

THE FINAL
CAMPAIGN:
MARINES IN THE
VICTORY ON
OKINAWA

MARINES IN
WORLD WAR II
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

BY COLONEL JOSEPH H. ALEXANDER
U.S. MARINE CORPS (RET)





The Final Campaign: Marines in the Victory on Okinawa

by Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret)

Daybreak on 29 May 1945 found the 1st Marine Division beginning its fifth consecutive week of frontal assault as part of the U.S. Tenth Army's grinding offensive against the Japanese defenses centered on Shuri Castle in southern Okinawa. Operation Iceberg, the campaign to seize Okinawa, was now two months old – and badly bogged down. The exhilarating, fast-paced opening of the campaign had been replaced by week after week of costly, exhausting, attrition warfare against the Shuri complex.

The 1st Marine Division, hemmed in between two other divisions with precious little maneuver room, had advanced barely a thousand yards in the past 18 days – an average of 55 yards each bloody day. Their sector featured one bristling, honeycombed ridge line after another – sequentially Kakazu, Dakeshi, and Wana (with its murderous, reverse slope canyon). Just beyond lay the long shoulder of Shuri Ridge, the nerve center of the Japanese *Thirty-second Army* and the outpost of dozens of the enemy's forward artillery observers who had

made life so miserable for American assault forces all month long.

But on this rainy morning, this 29th of May, things seemed somehow different, quieter. After days of bitter fighting, American forces had finally overrun both outposts of the Shuri Line: Conical Hill on the east, captured by the 96th Infantry Division, and the Sugar Loaf complex in the west, seized by the 6th Marine Division. Shuri no longer seemed invincible.

Company A of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines moved out warily, expecting the usual firestorm of Japanese artillery at any moment. There was none. The Marines reached the crest of Shuri Ridge with hardly a firefight. Astonished, the company commander looked westward along the ridge several hundred yards to the ruins of Shuri Castle, the medieval fortress of the ancient Ryukyuan kings. Everyone in the Tenth Army expected the Japanese to defend Shuri to the death – but the place seemed lightly held. Spiteful small arms fire appeared to come from nothing more than a rear guard. Field radios buzzed with this astounding news. Shuri Castle itself lay beyond division and corps boundaries, but it was there for the taking. The assault Marines asked permission to seize the prize.

Major General Pedro del Valle, commanding the 1st Marine Division, did not hesitate. By all rights the castle belonged to the neighboring 77th Infantry Division and del Valle knew his counterpart, Army Major General Andrew D. Bruce, would be angry if the Marines snatched the long-sought trophy be-

fore his soldiers could arrive. But this was an unprecedented opportunity to grab the Tenth Army's main objective. Del Valle gave the go-ahead. With that, Company A, 1/5, swept west along the ridge against light opposition and took possession of the battered complex. Del Valle's staff had to do some fancy footwork to keep peace with their Army neighbors. Only then did they learn that the 77th Division had scheduled a major bombardment of the castle that morning. Frantic radio calls averted the near-tragedy just in time. Results of the Marines' preemptive action incensed General Bruce. Recalled del Valle: "I don't think a single Army division commander would talk to me after that."

Notwithstanding this inter-service aggravation, the Americans had achieved much this morning. For two months the Shuri Heights had provided the Japanese with superb fields of observed fire that covered the port city of Naha and the entire five-mile neck of southern Okinawa. Even now, as the Marines of A/1/5 deployed into a hasty defensive line within the Castle's rubble, they were oblivious to the fact that a Japanese rear guard still occupied portions of the mammoth underground headquarters complex directly under their muddy boondockers. They would be astounded to learn that the subterranean headquarters of the *Thirty-second Army* measured 1,287 feet long and as much as 160 feet deep – all of it dug by pick and shovel.

The Japanese had in fact stolen a march on the approaching Tenth Army. Most of their forces had retreated southwards during the incessant rains, and would soon occupy

On the Cover: LtCol Richard P. Ross, commander of 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division, braves sniper fire to place the division's colors on a parapet of Shuri Castle on 30 May. This flag was first raised over Cape Gloucester and then Peleliu. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 121832.

At left: Two Marines, Davis P. Hargraves with Thompson submachine gun and Gabriel Chavarria with BAR, of 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, advance on Wana Ridge on 18 May 1945. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 123170



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 124370

A mass of rubble is all that is left of Shuri Castle, its walls, the moat below them, and Shuri City beyond, after the 5th Marines had captured the area. The battered trees are part of a forest growth which in more peaceful times had surrounded it.

the third (and final) ring of their prepared, underground defenses, a series of fortified escarpments in the Kiyamu Peninsula.

Seizing Shuri Castle represented an undeniable milestone in the Okinawa campaign, but it was a hollow victory. Just as the flag-raising on Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi signified only the end of the beginning of that prolonged battle, the capture of Shuri did not end the fighting. The brutal slugfest on Okinawa still had another 24 days to run. And still the Plum Rains fell, and the horrors, and the dying, continued.

Countdown to 'Love-Day'

The three-month-long battle of Okinawa covered a 700-mile arc from Formosa to Kyushu and involved a million combatants—Americans, Japanese, British, and native Okinawans. With a magnitude that rivaled the Normandy invasion the previous June, the battle of Okinawa was the biggest and costliest single operation of the Pacific War. For each of its 82 days of combat, the battle would claim an average of 3,000 lives from the antagonists and the unfortunate non-combatants.

Imperial Japan by spring 1945 has been characterized as a wounded

wild animal, enraged, cornered, and desperate. Japanese leaders knew fully well that Okinawa in U.S. hands would be transformed into a gigantic staging base—"the England of the Pacific"—for the ultimate invasion of the sacred homeland. They were willing to sacrifice everything to avoid the unspeakable disgrace of unconditional surrender and foreign occupation.

Okinawa would therefore present the U.S. Navy with its greatest operational challenge: protecting an enormous and vulnerable amphibious task force tethered to the beachhead against the ungodliest of furies, the

Japanese *kamikazes*. Equally, Okinawa would test whether U.S. amphibious power projection had truly come of age—whether Americans in the Pacific Theater could plan and execute a massive assault against a large, heavily defended land-mass, integrate the tactical capabilities of all services, fend off every imaginable form of counterattack, and maintain operational momentum ashore. Nor would Operation Iceberg be conducted in a vacuum. Action preliminary to the invasion would kick-off at the same time that major campaigns in Iwo Jima and the Philippines were still being wrapped up, a reflection of the great expansion of American military power in the Pacific, yet a further strain on Allied resources.

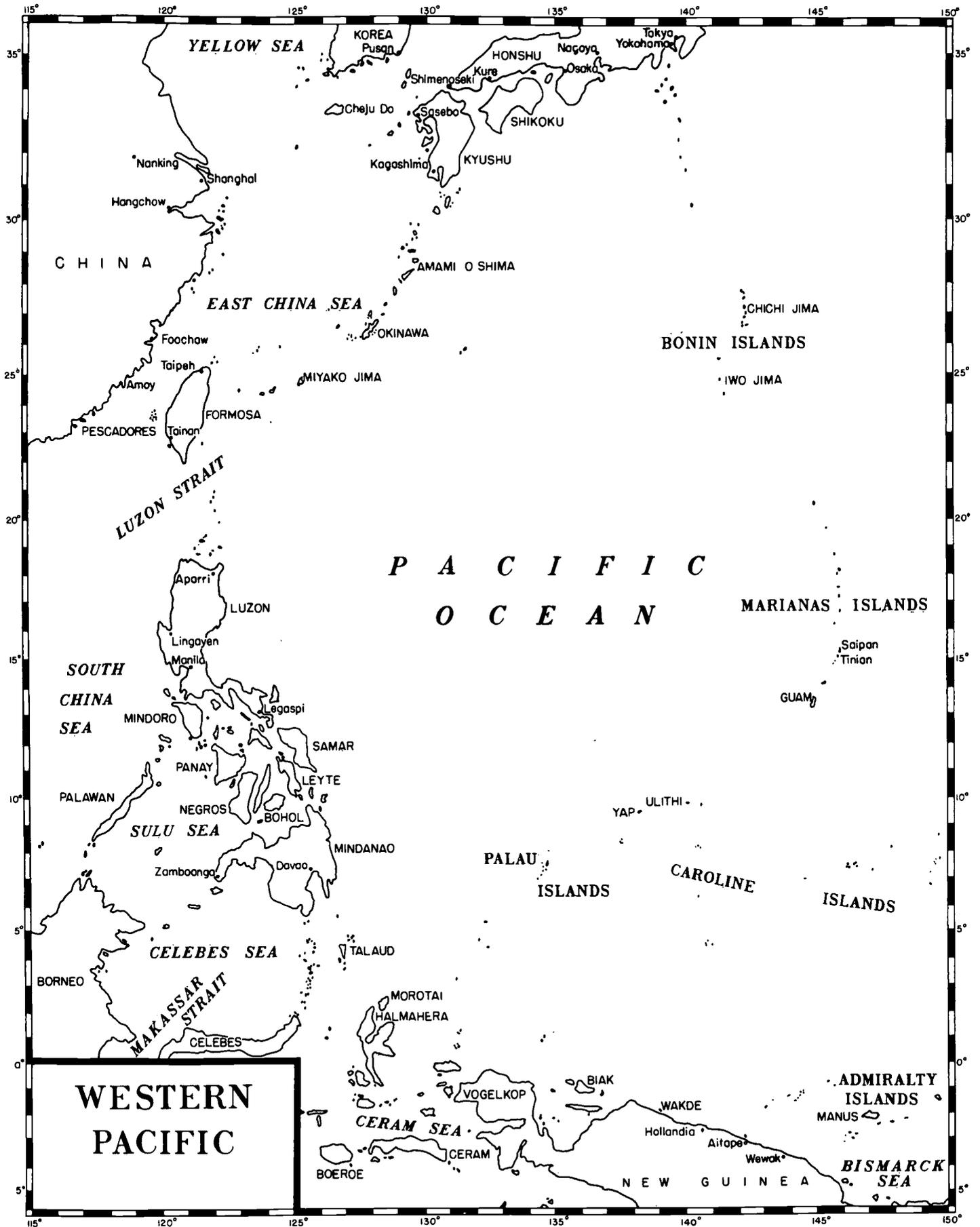
But as expansive and dramatic as the Battle of Okinawa proved to be, both sides clearly saw the contest as a foretaste of even more desperate fighting to come with the inevitable invasion of the Japanese home islands. Okinawa's proximity to Japan—well within medium bomber and fighter escort range—and its militarily useful ports, airfields, anchorages, and training areas—made the skinny island an imperative objective for the Americans, eclipsing their earlier plans for the seizure of Formosa for that purpose.

Okinawa, the largest of the Ryukyuan Islands, sits at the apex of a

A well-armed Marine assault team, with a BAR and a flamethrower, moves out and heads for its objective across the rubble created by preliminary bombardment.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 116632





**WESTERN
PACIFIC**

triangle almost equidistant to strategic areas. Kyushu is 350 miles to the north; Formosa 330 miles to the southwest; Shanghai 450 miles to the west. As so many Pacific battlefields, Okinawa had a peaceful heritage. Although officially one of the administrative prefectures of Japan, and Japanese territory since being forcibly seized in 1879, Okinawa prided itself on its distinctive differences, its long Chinese legacy and Malay influence, and a unique sense of community.

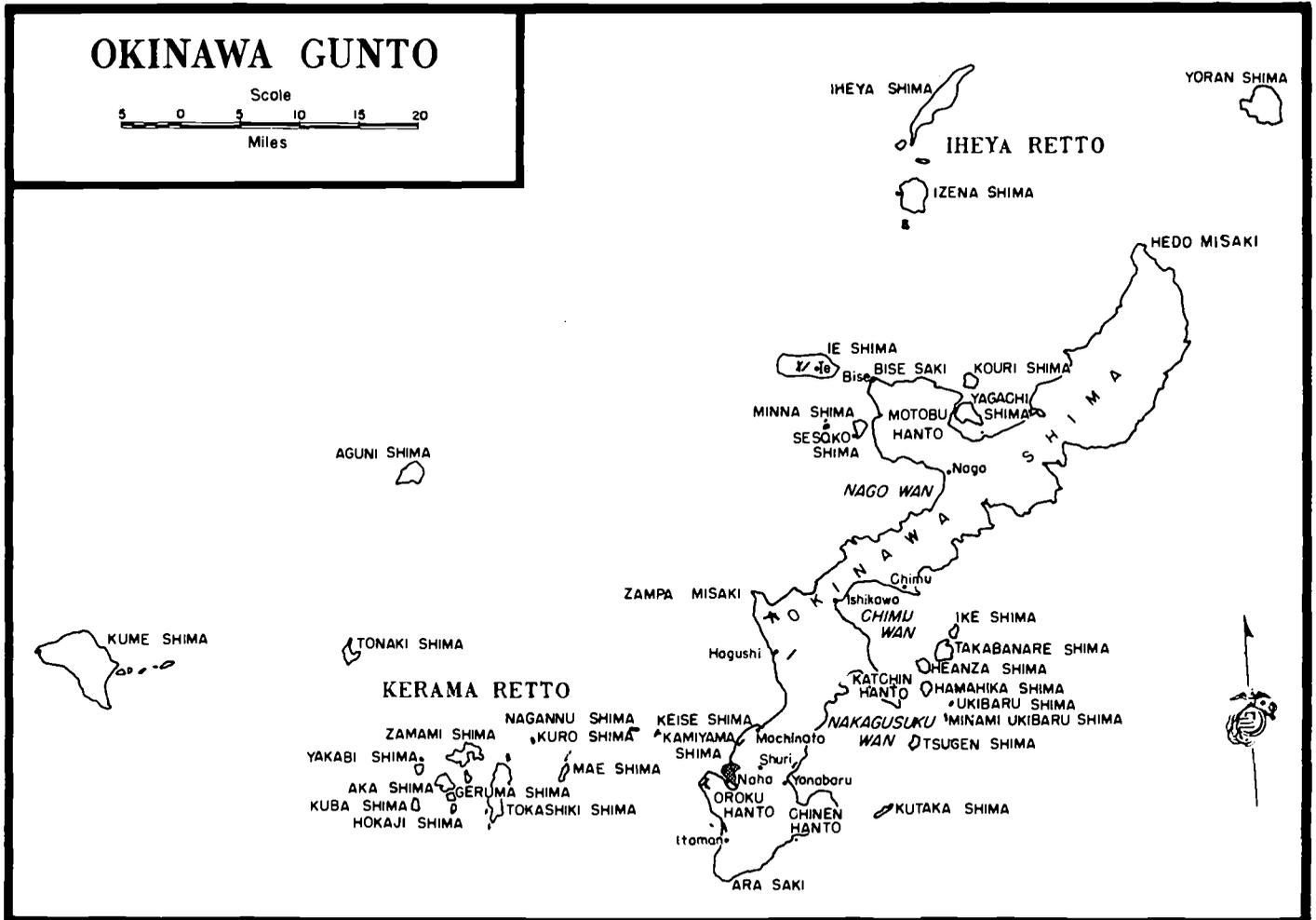
The Japanese *Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ)* in Tokyo did little to fortify or garrison Okinawa in the opening years of the Pacific War. With the American seizure of Saipan in mid-1944, however, *IGHQ* began dispatching reinforcements and fortification materials to critical areas within the "Inner Strategic Zone," including Iwo Jima, Peleliu, the Philippines, and Okinawa.

On Okinawa, *IGHQ* established a new field army, the *Thirty-second Army*, and endeavored to funnel trained components to it from elsewhere along Japan's great armed perimeter in China, Manchuria, or the home islands. But American submarines exacted a deadly toll. On 29 June 1944, the USS *Sturgeon* torpedoed the transport *Toyama Maru* and sank her with the loss of 5,600 troops of the *44th Independent Mixed Brigade*, bound for Okinawa. It would take the Japanese the balance of the year to find qualified replacements.

By October 1944 the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff had recognized the paramount strategic value of the Ryukyus and issued orders to Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet/Commander, Pacific Ocean Areas, to seize Okinawa immediately after the Iwo Jima campaign. The JCS directed

Nimitz to "seize, occupy, and defend Okinawa"—then transform the captured island into an advance staging base for the invasion of Japan.

Nimitz turned once again to his most veteran commanders to execute the demanding mission. Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, victor of Midway, the Gilberts, Marshalls, Marianas, and the Battle of the Philippine Sea, would command the U.S. Fifth Fleet, arguably the most powerful armada of warships ever assembled. Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, gifted and irascible veteran of the Solomons and Central Pacific landings, would again command all amphibious forces under Spruance. But Turner's military counterpart would no longer be the familiar old war-horse, Marine Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith. Iwo Jima had proven to be Smith's last fight. Now the expeditionary forces had grown to the size of a field





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 128548

In early April, Tenth Army commander LtGen Simon B. Buckner, Jr., USA, left, and Marine MajGen Roy S. Geiger, Commanding General, III Amphibious Corps, met to discuss the progress of the campaign. Upon Buckner's death near the end of the operation, Geiger was given command of the army and a third star.

army with 182,000 assault troops. Army Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr., the son of a Confederate general who fought against U.S. Grant at Fort Donaldson in the American Civil War, would command the newly created U.S. Tenth Army.

General Buckner took pains to ensure that the composition of the Tenth Army staff reflected his command's multiservice composition. Thirty-four Marine officers served on Buckner's staff, for example, including Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, USMC, as his Marine Deputy Chief of Staff. As Smith later remarked, "the Tenth Army became in effect a joint task force under CINCPAC."

Six veteran divisions — four Army, two Marine — would comprise Buckner's landing force, with a division from each service marked for reserve duty. Here was another indication of the growth of U.S. amphibious power in the Pacific. Earlier, the Ameri-

cans had forcibly landed one infantry division at Guadalcanal, two each in the Gilberts, Marshalls, and Palaus, and three each at Saipan and Iwo. By spring 1945, Spruance and Buckner could count on eight experienced divisions, above and beyond those still committed at Iwo or Luzon.

Buckner's Tenth Army had three major operational components. Army Major General John R. Hodge commanded the XXIV Corps, comprised of the 7th, 77th, and 96th Infantry Divisions, with the 27th Infantry Division in floating reserve, and the 81st Infantry Division in area reserve. Marine Major General Roy S. Geiger commanded the III Amphibious Corps (IIIAC), comprised of the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions, with the 2d Marine Division in floating reserve. Both corps had recent campaign experience, the XXIV in Leyte, the IIIAC at Guam and Peleliu. The third major component of Buckner's command was the Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army, com-

manded by Marine Major General Francis P. Mulcahy, who also commanded the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing. His Fighter Command was headed by Marine Brigadier General William J. Wallace.

The Marine components staged for Iceberg in scattered locations. The 1st Marine Division, commanded by Major General Pedro A. del Valle, had returned from Peleliu to "pitiful Pavuvu" in the Russell Islands to prepare for the next campaign. The 1st Division had also been the first to deploy to the Pacific and had executed difficult amphibious campaigns at Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, and Peleliu. At least one-third of the troops were veterans of two of those battles; another third had experienced at least one. Tiny Pavuvu severely limited work-up training, but a large-scale exercise in nearby Guadalcanal enabled the division to integrate its newcomers and returning veterans. General del Valle, a consummate artillery officer, ensured that his troops conducted tank-infantry training under the protective umbrella of supporting howitzer fires.

The 6th Marine Division became the only division to be formed overseas in the war when Major General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., activated the colors and assumed command in Guadalcanal in September 1944. The unit may have been new, but hardly a greenhorn could be found in its leadership ranks. Many former Mariner raiders with combat experience in the Solomons comprised the heart of the 4th Marines. The regiment had also landed at Emirau and Guam. The 22d Marines had combat experience at Eniwetok and Guam. And while the 29th Marines comprised a relatively new infantry regiment, its 1st Battalion had played a pivotal role in the Saipan campaign. General Shepherd used his time and the more expansive facilities on Guadalcanal to conduct progressive, work-up training, from

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The Senior Marine Commanders

The four senior Marine commanders at Okinawa were seasoned combat veterans and well versed in joint service operations – qualities that enhanced Marine Corps contributions to the success of the U.S. Tenth Army.

Major General Roy S. Geiger, USMC, commanded III Amphibious Corps. Geiger was 60, a native of Middleburg, Florida, and a graduate of both Florida State Normal and Stetson University Law School. He enlisted in the Marines in 1907 and became a naval aviator (the fifth Marine to be so designated) in 1917. Geiger flew combat missions in France in World War I in command of a squadron of the Northern Bombing Group. At Guadalcanal in 1942 he commanded the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and in 1943 he assumed command of I Marine Amphibious Corps (later IIIAC) on Bougainville, and for the invasions of Guam, and the Palaus. Geiger had a nose for combat; even on Okinawa he conducted frequent visits to the front lines and combat outposts. On two occasions he “appropriated” an observation plane to fly over the battlefield for a personal reconnaissance. With the death of General Buckner, Geiger assumed command of the Tenth Army, a singular and fitting attainment, and was immediately promoted to lieutenant general by the Marine Corps. Geiger subsequently relieved General Holland M. Smith as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. In that capacity, he was one of the very few Marines invited to attend the Japanese surrender ceremony on board USS *Missouri* on 2 September 1945 in Tokyo Bay. Geiger also served as an observer to

MajGen Roy S. Geiger



the 1946 atomic bomb tests in Bikini Lagoon, and his somber evaluation of the vulnerability of future surface ship-to-shore assaults to atomic munitions spurred Marine Corps development of the transport helicopter. General Geiger died in 1947.

Major General Pedro A. del Valle, USMC, commanded the 1st Marine Division. Del Valle was 51, a native of San Juan, Puerto Rico, and a 1915 graduate of the Naval Academy. He commanded the Marine Detachment on board the battleship *Texas* in the North Atlantic during World War I. Subsequent years of sea duty and expeditionary campaigns in the Caribbean and Central America provided del Valle a vision of how Marines might better serve the Navy and their country in war. In 1931 Brigadier General Randolph C. Berkeley appointed then-Major del Valle to the “Landing Operations Text Board” in Quantico, the first organizational step taken by the Marines (with Navy gunfire experts) to develop a working doctrine for amphibious assault. His provocative essay, “Ship-to-Shore in Amphibious Operations,” in the February 1932 *Marine Corps Gazette*, challenged his fellow officers to think seriously of executing an *opposed* landing. A decade later, del Valle, a veteran artilleryman, commanded the 11th Marines with distinction during the campaign for Guadalcanal. More than one surviving Japanese marveled at the “automatic artillery” of the Marines. Del Valle then commanded corps artillery for IIIAC at Guam before assuming command of “The Old Breed” for Okinawa. General del Valle died in 1978.

MajGen Pedro A. del Valle

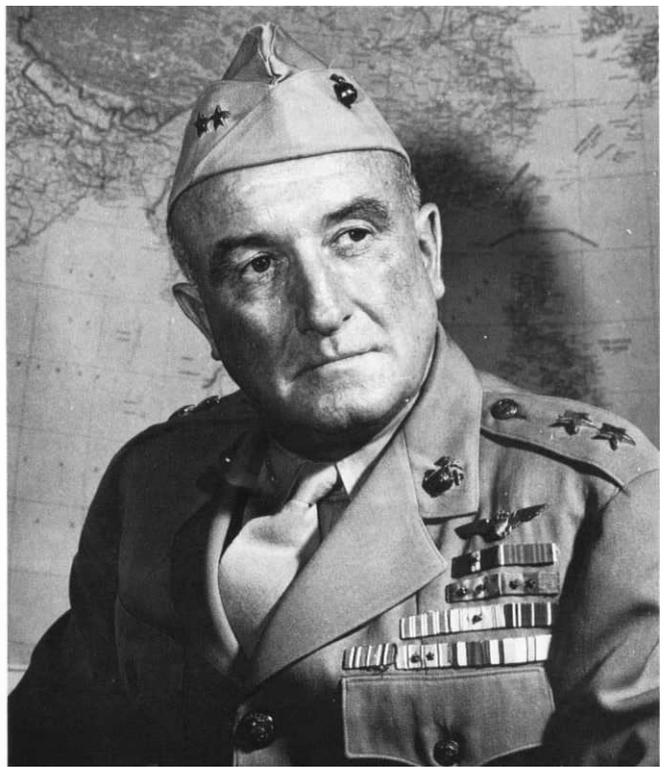




Gen Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr.

Major General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., USMC, commanded the 6th Marine Division. Shepherd was 49, a native of Norfolk, Virginia, and a 1917 graduate of Virginia Military Institute. He served with great distinction with the 5th Marines in France in World War I, enduring three wounds and receiving the Navy Cross. Shepherd became one of those rare infantry officers to hold command at every possible echelon, from rifle platoon to division. Earlier in the Pacific War, he commanded the 9th Marines, served as Assistant Commander of the 1st Marine Division at Cape Gloucester, and commanded the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade at Guam. In September 1944 at Guadalcanal, he became the first commanding general of the newly formed 6th Marine Division and led it with great valor throughout Okinawa. After the war, he served as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, during the first two years of the Korean War, and subsequently became 20th Commandant of the Corps. General Shepherd died in 1990.

Major General Francis P. Mulcahy, USMC, commanded both the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing and the Tenth Army Tactical Air Force (TAF). Mulcahy was 51, a native of



MajGen Francis P. Mulcahy

Rochester, New York, and a graduate of Notre Dame University. He was commissioned in 1917 and attended naval flight school that same year. Like Roy Geiger, Mulcahy flew bombing missions in France during World War I. He became one of the Marine Corps pioneers of close air support to ground operations during the inter-war years of expeditionary campaigns in the Caribbean and Central America. At the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Mulcahy was serving as an observer with the British Western Desert Air Force in North Africa. He deployed to the Pacific in command of the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing. In the closing months of the Guadalcanal campaign, Mulcahy served with distinction in command of Allied Air Forces in the Solomons. He volunteered for the TAF assignment, deployed ashore early to the freshly captured airfields at Yontan and Kadena, and worked exhaustively to coordinate the combat deployment of his joint-service aviators against the *kamikaze* threat to the fleet and in support of the Tenth Army in its protracted inland campaign. For his heroic accomplishments in France in 1918, the Solomons in 1942-43, and at Okinawa, he received three Distinguished Service Medals. General Mulcahy died in 1973.

(Continued from page 5)
platoon to regimental level. Looking ahead to Okinawa, Shepherd emphasized rapid troop deployments, large-scale operations, and combat in built-up areas.

The 2d Marine Division, commanded by Major General LeRoy P. Hunt, had returned to Saipan after completing the conquest of Tinian.

There the division absorbed up to 8,000 replacements and endeavored to train for a frustratingly varied series of mission assignments as, in effect, a strategic reserve. The unit already possessed an invaluable lineage in the Pacific War—Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, and Tinian—and its mere presence in Ryukyus' waters would constitute a formidable "am-

phibious force-in-being" which would distract the Japanese on Okinawa. Yet the division would pay a disproportionate price for its bridesmaid's role in the coming campaign.

The Marine divisions preparing to assault Okinawa experienced yet another organizational change, the fourth of the war. Headquarters Ma-

rine Corps (HQMC), constantly reviewing the lessons learned in the war to date, had just completed a series of revisions to the tables of organization and equipment for the division and its components. Although the "G-Series" T/O would not become official until a month after the landing, the divisions had already complied with most of the changes. The overall size of each division increased from 17,465 to 19,176. This growth reflected the addition of an assault signal company, a rocket platoon (the "Buck Rogers Men"), a war dog platoon, and—significantly—a 55-man assault platoon in each regimental headquarters. Artillery, motor transport, and service units received slight increases. So did the machine gun platoons in each rifle company. The most timely weapons change occurred with the replacement of the 75mm "half-tracks" with the newly developed M-7 105mm self-propelled howitzer—four to each regiment. Purists in the artillery regiments tended to sniff at these weapons, deployed by the infantry not as massed howitzers but rather as direct-fire, open-sights "siege guns" against Okinawa's thousands of fortified caves, but the riflemen soon swore by them.

Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, backed up these last-minute changes by providing the quantities of replacements required, so that each assault division actually landed at full tables of organization (T/O) strength, plus the equivalent of two replacement drafts each. Sometimes the skills required did not match the requirement, however. Some of the artillery regiments had to absorb a flood of radar technicians and anti-aircraft artillery gunners from the old Defense Battalions at the last moment. But by and large, the manpower and equipment shortfalls which had beset many early operations had been overcome by the time of embarkation for the Okinawa campaign.

Surprisingly for this late in the war, operational intelligence proved

Initial Infantry Commanders

Within III Amphibious Corps, the initial infantry commanders were those who led their troops ashore in the initial assault on Okinawa during Operation Iceberg. Eighty-two days of sustained combat exacted a heavy toll in casualties and debilitation. Among the battalion commanders, for example, four were killed, nine were wounded. Only those commanders indicated with an asterisk [*] retained their commands to the end of the battle.

1st Marine Division

1st Marines: Col Kenneth B. Chappell
 1/1: LtCol James C. Murray, Jr.
 2/1: LtCol James C. Magee, Jr.*
 3/1: LtCol Stephen V. Sabol

5th Marines: Col John H. Griebel*
 1/5: LtCol Charles W. Shelburne*
 2/5: LtCol William E. Benedict
 3/5: Maj John H. Gustafson

7th Marines: Col Edward W. Snedeker*
 1/7: LtCol John J. Gormley*
 2/7: LtCol Spencer S. Berger*
 3/7: LtCol Edward H. Hurst

8th Marines: Col Clarence R. Wallace*
 1/8: LtCol Richard W. Hayward*
 2/8: LtCol Harry A. Waldorf*
 3/8: LtCol Paul E. Wallace*

6th Marine Division

4th Marines: Col Alan Shapley*
 1/4: Maj Bernard W. Green
 2/4: LtCol Reynolds H. Hayden
 3/4: LtCol Bruno A. Hochmuth*

22nd Marines: Col Merlin F. Schneider
 1/22: Major Thomas J. Myers
 2/22: LtCol Horatio C. Woodhouse, Jr.
 3/22: LtCol Malcolm O. Donohoo

29th Marines: Col Victor F. Bleasdale
 1/29: LtCol Jean W. Moreau
 2/29: LtCol William G. Robb*
 3/29: LtCol Erma A. Wright

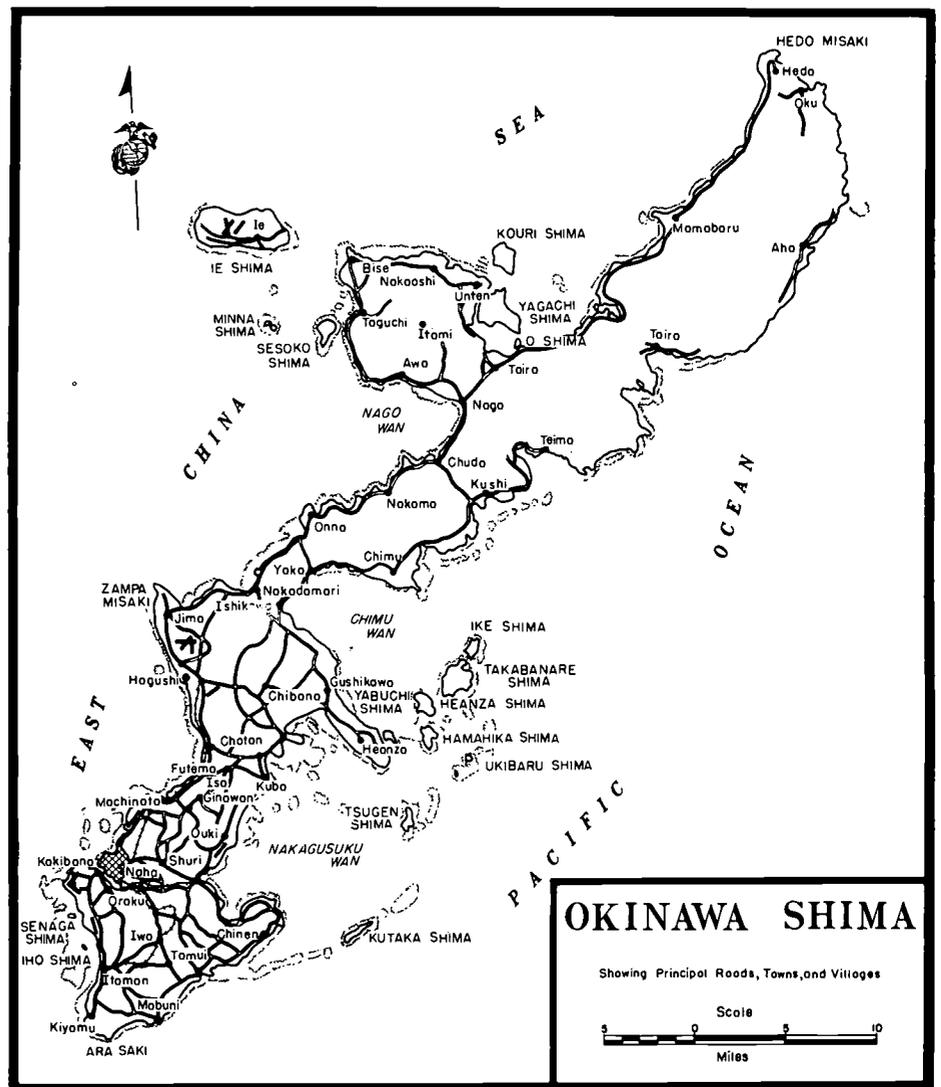
Note: The 8th Marines entered combat on Okinawa in June attached to the 1st MarDiv

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 123072



less than satisfactory prior to the Okinawa landing. Where pre-assault combat intelligence had been superb in the earlier operations at Tarawa (the apogean neap tide notwithstanding) and Tinian, here at Okinawa, the landing force did not have accurate figures of the enemy's numbers, weapons, and disposition, or intelligence of his abilities. Part of the problem lay in the fact that cloud cover over the island most of the time prevented accurate and complete photo-reconnaissance of the target area. In addition, the incredible digging skills of the defending garrison and the ingenuity of the Japanese commander conspired to disguise the island's defenses.

The island of Okinawa is 60 miles long, but only the lower third contained the significant military objectives of airfields, ports, and anchorages. When Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima assumed command of the *Thirty-second Army* in August 1944, he quickly realized this and decided to concentrate his forces in the south. He also decided, regretfully, to refrain from contesting the likely American landings along the broad beaches at Hagushi on the southwest coast. Doing so would forfeit the prize airfields of Yontan and Kadena, but it would permit Ushijima to conserve his forces and fight the only kind of battle he thought had a chance for the Empire: a defense in depth, largely underground and thus protected from the overwhelming American superiority in supporting arms. This was the attrition/cave warfare of the more recent defenses at Biak, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima. Each had exacted a frightful cost on the American invaders. Ushijima sought to duplicate this philosophy in spades. He would go to ground, sting the Americans with major-caliber gunfire from his freshly excavated "fire-port" caves, bleed them badly, bog down their momentum—and in so doing provide the Imperial Army and Navy air arms the opportunity to destroy the Fifth



Fleet by massed *kamikaze* attacks.

To achieve this strategy, Ushijima had upwards of 100,000 troops on the island, including a generous number of Okinawan conscripts, the Home Guard known as *Boeitai*. He also had a disproportionate number of artillery and heavy weapon units in his command. The Americans in the Pacific would not encounter a more formidable concentration of 150mm howitzers, 120mm mortars, 320mm mortars, and 47mm antitank guns. Finally, Ushijima also had time. The American strategic decisions to assault the Philippines, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima before Okinawa gave the Japanese garrison on Okinawa seven months to develop its defenses around the Shuri epicenter. Americans had already seen what the Japanese could do in terms of fortifying a position within an incredibly

short time. At Okinawa, they achieved a masterpiece. Working entirely with hand tools—there was not a single bulldozer on the island—the garrison dug miles of underground fighting positions, literally honeycombing southern Okinawa's ridges and draws, and stocked each successive position with reserves of ammunition, food, water, and medical supplies. The Americans expected a ferocious defense of the Hagushi beaches and the airfields just beyond, followed by a general counterattack—then the battle would be over except for mop-up patrolling. They could not have been more misinformed.

The U.S. plan of attack called for advance seizure of the Kerama Retto Islands off the southwest coast, several days of preliminary air and naval gunfire bombardment, a massive

The Japanese Forces

Marines and Army infantry faced strong opposition from more than 100,000 troops of Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima's *Thirty-second Army*, although American intelligence initially estimated Ushijima's strength at only 60,000 to 70,000. Most of the *Thirty-second Army's* reinforcing organizations had traveled to Okinawa from previous posts in China, Manchuria, and Japan.

The first to arrive was the *9th Infantry Division*, a crack veteran unit destined to be the backbone of Ushijima's defense forces. The next reinforcement was the *44th Independent Mixed Brigade* which lost part of its strength when one of the ships carrying the brigade to Okinawa was torpedoed. Next, the *15th Independent Mixed Regiment* was flown directly to Okinawa and was added to the remnants of the 44th. The next large unit to reach Okinawa was the *24th Infantry Division*, which came from Manchuria. Well equipped and trained, it had not yet been blooded in battle. Lieutenant General Takeo Fujioka's *62d Infantry Division* was the final major infantry unit assigned to the *Thirty-second Army*. It was a brigaded division, consisting of two brigades of four independent infantry battalions each. Two more of these battalions arrived on Okinawa in September 1944 and one was allocated to each brigade.

Because *Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ)*, the joint Army and Navy command in Tokyo, foresaw the battle of Okinawa as one of fixed defenses, Ushijima was not assigned any appreciably strong armored force other than the *27th Tank Regiment*. In view of the hopeless situation in the Philippines and the inability to deliver supplies and reinforcements, *IGHQ* diverted large weapons shipments, if not troops, to Okinawa. The *Thirty-second Army* thus possessed a heavier concentration of artillery under a single command than had been available to any other Japanese organization in the Pacific at any one time. The total enemy artillery strength, less the *42d Field Artillery Regiment*, which was organic to the *24th Division*, was grouped within the *5th Artillery Command*. In addition to the comparatively weak *7th Heavy Artillery Regiment*, Major General Kosuke Wada's command consisted of two independent artillery regiments, and the artillery elements of the *44th Brigade* and the *27th Tank Regiment*. In addition, he had the *1st* and *2d Medium Artillery Regiments* with 36

howitzers and the *100th Heavy Artillery Battalion* with eight 150mm guns. Wada also had in his command the *1st Independent Heavy Mortar Regiment*, which fired the 320mm spigot mortar earlier encountered by Marines on Iwo Jima. Although the *1st* and *2d Light Mortar Battalions* were nominally part of Wada's organization, their 96 81mm mortars were assigned in close support of the infantry and controlled by the defense sector commanders.

The reserve of potential infantry replacements varied from good, in the *23d* and *26th Shipping Engineer Regiments*, to poor, at best, in the assorted rear area service units. The largest number of replacements, 7,000 men, was provided by the *10th Air Sector Command*, which was comprised of airfield maintenance and construction units at the Yontan, Kadena, and Ie Shima air strips. Another source of infantry replacements were the seven sea raiding squadrons, three of which were based at Kerama Retto and the remainder at Unten-Ko in the north of Okinawa. Each of those squadrons had a hundred picked men, whose sole assignment was to destroy American amphibious invasion shipping during the course of landing operations by crashing explosives-laden suicide craft into the sides of attack transports and cargo vessels.

Ushijima's naval component consisted of the *Okinawa Naval Base Force*, the *4th Surface Escort Unit*, and various naval aviation activities all under the command of Rear Admiral Minoru Ota. In this combined command were approximately 10,000 men, of whom only 35 percent were regular naval personnel. The remainder were civilian employees belonging to the different sub-units of the *Naval Base Force*. Part of Ota's command consisted of torpedo boat, suicide boat, and midget submarine squadrons at the Unten-Ko base on Motobu Peninsula.

Rounding out the *Thirty-second Army* was a native Okinawan home guard, whose members were called *Boeitai*. These men were trained by the army and were to be integrated into army units once the battle for Okinawa was joined. The *Boeitai* provided Ushijima with 17,000-20,000 extra men. Added to this group were 1,700 male Okinawan children, 14 years of age and older, who were organized into volunteer youth groups called "Blood and Iron for the Emperor Duty Units," or *Tekketsu* – Benis M. Frank

four-division assault over the Hagushi Beaches (the Marines of III-AC on the north, the soldiers of XXIV Corps on the south). Meanwhile, the 2d Marine Division with a separate naval task unit would endeavor to duplicate opposite the Minatoga Beaches on Okinawa's southeast coast its successful amphibious feint off Tinian. Love-Day

(selected from the existing phonetic alphabet in order to avoid planning confusion with "D-Day" being planned for Iwo Jima) would occur on 1 April 1945. Hardly a man failed to comment on the obvious irony: it was April Fool's Day and Easter Sunday – which would prevail?

The U.S. Fifth Fleet constituted an awesome sight as it sortied from

Ulithi Atoll and a dozen other ports and anchorages to steam towards the Ryukyus. Those Marines who had returned to the Pacific from the original amphibious offensive at Guadalcanal some 31 months earlier marveled at the profusion of assault ships and landing craft. The new vessels covered the horizon, a mind-boggling sight.



Thirty-second Army officers sit for a formal portrait on Okinawa in February 1945. Numbers identify: (1) RAdm Minoru Ota, Commanding Officer, Naval Base Force; (2) LtGen Mitsuru Ushijima, Commanding General, Thirty-second Army; (3) Maj-Gen Isamu Cho, Chief of Staff, Thirty-second Army; (4) Col Hitoshi Kanayama, Commanding Officer, 89th Regiment; (5) Col Kiuji Hongo, Commanding Officer, 32d Regiment; (6) Col Hiromichi Yahara, Senior Staff Officer, Thirty-second Army.

On 26 March, the 77th Infantry Division kicked off the campaign by its skillful seizure of the Kerama Retto, a move which surprised the Japanese and produced great operational dividends. Admiral Turner now had a series of sheltered anchorages to repair ships likely to be damaged by Japanese air attacks — and already *kamikazes* were exacting a toll. The soldiers also discovered the main cache of Japanese suicide boats, nearly 300 power boats equipped with high-explosive rams intended to sink the thin-skinned troop transports in their anchorages off the west coast of Okinawa. The Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, Force Reconnaissance Battalion, commanded by Major James L. Jones, USMC, preceded each Army landing with stealthy scouting missions the preceding night. Jones' Marines also scouted the barren sand spits of Keise Shima and found them undefended. With that welcome news, the Army landed a battery of 155mm "Long Toms" on the small islets and soon added their considerable firepower to the naval bombardment of the southwest coast of Okinawa.

Meanwhile, Turner's minesweepers had their hands full clearing approach lanes to the Hagushi Beaches.

Navy Underwater Demolition Teams, augmented by Marines, blew up hundreds of man-made obstacles in the shallows. And in a full week of preliminary bombardment, the fire support ships delivered more than 25,000 rounds of five-inch shells or larger. The shelling produced more spectacle than destruction, however, because the invaders still believed General Ushijima's forces would be arrayed around the beaches and airfields. A bombardment of that scale and duration would have saved many lives at Iwo Jima; at Okinawa this precious ordnance produced few tangible results.

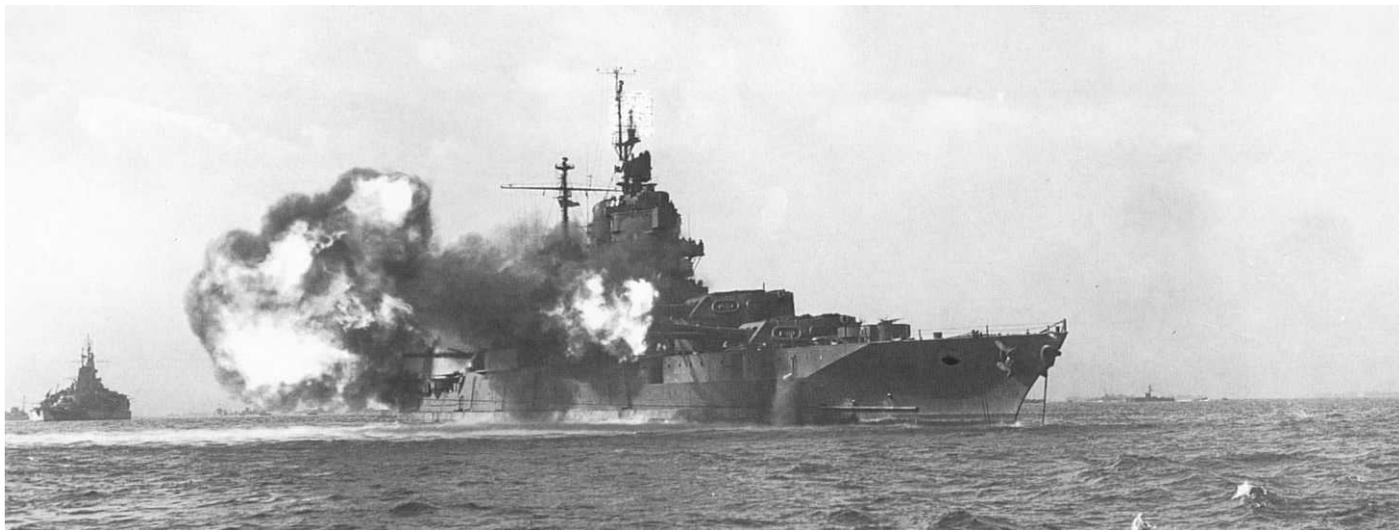
A Japanese soldier observing the huge armada bearing down on Okinawa wrote in his diary, "it's like a frog meeting a snake and waiting for the snake to eat him." Tensions ran high among the U.S. transports as well. The 60mm mortar section of Company K, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, learned that casualty rates on L-Day could reach 80-85 percent. "This was not conducive to a good night's sleep," remarked Private First Class Eugene B. Sledge, a veteran of the Peleliu landing. On board another transport, combat correspondent Ernie Pyle sat down to a last hot meal with the enlisted Ma-

rines: " 'Fattening us up for the kill,' the boys say," he reported. On board a nearby LST, a platoon commander rehearsed his troops in the use of home-made scaling ladders to surmount a concrete wall just beyond the beaches. "Remember, don't stop — get off that wall, or somebody's gonna get hurt."

L-Day and Movement to Contact

Operation Iceberg got off to a roaring start. The few Japanese still in the vicinity of the main assault at first light on L-Day, 1 April 1945, could immediately sense the wisdom of General Ushijima in conceding the landing to the Americans. The enormous armada, assembled from ports all over the Pacific Ocean, had concentrated on schedule off Okinawa's southwest coast and stood coiled to project its 182,000-man landing force over the beach. This would be the ultimate forcible entry, the epitome of all the amphibious lessons learned so painstakingly from the crude beginnings at Guadalcanal and North Africa.

Admiral Turner made his final review of weather conditions in the amphibious objective area. As at Iwo Jima, the amphibians would be blessed with good weather on the critical first day of the landing. Skies would be cloudy to clear, winds moderate east to northeast, surf moderate, temperature 75 degrees. At 0406 Turner announced "Land the Landing Force," the familiar phrase which marked the sequential countdown to the first assault waves hitting the beaches at H-Hour. Combat troops already manning the rails of their transports then witnessed an unforgettable display of naval power — the sustained bombardment by shells and rockets from hundreds of ships, alternating with formations of attack aircraft streaking low over the beaches, bombing and strafing at will. Enemy return fire seemed scattered and ineffectual, even against



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 116412

Taking part in the prelanding bombardment of Okinawa was the Idaho (BB 42), blasting away at the island with her 14-inch guns at preselected targets. As the troops landed, naval gunfire ships let loose with rolling barrages which cleared the way.

such a mass of lucrative targets assembled offshore. Turner confirmed H-Hour at 0830.

Now came the turn of the 2d Marine Division and the ships of the Diversionary Force to decoy the Japanese with a feint landing on the opposite coast. The ersatz amphibious force steamed into position, launched amphibian tractors and Higgins boats, loaded them conspicuously with combat-equipped Marines, then dispatched them towards Minatoga Beach in seven waves. Paying careful attention to the clock, the fourth wave commander crossed the line of departure exactly at 0830, the time of the real H-Hour on the west coast. The LVTs and boats then turned sharply away and returned to the transports, mission accomplished.

There is little doubt that the diversionary landing (and a repeat performance the following day) achieved its purpose. In fact, General Ushijima retained major, front-line infantry and artillery units in the Minatoga area for several weeks thereafter as a contingency against a secondary landing he fully anticipated. The garrison also reported to IGHQ on L-Day morning that "enemy landing attempt on east coast completely foiled with heavy losses to enemy."

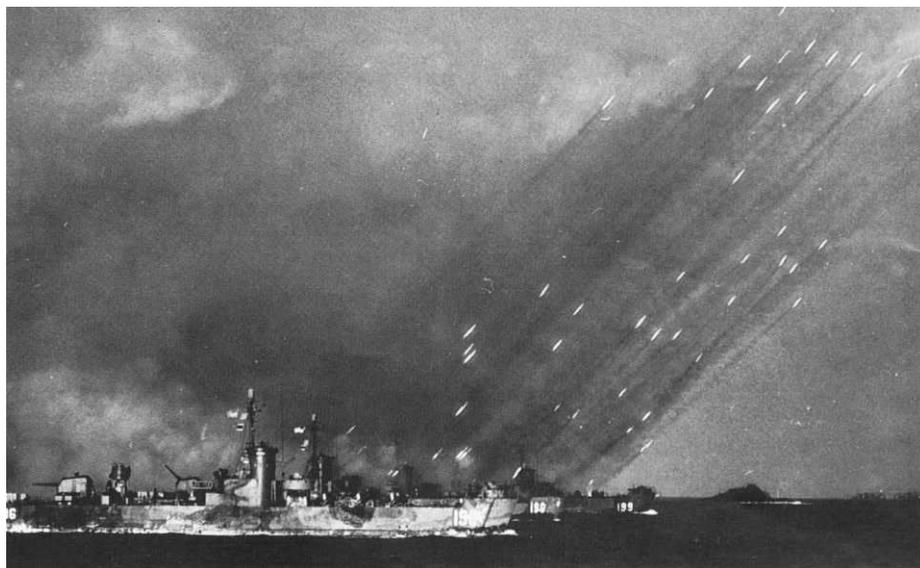
But the successful deception came at considerable cost. Japanese kamikazes, convinced that this was the main landing, struck the small force that same morning, seriously damaging the troopship *Hinsdale* and *LST 844*. The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and the 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion suffered nearly 50 casualties; the two ships lost an equal number of sailors. Ironically, the division expected to have the least damage or casualties in the L-Day battle lost more men than any other division in the Tenth Army that day. Complained division Operations

Officer Lieutenant Colonel Samuel G. Taxis: "We had asked for air cover for the feint but were told the threat would be 'incidental.'"

On the southwest approaches, the main body experienced no such interference. An extensive coral reef provided an offshore barrier to the Hagushi beaches, but by 1945 reefs no longer posed a problem to the landing force. Unlike Tarawa, where the reef dominated the tactical development of the battle, General Buckner at Okinawa had more than 1,400 LVTs to transport his assault echelons from ship to shore without

A flotilla of LSM-Rs delivers final suppressive fires before assault waves hit the beach. Upon impact, they churned up the earth and caused considerable damage.

Photo by Capt Edward Steichen, USNR, in Marine Corps Historical Center



hesitation. These long lines of LVTs now extended nearly eight miles as they churned across the line of departure on the heels of 360 armored LVT-As, whose turret-mounted, snub-nosed 75mm howitzers blasted away at the beach as they advanced the final 4,000 yards. Behind the LVTs came nearly 700 DUKWs, amphibious trucks, bearing the first of the direct support artillery battalions. The horizon behind the DUKWs seemed filled with lines of landing boats. These would pause at the reef to marry with outward bound LVTs. Soldiers and Marines alike had rehearsed transfer line operations exhaustively. There would be no break in the assault's momentum this day.

The mouth of the Bishi Gawa (River) marked the boundary between the XXIV Corps and IIIAC along the Hagushi beaches. The Marines' tactical plan called for the two divisions to land abreast, the 1st on the right, the 6th on the left. Each division in turn landed with two regiments abreast. The assault regiments, from north to south, were the 22d, 4th, 7th, and 5th Marines. Reflecting years of practice, the first assault wave touched down close to 0830, the designated H-Hour. The Marines stormed out of their LVTs, swarmed over the berms and seawalls, and entered the great unknown. The forcible invasion of Okinawa had begun. Within the first hour the Tenth Army had put 16,000 combat troops ashore.

The assault troops experienced a universal shock during the ship-to-shore movement. In spite of the dire intelligence predictions and their own combat experience, the troops found the landing to be a cakewalk—virtually unopposed. Private First Class Gene Sledge's mortar section went in singing "Little Brown Jug" at the top of its lungs. Corporal James L. Day, a rifle squad leader attached to Company F, 2d Battalion, 22d Marines, who had landed at Eniwetok and Guam earlier, couldn't believe his good luck: "I didn't hear a single shot

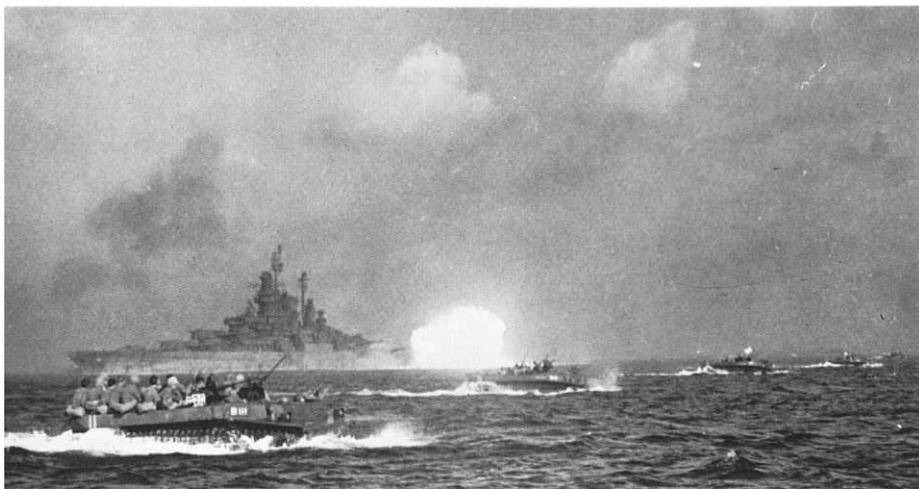
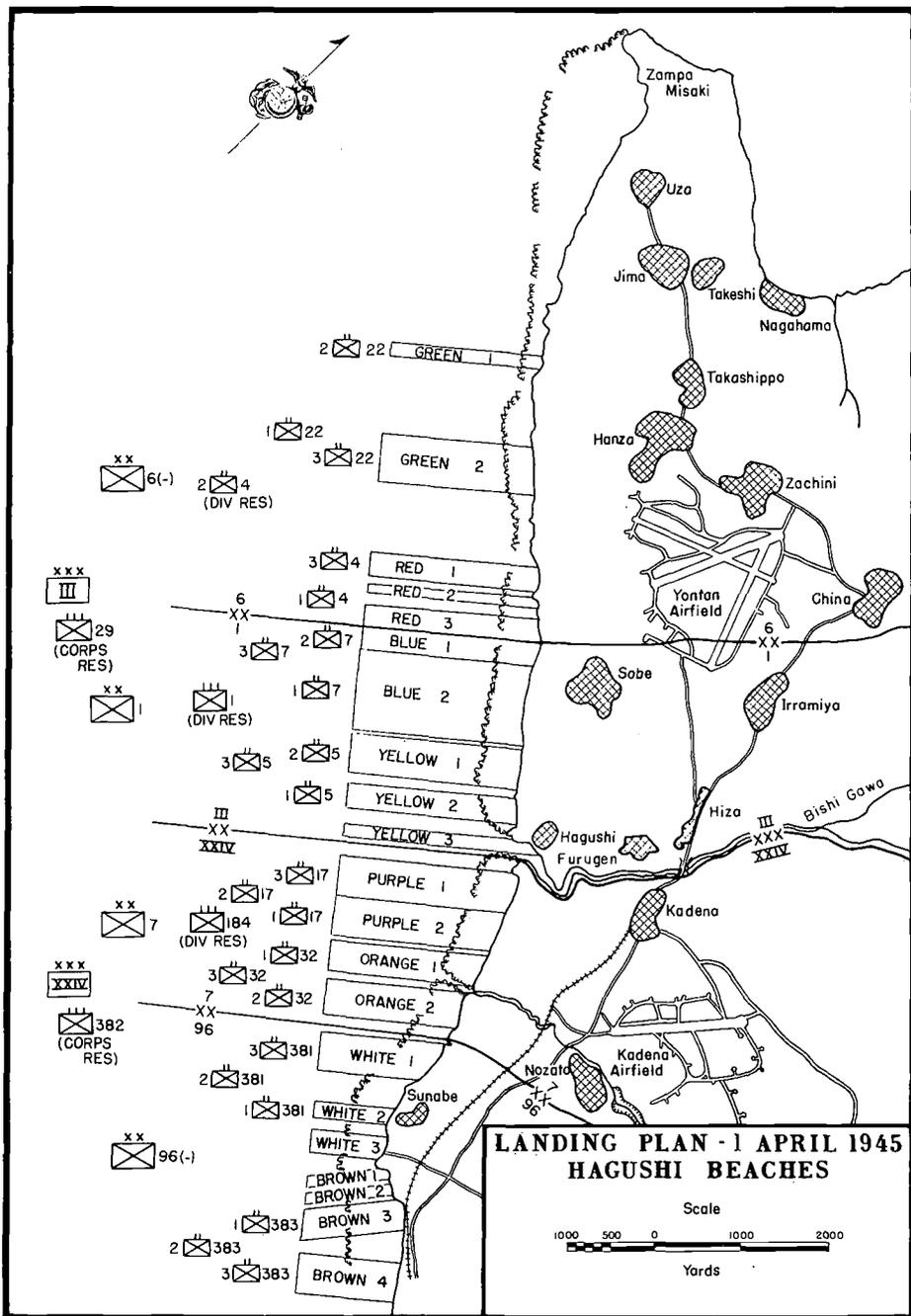


Photo by Capt Edward Steichen, USNR, in Marine Corps Historical Center
Amphibious mastery at work: assault Marines in amphibian tractors (LVTs) churn towards the beach on L-Day beneath the protective heavy fire of a battleship.





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 116103

Armored amtracs of Company A, 1st Armored Amphibious Battalion, carry the assault wave of the 4th Marines, 6th Marine Division, onto Red Beach. The LVTs mount 75mm howitzers and .50-caliber machine guns, and were used effectively later in the campaign when the Thirty-second Army attempted amphibious landings on Tenth Army flanks in April.

all morning—it was unbelievable!” Most veterans expected an eruption of enemy fire any moment. Later in the day General del Valle’s LVT became stuck in a pothole enroute to the beach, the vehicle becoming a very lucrative, immobile target. “It was the worst 20 minutes I ever spent in my life,” he said.

The morning continued to offer pleasant surprises to the invaders. They found no mines along the beaches, discovered the main bridge over the Bishi River still intact and—wonder of wonders—both airfields relatively undefended. The 6th Marine Division seized Yontan Airfield by 1300; the 7th Infantry Division had no problems securing nearby Kadena.

The rapid clearance of the immediate beaches by the assault units left plenty of room for follow-on forces, and the division commanders did not hesitate to accelerate the landing of tanks, artillery battalions, and reserves. The mammoth build-up proceeded with only a few glitches. Four artillery pieces went down when their DUKWs foundered along the reef. Several Sherman tanks grounded on the reef. And the 3d Battalion,

1st Marines, reached the transfer line by 1800 but had to spend an uncomfortable night in its boats when sufficient LVTs could not be mustered at that hour for the final leg. These were minor inconveniences. Incredibly, by day’s end, the Tenth Army had 60,000 troops ashore, occupying an expanded beachhead eight miles long and two miles deep. This was the real measure of effectiveness of the Fifth Fleet’s proven amphibious proficiency.

The huge landing was not entirely bloodless. Snipers wounded Major John H. Gustafson, commanding the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, late in the afternoon. Other men went down to enemy mortar and machine gun fire. But the losses of the entire Tenth Army, including the hard-luck 2d Marine Division, amounted to 28 killed, 104 wounded, and 27 missing on L-Day. This represented barely 10 percent of the casualties sustained by the V Amphibious Corps the first day on Iwo Jima.

Nor did the momentum of the assault troops of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, clamber over a seawall after landing on Blue Beach 2 on 1 April 1945, against no opposition at the beachhead.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 117020





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 116368

Other Marines were boated to the beachhead in LCVPs. Debarking from the Higgins boats, they waded through the quiet surf over the coral reef to reach shore.

sault slow appreciably after the Tenth Army broke out of the beachhead. The 7th Infantry Division reached the East Coast on the second day. On the third day, the 1st Marine Division seized the Katchin Peninsula, effectively cutting the island in two. By that date, IIIAC elements had reached objectives thought originally to require 11 days in the taking. Lieutenant Colonel Victor H. Krulak,

operations officer for the 6th Marine Division, recalls General Shepherd telling him, "Go ahead! Plow ahead as fast as you can. We've got these fellows on the run." "Well, hell," said Krulak, "we didn't have them on the run. They weren't there."

As the 6th Marine Division swung north and the 1st Marine Division moved out to the west and northwest, their immediate problems

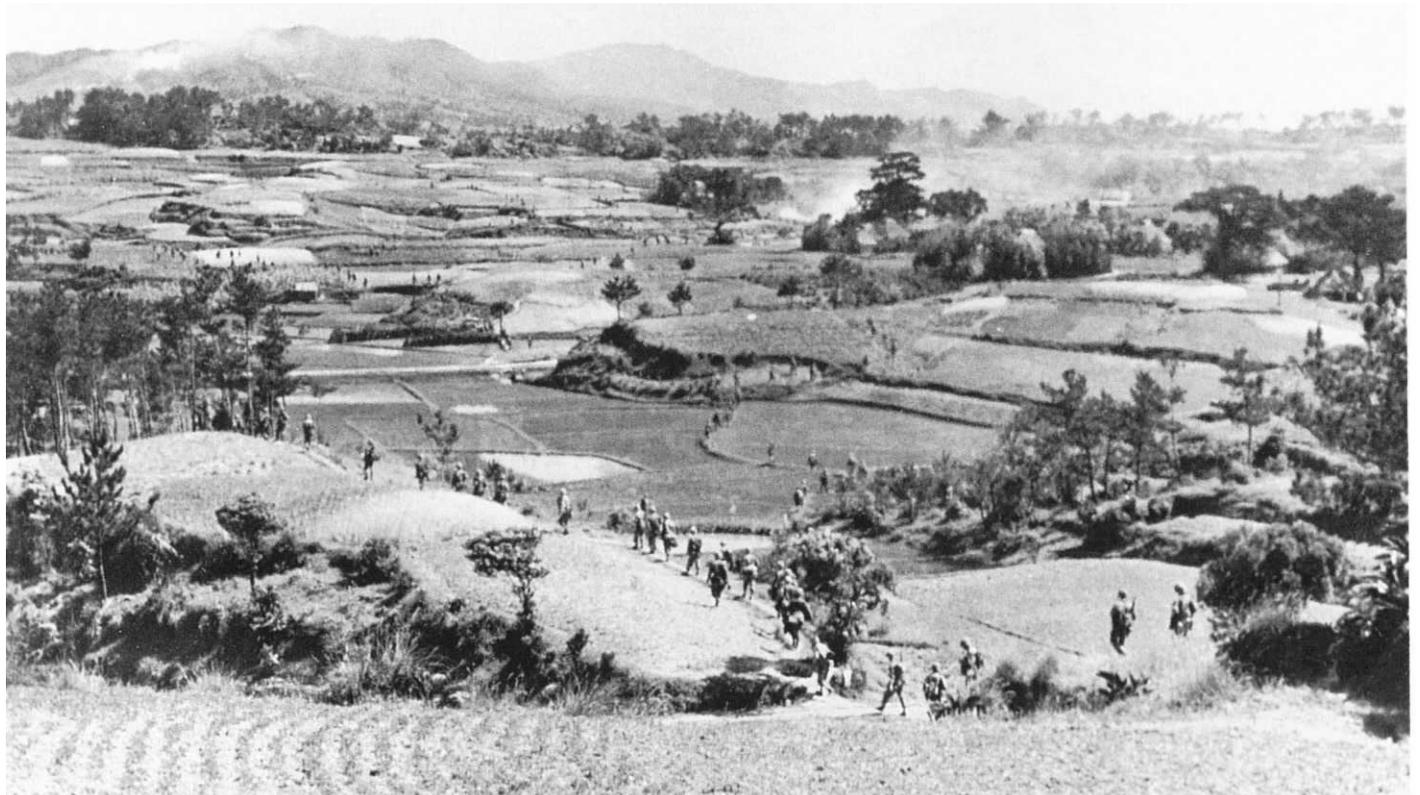
stemmed not from the Japanese but from a sluggish supply system, still being processed over the beach. The reef-side transfer line worked well for troops but poorly for cargo. Navy beachmasters labored to construct an elaborate causeway to the reef, but in the meantime, the 1st Marine Division demonstrated some of its amphibious logistics know-how learned "on-the-job" at Peleliu. It mounted swinging cranes on powered causeways and secured the craft to the seaward side of the reef. Boats would pull alongside in deep water; the crane would lift nets filled with combat cargo from the boats into the open hatches of a DUKW or LVT waiting on the shoreward side for the final run to the beach. This worked so well that the division had to divide its assets among the other divisions within the Tenth Army.

Beach congestion also slowed the process. Both Marine divisions resorted to using their replacement drafts as shore party teams. Their inexperience in this vital work, com-

Marines of the 6th Division have a peaceful "walk in the sun," as they head north down the hillside approaching the town of

Ishikawa on L-plus 3. Their idyllic trairpse will end soon as they near Mount Yae Take and well-defended enemy positions.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 116523





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 118304

As invasion forces fanned out on Okinawa, the beaches were scenes of organized disorder as shore parties unloaded the beans and bullets needed by the assault troops. They also began unloading materiel which would be needed later in the campaign.

bined with the constant call for groups as replacements, caused problems of traffic control, establishment of functional supply dumps, and pilferage. This was nothing new; other divisions in earlier operations had encountered the same circumstances. The rapidly advancing assault divisions had a critical need for motor transport and bulk fuel, but these proved slow to land and distribute. Okinawa's rudimentary road network further compounded the problem. Colonel Edward W. Snedeker, commanding the 7th Marines, summarized the situation after the landing in this candid report: "The movement from the west coast landing beaches of Okinawa across the island was most difficult because of the rugged terrain crossed. It was physically exhausting for personnel who had been on transports a long time. It also presented initially an impossible supply problem in the Seventh's zone of action because of the lack of roads."

General Mulcahy did not hesitate to move the command post of the Tactical Air Force ashore as early as

L plus 1. Operating from crude quarters between Yontan and Kadena, Mulcahy kept a close eye on the progress the SeaBees and Marine and Army engineers were making on repairing both captured airfields. The first American aircraft, a Marine observation plane, landed on 2 April. Two days later the fields were ready to accept fighters. By the eighth day, Mulcahy could accommodate medium bombers and announced to the Fleet his assumption of control of all aircraft ashore. By then his fighter arm, the Air Defense Command, had been established ashore nearby under the leadership of Marine Brigadier General William J. Wallace. With that, the graceful F4U Corsairs of Colonel John C. Munn's Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 31 and Colonel Ward E. Dickey's MAG-33 began flying in from their escort carriers. Wallace immediately tasked them to fly combat air patrols (CAP) over the fleet, already seriously embattled by massed *kamikaze* attacks. Ironically, most of the Marine fighter pilots' initial missions consisted of CAP assignments, while the Navy

squadrons on board the escort carriers picked up the close air support jobs. Dawn of each new day would provide the spectacle of Marine Corsairs taking off from land to fly CAP over the far-flung Fifth Fleet, passing Navy Hellcats from the fleet coming in take station in support of the Marines fighting on the ground. Other air units poured into the two airfields as well: air warning squadrons, night fighters, torpedo bombers, and an Army Air Forces fighter wing. While neither Yontan nor Kadena were exactly safe havens—each received nightly artillery shelling and long-range bombing for the first full month ashore—the two airfields remained in operation around the clock, an invaluable asset to both Admiral Spruance and General Buckner.

While the 1st Marine Division continued to hunt down small bands of enemy guerrillas and infiltrators throughout the center of the island, General Geiger unleashed the 6th Marine Division to sweep north. These were heady days for General Shepherd's troops: riflemen clustered topside on tanks and self-propelled guns, streaming northward against a fleeing foe. Not since Tinian had Marines enjoyed such exhilarating mobility. By 7 April the division had seized Nago, the largest town in northern Okinawa, and the U.S. Navy obligingly swept for mines and employed underwater demolition teams (UDT) to breach obstacles in order to open the port for direct, sea-borne delivery of critical supplies to the Marines. Corporal Day marveled at the rapidity of their advance so far. "Hell, here we were in Nago. It was not tough at all. Up to that time [our squad] had not lost a man." The 22d Marines continued north through broken country, reaching Hedo Misaki at the far end of the island on L plus 12, having covered 55 miles from the Hagushi landing beaches.

For the remainder of the 6th Marine Division, the honeymoon was about to end. Just northwest of Nago



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 117054

Grinning troops of the 29th Marines hitch a ride on board an M-7 self-propelled 105mm howitzer heading for Chuta in the drive towards Motobu Peninsula.

the great bulbous nose of Motobu Peninsula juts out into the East China Sea. There, in a six-square-mile area around 1,200-foot Mount Yae Take, Colonel Takesiko Udo and his *Kunigami Detachment* ended their delaying tactics and assumed prepared defensive positions. Udo's force consisted of two rifle battalions, a regimental gun company and an antitank company from the *44th Independent Mixed Brigade*, in all about two thousand seasoned troops.

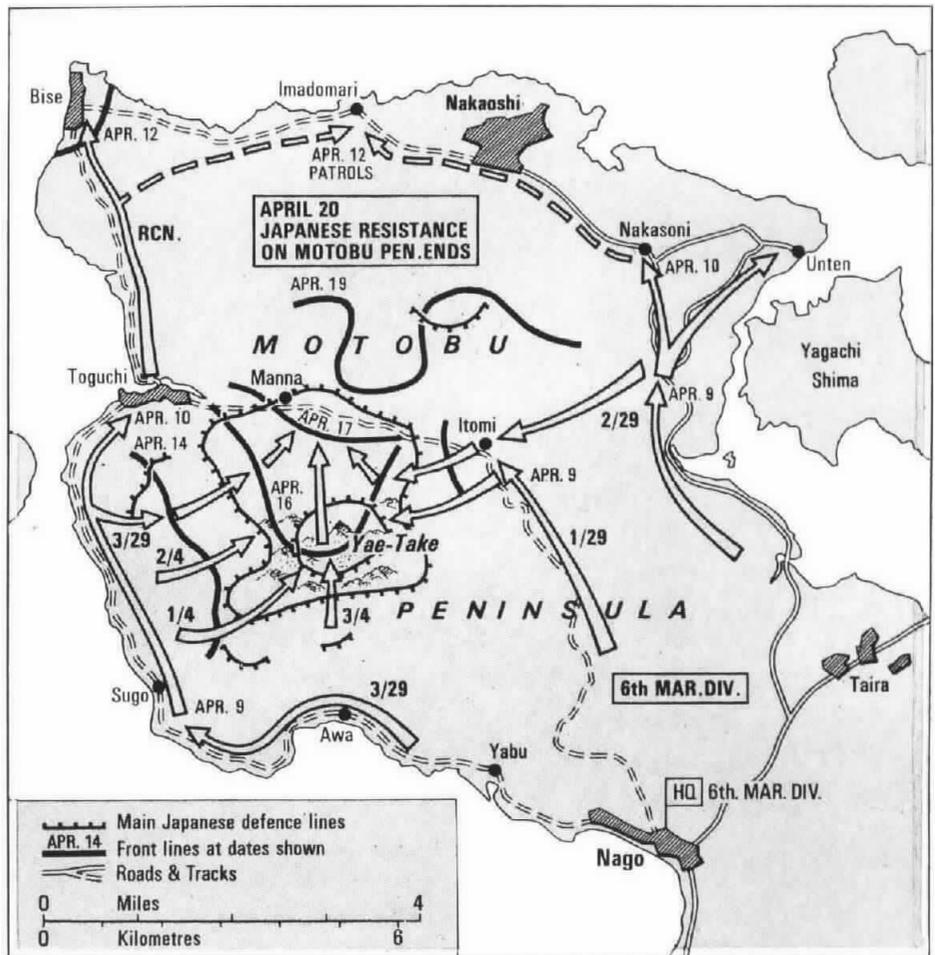
Yae Take proved to be a defender's dream, broken into steep ravines and tangled with dense vegetation. The Japanese sowed the approaches with mines and mounted 20mm dual-purpose machine-cannons and heavier weapons deep within caves. As Colonel Krulak recalled: "They were just there – they weren't going anywhere – they were going to fight to the death. They had a lot of naval guns that had come off disabled ships, and they dug them way back in holes where their arc of fire was not more than 10 or 12 degrees." One of the artillery battalions of the 15th Marines had the misfortune to lay their guns directly within the narrow arc of a hidden 150mm cannon. "They lost two howitzers before you

could spell cat," said Krulak.

The battle of Yae Take became the 6th Marine Division's first real fight, five days of difficult and deadly combat against an exceptionally determined enemy. Both the 4th and 29th

Marines earned their spurs here, developing teamwork and tactics that would put them in good stead during the long campaign ahead.

Part of General Shepherd's success in this battle stemmed from his desire to provide proven leaders in command of his troops. On the 15th, Shepherd relieved Colonel Victor F. Bleasdale, a well-decorated World War I Marine, to install Guadalcanal veteran Colonel William J. Whaling as commanding officer of the 29th Marines. When Japanese gunners killed Major Bernard W. Green, commanding the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, Colonel Shapley assigned his own executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Fred D. Beans, a former Marine raider, as his replacement. The savage fighting continued, with three battalions attacking from the west, two from the east – protected against friendly fire by the steep pinnacle between them. Logistic support to the fighting became so critical that every



man, from private to general, who ascended the mountain to the front lines carried either a five-gallon water can or a case of ammo. And all hands coming down the mountain had to help bear stretchers of wounded Marines. On 15 April, one company of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, suffered 65 casualties, including three consecutive company commanders. On 16 April, two companies of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, seized the topographic crest. On the following day, the 29th Marines received exceptional fire support from the 14-inch guns of the old battleship *Tennessee* and low-level, in-your-pocket bombing from the Corsairs of Marine Fighter Squadron 322.

Colonel Udo and his *Kunigami Detachment* died to the man at Yae Take. On 20 April General Shepherd declared the Motobu Peninsula secured. His division had earned a valuable victory, but the cost had not been cheap. The 6th Marine Division suffered the loss of 207 killed and 757

wounded in the battle. The division's overall performance impressed General Oliver P. Smith, who recorded in his journal:

The campaign in the north should dispel the belief held by some that Marines are beach-bound and are not capable of rapid movement. Troops moved rapidly over rugged terrain, repaired roads and blown bridges, successively opened new unloading points, and reached the northern tip of the island, some 55 miles from the original landing beaches, in 14 days. This was followed by a mountain campaign of 7 days duration to clear the Motobu Peninsula.

During the battle for Motobu Peninsula, the 77th Infantry Division once again displayed its amphibious prowess by landing on the island of Ie Shima to seize its airfields. On 16 April, Major Jones' force reconnais-

Uncovered on Motobu Peninsula, hidden in a cave, was this Japanese 150mm gun waiting to be used against 6th Marine Division troops advancing northwards.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 122207



sance Marines again helped pave the way by seizing Minna Shima, a tiny islet about 6,000 yards off shore from Ie Shima. Here the soldiers positioned a 105mm battery to further support operations ashore. The 77th needed plenty of fire support. Nearly 5,000 Japanese defended the island. The soldiers overwhelmed them in six days of very hard fighting at a cost of 1,100 casualties. One of these was the popular war correspondent Ernie Pyle, who had landed with the Marines on L-Day. A Japanese *Nambu* gunner on Ie Shima shot Pyle in the head, killing him instantly. Soldiers and Marines alike grieved over Pyle's death, just as they had six days earlier with the news of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's passing.

The 1st Marine Division fought a different campaign in April than their sister division to the north. Their days were filled with processing refugees and their nights with patrols and ambushes. Guerrillas and snipers exacted a small but steady toll. The 7th Marines became engaged in a hot firefight near Hizaonna, but most of the action remained small-unit and nocturnal. The "Old Breed" Marines welcomed the cycle of low intensity. After so many months in the tropics, they found Okinawa refreshingly cool and pastoral. The Marines grew concerned about the welfare of the thousands of Okinawan refugees who straggled northwards from the heavy fighting. As Private First Class Eugene Sledge observed, "The most pitiful things about the Okinawan civilians were that they were totally bewildered by the shock of our invasion, and they were scared to death of us. Countless times they passed us on the way to the rear with fear, dismay, and confusion on their faces."

Sledge and his companions in the 5th Marines could tell by the sound of intense artillery fire to the south that the XXIV Corps had collided with General Ushijima's outer defenses. Within the first week the soldiers of the 7th and 96th Divisions



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 116840

Shortly after the main landings on Okinawa, famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle, a Scripps-Howard columnist who had been in the thick of the war in the Italian campaign, shares a smoke with a Marine patrol. Later in Operation Iceberg he was killed by machine gun fire on Ie Shima, a nearby island fortress.

had answered the riddle of "where are the Japs?" By the second week, both General Hodge and General Buckner were painfully aware of Ushijima's intentions and the range and depth of his defensive positions. In addition to their multitude of caves, minefields, and reverse-slope emplacements, the Japanese in the Shuri

complex featured the greatest number of large-caliber weapons the Americans had ever faced in the Pacific. All major positions enjoyed mutually supporting fires from adjacent and interior hills and ridgelines, themselves honeycombed with caves and fighting holes. Maintaining rigid adherence to these intricate

Within a short time after they came ashore, Marines encountered native Okinawans. This group of elderly civilians is escorted to the safety of a rear area by Marine PFC John F. Cassinelli, a veteran 1st Marine Division military policeman.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 117288



networks of mutually supporting positions required iron discipline on the part of the Japanese troops. To the extent this discipline prevailed, the Americans found themselves entering killing zones of savage lethality.

In typical fighting along this front, the Japanese would contain and isolate an American penetration (Army or Marine) by grazing fire from supporting positions, then smother the exposed troops on top of the initial objective with a rain of preregistered heavy mortar shells until fresh Japanese troops could swarm out of their reverse-slope tunnels in a counterattack. Often the Japanese shot down more Americans during their extraction from some fire-swept hilltop than they did in the initial advance. These early U.S. assaults set the pattern to be encountered for the duration of the campaign in the south.

General Buckner quickly committed the 27th Infantry Division to the southern front. He also directed General Geiger to loan his corps artillery and the heretofore lightly committed 11th Marines to beef up the fire support to XXIV Corps. This temporary assignment provided four 155mm battalions, three 105mm battalions, and one residual 75mm pack howitzer battalion (1/11) to the general bombardment underway of Ushijima's outer defenses. Lieutenant Colonel Frederick P. Henderson, USMC, took command of a provisional field artillery group comprised of the Marine 155mm gun battalions and an Army 8-inch howitzer battalion—the "Henderson Group"—which provided massive fire support to all elements of the Tenth Army.

Readjusting the front lines of XXIV Corps to allow room for the 27th Division took time; so did building up adequate units of fire for field artillery battalions to support the mammoth, three-division offensive General Buckner wanted. A week of general inactivity passed along the southern front, which inadvertently allowed the Japanese to make their



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 116356

Two Marines help an aged Okinawan to safety in the rear of the lines, as a third Marine of the party carries the man's meager possessions. Only children, women, and the aged and infirm were found and protected by assaulting Marines as they pushed across the island during the first few days following the 1 April landing.

own adjustments and preparations for the coming offensive. On 18 April (L plus 17) Buckner moved the command post of the Tenth Army ashore. The offensive began the next morning, preceded by the ungodliest preliminary bombardment of the ground war, a virtual "typhoon of steel" delivered by 27 artillery batteries, 18 ships, and 650 aircraft. But the Japanese simply burrowed deeper into their underground fortifications and waited for the infernal pounding to cease and for American infantry to advance into their well-designed killing traps.

The XXIV Corps executed the assault on 19 April with great valor, made some gains, then were thrown back with heavy casualties. The Japanese also exacted a heavy toll of U.S. tanks, especially those supporting the 27th Infantry Division. In the fighting around Kakazu Ridge, the Japanese had separated the tanks from their supporting infantry by fire, then knocked off 22 of the 30 Shermans with everything from 47mm guns to hand-delivered satchel charges.

The disastrous battle of 19 April provided an essential dose of reality to the Tenth Army. The so-called "walk in the sun" had ended. Overcoming the concentric Japanese

defenses around Shuri was going to require several divisions, massive firepower, and time — perhaps a very long time. Buckner needed immediate help along the Machinato-Kakazu lines. His operations officer requested General Geiger to provide the 1st Tank Battalion to the 27th Division. Hearing this, General del Valle became furious. "They can have my division," he complained to Geiger, "but not piece-meal." Del Valle had other concerns. Marine Corps tankers and infantry trained together as teams. The 1st Marine Division had perfected tank-infantry offensive attacks in the crucible of Peleliu. Committing the tanks to the Army without their trained infantry squads could have proven disastrous.

Fortunately, Geiger and Oliver P. Smith made these points clear to General Buckner. The Tenth Army commander agreed to refrain from piece-meal commitments of the Marines. Instead, on 24 April, he requested Geiger to designate one division as Tenth Army Reserve and make one regiment in that division ready to move south in 12 hours. Geiger gave the mission to the 1st Marine Division; del Valle alerted the 1st Marines to be ready to move south.

These decisions occurred while

Buckner and his senior Marines were still debating the possibility of opening a second front with an amphibious landing on the Minatoga Beaches. But the continued bloody fighting along the Shuri front received the forefront of Buckner's attention. As his casualties grew alarmingly, Buckner decided to concentrate all his resources on a single front. On 27 April he assigned the 1st Marine Division to XXIV Corps. During the next three days the division moved south to relieve the shot-up 27th Infantry Division on the western (right) flank of the lines. The 6th Marine Division received a warning order to prepare for a similar displacement to the south. The long battle for Okinawa's southern highlands was shifting into high gear.

Meanwhile, throughout April and with unprecedented ferocity, the Japanese *kamikazes* had punished the ships of the Fifth Fleet supporting the operation. So intense had the aerial battles become that the western beaches, so beguilingly harmless on L-Day, became positively deadly each night with the steady rain of shell fragments from thousands of anti-aircraft guns in the fleet. Ashore or afloat, there were no safe havens in this protracted battle.

The Air and Sea Battles

The Japanese strategy for defending Okinawa made the most of that nation's dwindling resources and rampant fanaticism. While General Ushijima bloodied the American landing force in a protracted battle of attrition, the Japanese air arm would savage the Fifth Fleet tethered to the island in support. The battle would thus feature the unique combination of a near-passive ground defense with a violent air offensive that would employ suicide tactics on an unprecedented scale.

By the spring of 1945 the Americans knew well the Japanese propensity for individual suicide attacks, having experienced *kamikazes* in the Philippines, antishipping swimmers

The U.S. Army at Okinawa

It would be an injustice not to credit the U.S. Army for its significant participation in the Okinawa campaign. In fact, the Army deployed as many combat troops, sustained proportionate casualties, and fought with equal valor as the Marines. The Army battles for Kakazu Ridge, Conical Hill, and the Yuza Dake Escarpment are as much hallowed touchstones to that service as are Sugar Loaf and Kunishi Ridge to the Marines. The Okinawa campaign still serves as a model of joint-service cooperation, in spite of isolated cases of “sibling rivalry.”

At one point in mid-1943, the Joint Chiefs of Staff could identify only three divisions in the Pacific with “amphibious expertise”: the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions, veterans of Tulagi and Guadalcanal; and the 7th Infantry Division, fresh from the Aleutians. By the time these same units joined with four other divisions to constitute the Tenth Army for Okinawa, the number of divisions with experience in amphibious operations deployed in the Pacific had expanded sevenfold. The three principal assault units in Major General John R. Hodge’s XXIV Corps had fresh experience in “storm landings” in Leyte. That campaign was the first for the 96th Division, which acquitted itself well, and the third amphibious operation for the 7th Division, following Attu and Kwajalein. Leyte also saw the 77th Division, veterans of the battle for Guam, execute a bold landing at Ormoc which surprised the Japanese defenders. New to XXIV Corps was the 27th Division, a National Guard unit still regarded with acrimony by some Marines after the Saipan flail, but an outfit proud of its amphibious experiences in the Gilberts and Marianas. None of the Army divisions had the luxury of extended preparations for Okinawa. General Douglas MacArthur did not release the XXIV Corps, understrength and underfed after 110 days’ combat in Leyte, to the Tenth Army until seven weeks before the Okinawa landing. The 27th Division had more time but endured unsatisfactory training conditions in the jungles of Espiritu Santo.

Examples of full cooperation by Army units with Marines abound in the Okinawa campaign. Army Air Forces P-47 Thunderbolts flew long-range bombing and fighter missions for General Mulcahy’s TAF. Army and Marine Corps artillery units routinely supported opposite services during the protracted drive against the Shuri Line. The Marines gained a healthy respect for the Army’s 8-inch howitzers; often these heavy weapons provided the only means of reducing a particularly well-fortified Japanese strong-



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point. In addition, General Buckner attached the invaluable “Zippo Tanks” of the 713th Armored Flame Thrower Battalion and 4.2-inch mortar batteries to both Marine divisions. The 6th Marine Division also had the 708th Amphibian Tank Battalion attached for the duration of the battle. Each of these attached units received the Presidential Unit Citation for service with their parent Marine divisions.

On a less formal basis, the Army frequently lent logistical support to the Marines as the campaign struggled south through the endless rains. Even the fourth revision of the Marine division’s table of organization did not provide sufficient transport assets to support such a protracted campaign executed at increasing distances from the force beachhead. A shortfall in amphibious cargo ships assigned to the Marines further reduced the number of organic tracked and wheeled logistics vehicles available. Often, the generosity of the supporting Army units spelled the difference of whether the Marines would eat that day. The best example of this helping spirit occurred on 4 June when elements of the 96th Division provided rations to Lieutenant Colonel Richard P. Ross’ 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, brightening what the battalion otherwise reported as “the most miserable day spent on Okinawa.”

Okinawa, in short, was too big and too tough for a single service to undertake. The 82-day campaign against a tenacious, well-armed enemy required unusual teamwork and cooperation among all services.

in the waters near Iwo Jima, and “human bullet” antitank demolitionists at Peleliu. But IGHQ escalated these tactics to an awesome level at Okinawa by introducing the *kikusui* (Floating Chrysanthemums) massed suicide air strikes against the fleet. While small groups of *kamikazes*

struck the fleet on a nightly basis, the worst damage came from the concentrated *kikusui* raids. The Japanese launched ten separate *kikusui* attacks during the battle—some of them numbering up to 350 aircraft—and IGHQ coordinated many of these with other tactical surprises, such as

the counterattacks of 12-13 April and 3-4 May or the sacrificial sortie of the *Yamato*. The results proved costly to both sides.

Swarms of *kamikazes* bedeviled the Fifth Fleet from the time the advance force first steamed into Ryukyuan waters throughout the course



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The amphibious task force under one of the first destructive heavy kamikaze attacks off Okinawa's southwest coast on L plus 5. The kamikazes were to make many such visits to Okinawa before the operation ended, causing much damage.

of the battle. Some intermediate Navy commanders spoke dismissively of the threat—inexperienced pilots in ramshackle planes launched with barely enough fuel to reach Okinawa. Indeed, many of the 2,373 kamikazes never made it to the objective. But those Special Attack Unit pilots who survived the air and surface screens inflicted grievous damage on the Fifth Fleet. By the end of the campaign, the fleet had suffered 34 ships and craft sunk, 368 damaged, and more than 9,000 casualties—the greatest losses ever sustained by the U.S. Navy in a single battle.

The situation at sea grew so critical that on one occasion smoke from burning ships and screening escorts offshore blinded Yontan Airfield, causing three returning CAP planes to crash. As the onslaught continued, Admiral Spruance observed frankly, "The suicide plane is a very effective weapon which we must not underestimate." Spruance spoke from first-hand experience. Kamikazes knocked his first flagship, the heavy cruiser *Indianapolis*, out of the battle early in the campaign, then severely damaged his replacement flagship, the battleship *New Mexico*, a few weeks later.

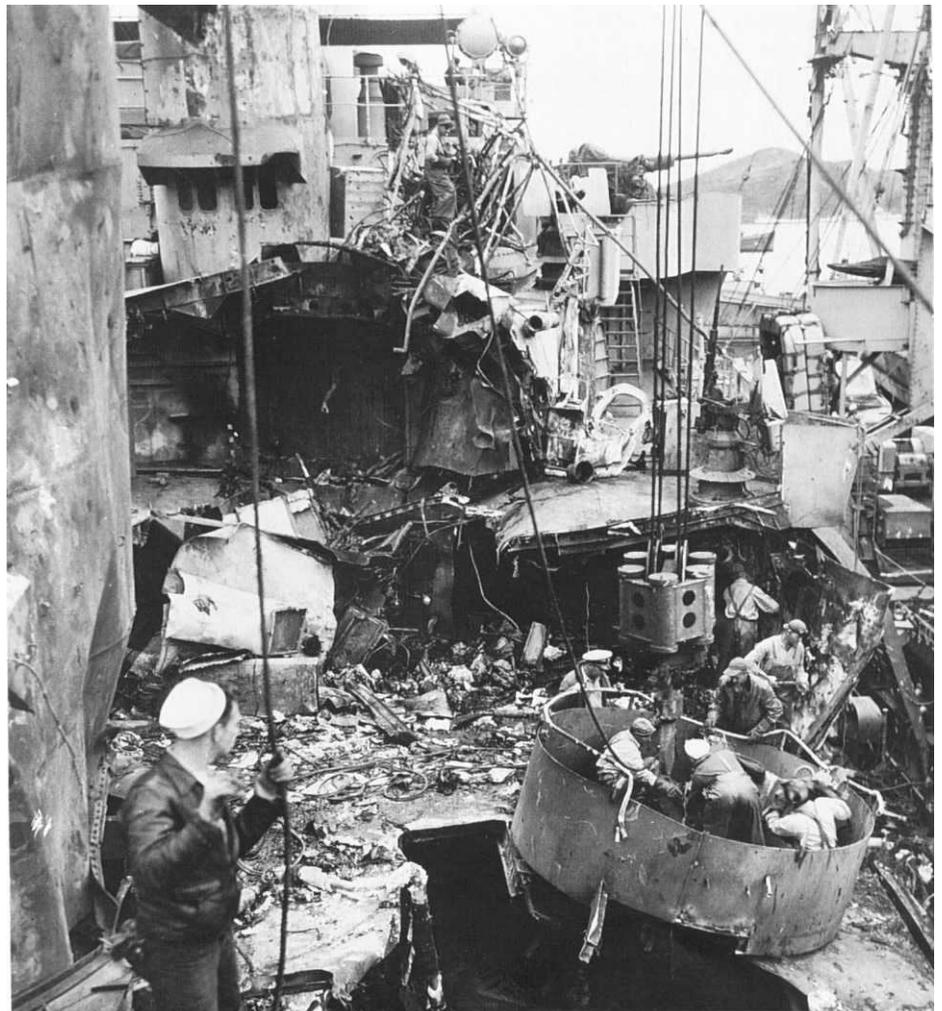
The Japanese attacking the U.S. fleet off Okinawa also introduced their newest weapon, the "Ohka" (cherry blossom) bomb (called by the Americans "Baka," a derisive Japanese term meaning "foolish"). It was a

manned, solid-fuel rocket packed with 4,400 pounds of explosives, launched at ships from the belly of a twin-engined bomber. The *Baka* bombs became in effect the first antiship guided missiles, screaming

towards the target at an unheard-of 500 knots. One such weapon blew the destroyer *Manert L. Abele* out of the water. Fortunately, most of the *Bakas* missed their targets, the missiles proving too fast for inex-

A U.S. ship badly damaged by a kamikaze hit receives a survey inspection within the protected anchorage of Kerama Retto, where the Navy repaired its damaged fleet.

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perienced pilots to control in their few seconds of glory.

The ultimate suicide attack was the final sortie of the superbattleship *Yamato*, the last of the world's great dreadnoughts, whose feared 18.1-inch guns could outrange the biggest and newest U.S. battleships. IGHQ dispatched *Yamato* on her last mission, a bizarre scheme, with no air cover and but a handful of surface escorts and only enough fuel for a one-way trip. She was to distract the American carriers to allow a simultaneous *kikusui* attack against the remainder of the fleet. Achieving this, *Yamato* would beach itself directly on Okinawa's west coast, using her big guns to shoot up the thin-skinned amphibious shipping and the landing force ashore. The plan proved absurd.

In earlier years of the war the sortie of this mammoth warship would have caused consternation among the fleet protecting an amphibious

beachhead. Not now. Patrolling U.S. submarines gave Spruance early warning of *Yamato's* departure from Japanese waters. "Shall I take them or will you?" asked Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, commanding the fast carriers of Task Force 58. Spruance knew his battleship force yearned for a surface battle to avenge their losses at Pearl Harbor, but this was no time for sentiment. "You take them," he signaled. With that, Mitscher's Hellcats and Avengers roared aloft, intercepted *Yamato* a hundred miles from the beachhead, and sank her in short order with bombs and torpedoes. The cost: eight U.S. planes, 12 men.

Another bizarre Japanese suicide mission proved more effective. On the night of 24-25 May, a half-dozen transport planes loaded with *Giretsu*, Japanese commandos, approached the U.S. airbase at Yontan. Alert anti-aircraft gunners flamed five. The surviving plane made a

wheels-up belly landing on the airstrip, discharging troops as she slid in sparks and flames along the surface. The commandos blew up eight U.S. planes, damaged twice as many more, set fire to 70,000 gallons of aviation gasoline, and generally created havoc throughout the night. Jittery aviation and security troops fired at shadows, injuring their own men more than the Japanese. It took 12 hours to hunt down and kill the last raider.

Admiral Spruance at sea and General Mulcahy ashore exerted Herculean efforts to reduce the effectiveness of these suicide strikes. The fast carriers struck Japanese airfields in Kyushu and Formosa time and again, but these numbered more than 100, and as usual the Japanese proved adept at camouflage. Small landing parties of soldiers and Marines seized outlying islands (see sidebar) to establish early warning and fighter direction outposts. And fighter

Japanese night raiders are met on 16 April with a spectacular network of anti-aircraft fire by Marine defenders based at Yon-

tan airfield. In the foreground, silhouetted against the interlaced pattern of tracer bullets, are Corsairs of VMF-311.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 118775



Marine Air at Okinawa

“Okinawa was the culmination of the development of air support doctrine in the Pacific,” declared Colonel Vernon E. Megee, commander of Landing Force Air Support Units during the campaign. “The procedures we used there were the result of lessons learned in all preceding campaigns, including the Philippines.” Indeed, Marine aviation at Okinawa operated across the spectrum of missions, from supply drops to bombing an enemy battleship.

Altogether, some 700 Marine planes of one type or another took part in the Okinawa campaign. About 450 of these engaged in combat for more than half the battle. Most Marine air units served under the aegis of the Tenth Army’s Tactical Air Force (TAF), commanded by Major General Francis P. Mulcahy, USMC (relieved on 8 June by Major General Louis E. Woods, USMC). Outside of TAF were the Marine fighter squadrons assigned to the fleet carriers or escort carriers, plus long-range transports.

Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commanding all Allied forces for Operation Iceberg, deemed the Japanese air arm to be the biggest threat to the success of the invasion. The Tenth Army’s first objective, therefore, became that of seizing Yontan and Kadena airfields to accommodate land-based fighter squadrons. The invaders achieved this on L-Day. The following day General Mulcahy moved ashore and commenced TAF operations. Mulcahy’s top priority remained that of maintaining air superiority over the objective and the Fifth Fleet. In view of the unprecedented *kamikaze* attacks unleashed by the Japanese against the task force, this mission remained Mulcahy’s preoccupation for many weeks.

Both Marine and Army aviation units would comprise Mulcahy’s TAF. The force would grow to include a total of 15 Marine fighter squadrons, 10 Army fighter squadrons, two Marine torpedo bomber squadrons, and 16 Army bomber squadrons. In the execution of the air superiority missions, the Marine fighter squadrons flew Chance Vought F4U Corsairs, and the Marine night fighter squadrons flew radar-equipped Grumman F6F Hellcats. Army fighter pilots flew the Republic P-47 Thunderbolts; their night fighter squadron was equipped with the Northrop P-61 Black Widows.

The American pilots fought their air-to-air duels not just against one-way *kamikazes*; they also faced plenty of late-model Jacks and Franks. Altogether, TAF pilots shot down 625 Japanese planes. Colonel Ward E. Dickey’s Marine Aircraft Group 33 set the record with 214 kills; more than half claimed by the “Death Rattlers” of Major George F. Axtell’s Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMF) 323.

The necessity for TAF to protect the fleet caused some ground commanders to worry that their own close air support would be “short-sheeted.” But Navy (and some Marine) squadrons from the escort carriers picked up the slack, flying more than 60 percent of the close air missions. Between 1 April and 21 June, the combination of TAF and

carrier pilots flew 14,244 air support sorties. Nearly 5,000 of these supported the Marines of IIIAC. In the process, the supporting aviators dropped 152,000 gallons of napalm on enemy positions.

Air Liaison Parties accompanied the front-line divisions and served to request close air support and direct (but not *control*—the front was too narrow) aircraft to the target. Coordination of lower-echelon air requests became the province of three Marine Landing Force Air Support Control Units, one representing Tenth Army to the fleet commander, the others each responsive to the Army XXIV Corps and IIIAC. This technique further refined the experiments Colonel Megee had begun at Iwo Jima. In most cases, close air support to the infantry proved exceptionally effective. Some units reported prompt, safe delivery of ordnance on target within 100 yards. In other instances there were delays, accidents (although less than a dozen), or situations where the lines were simply too intermingled for any air support—as during the 6th Marine Division’s struggle for Oroku Peninsula.

Other Marine aviation units contributed significantly to the victory in Okinawa. Marine Torpedo Bomber Squadron (VMTB) pilots flew their Grumman Avenger (TBF) “torpeckers” in “zero-zero” weather to drop 400,000 pounds of rations, medical supplies, and ammunition to forward ground units—greatly assisted by the skillful prepackaging of the IIIAC Air Delivery Section. And the fragile little Grasshoppers of the four Marine Observation Squadron (VMO) squadrons flew 3,486 missions of artillery spotting, photo reconnaissance, and medical evacuation. One senior artillery officer described the VMO pilots as “the unsung heroes of Marine aviation . . . often they would fly past cave openings at the same level so they could look in and see if there was a gun there.” Colonel Yahara complained that his artillery units knew from bitter experience that the presence of an American Grasshopper overhead presaged quick retribution for any Japanese gun that fired.

Marine aviators at Okinawa served with a special *elan*. During one desperate dogfight, a Marine pilot radioed, “Come on up and help me, I’ve got a Frank and two Zekes cornered!” Those were his last words, but his fighting spirit persisted. Said one grateful destroyer skipper who had been rescued from swarms of *kamikazes* by Marine Corsairs, “I am willing to take my ship to the shores of Japan if I could have these Marines with me.”

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 126420

