had advanced 400 yards with no resistance whatever for the first 40 minutes, and only a smattering of it afterwards. Just when it appeared that complete success had been attained, the light of day revealed a somewhat different and sobering picture. It became apparent that on the basis of the instructions received from 1/21 the preceding evening, 3/9 had captured Hill 331 instead of Hill 362C. The real

³¹ Maj Robert D. Heintz, Jr., "Dark Horse on Iwo," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 29, no. 8 (Aug 45), p. 58.

objective still lay 250 yards ahead. Apparently, the battalion's jumpoff positions had been somewhat further back than anyone had realized.

Determined to strike while the iron was still hot, Lieutenant Colonel Boehm called for artillery support and continued to press the attack against the real objective. By this time, the element of surprise had been lost. Jumping off at 0715, 3/9 savagely slashed its way forward from Hill 331 towards 362. The advance progressed over broken and treacherous ground, which exposed Lieutenant Colonel Boehm's men to fire from the front, the flanks, and the rear. Bitter fighting continued throughout the morning, and in approaching the objective, Marines had to eliminate caves and bunkers one by one with flamethrowers, rockets, and demolition charges. At 1330 3/9 reported that it had captured the objective.³² This report proved correct, and a major obstacle in the path of the 3d Marine Division's advance was thus eliminated. In outlining the activities of 3/9 on 7 March, the battalion commander was to make this comment:

Most notable in the night attack was the fact that, although nearly all the basic dope was bad, the strategy proved very sound, since it turned out that the open ground taken under cover of darkness was the most heavily fortified of all terrain captured that day, and the enemy occupying this vital ground were taken completely by surprise (actually sleeping in their pillboxes and caves). . . . It should be kept in mind, however, that a stroke of luck went a long way toward making the attack a success.³³

³² *3d MarDiv AR*, p. 15.

³³ *9th Mar AR*, Encl C, p. 11.

While 3/9, as part of the 21st Marines, was to make the most spectacular gains for the day, the remainder of the 9th Marines was to see some of the most bitter fighting of the Iwo operation. While 3/9 was attacking southward towards Hills 331 and 362C, 1/9 and 2/9 attacked eastward, also in the general direction of Hill 362C. By daybreak the 9th Marines, with the 2d Battalion on the left and the 1st Battalion on the right, had advanced about 200 yards. However, at first light of day the enemy, consisting of Baron Nishi's *26th Tank Regiment*, awoke to the presence of the intruders and put up a fierce opposition. The 2d Battalion, which had already advanced into the enemy fortifications, began to draw heavy fire from the front, flanks, and rear. For all practical purposes, the two battalions were cut off and casualties were heavy.

By midmorning it became apparent that the 9th Marines could not break through the resistance it faced from the front, and General Erskine shifted the regimental boundaries so that the advance of the 21st Marines would pinch out the 9th. Around noon, 1/9 regained some freedom of movement and attempted to establish contact with elements of 3/9 atop Hill 362C. This attempt which, if successful, would have caught Baron Nishi's men in a giant vise, failed. Instead, elements of 2/9 were themselves surrounded and unable to move in any direction. Tanks sent forward in support of 2/9 were unable to get through, though they did relieve some of the pressure on the surrounded units. At dusk on 7 March, elements of 2/9 were still pinned down.

It would be 36 hours before two companies of Lieutenant Colonel Cushman's battalion would be able to extricate themselves from the encirclement.

Just about that length of time would be required before the first Marines of the 3d Division reached the coast. It would not be an easy advance for the men of 2/21, 1/21, and 3/9 who would continue the drive for the sea, while Marines of 3/21 and 2/9 would continue to chip away at a stubborn pocket of enemy resistance that still showed no sign of disintegrating.

On the morning of 8 March, D plus 17, the men of the 3d Marine Division resumed the attack, this time with conventional tactics. The attack was preceded by a 10-minute artillery preparation. Destroyers offshore supported the division and corps artillery with a half-hour bombardment. Once again, a rolling barrage was employed. The 21st Marines jumped off with the 1st and 2d Battalions abreast, 1/21 on the right. The advance of 2/21 had to be coordinated with that of the adjacent 5th Marine Division.

This time, the Japanese were wide awake and the 21st Marines received heavy flanking fire from the sector of the adjacent division, as well as from the zone of action of the 9th Marines, whenever an attempt was made to move down to the cliff overlooking the beach. Nine tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion supported 2/21 as best they could by shelling caves and pillboxes in the rugged terrain over which the battalion had to advance. To the right of 2/21, the 1st Battalion was making slow progress and by evening had advanced 300 yards through what was believed

to be the final organized enemy defenses before the coast was reached.

In the zone of action of the 9th Marines, 3/9 attacked eastward from Hill 362C, passing 3/21, which had been attached to it, and moving through the right of 1/9. The intermediate objective of 3/9 was the edge of the plateau overlooking the beach; the final objective was the beach itself. Despite tenacious enemy resistance, the battalion advanced some 400 yards beyond Hill 362C towards the beach. At times it appeared that, despite the ferocity of the battle, enemy resistance was less organized and assumed the dimensions of a "last ditch" fight.³⁴ In order to assist the battalion in its drive through the broken terrain, in which sandstone buttes abounded, a destroyer fired into the draws that led down to the sea; an air strike also was directed into the same general area. By late afternoon, 3/9 had seized the intermediate objective and was ordered to hold up the advance on the high ground.

Meanwhile, the attack of the remainder of the 9th Marines had bogged down in the inaccessible terrain in which the Japanese had holed up. Remnants of Colonel Nishi's force were making their last stand here, fighting from caves and emplacements in the sandstone with all they had. The materiel at their disposal was still formidable: well concealed antitank guns, and dug-in tanks, equipped with 37mm and 47mm guns. As a result, no coordinated advance was possible. Small teams of

³⁴ "This is exactly what it was, but with the inevitable 'handwriting on the wall' they fought like Hell." *Boehm ltr.*

men, rushing from one standstone butte to another, fought Indian style, blasting away at the enemy defenses here and there, but nowhere could the pocket be dented.

The following day, 9 March, saw the continuation of the 3d Division drive to the sea. Once again, 3/9 jumped off following the customary preparation and advanced towards the beach. While still very much in evidence, enemy resistance was becoming more sporadic. By late afternoon, 3/9 had penetrated down to the beach, both 3/9 and 1/21 dispatching patrols to the water's edge. In support of the two battalions, an air strike was directed against an obstinate enemy pocket in the zone of action of the 5th Division. In addition, a destroyer offshore, with the 3d Division naval gunfire officer on board, fired on caves and enemy positions in the beach area.

Once again, the 9th Marines, with 3/21 attached, hit a stone wall of resistance. Even though tank support was available, the terrain severely limited the employment of armor. The enemy was not slow to take advantage of this situation. He first fired a number of air bursts over one of the tanks in order to disperse the infantry. Once this had been accomplished, he dispatched a demolition detachment under cover of a smoke screen which put the tank out of action with a demolition charge and a Molotov cocktail. Neither 2/9 nor 3/21 were able to score any sizable gains during the day.

Ever since the 3d Marine Division had entered the fight for Iwo Jima and begun its drive through the center of the island, General Erskine had been

deeply disturbed by his losses and their adverse effect on his division's combat efficiency. He strongly felt that some of these casualties could have been avoided and subsequently made this statement:

Infantry battalions were now definitely beginning to feel the presence of the large number of replacements, manifested by a sharp drop in combat efficiency. These men were found to be willing but very poorly trained, especially in basic individual conduct. The faulty teamwork, resulting from lack of small unit training, was also a definite hindrance to the operation of the infantry battalions. Many needless casualties occurred in these replacements because of a lack of knowledge of the proper use of cover and concealment.³⁵

The situation described by General Erskine resulted from an organizational innovation employed for the first time in the Marianas and subsequently on Iwo Jima. Six replacement drafts, totalling 7,188 officers and men, all of them recent arrivals from the United States, had been attached to the three divisions. It had been planned to feed these replacements into the combat units as warranted by casualties, in hopes that such a steady flow would guarantee a high degree of combat efficiency. Prior to being channeled into the combat units, these men were to supplement the shore party, thus serving a dual purpose. The basic thought behind this procedure may have been sound, but:

... unfortunately, this plan did not work out nearly so well as had been hoped. Like most replacement drafts, these had been sent overseas with inadequate combat training, the idea being that they would complete this in the field. But the

³⁵ *3d MarDiv AR*, p. 17.

necessity of mastering shore party duties prevented this, with the result that most of them had to be broken in during actual battle by the units into which they had been incorporated. This was hard on all hands, and there were times during the later stages when it appeared that progress was being hindered rather than helped by the presence of the new men.³⁶

In reviewing the handling of replacements during the Iwo Jima operation, the former VAC chief of staff was to comment:

1. These replacements were the only ones available. VAC could do nothing about additional training.

2. If not used for shore party duty, separate troops would have been required for that, necessitating additional shipping.

3. Shore party requirements should be reduced as the advance continued. In fact some pioneers were used later as frontline troops.

4. Duty with the shore party in itself necessitated some training in self protection, which should have proved useful at the front.³⁷

In any case, by evening of 9 March, General Erskine had achieved his primary mission which was to break through to the northeastern shore of the island. The initial approach to the beach had been made by elements of Company A, 21st Marines, who were later joined by 3/9. By nightfall the 3d Division Marines held nearly 800 yards of shoreline, thus cutting the area still in enemy

hands into two separate sectors. At the northern tip of the island, near Kitano Point, General Kuribayashi would continue to offer stubborn opposition. This last vestige of enemy resistance would be eliminated only after protracted fighting by elements of both the 3d and 5th Marine Divisions. Upon reaching the northeast coast after their arduous and costly advance through the center of Iwo, elated 3d Division Marines sent back a canteen filled with sea water to General Schmidt, marked "for inspection, not consumption."

Another milestone in the prolonged battle for Iwo Jima had been reached. In the words of one historical narrative:

Not as dramatic an incident as the flag raising on Suribachi, this was far more significant. The enemy in the bulge of the island was split, and Americans controlled the terrain approaches from the Motoyama tableland down the deep ravines to the cliffs and to the sea.³⁸

General Kuribayashi and the remnants of his garrison still held one square mile in the north of the island, determined as ever to sell their lives as dearly as possible. Small though tenacious pockets of resistance remained in the southeastern portion of Iwo. But an end to the terrible slaughter was finally in sight.

³⁶ Hough, *The Island War*, p. 335.

³⁷ *Rogers ltr.*

³⁸ Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, pp. 497-498.