



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 121884 Marine Avengers of Marine Torpedo-Bomber Squadron 232 are seen through the hatch of a transport, which served as a navigation plane for the overwater flight from Ulithi to Kadena. The flight echelon landed on 22 April and began close-support missions the next day.

planes from all three services took to the air to intercept the intermittent waves of enemy planes.

Not all of the Japanese air strikes were kamikazes. An equal number of fighters and bombers accompanied each raid to guide the suiciders to their targets and attack American targets by conventional means. Some of these included late-model fighters like the Nakajima "Frank." Deadly air-to-air duels took place over hundreds of miles of ocean expanse.

The far-ranging fast carriers usual-

ly made the first interceptions. While most pilots were Navy, the task force included two Marine fighter squadrons each on the carriers *Bunker Hill* and *Bennington*. One Marine aviator from *Bennington*, Lieutenant Kenneth E. Huntington, flew the only USMC Corsair in the attack on *Yamato*. Huntington swept in through heavy AA fire to deliver his bomb squarely on the battleship's forward turret. As described by combat correspondent Robert Sherrod, "One Marine, one bomb, one Navy Cross."

Marine fighters of MAGs-31 and -33, flying from Yontan under General Mulcahy's TAF, provided most of the CAP missions over the fleet during the first several weeks of the battle. The CAP requirement soared from 12 planes initially to as many as 32 on station, with an additional dozen on strip alert. The missions involved long hours of patrolling, typically in rough weather spiked by sudden violent encounters with Japanese raiders. The CAP planes ran a double risk. Dueling a Japanese fighter often took both planes within range of nervous shipboard AA gun-

ners who sometimes downed both antagonists unwittingly.

On 16 April, VMF-441 raced to the rescue of the picket ship *Laffey*, already hit by five suiciders. The Corsairs shot down 17 attackers in short order, losing only one plane which had chased a kamikaze so low they both clipped the ship's superstructure and crashed.

On 22 April, the "Death Rattlers" of VMF-323 intercepted a large flight of raiders approaching the fleet at dusk. Three Marines shot down 16 of these in 20 minutes. The squadron commander, Major George C. Axtell, knocked down five, becoming an instant ace. As Axtell described these sudden dogfights:

You'd be flying in and out of heavy rain and clouds. Enemy and friendly aircraft would wind up in a big melee. You just kept turning into any enemy aircraft that appeared . . . It was fast and furious and the engagement would be over within thirty minutes.

But in spite of the heroic efforts of all these aviators and their ground

A "Grasshopper" from a Marine observation squadron flies over Naha, permitting an aerial photographer to take oblique

photos which will be used by Marine artillery units to spot targets and determine the damage already done by the Allies.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 128032





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 119294

During a visit to Marines in late April, the Commandant, Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift, second from left, called on MajGen Francis P. Mulcahy, center, commander of the Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army, and three of his pilots: Maj George C. Axtell, Jr., left; Maj Jefferson D. Dorroh, second from right; and Lt Jeremiah J. O'Keefe. Maj Axtell commanded VMF-323, the "Death Rattlers."

crews, the *kamikazes* swarmed in such numbers that a few always got through. Soon, the protected anchorage at Kerama Retto began to resemble a floating graveyard of heavily damaged ships. Small groups of suiciders appeared every night, and the fleet seemed particularly vulnerable during the full moon. One naval officer described the night-time raiders as "witches on broomsticks." More often than not, the victims of these nocturnal attacks were the "small boys," the picket ships and diminutive amphibs. Nineteen-year-old Signalman 3/C Nick Floros manned a 20mm gun mount on tiny *LSM-120* one midnight when a *kamikaze* appeared "out of nowhere, gliding in low with its engine cut off—like a giant bat." The plane struck the adjacent *LSM* with a terrific explosion before anyone could fire a shot. The small landing ship, loaded with landing force supplies, somehow survived the fiery blast but was immediately consigned to the "demolition yard" at Kerama Retto.

*Imperial General Headquarters*, accepting the inflated claims of the few observers accompanying the *kikusui* attacks, believed their suicidal air

offensive had fatally crippled the U.S. Fleet. This was wishful thinking. The Fifth Fleet may have been stressed and battered by the *kamikazes*, but it was simply too huge a force to be deterred. The fleet withstood the worst of these seemingly endless air attacks without for a moment forsaking its primary mission of supporting the amphibious assault on Okinawa. Naval gunfire support, for example, had never been so thoroughly effective, beginning with the 3,800 tons of munitions delivered on L-Day. Throughout much of the campaign, each front-line regiment received direct support from one "call fire" ship and one "illumination ship." Typical of the appreciation most members of the landing force expressed for the quality of naval gunfire support was this message from General Shepherd to the Commander, Northern Attack Force during the 6th Marine Division's assault on Mount Yae Take: "The effectiveness of your gunfire support was measured by the large number of Japanese encountered. Dead ones."

Similarly, even during the the most intense of the *kikusui* attacks of 1-16 April, the fleet unloaded an astonish-

ing 557,000 tons of supplies over the Hagushi Beaches to support the Tenth Army, executed the division-level assault on Ie Shima, and cleared mines and obstacles under fire to open the port of Nago. The only direct effect the mass *kamikaze* raids ever had on the conduct of Tenth Army operations ashore was the sinking on 6 April of the ammunition ships *Logan Victory* and *Hobbs Victory*. The subsequent shortage of 105mm and 155mm artillery ammunition delayed General Buckner's first great offensive against the outer Shuri defenses by about three days. In all respects, the Fifth Fleet deserved its media sobriquet as "The Fleet That Came to Stay."

But as April dragged into May, and the Tenth Army seemed bogged down in unimaginative frontal attacks along the Shuri line, Admirals Spruance and Turner began to press General Buckner to accelerate his tactics in order to decrease the vulnerability of the fleet. Admiral Nimitz, quite concerned, flew to Okinawa to counsel Buckner. "I'm losing a ship and a half each day out here," Nimitz said, "You've got to get this thing moving."

The senior Marines urged Buckner to "play the amphib card," to execute a major landing on the southeast coast, preferably along the alternate beaches at Minatoga, in order to turn the Japanese right flank. They were joined in this recommendation by several Army generals who already perceived what a meatgrinder the frontal assaults along the Shuri line would become. The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alexander A. Vandegrift, visited the island and seconded these suggestions to Buckner. After all, Buckner still had control of the 2d Marine Division, a veteran amphibious outfit which had demonstrated effectively against the Minatoga Beaches on L-Day. Buckner had subsequently returned the embarked division to Saipan to reduce its vulnerability to additional *kamikaze* attacks, but the



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 120053

All Marines sight-in on the mouth of a cave into which an explosive charge had been thrown, and wait to see if any enemy soldiers will try to escape. This is one of the many bitterly contested cave positions found in numerous ridges and hills.

unit still had its assigned ships at hand, still combat loaded. The 2d Marine Division could have opened a second front in Okinawa within a few days.

General Buckner was a popular, competent commander, but he had limited experience with amphibious warfare and possessed a conservative nature. His staff warned of logistics problems involved in a second front. His intelligence advisors predicted stiff enemy resistance around the Minatoga beachhead. Buckner had also heard enough of the costly Anzio operation in Italy to be leery of any landing executed too far from the main effort. He honestly believed the Japanese manning the Shuri defenses would soon crack under the synchronized application of all his massed firepower and infantry. Buckner therefore rejected the amphibious option out of hand. Surprisingly, Nimitz and his Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Forrest Sherman,

agreed. Not so Admirals Spruance and Turner or the Marines. As Spruance later admitted in a private letter, "There are times when I get impatient for some of Holland Smith's drive." General Shepherd noted, "General Buckner did not cotton to amphibious operations." Even Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, Operations Officer of the *Thirty-second Army*, admitted under interrogation that he had been baffled by the American's adherence to a purely frontal assault from north to south. "The absence of a landing [in the south] puzzled the *Thirty-second Army* staff," he said, "particularly after the beginning of May when it became impossible to put up more than a token resistance in the south."

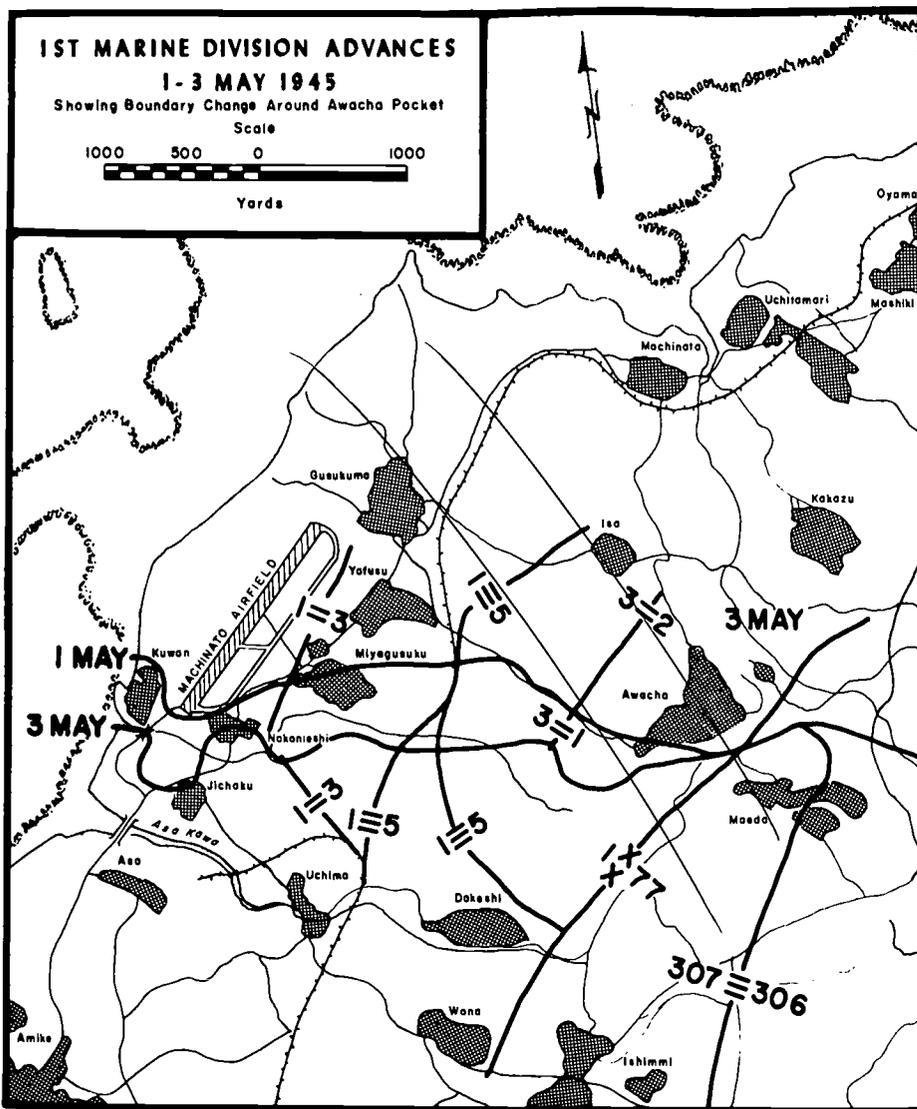
By then the 2d Marine Division was beginning to feel like a yo-yo in preparing for its variously assigned missions for Operation Iceberg. Lieutenant Colonel Taxis, Division G-3, remained unforgiving of Buckner's

decision. "I will always feel," he stated after the war, "that the Tenth Army should have been prepared the instant they found they were bogged down, they should have thrown a left hook down there in the southern beaches . . . . They had a hell of a powerful reinforced division, trained to a gnat's whisker."

Buckner stood by his decision. There would be no "left hook." Instead, both the 1st and the 6th Marine Divisions would join the Shuri offensive as infantry divisions under the Tenth Army. The 2d Marine Division, less one reinforced regimental landing team (the 8th Marines), would languish back in Saipan. Then came Okinawa's incessant spring rains.

### *Assault on Shuri*

The Tenth Army's Action Report for the battle of Okinawa paid this understated compliment to the *Thirty-second Army's* defensive ef-



the island is barely 9,000 yards. General Buckner initially pushed south with two Army divisions abreast. By 8 May he had doubled this commitment: two Army divisions of the XXIV Corps on the east, two Marine divisions of IIIAC on the west. Yet each division would fight its own desperate, costly battles against disciplined Japanese soldiers defending elaborately fortified terrain features. There was no easy route south.

By eschewing the amphibious flanking attack in late April, General Buckner had fresh divisions to employ in the general offensive towards Shuri. Thus, the 77th Division relieved the 96th in the center, and the 1st Marine Division began relieving the 27th Division on the west. Colonel Kenneth B. Chappell's 1st Marines entered the lines on the last day of April and drew heavy fire from the moment they approached. By the time the 5th Marines arrived to complete the relief of 27th Division elements on 1 May, Japanese gunners supporting the veteran *62d Infantry Division* were pounding anything that moved. "It's hell in there, Marine," a dispirited soldier remarked to Private First Class Sledge as 3/5 entered the lines. "I know," replied Sledge with false bravado, "I fought at Peleliu." But soon Sledge was running for his life:

As we raced across an open field, Japanese shells of all types whizzed, screamed, and roared around us with increasing frequency. The crash and thunder of explosions was a nightmare . . . . It was an appalling chaos. I was terribly afraid.

General del Valle assumed command of the western zone at 1400 on 1 May and issued orders for a major attack the next morning. That evening a staff officer brought the general a captured Japanese map, fully annotated with American positions. With growing uneasiness, del Valle realized his opponents already knew

forts: "The continued development and improvement of cave warfare was the most outstanding feature of the enemy's tactics on Okinawa." In their decision to defend the Shuri highlands across the southern neck of the island, General Ushijima and his staff had selected the terrain that would best dominate two of the island's strategic features: the port of Naha to the west, and the sheltered anchorage of Nakagusuku Bay (later Buckner Bay) to the east. As a consequence, the Americans would have to force their way into Ushijima's preregistered killing zones to achieve their primary objectives.

Everything about the terrain favored the defenders. The convoluted topography of ridges, draws, and escarpments served to compartment the battlefield into scores of small firefights, while the general absence

of dense vegetation permitted the defenders full observation and interlocking supporting fires from intermediate strongpoints. As at Iwo Jima, the Japanese Army fought largely from underground positions to offset American dominance in supporting arms. And even in the more accessible terrain, the Japanese took advantage of the thousands of concrete, lyre-shaped Okinawan tombs to provide combat outposts. There were blind spots in the defenses, to be sure, but finding and exploiting them took the Americans an inordinate amount of time and cost them dearly.

The bitterest fighting of the campaign took place within an extremely compressed battlefield. The linear distance from Yonabaru on the east coast to the bridge over the Asa River above Naha on the opposite side of



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 125697

*An Okinawan civilian is flushed from a cave into which a smoke grenade had been thrown. Many Okinawans sought the refuge of caves in which they could hide while the tide of battle passed over them. Unfortunately, a large number of caves were sealed when Marines suspected that they were harboring the enemy.*

the 1st Marine Division had entered the fight.

The division attacked south the next day into broken country thereafter known as the Awacha Pocket. For all their combat prowess, however, the Marines proved to be no more immune to the unrelenting storm of shells and bullets than the soldiers they had relieved. The disappointing day also included several harbingers of future conditions. First, it rained hard all day. Second, as soon as the 5th Marines seized the nearest high ground they came under such intense fire from adjacent strongpoints and from higher ground within the 77th Division's zone to the immediate southeast they had to withdraw. Third, the Marines spent much of the night engaged in violent hand-to-hand fighting with scores of Japanese infiltrators. "This," said one survivor, "is going to be a bitch."

The Peleliu veterans in the ranks of the 1st Marine Division were no strangers to cave warfare. Clearly, no other division in the campaign could claim such a wealth of practical ex-

perience. And while nothing on Okinawa could match the Umurbrogol's steep cliffs, heavy vegetation, and endless array of fortified ridges, the "Old Breed" in this battle faced a smarter, more numerous foe who had more artfully prepared each wrinkle in the moonscape. In overcoming the sequential barriers of Awacha, Dakeshi, and Wana, the 1st Marine Division faced four straight weeks of hell. The funneling effects

of the cliffs and draws reduced most attacks to brutal frontal assaults by fully-exposed tank-infantry-engineer teams. General del Valle characterized this small unit fighting as "a slugging match with but temporary and limited opportunity to maneuver."

General Buckner captured the fancy of the media with his metaphor about the "blowtorch and corkscrew" tactics needed for effective cave warfare, but this was simply stating the obvious to the Army veterans of Biak and the Marine veterans of Peleliu and Iwo Jima. Flamethrowers were represented by the blowtorch, demolitions, by the corkscrew – but both weapons had to be delivered from close range by tanks and the exposed riflemen covering them.

On 3 May the rains slowed and the 5th Marines resumed its assault, this time taking and holding the first tier of key terrain in the Awacha Pocket. But the systematic reduction of this strongpoint would take another full week of extremely heavy fighting. Fire support proved excellent. Now it was the Army's time to return the favor of interservice artillery support. In this case, the 27th Division's field artillery regiment stayed on the lines, and with its forward observers and linemen intimately familiar with the terrain in that sector, rendered yeoman service.

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*A "Ronson" tank, mounting a flame thrower, lays down a stream of fire against a position located in one of the many Okinawan tombs set in the island's hillsides.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 122153



# Marine Artillery at Okinawa

The nature of the enemy defenses and the tactics selected by the Tenth Army commander made Okinawa the biggest battle of the war for Marine artillery units. General Geiger landed with 14 firing battalions within IIIAC; the total rose to 15 in June when Lieutenant Colonel Richard G. Weede's 2/10 came ashore in support of the 8th Marines.

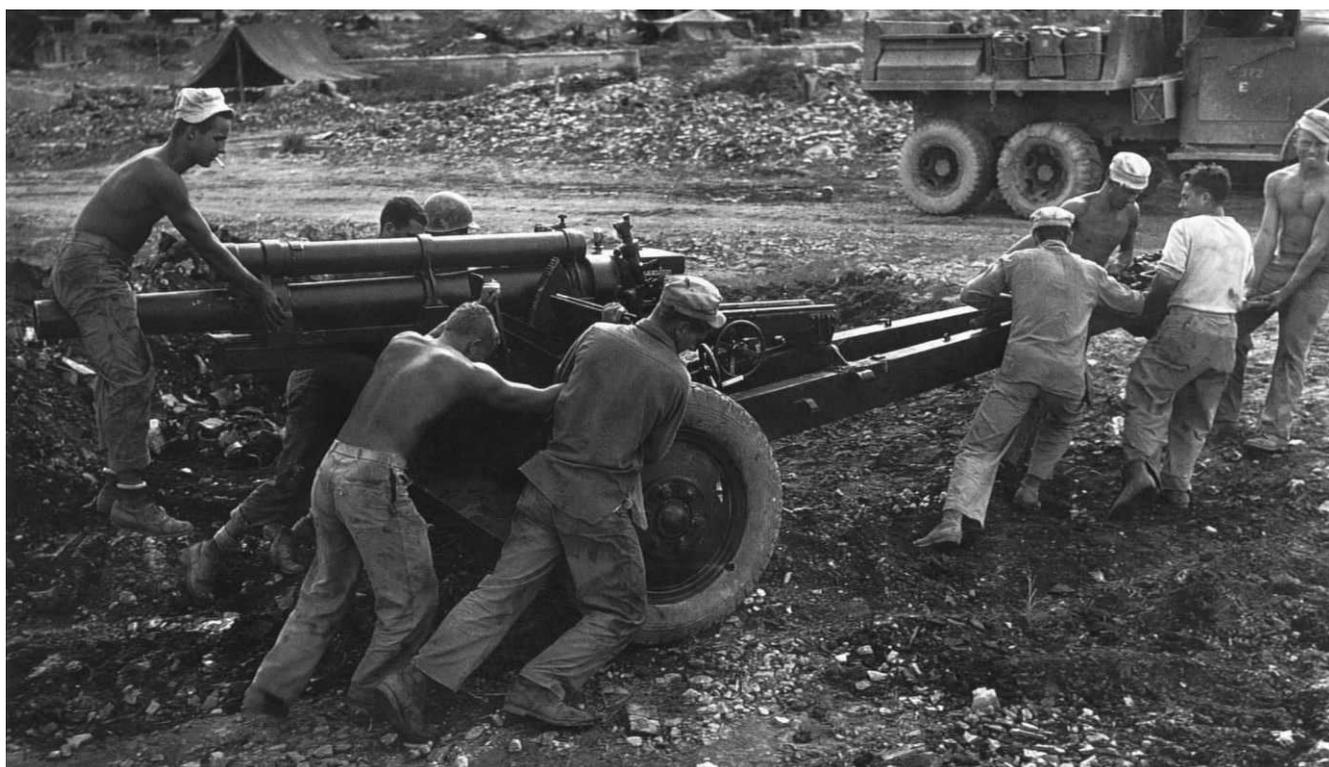
Brigadier General David R. Nimmer commanded III Corps Artillery, and Lieutenant Colonel Curtis Burton, Jr., commanded the 2d Provisional Field Artillery Group, which contained three batteries of 155mm howitzers and three of 155mm "Long Tom" guns. Colonel Wilburt S. ("Big Foot") Brown commanded the 11th Marines and Colonel Robert B. Luckey, the 15th Marines. The Marine divisions had greatly enhanced their firepower since the initial campaigns in the Pacific. While one 75mm pack howitzer battalion remained (1/11), the 105mm howitzer had become the norm for division artillery. Front-line infantry units also were supported by the 75mm fire of medium tanks and LVT-As, 105mm fire from the new M-7 self-propelled "siege guns," 4.5-inch multiple rocket launchers fired by the "Buck Rogers Men," and the attached Army 4.2-inch mortar platoons.

Lieutenant Colonel Frederick P. Henderson described this combination of fire support: "Not many people realize that the artillery in Tenth Army, plus the LVT-As and naval gunfire equivalent gave us a guns/mile of front ratio on Okinawa that was probably higher than any U.S. effort in World War II."

General Buckner urged his corps commanders to integrate field artillery support early in the campaign. With his corps artillery and the 11th Marines not fully committed during the opening weeks, General Geiger quickly agreed for these units to help the XXIV Army Corps in their initial assaults against the outer Shuri defenses. In the period of 7 April-6 May, these artillery units fired more than 54,000 rounds in support of XXIV Corps. This was only the beginning. Once both Marine divisions of IIIAC entered the lines, they immediately benefited from Army artillery support as well as their own organic fire support. As one example, prior to the 5th Marines launching a morning attack on the Awacha Pocket on 6 May, the regiment received a preliminary bombardment of the objective from four battalions – two Army, two Marine.

By the end of the battle, the Tenth Army artillery units would fire 2,046,930 rounds down range, all in addition to 707,500 rockets, mortars, and shells of five-inch or larger from naval gunfire ships offshore. Half of the artillery rounds would be 105mm shells from howitzers and the M-7 self-propelled guns. Compared to the bigger guns, the old, expeditionary 75mm pack howitzers of 1/11 were the "Tiny Tims" of the battlefield. Their versatility and relative mobility, however, proved to be assets in the long haul. Colonel Brown augmented the battalion with LVT-As, which fired similar ammunition. According to Brown, "75mm ammo was plentiful, as contrasted with the heavier calibers, so 1/11 (Reinforced) was used to fire interdiction, harassing, and 'appeasement' missions across the front."

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 12446



Generals Geiger and del Valle expressed interest in the larger weapons of the Army. Geiger particularly admired the Army's eight-inch howitzer, whose 200-pound shell possessed much more penetrating and destroying power than the 95-pound shell of the 155mm guns, the largest weapon in the Marines' inventory. Geiger recommended that the Marine Corps form eight-inch howitzer battalions for the forthcoming attack on of Japan. For his part, del Valle prized the accuracy, range, and power of the Army's 4.2-inch mortars and recommended their inclusion in the Marine division.

On some occasions, artillery commanders became tempted to orchestrate all of this killing power in one mighty concentration. "Time on target" (TOT) missions occurred frequently in the early weeks, but their high consumption rate proved disadvantageous. Late in the campaign Colonel Brown decided to originate a gargantuan TOT by 22 battalions on Japanese positions in the southern Okinawan town of Makabe. The sudden concentration worked beautifully, he recalled, but "I neglected to tell the generals, woke everyone out of a sound sleep, and caught hell from all sides."

General Geiger insisted that his LVT-As be trained in advance as field artillery. This was done, but the opportunity for direct fire support to the assault waves fizzled on L-Day when the Japanese chose not to defend the Hagushi

beaches. Lieutenant Colonel Louis Metzger commanded the 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion and supported the 6th Marine Division up and down the length of the island. Metzger's LVT-As fired 19,000 rounds of 75mm shells in an artillery support role after L-Day.

The Marines made great strides towards refining supporting arms coordination during the battle for Okinawa. Commanders established Target Information Centers (TICs) at every level from Tenth Army down to battalion. The TICs functioned to provide a centralized target information and weapons assignment system responsive to both assigned targets and targets of opportunity. Finally, all three component liaison officers—artillery, air, and naval gunfire—were aligned with target intelligence information officers. As described by Colonel Henderson, the TIC at IIIAC consisted of the corps artillery S-2 section "expanded to meet the needs of artillery, NGF, and CAS on a 24-hour basis . . . . The Corps Arty Fire Direction Center and the Corps Fire Support Operations Center were one and the same facility—with NGF and air added."

Such a commitment to innovation led to greatly improved support to the foot-slogging infantry. As one rifle battalion commander remarked, "It was not uncommon for a battleship, tanks, artillery, and aircraft to be supporting the efforts of a platoon of infantry during the reduction of the Shuri position."

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At this point an odd thing happened, an almost predictable chink in the Japanese defensive discipline. The genial General Ushijima permitted full discourse from his staff regarding tactical courses of action. Typically, these debates occurred between the impetuous chief of staff, Lieutenant General Isamu Cho, and the conservative operations officer, Colonel Hiromichi Yahara. To this point, Yahara's strategy of a protracted holding action had prevailed. The Thirty-second Army had resisted the enormous American invasion successfully for more than a month. The army, still intact, could continue to inflict high casualties on the enemy for months to come, fulfilling its mission of bleeding the ground forces while the "Divine Wind" wreaked havoc on the fleet. But maintaining a sustained defense was anathema to a warrior like Cho, and he argued stridently for a massive counterattack. Against Yahara's protests, Ushijima sided with his chief of staff.

The great Japanese counterattack

of 4-5 May proved ill-advised and exorbitant. To man the assault forces, Ushijima had to forfeit his coverage of the Minatoga sector and bring those troops forward into unfamiliar territory. To provide the massing of fires necessary to cover the assault he had to bring most of his artillery pieces and mortars out into the open. And his concept of using the 26th Shipping Engineer Regiment and other special assault forces in a frontal attack, and, at the same time, a

waterborne, double envelopment would alert the Americans to the general counteroffensive. Yahara cringed in despair.

The events of 4-5 May proved the extent of Cho's folly. Navy "Flycatcher" patrols on both coasts interdicted the first flanking attacks conducted by Japanese raiders in slow-moving barges and native canoes. Near Kusan, on the west coast, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, and the LVT-As of the 3d Armored Am-

*Marines of the 1st Division move carefully toward the crest of a hill on their way to Dakeshi. The forwardmost Marines stay low, off of the skyline.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 120412





Marine Corps Historical Center

*In the end, victory was achieved at Okinawa by well-trained assault troops on the ground, like this Marine flamethrower operator and his watchful rifleman.*

phibian Battalion greeted the invaders trying to come ashore with a deadly fire, killing 700. Further along the coast, 2/1 intercepted and killed 75 more, while the 1st Reconnaissance Company and the war dog platoon tracked down the last 65 hiding in the brush. Meanwhile the XXIV Corps received the brunt of the overland thrust and contained it effectively, scattering the attackers into small

groups, hunting them down ruthlessly. The 1st Marine Division, instead of being surrounded and annihilated in accordance with the Japanese plan, launched its own attack instead, advancing several hundred yards. The *Thirty-second Army* lost more than 6,000 first-line troops and 59 pieces of artillery in the futile counterattack. Ushijima, in tears, promised Yahara he would never

again disregard his advice. Yahara, the only senior officer to survive the battle, described the disaster as "the decisive action of the campaign."

At this point General Buckner decided to make it a four-division front and ordered General Geiger to redeploy the 6th Marine Division south from the Motobu Peninsula. General Shepherd quickly asked Geiger to assign his division to the seaward flank to continue the benefit of direct naval gunfire support. "My G-3, Brute Krulak, was a naval gunfire expert," Shepherd said, noting the division's favorable experience with fleet support throughout the northern campaign. Unspoken was an additional benefit: Shepherd would have only one adjacent unit with which to coordinate fire and maneuver, and a good one at that, the veteran 1st Marine Division.

On the morning of 7 May General Geiger regained control of the 1st Marine Division and his Corps Artillery from XXIV Corps and established his forward CP. The next day the 22d Marines relieved the 7th Marines in the lines north of the Asa River. The 1st Marine Division, which had suffered more than 1,400 casualties in its first six days on the lines while trying to cover a very

*Men of the 7th Marines wait until the exploding white phosphorous shells throw up a thick-enough smoke screen to ena-*

*ble them to advance in their drive towards Shuri. The smoke often concealed the relentlessly attacking troops.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 120182





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 119485

*Heading south toward Shuri Castle, a 1st Marine Division patrol passes through a small village which had been unsuccessfully defended by Japanese troops.*

wide front, adjusted its boundaries gratefully to make room for the newcomers.

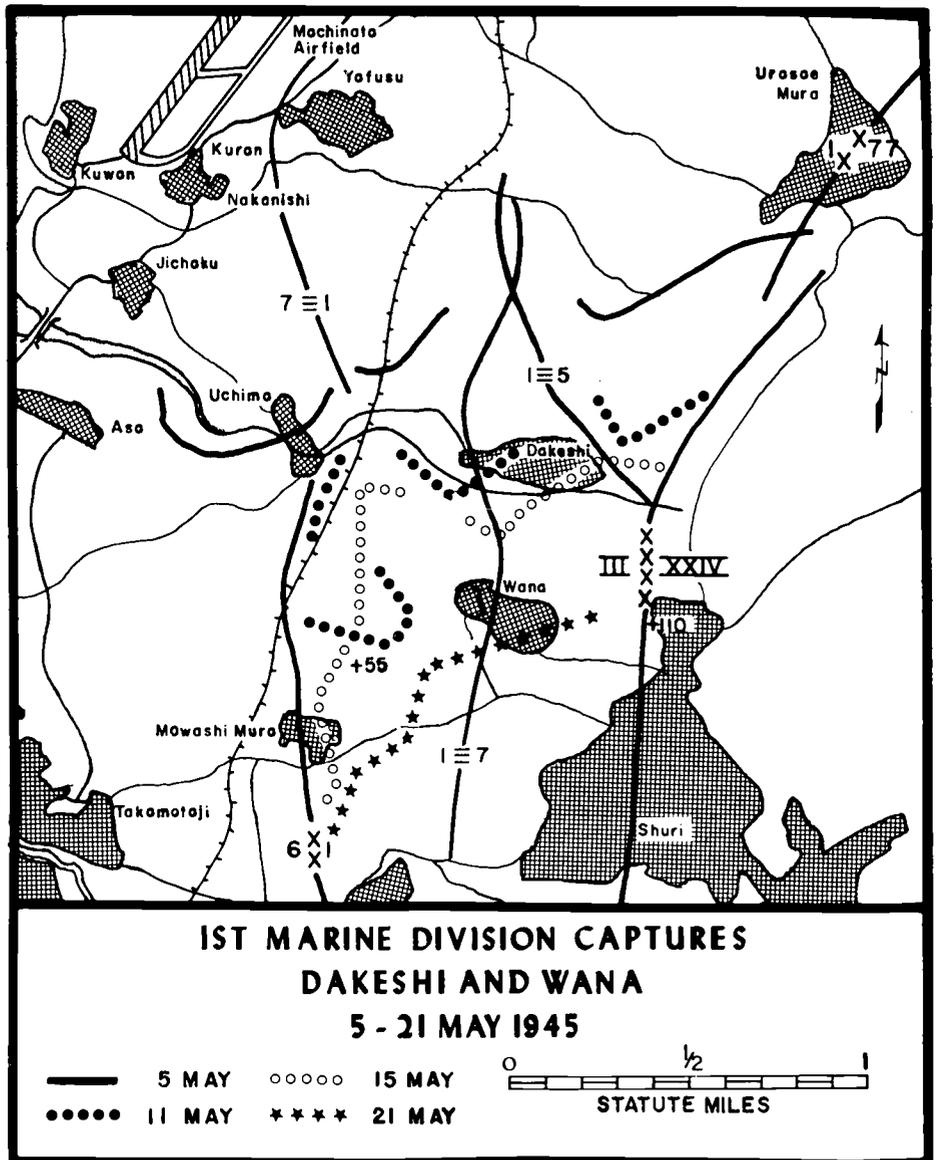
Yet the going got no easier, even with two full Marine divisions now shoulder-to-shoulder in the west. Heavy rains and fierce fire greeted the 6th Marine Division as its regiments entered the Shuri lines. The situation remained as grim and deadly all along the front. On 9 May, 1/1 made a spirited attack on Hill 60 but lost its commander, Lieutenant Colonel James C. Murray, Jr., to a sniper. Nearby that night, 1/5 engaged in desperate hand-to-hand fighting with a force of 60 Japanese soldiers who appeared like phantoms out of the rocks.

The heavy rains caused problems for the 22d Marines in its efforts to cross the Asa River. The 6th Engineers fabricated a narrow foot-bridge under intermittent fire one night. Hundreds of infantry raced across before two Japanese soldiers wearing satchel charges strapped to their chests dashed into the stream and blew themselves and the bridge to kingdom come. The engineers then spent the next night building a more substantial Bailey Bridge. Across it poured reinforcements and vehicles, but the tanks played hell traversing

the soft mud along both banks—each attempt was an adventure. Yet the 22d Marines were now south of the river in force, an encouraging bit of progress on an otherwise stalemated front.

The 5th Marines finally fought clear of the devilish Awacha Pocket on the 10th, ending a week of frustration and point-blank casualties. Now it became the turn of the 7th Marines to engage its own nightmare terrain. Due south of their position lay Dakeshi Ridge. Coincidentally, General Buckner prodded his commanders on the 11th, announcing a renewed general offensive along the entire front. This proclamation may well have been in response to the growing criticism Buckner had been

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# Marine Tanks at Okinawa

The Sherman M-4 medium tank employed by the seven Army and Marine Corps tank battalions on Okinawa would prove to be a decisive weapon – but only when closely coordinated with accompanying infantry. The Japanese intended to separate the two components by fire and audacity. “The enemy’s strength lies in his tanks,” declared Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima before the invasion. Anti-tank training received the highest priority within his *Thirty-second Army*. These urgent preparations proved successful on 19 April when the Japanese knocked out 22 of 30 Sherman tanks of the 27th Division, many by suicide demolitionists.

The Marines fared better in this regard, having learned in earlier campaigns to integrate infantry and artillery as a close, protective overwatch to their accompanying tanks, keeping the “human bullet” suicide squads at bay. Although enemy guns and mines took their toll of the Shermans, only a single Marine tank sustained damage from a Japanese suicide foray.

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur J. Stuart commanded the 1st Tank Battalion during the Okinawa campaign. The unit had fought with distinction at Peleliu a half-year earlier, despite shipping shortfalls which kept a third of its tanks out of the fight. Stuart insisted on retaining the battalion’s older M-4A2 Shermans because he believed the twin General Motors diesel engines were safer in combat. General del Valle agreed: “The tanks were not so easily set on fire and blown up under enemy fire.”

By contrast, Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Denig’s 6th Tank Battalion preferred the newer M-4A3 model Shermans. Denig’s tankers liked the greater horsepower provided by the water-cooled Ford V-8 engine and considered the reversion to gasoline from diesel an acceptable risk. The 6th Tank Battalion would face its greatest challenge against Admiral Minoru Ota’s mines and naval guns on Oroku Peninsula.

The Sherman tank, much maligned in the European theater for its shortcomings against the heavier German Tigers, seemed ideal for island fighting in the Pacific. By Okinawa, however, the Sherman’s limitations became evident. The 75mm gun proved too light against some of Ushijima’s fortifications; on these occasions the new M-7 self-propelled 105mm gun worked better. And the Sherman was never known for its armor protection. At 33 tons, its strength lay more in mobility and reliability. But as Japanese anti-tank weapons and mines reached the height of lethality at Okinawa, the Sherman’s thin-skinned weak points (1.5-inch armor on the sides and rear, for example) became a cause for concern. Marine tank crews had resorted to sheathing the sides of their vehicles with lumber as a foil to hand-lobbed Japanese magnetic mines as early as the Marshalls campaign. By the time of Okinawa, Marine Shermans were festooned with spot-welded track blocks, wire mesh, sandbags, and clusters of large nails—all designed to enhance armor protection.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 123166

Both tank battalions fielded Shermans configured with dozer blades, invaluable assets in the cave fighting to come, but—surprisingly—neither outfit deployed with flame tanks. Despite rave reports of the success of the USN Mark I turret-mounted flame system installed in eight Shermans in the battle of Iwo Jima, there would be no massive retrofit program for the Okinawa-bound Marine tank units. Instead, all flame tanks on Okinawa were provided courtesy of the U.S. Army’s 713th Armored Flamethrower Battalion. Company B of that unit supported the IIIAC with brand-new H-1 flame tanks. Each carried 290 gallons of napalm-thickened fuel, good for two-and-a-half minutes of flame at ranges out to 80 yards. The Marines received consistently outstanding support from this Army company throughout the battle.

The Marines employed the newly developed T-6 “Tank Flotation Devices” to get the initial assault waves of Shermans ashore on L-Day. The T-6 featured a series of flotation tanks welded all around the hull, a provisional steering device making use of the tracks, and electric bilge pumps. Once ashore, the crew hoped to jettison the ungainly rig with built-in explosive charges, a scary proposition.

The invasion landing on 1 April for the 1st Tank Battalion was truly “April Fool’s Day.” The captain of an LST carrying six Shermans equipped with the T-6 launched the vehicles an hour late and 10 miles at sea. It took this irate contingent five hours to reach the beach, losing two vehicles on the reef at ebb tide. Most of Colonel Stuart’s other Shermans made it ashore before noon, but some of his reserves could not cross the reef for 48 hours. The 6th Tank Battalion had better luck. Their LST skippers launched the T-6 tanks on time and in close. Two tanks were lost—one sank when its main engine failed, another broke a track and veered into an unseen hole—but the other Shermans surged ashore, detonated their float tanks successfully, and were ready to roll by H plus 29.

Japanese gunners and mine warfare experts knocked out 51 Marine Corps Shermans in the battle. Many more tanks sustained damage in the fighting but were recovered and restored by hard-working maintenance crews, the unsung heroes. As a result of their ingenuity, the assault infantry battalions never lacked for armored firepower, mobility, and shock action. The concept of Marine combined-arms task forces was now well underway.

(Continued from page 33)

receiving from the Navy and some of the media for his time-consuming attrition strategy. But the riflemen's war had progressed beyond high-level exhortation. The assault troops knew fully what to expect – and what it would likely cost.

The 7th Marines was an experienced outfit and well commanded by Guadalcanal and Bougainville veteran Colonel Edward W. Snedeker. "I was especially fortunate at Okinawa," he said, "in that each of my battalion commanders had fought at Peleliu." Nevertheless, the regiment had its hands full with Dakeshi Ridge. "It was our most difficult mission," said Snedeker. After a day of intense fighting, Lieutenant Colonel John J. Gormley's 1/7 fought its way to the crest of Dakeshi, but had to withdraw under swarming Japanese counterattacks. The next day, Lieutenant Colonel Spencer S. Berger's 2/7 regained the crest and cut down the counterattackers emerging from their reverse-slope bunkers. The 7th Marines were on Dakeshi to stay, another significant breakthrough.

"The Old Breed" Marines enjoyed only a brief elation at this achievement because from Dakeshi they could glimpse the difficulties yet to come. In fact, the next 1,200 yards of their advance would eat up 18 days of fighting. In this case, seizing Wana Ridge would be tough, but the most formidable obstacle would be steep, twisted Wana Draw that rambled just to the south, a deadly killing ground, surrounded by towering cliffs pocked with caves, with every possible approach strewn with mines and covered by interlocking fire. "Wana Draw proved to be the toughest assignment the 1st Division was to encounter," reported General Oliver P. Smith. The remnants of the *62d Infantry Division* would defend Wana to their deaths.

Because the 6th Marine Division's celebrated assault on Sugar Loaf Hill occurred during the same period,

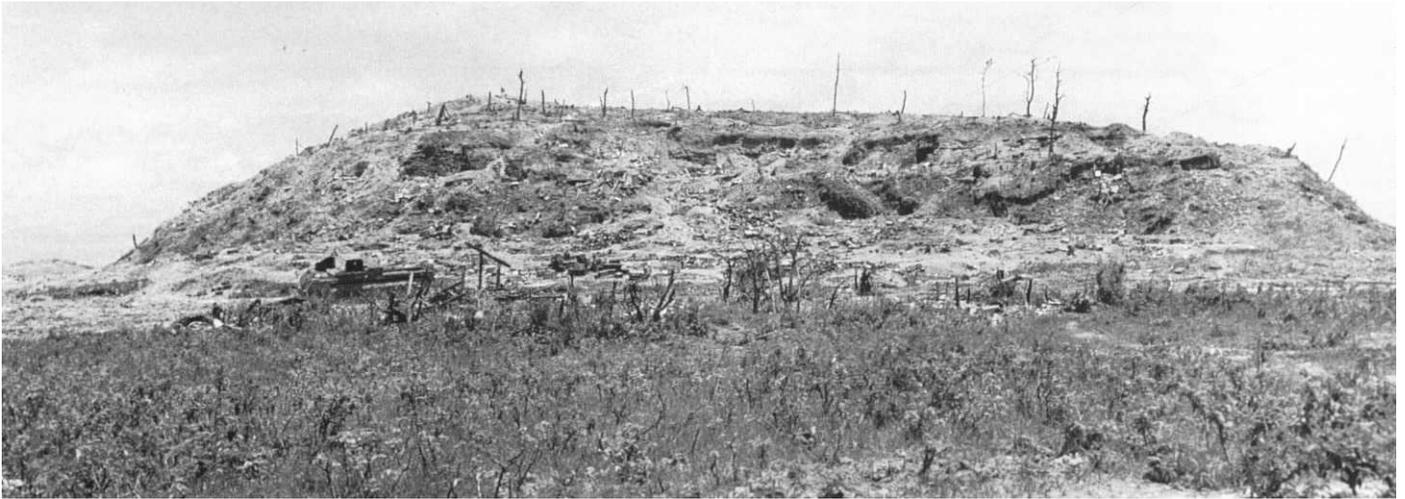
historians have not paid as much attention to the 1st Division's parallel efforts against the Wana defenses. But Wana turned out to be almost as deadly a "mankiller" as Sugar Loaf and its bloody environs. The 1st Marines, now led by Colonel Arthur T. Mason, began the assault on the Wana complex on 12 May. In time, all three infantry regiments would take their turn attacking the narrow gorge to the south. The division continued to make full use of its tank battalion. The Sherman medium tanks and attached Army flame tanks were indispensable in both their assault and direct fire support roles (see sidebar). On 16 May, as an indicator, the 1st Tank Battalion fired nearly 5,000 rounds of 75mm and 173,000 rounds of .30-caliber ammunition, plus 600 gallons of napalm.

Crossing the floor of the gorge continued to be a heart-stopping race against a gauntlet of enemy fire, however, and progress came extremely slowly. Typical of the fighting was the division's summary for its aggregate progress on 18 May: "Gains were measured by yards won, lost, then won again." On 20 May, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen V. Sabol's 3/1 improvised a different method of dislodging Japanese defenders from their reverse-slope positions in Wana Draw. In five hours of muddy, back-breaking work, troops manhandled several drums of napalm up the north side of the ridge. There the Marines split the barrels open, tumbled them down into the gorge, and set them ablaze by dropping white phosphorous grenades in their wake. But each small success seemed to be undermined by the Japanese ability to reinforce and resupply their positions during darkness, usually screened by mortar barrages or small-unit counterattacks. The fighting in such close quarters was vicious and deadly. General del Valle watched in alarm as his casualties mounted daily. The 7th Marines, which lost 700 men taking Dakeshi, lost 500 more in its first five days

fighting for the Wana complex. During 16-19 May, Lieutenant Colonel E. Hunter Hurst's 3/7 lost 12 officers among the rifle companies. The other regiments suffered proportionately. Throughout the period 11-30 May, the division would lose 200 Marines for every 100 yards advanced.

Heavy rains resumed on 22 May and continued for the next ten days. The 1st Marine Division's sector contained no roads. With his LVTs committed to delivering ammunition and extracting casualties, del Valle resorted to using his replacement drafts to hand-carry food and water to the front lines. This proved less than satisfactory. "You can't move it all on foot," noted del Valle. Marine torpedo bombers flying out of Yontan began air-dropping supplies by parachute, even though low ceilings, heavy rains, and enemy fire made for hazardous duty. The division commander did everything in his power to keep his troops supplied, supported, reinforced, and motivated – but conditions were extremely grim.

To the west, the neighboring 6th Marine Division's advance south below the Asa River collided against a trio of low hills dominating the open country leading up to Shuri Ridge. The first of these hills – steep but unassuming – became known as Sugar Loaf. To the southeast lay Half Moon Hill, to the southwest Horseshoe Hill and the village of Takamotoji. The three hills represented a singular defensive complex; in fact they were the western anchor of the Shuri Line. So sophisticated were the mutually supporting defenses of the three hills that an attack on one would prove futile unless the others were simultaneously invested. Colonel Seiko Mita and his *15th Independent Mixed Regiment* defended this sector. Its mortars and antitank guns were particularly well-sited on Horseshoe. The western slopes of Half Moon contained some of the most effective machine gun nests the Marines had yet encountered. Sugar Loaf itself contained



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 124745

*Sugar Loaf, western anchor of the Shuri defenses, and objective of the 22d Marines, is seen from a point directly north.*

elaborate concrete-reinforced reverse-slope positions. And all approaches to the complex fell within the beaten zone of heavy artillery from Shuri Ridge which dominated the battlefield.

Battlefield contour maps indicate Sugar Loaf had a modest elevation of 230 feet; Half Moon, 220; Horseshoe, 190. In relative terms, Sugar Loaf, though steep, only rose about 50 feet above the northern approaches. This was no Mount Suribachi; its significance lay in the ingenuity of its defensive fortifications and the ferocity with which General Ushijima would counterattack each U.S. penetration. In this regard, the Sugar Loaf complex more closely resembled a smaller version of Iwo Jima's Turkey Knob/~~Amphitheater sector~~. As a tactical objective, Sugar Loaf itself lacked the physical dimensions to accommodate anything larger than a rifle company. But eight days of fighting for the small ridge would chew up a series of very good companies from two regiments.

Of all the contestants, American or Japanese, who survived the struggle for Sugar Loaf, Corporal James L. Day, a squad leader from Weapons Company, 2/22, had indisputably the "best seat in the house" to observe the battle. In a little-known aspect of this epic story, Day spent four days and three nights isolated in a shell

hole on Sugar Loaf's western shoulder. This proved to be an awesome but unenviable experience.

Corporal Day received orders on 12 May to recross the Asa River and support the assault of Company G, 2/22, against the small ridge. Day and his squad arrived too late to do much more than cover the fighting withdrawal of the remnants from the summit. The company lost half its number in the day-long assault, including its plucky commander, Captain Owen T. Stebbins, shot in both legs by a Japanese *Nambu* machine-gunner. Day described Stebbins as "a brave man whose tactical plan for assaulting Sugar Loaf became the pattern for successive units to follow." Concerned about the unrestricted fire from the Half Moon Hill region,

*Amtracs, such as these, were pressed into service in the difficult terrain to resupply the Marines on Sugar Loaf and to evacuate the wounded, all the while under fire.*

Major Henry A. Courtney, Jr., battalion executive officer, took Corporal Day with him on the 13th on a hazardous trek to the 29th Marines to coordinate the forthcoming attacks. With the 29th then committed to protecting 2/22's left flank, Courtney assigned Day and his squad in support of Company F for the next day's assault.

Day's rifle squad consisted of seven Marines by that time. On the 14th, they joined Fox Company's assault, reached the hill, scampered up the left shoulder ("you could get to the top in 15 seconds"). Day then received orders to take his squad back around the hill to take up a defensive position on the right (western) shoulder. This took some doing. By late afternoon, Fox Com-

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 123218



pany had been driven off its exposed position on the left shoulder, leaving Day with just two surviving squadmates occupying a large shell hole on the opposite shoulder.

During the evening, unknown to Day, Major Courtney gathered 45 volunteers from George and Fox companies and led them back up the left shoulder of Sugar Loaf. In hours of desperate, close-in fighting, the Japanese killed Major Courtney and half his improvised force. "We didn't know who they were," recalled Day, "because even though they were only 50 yards away, they were on the opposite side of the crest. Out of visual contact. But we knew they were Marines and we knew they were in trouble. We did our part by shooting and grenading every [Japanese] we saw moving in their direction." Day and his two men then heard the sounds of the remnants of Courtney's force being evacuated down the hill and knew they were again alone on Sugar Loaf.

Representing in effect an advance combat outpost on the contested ridge did not particularly bother the 19-year-old corporal. Day's biggest concerns were letting other Marines know they were up there and replenishing their ammo and grenades. "Before dawn I went back down the hill. A couple of LVTs had been trying to deliver critical supplies to the folks who'd made the earlier penetration. Both had been knocked out just north of the hill. I was able to raid those disabled vehicles several times for grenades, ammo, and rations. We were fine."

On 15 May, Day and his men watched another Marine assault develop from the northeast. Again there were Marines on the eastern crest of the hill, but fully exposed to raking fire from Half Moon and mortars from Horseshoe. Day's Marines directed well-aimed rifle fire into a column of Japanese running towards Sugar Loaf from Horseshoe, "but we really needed a machine gun." Good

fortune provided a .30-caliber, air-cooled M1919A4 in the wake of the retreating Marines. But as soon as Day's gunner placed the weapon in action on the forward parapet of the hole, a Japanese 47mm crew opened up from Horseshoe, killing the Marine and destroying the gun. Now there were just two riflemen on the ridgetop.

Tragedy also struck the 1st Battalion, 22d Marines, on the 15th. A withering Japanese bombardment caught the command group assembled at their observation post planning the next assault. Shellfire killed the commander, Major Thomas J. Myers, and wounded every company commander, as well as the CO and XO of the supporting tank company. Of the death of Major Myers, General Shepherd exclaimed, "It's the greatest single loss the Division has sustained. Myers was an outstanding leader." Major Earl J. Cook, battalion executive officer, took command and continued attack preparations. The division staff released this doleful warning that midnight: "Because of the commanding ground which he occupies the enemy is able to accurately locate our OPs and CPs. The dangerous practice of permitting un-

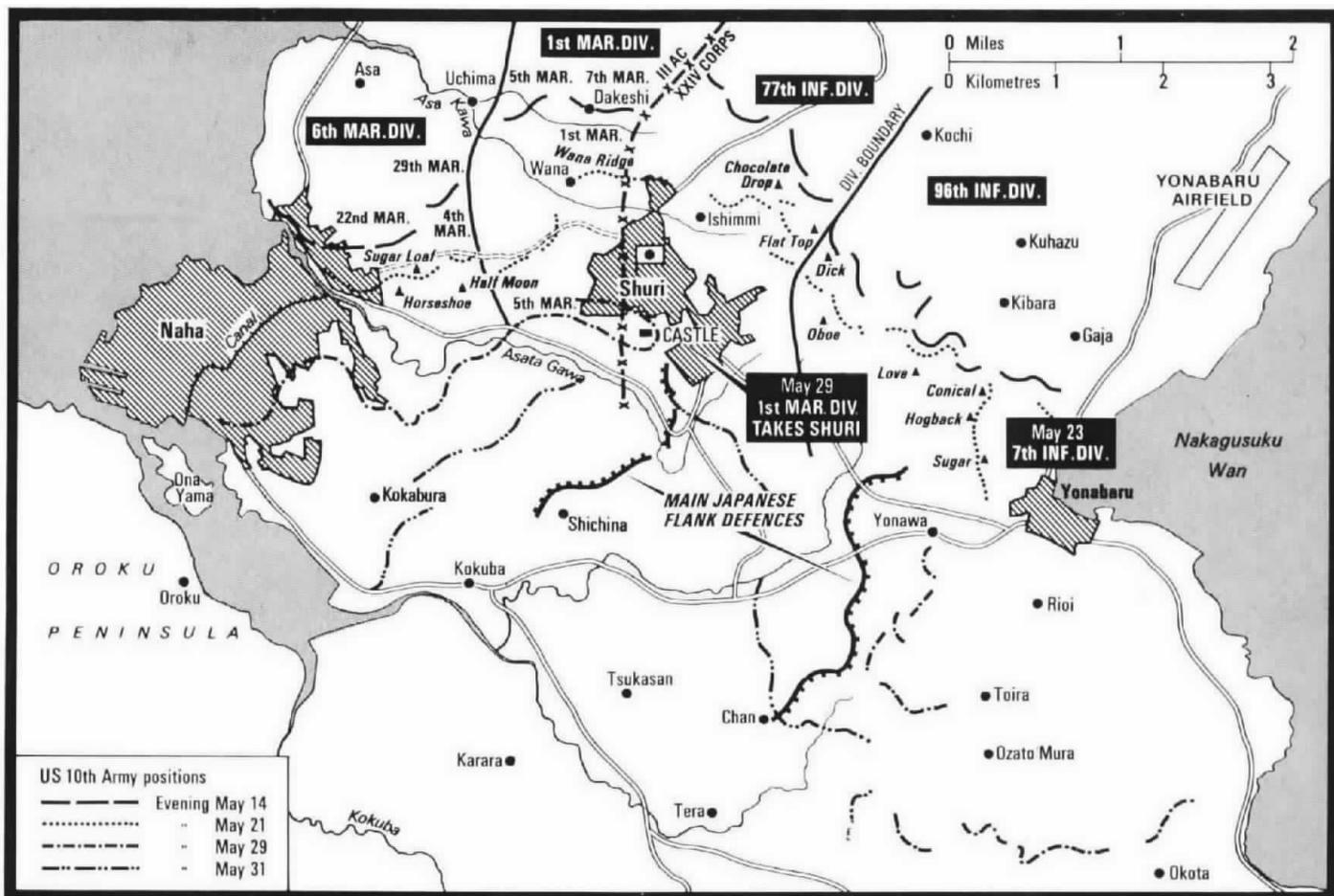
necessary crowding and exposure in such areas has already had serious consequences." The warning was meaningless. Commanders had to observe the action in order to command. Exposure to interdictive fire was the cost of doing business as an infantry battalion commander. The next afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel Jean W. Moreau, commanding 1/29, received a serious wound when a Japanese shell hit his observation post squarely. Major Robert P. Neuffer, Moreau's exec, assumed command. Several hours later a Japanese shell wounded Major Malcolm "O" Donohoo, commanding 3/22. Major George B. Kantner, his exec, took over. The battle continued.

The night of 15-16 seemed endless to Corporal Day and his surviving squadmate, Private First Class Dale Bertoli. "The Japs knew we were the only ones up there and gave us their full attention. We had plenty of grenades and ammo, but it got pretty hairy." The south slope of Sugar Loaf is the steepest. The Japanese would emerge from their reverse-slope caves, but they faced a difficult ascent to get to the Marines on the military crest. Hearing them scramble up the rocks alerted Day and Ber-

*Tanks evacuate the wounded as men of the 29th Marines press the fight to capture Sugar Loaf. The casualties were rushed to aid stations behind the front lines.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 122421





toli to greet them with grenades. Those of the enemy who survived this mini-barrage would find themselves backlit by flares as they struggled over the crest. Day and Bertoli, back to back against the dark side of the crater, shot them readily.

"The 16th was the day I thought Sugar Loaf would fall," said Day. He and Bertoli hunkered down as Marine tanks, artillery, and mortars pounded the ridge and its supporting bastions. "We looked back and see the whole battle shaping up, a great panorama." This was the turn of I/3/22, well supported by tanks. But Day could also see that the Japanese fires had not slackened at all. "The real danger at Sugar Loaf was not the hill itself, where we were, but in a 300-yard by 300-yard killing zone which the Marines had to cross to approach the hill from our lines to the north . . . . It was a dismal sight, men falling, tanks getting knocked out . . . . the division probably suffered 600 casualties that day." In retrospect, the 6th Marine Divi-

sion considered 16 May to be "the bitterest day of the entire campaign."

By then the 22d Marines was down to 40 percent effectiveness and General Shepherd relieved it with the 29th Marines. He also decided to install fresh leadership in the regiment, replacing the commander and executive officer with the team of Colonel Harold C. Roberts and Lieutenant Colonel August C. Larson.

The weather cleared enough during the late afternoon of the 16th to enable Day and Bertoli to see well past Horseshoe Hill, "all the way to the Asato River." The view was not encouraging. Steady columns of Japanese reinforcements streamed northward, through Takamotoji village, towards the contested battlefield. "We kept firing on them from 500 yards away," still maintaining the small but persistent thorn in the flesh of the Japanese defenses. Their rifle fire attracted considerable attention from prowling squads of Japanese raiders that night. "They came at us from 2130 on," recalled Day, "and all

we could do was keep tossing grenades and firing our M-1s." Concerned Marines north of Sugar Loaf, hearing the nocturnal ruckus, tried to assist with mortar fire. "This helped, but it came a little too close." Both Day and Bertoli were wounded by Japanese shrapnel and burned by "friendly" white phosphorous.

Early on the 17th a runner from the 29th Marines scrambled up to the shell-pocked crater with orders for the two Marines to "get the hell out." A massive bombardment by air, naval gunfire, and artillery would soon saturate the ridge in preparation of a fresh assault. Day and Bertoli readily complied. Exhausted, reeking, and partially deafened, they stumbled back to safety and an intense series of debriefings by staff officers. Meanwhile, a thundering bombardment crashed down on the three hills.

The 17th of May marked the fifth day of the battle for Sugar Loaf. Now it was the turn of Easy Company, 2/29, to assault the complex of



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 124747

*The difficult and shell-pocked terrain of Okinawa is seen here in a view from the crest of Sugar Loaf toward Crescent Hill and southeast beyond the Kokuba River. This photograph also*

*illustrates the extent to which Sugar Loaf Hill dominated the Asato corridor running from Naha to Shuri and demonstrates why the Japanese defended the area so tenaciously.*

defenses. No unit displayed greater valor, yet Easy Company's four separate assaults fared little better than their many predecessors. At midpoint of these desperate assaults, the 29th Marines reported to division, "E Co. moved to top of ridge and had 30 men south of Sugar Loaf; sustained two close-in charges; killed a hell of a lot of Nips; moved back to base to reform and are going again; will take it." But Sugar Loaf would not fall this day. At dusk, after prevailing in one more melee of bayonets, flashing knives, and bare hands against a particularly vicious counterattack, the company had to withdraw. It had lost 160 men.

The 18th of May marked the beginning of seemingly endless rains. Into the start of this soupy mess attacked Dog Company, 2/29, this

time supported by more tanks which braved the minefields on both shoulders of Sugar Loaf to penetrate the no-man's land just to the south. When the Japanese poured out of their reverse-slope holes for yet another counterattack, the waiting tanks surprised and riddled them. Dog Company earned the distinction of becoming the first rifle company to hold Sugar Loaf overnight. The Marines would not relinquish that costly ground.

But now the 29th Marines were pretty much shot up, and still Half Moon, Horseshoe, and Shuri remained to be assaulted. General Geiger adjusted the tactical boundaries slightly westward to allow the 1st Marine Division a shot at the eastern spur of Horseshoe, and he also released the 4th Marines from

Corps reserve. General Shepherd deployed the fresh regiment into the battle on the 19th. The battle still raged. The 4th Marines sustained 70 casualties just in conducting the relief of lines with the 29th Marines. But with Sugar Loaf now in friendly hands, the momentum of the fight began to change. On 20 May, Lieutenant Colonel Reynolds H. Hayden's 1/4 and Lieutenant Colonel Bruno A. Hochmuth's 3/4 made impressive gains on either flank. By day's end, 2/4 held much of Half Moon, while 3/4 had seized a good portion of Horseshoe. As Corporal Day had warned, most Japanese reinforcements funneled into the fight from the southwest, so 3/4 prepared for nocturnal visitors at Horseshoe. These arrived in massive numbers, up to 700 Japanese soldiers and

sailors, and surged against 3/4 much of the night. Hochmuth had a wealth of supporting arms: six artillery battalions in direct support at the onset of the attack, and up to 15 battalions at the height of the fighting. Throughout the crisis on Horseshoe, Hochmuth maintained a direct radio link with Lieutenant Colonel Bruce T. Hemphill, commanding 4/15, one of the support artillery firing battalions. This close exchange between commanders reduced the number of short rounds which might have otherwise decimated the defenders and allowed the 15th Marines to provide uncommonly accurate fire on the Japanese. The rain of shells blew great holes in the ranks of every Japanese advance; Marine riflemen met those who survived at bayonet

point. The counterattackers died to the man.

Even with Hochmuth's victory the protracted battle of Sugar Loaf lacked a climactic finish. There would be no celebration ceremony here. Shuri Ridge loomed ahead, as did the sniper-infested ruins of Naha. Elements of the 1st Marine Division began bypassing the last of the Wana defenses to the east. The 6th Division slipped westward. Colonel Shapley's 4th Marines crossed the Asa River, now chest-high from the heavy rainfall, on 23 May. The III Amphibious Corps stood poised on the outskirts of Okinawa's capital city.

The Army divisions in XXIV Corps matched the Marines' breakthroughs. On the east coast, the 96th Division seized Conical Hill, the Shu-

ri Line's opposite anchor from Sugar Loaf, after weeks of bitter fighting. The 7th Division, in relief, seized Yonabaru on 22 May. Suddenly, the *Thirty-second Army* faced the threat of being cut off from both flanks. This time General Ushijima listened to Colonel Yahara's advice. Instead of fighting to the death at Shuri Castle, the army would take advantage of the awful weather and retreat southward to their final line of prepared defenses in the Kiyamu Peninsula. Ushijima executed this withdrawal masterfully. While American aviators spotted and interdicted the southbound columns, they also reported other columns moving north. General Buckner assumed the enemy was simply rotating units still defending the Shuri defenses. But these north-

*"Buck Rogers" rocket Marines load projectiles into the racks of a mobile launcher in preparation for laying down a bar-*

*rage on Japanese positions during the Tenth Army drive to the south of Okinawa. Such barrages were very effective.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 181768





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 122390

*Men of Company G, 2d Battalion, 22d Marines, found themselves fighting in an urban environment in their house-to-house attack against the Japanese in Naha.*

bound troops were ragtag units assigned to conduct a do-or-die rear guard. At this, they were eminently successful.

This was the situation encountered by the 1st Marine Division in its unexpectedly easy advance to Shuri Ridge on 29 May as described in the opening paragraphs. The 5th Marines suddenly possessed the abandoned castle. While General del Valle tried to placate the indignation of the 77th Division commander at the Marines' "intrusion" into his zone, he got another angry call from the Tenth Army. It seems that that the Company A, 1/5 company commander, a South Carolinian, had raised the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy over Shuri Castle instead of the Stars and Stripes. "Every damned outpost and O.P. that could see this started telephoning me," said del Valle, adding, "I had one hell of a hullabaloo converging on my telephone." Del Valle agreed to erect a proper flag, but it took him two days to get one through the intermittent fire of Ushijima's surviving rear guards. Lieutenant Colonel Richard P. Ross, commanding the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, raised this flag in the rain on the last day of May, then took cover. Unlike Sugar Loaf, Shuri Castle could be seen from all over southern Okinawa, and every Japanese gunner within range opened up on the hated colors.

The Stars and Stripes fluttered over Shuri Castle, and the fearsome Yonabaru-Shuri-Naha defensive masterpiece had been decisively breached. But the *Thirty-second Army* remained as deadly a fighting force as ever. It was an army that would die hard defending the final eight miles of shell-pocked, rain-

*A Marine who had his clothing blown from his back by a Japanese mortar explosion, but is otherwise unwounded, is helped to the rear by an uninjured buddy.*

soaked southern Okinawa.

## *Closing the Loop*

The retreating Japanese troops did not escape scot-free from their Shuri defenses. Naval spotter planes located one southbound column and called in devastating fire from a half dozen ships and every available attack aircraft. In short order several miles of the muddy road were strewn with wrecked trucks, field guns, and corpses. General del Valle congratulated the Tactical Air Force: "Thanks for prompt response this afternoon when Nips were caught on road with kimonos down."

Successful interdictions, however, remained the exception. Most of Ushijima's *Thirty-second Army* survived the retreat to its final positions in the Kiyamu Peninsula. The Tenth Army missed a golden opportunity to end the battle four weeks early, but the force, already slowed by heavy rains and deep mud, was sim-

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 120280





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 122274

*A bereaved father prays for his dead son: Col Francis I. Fenton, 1st Marine Division engineer, kneels at the foot of the stretcher holding the body of PFC Michael Fenton, as division staff members mourn. Col Fenton said that the other dead Marines were not as fortunate as his son, who had his father there to pray for him.*

ply too ponderous to respond with alacrity.

The infantry slogged southward, cussing the weather but glad to be beyond the Shuri Line. Yet every advance exacted a price. A Japanese sniper killed Lieutenant Colonel Horatio C. Woodhouse, Jr., the competent commander of 2/22, as he led his battalion towards the Kokuba Estuary. General Shepherd, grieving privately at the loss of his younger cousin, replaced him in command with the battalion exec, Lieutenant Colonel John G. Johnson.

As the IIIAC troops advanced further south, the Marines began to encounter a series of east-west ridges dominating the open farmlands in their midst. "The southern part of Okinawa," reported Colonel Snedeker, "consists primarily of cross ridges sticking out like bones from the spine of a fish." Meanwhile, the Army divisions of XXIV Corps warily approached two towering escarpments in their zone, Yuza Dake and Yaēju Dake. The Japanese had obviously gone to ground along these ridges

and peaks and lay waiting for the American advance.

Rain and mud continued to plague the combatants. One survivor of this segment of the campaign described the battlefields as "a five-mile sea of mud." As Private First Class Sledge recorded in the margins of his sodden New Testament, "Mud in camp on Pavuvu was a nuisance . . . . But mud on the battlefield is misery be-

*This self-propelled M-7 105mm gun was completely bogged down in the heavy rains which fell on Okinawa in the last weeks in May. It replaced the half-track-mounted 75mm gun as the regimental commander's artillery in Operation Iceberg.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 123438



yond description." The 96th Division wearily reported the results of one day's efforts under these conditions: "those on forward slope slid down; those on reverse slope slid back; otherwise no change."

The Marines began to chafe at the heavy-handed controls of the Tenth Army, which seemed to stall with each encounter with a fresh Japanese outpost. General Buckner favored a massive application of firepower on every obstacle before committing troops in the open. Colonel Shapley, commanding the 4th Marines, took a different view. "I'm not too sure that sometimes when they whittle you away, 10-12 men a day, then maybe it would be better to take 100 losses a day if you could get out sooner." Colonel Wilburt S. "Big Foot" Brown, a veteran artilleryman commanding the 11th Marines, and a legend in his own time, believed the Tenth Army relied too heavily on firepower. "We poured a tremendous amount of metal into those positions," he said. "It seemed nothing could be living in that churning mass where the shells were falling and roaring, but when we next advanced the Japs would still be there and madder than ever." Brown also lamented the overuse of star shells for night illumination: "I felt like we were the children of Israel in the wilderness — living under



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 123507

*Cleanliness is next to godliness, figures this Marine, as he stands knee-deep in water while shaving in the midst of a totally saturated and flooded bivouac area.*

a pillar of fire by night and a cloud of smoke by day.”

Such a heavy reliance on artillery support stressed the amphibious supply system. The Tenth Army’s demand for heavy ordnance grew to 3,000 tons of ammo per day; each round had to be delivered over the beach and distributed along the front. This factor reduced the availability of other supplies, including rations. Front-line troops, especially the Marines, began to go hungry. Again partial succor came from the friendly skies. Marine pilots flying General Motors Avenger torpedo-bombers of VMTB-232 executed 80 air drops of rations during the first three days of June alone. This worked well, thanks to the intrepid pilots, and thanks to the rigging skills of the Air Delivery Section, veterans of the former Marine parachute battalions.

Offshore from the final drive south, the ships of the fleet continued to withstand waves of *kamikaze* attacks. Earlier, on 17 May, Admiral Turner had declared an end to the amphibious assault phase. General Buckner thereafter reported directly

to Admiral Spruance. Turner departed, leaving Vice Admiral Harry W. Hill in command of the huge amphibious force still supporting the Tenth Army. On 27 May, Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey relieved Spruance. With that, the Fifth Fleet became the Third Fleet – same ships, same crews, different designation. Spruance and Turner began planning the next amphibious assault, the long-anticipated invasion of the Japanese home islands.

*Okinawa’s “Plum Rains” of May and June came close to immobilizing the U.S. Tenth Army’s drive south. Heroic efforts kept the frontline troops supported logistically.*

Marine Corps Historical Center



General Shepherd, appreciative of the vast amphibious resources still available on call, decided to interject tactical mobility and surprise into the sluggish campaign. In order for the 6th Marine Division to reach its intermediate objective of the Naha airfield, Shepherd first had to overwhelm the Oroku Peninsula. Shepherd could do this the hard way, attacking from the base of the peninsula and scratching seaward – or he could launch a shore-to-shore amphibious assault across the estuary to catch the defenders in their flank. “The Japanese expected us to force a crossing of the Kokuba,” he said, “I wanted to surprise them.” Convincing General Geiger of the wisdom of this approach was easy; getting General Buckner’s approval took longer. Abruptly Buckner agreed, but gave the 6th Division barely 36 hours to plan and execute a division-level amphibious assault.

Lieutenant Colonel Krulak and his G-3 staff relished the challenge. Scouts from Major Anthony “Cold Steel” Walker’s 6th Reconnaissance Company stole across the estuary at night to gather intelligence on the Nishikoku Beaches and the Japanese defenders. The scouts confirmed the existence on the peninsula of a cobbled force of Imperial Japanese Navy units under an old adversary. Fittingly, this final opposed amphibious



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 126402

*When the heavy rains of May arrived, deep mud caused by days of torrential downpours made air delivery the only possible means of providing forward combat units with food, ammunition, and water. As a result, Marine torpedo-bombers of VMTBs -131 and -232 were employed in supply drops by parachute. The white panels laid on the ground at the right mark the target area for the drops.*

landing of the war would be launched against one of the last surviving Japanese *rikusentai* (Special Naval Landing Force) commanders, Rear Admiral Minoru Ota.

Admiral Ota was 54, a 1913 graduate of the Japanese Naval Academy, and a veteran of *rikusentai* service from as early as 1932 in Shanghai. Ten years later he commanded the *2d Combined Special Landing Force* destined to assault Midway, but was thwarted by the disastrous naval defeat suffered by the Japanese. In November 1942, commanding the *8th Combined Special Landing Force* in the Central Solomons, he defended Bairoko against the 1st Marine Raider Regiment. By 1945, however, the *rikusentai* had all but disappeared, and Ota commanded a rag-tag outfit of several thousand coast defense and anti-aircraft gunners, aviation mechanics, and construction specialists. Undismayed, Ota breathed fire into his disparate forces, equipped them with hundreds of machine cannons from wrecked aircraft, and made them sow thousands of mines.

Krulak and Shepherd knew they faced a worthy opponent, but also saw they held the advantage of surprise if they could act swiftly. The fi-

nal details of planning centered on problems with the division's previously dependable LVTs. Sixty-five days of hard campaigning ashore had taken a heavy toll of the tracks and suspension systems of these assault amphibians. Nor were repair parts available. LVTs had served in abundance on L-Day to land four divisions; now the Marines had to scrape to produce enough for the assault elements of one regiment. Worse for the planners, the first typhoon of the season was approaching, and the Navy was getting jumpy. General Shepherd

*As soon as the parachute drops landed in the target zone, grateful Marines enthusiastically retrieved the supplies, often while under enemy fire. Some of the drops were out of reach as they landed in territory where Japanese soldiers claimed them.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 123168



remained firm in his desire to execute the assault on K-Day, 4 June. Admiral Halsey backed him up.

Shepherd considered Colonel Shapley "an outstanding officer of great ability and great leadership," and chose the 4th Marines to lead the assault. Shapley divided the 600-yard Nishikoku Beach between 2/4 on the left and 1/4 on the right. Despite heavy rains, the assault went on schedule. The Oroku Peninsula erupted in flame and smoke under the pounding of hundreds of naval guns, artillery batteries, and aerial bombs. Major Anthony's scouts seized Ono Yama island, the 4th Marines swept across the estuary, and LCMs and LCIs loaded with tanks appeared from the north, from "Loomis Harbor," named after the IIIAC Logistics Officer, Colonel Francis B. "Loopy" Loomis, Jr., a veteran Marine aviator. The amphibious force attained complete surprise. Many of 1/4's patched-up LVTs broke down enroute, causing uncomfortable delays, but enemy fire proved intermittent, and empty LVTs from the first waves quickly returned to transfer the stranded troops. The 4th Marines advanced rapidly. Soon it became time for Colonel Whaling's 29th Marines to cross. By dark on K-Day the 6th Division occupied 1,200 yards of



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 122167

*It seemed to be one hill after another in the drive south. Amidst tree stumps which hardly serve as adequate cover, a bazooka team waits for an opportunity to charge into the face of Japanese fire over the crest of the hill in front of them.*

the Oroku Peninsula. Admiral Ota furiously redirected his sailors to the threat from the rear. Then Colonel Roberts' 22d Marines began advancing along the original corridor.

The amphibious assault had been nigh letter-perfect, the typhoon came and went, and the Marines occupied the peninsula in force, capturing the airfield in two days. When the 1st Marine Division reached the southwest coast north of Itoman on 7 June, Admiral Ota's force lost its chance of escape. General Shepherd then orchestrated a three-fold enveloping movement with his regiments and the outcome became inevitable.

Admiral Ota was no ordinary opponent, however, and the battle for Oroku was savage and lethal. Ota's 5,000 spirited sailors fought with *elan*, and they were very heavily armed. No similar-sized force on Okinawa possessed so many automatic weapons or employed mines so effectively. The attacking Marines also encountered some awesome weapons at very short range — eight-inch coast defense guns redirected inland, rail-mounted eight-inch rockets (the "Screaming Mimi"), and the enormous 320mm spigot mortars which launched the terrifying "flying ashcans." On 9 June the 4th Marines

reported "character of opposition unchanged; stubborn defense of high ground by 20mm and MG fire." Two days later the 29th Marines reported: "L Hill under attack from two sides; another tank shot on right flank; think an eight-inch gun."

Ota could nevertheless see the end coming. On 6 June he reported to naval headquarters in Tokyo: "The

*Trying in vain to escape and knee deep in the water's edge along the sea wall near the Oroku Peninsula, a Japanese soldier passes the bodies of two other soldiers.*

troops under my command have fought gallantly, in the finest tradition of the Japanese Navy. Fierce bombardments may deform the mountains of Okinawa but cannot alter the loyal spirit of our men." Four days later Ota transmitted his final message to General Ushijima ("Enemy tank groups are now attacking our cave headquarters; the Naval Base Force is dying gloriously. . . .") and committed suicide, his duty done.

General Shepherd knew he had defeated a competent foe. He counted the costs in his after-action summary of the Oroku operation:

During the 10 days' fighting, almost 5000 Japanese were killed and nearly 200 taken prisoner. Thirty of our tanks were disabled, many by mines. One tank was destroyed by two direct hits from an 8-inch naval gun fired at point blank range. Finally, 1,608 Marines were killed or wounded.

When the 1st Marine Division reached the coast near Itoman it represented the first time in more

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 126267





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 125055

*This Marine patrol scouts out the rugged terrain and enemy positions on the reverse slope of one of the hills in the path of the 1st Division's southerly attack.*

than a month that the division had access to the sea. This helped relieve the Old Breed's extended supply lines. "As we reached the shore we were helped a great deal by amphibian tractors that had come down the coast with supplies," said Colonel Snedeker of the 7th Marines, "Otherwise we couldn't get supplies overland."

The more open country in the south gave General del Valle the opportunity to further refine the deployment of his tank-infantry teams. No unit in the Tenth Army surpassed the 1st Marine Division's synchronization of these two supporting arms. Using tactical lessons painfully learned at Peleliu, the division never allowed its tanks to range beyond direct support of the accompanying infantry and artillery forward observers. As a result, the 1st Tank Battalion was the only armored unit in the battle not to lose a tank to Japanese suicide squads — even during the swirling close-quarters frays within Wana Draw. General del Valle, the consummate artilleryman, valued his attached Army 4.2-inch mortar battery. "The 4.2s were invaluable on Okinawa," he said, "and that's why my tanks had such good luck." But good luck reflected a great deal of application. "We developed the tank-infantry

team to a fare-thee-well in those swales — backed up by our 4.2-inch mortars."

Colonel "Big Foot" Brown of the 11th Marines took this coordination several steps further as the campaign dragged along:

Working with LtCol "Jeb" Stuart of the 1st Tank Battalion, we developed a new method of protecting tanks and reducing vulnerability to the infantry in the assault. We'd place an artillery observer in one of the tanks with a radio to one of the 155mm howitzer battalions. We'd also use an aerial observer overhead. We used 75mm, both packs and LVT-As, which had airburst capabilities. If any Jap [suicider] showed anywhere we opened fire with the airbursts and kept a pattern of shell fragments pattering down around the tanks.

Lieutenant Colonel James C. Magee's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, used similar tactics in a bloody but successful day-long assault on Hill 69 west of Ozato on 10 June. Magee lost three tanks to Japanese artillery fire in the approach, but took the hill and held it throughout the inevitable counterattack that night.

Beyond Hill 69 loomed Kunishi

Ridge for the 1st Marine Division, a steep, coral escarpment which totally dominated the surrounding grasslands and rice paddies. Kunishi was much higher and longer than Sugar Loaf, equally honeycombed with enemy caves and tunnels, and while it lacked the nearby equivalents of Half Moon and Horseshoe to the rear flanks, it was amply covered from behind by Mezado Ridge 500 yards further south. Remnants of the veteran 32d Infantry Regiment infested and defended Kunishi's many hidden bunkers. These were the last of Ushijima's organized, front-line troops, and they would render Kunishi Ridge as deadly a killing ground as the Marines would ever face.

Japanese gunners readily repulsed the first tank-infantry assaults by the 7th Marines on 11 June. Colonel Snedeker looked for another way. "I came to the realization that with the losses my battalions suffered in experienced leadership we would never be able to capture (Kunishi Ridge) in daytime. I thought a night attack might be successful." Snedeker flew over the objective in an observation aircraft, formulating his plan. Night assaults by elements of the Tenth Army were extremely rare in this campaign — especially Snedeker's ambitious plan of employing two battalions. General del Valle voiced his approval. At 0330 the next morning, Lieutenant Colonel John J. Gormley's 1/7 and Lieutenant Colonel Spencer S. Berger's 2/7 departed the combat outpost line for the dark ridge. By 0500 the lead companies of both battalions swarmed over the crest, surprising several groups of Japanese calmly cooking breakfast. Then came the fight to stay on the ridge and expand the toehold.

With daylight, Japanese gunners continued to pole-ax any relief columns of infantry, while those Marines clinging to the crest endured showers of grenades and mortar rounds. As General del Valle put it,

"The situation was one of the tactical oddities of this peculiar warfare. We were on the ridge. The Japs were in it, on both the forward and reverse slopes."

The Marines on Kunishi critically needed reinforcements and resupplies; their growing number of wounded needed evacuation. Only the Sherman medium tank had the bulk and mobility to provide relief. The next several days marked the finest achievements of the 1st Tank Battalion, even at the loss of 21 of its Shermans to enemy fire. By removing two crewmen, the tankers could stuff six replacement riflemen inside each vehicle. Personnel exchanges once atop the hill were another matter. No one could stand erect without getting shot, so all "transactions" had to take place via the escape hatch in the bottom of the tank's hull. These scenes then became commonplace: a tank would lurch into the beleaguered Marine positions on Kunishi, remain buttoned up while the replacement troops slithered out of the escape hatch carrying ammo, rations, plasma, and water; then other Marines would crawl under, dragging their wounded comrades on ponchos and man-

handle them into the small hole. For those badly wounded who lacked this flexibility, the only option was the dubious privilege of riding back down to safety while lashed to a stretcher topside behind the turret. Tank drivers frequently sought to provide maximum protection to their exposed stretcher cases by backing down the entire 800-yard gauntlet. In this painstaking fashion the tankers managed to deliver 50 fresh troops and evacuate 35 wounded men the day following the 7th Marines' night attack.

Encouraged by these results, General del Valle ordered Colonel Mason to conduct a similar night assault on the 1st Marines' sector of Kunishi Ridge. This mission went to 2/1, who accomplished it smartly the night of 13-14 June despite inadvertent lapses of illumination fire by forgetful supporting arms. Again the Japanese, furious at being surprised, swarmed out of their bunkers in counterattack. Losses mounted rapidly in Lieutenant Colonel Magee's ranks. One company lost six of its seven officers that morning. Again the 1st Tank Battalion came to the rescue, delivering reinforcements and evacuating 110 casualties by dusk.

General del Valle expressed great pleasure in the success of these series of attacks. "The Japs were so damned surprised," he remarked, adding, "They used to counterattack at night all the time, but they never felt we'd have the audacity to go and do it to them." Colonel Yahara admitted during his interrogation that these unexpected night attacks were "particularly effective," catching the Japanese forces "both physically and psychologically off-guard."

By 15 June the 1st Marines had been in the division line for 12 straight days and sustained 500 casualties. The 5th Marines relieved it, including an intricate night-time relief of lines by 2/5 of 2/1 on 15-16 June. The 1st Marines, back in the relative safety of division reserve, received this mindless regimental re-joinder the next day: "When not otherwise occupied you will bury Jap dead in your area."

The battle for Kunishi Ridge continued. On 17 June the 5th Marines assigned K/3/5 to support 2/5 on Kunishi. Private First Class Sledge approached the embattled escarpment with dread: "Its crest looked so much like Bloody Nose that my knees nearly buckled. I felt as though

*A Marine-manned, water-cooled, .30-caliber Browning machine gun lays down a fierce base of fire as Marine rifle-* *men maneuver to attack the next hill to be taken in the drive to the south of Okinawa, where the enemy lay in wait.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 121760





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 123727

*Navy corpsmen lift a wounded Marine into the cabin of one of the Grasshoppers of a Marine Observation Squadron on Okinawa. The plane will then fly the casualty on to one of the aid stations in the rear for further treatment.*

I were on Peleliu and had it all to go through again." The fighting along the crest and its reverse slope took place at point-blank range — too close even for Sledge's 60mm mortars. His crew then served as stretcher bearers, extremely hazardous duty. Half his company became casualties in the next 22 hours.

Extracting wounded Marines from Kunishi remained a hair-raising feat. But the seriously wounded faced another half-day of evacuation by field ambulance over bad roads subject to interdictive fire. Then the aviators stepped in with a bright idea. Engineers cleared a rough landing strip suitable for the ubiquitous "Grasshopper" observation aircraft north of Itoman. Hospital corpsmen began delivering some of the casualties from the Kunishi and Hill 69 battles to this improbable airfield. There they were tenderly inserted into the waiting Piper Cubs and flown back to field hospitals in the rear, an eight-minute flight. This was the dawn of tactical air medevacs which would save so many lives in subsequent Asian wars. In 11 days, the dauntless pilots of Marine Observation

Squadrons (VMO) -3 and -7 flew out 641 casualties from the Itoman strip.

The 6th Marine Division joined the southern battlefield from its forcible seizure of the Oroku Peninsula. Colonel Roberts' 22d Marines became the fourth USMC regiment to engage in the fighting for Kunishi. The *32d Infantry Regiment* died hard, but soon the combined forces of IIIAC had swept south, overlapped Mezado Ridge, and could smell the sea along the south coast. Near Ara Saki, George Company, 2/22, raised the 6th Marine Division colors on the island's southernmost point, just as they had done in April at Hedo Misaki in the farthest north.

The long-neglected 2d Marine Division finally got a meaningful role for at least one of its major components in the closing weeks of the campaign. Colonel Clarence R. Wallace and his 8th Marines arrived from Saipan, initially to capture two outlying islands, Iheya Shima and Aguni Shima, to provide more early warning radar sites against the *kamikazes*. Wallace in fact commanded a sizable force, virtually a brigade, including the attached 2d Battalion, 10th

Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Richard G. Weede) and the 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion (Major Fenlon A. Durand). General Geiger assigned the 8th Marines to the 1st Marine Division, and by 18 June they had relieved the 7th Marines and were sweeping southeastward with vigor. Private First Class Sledge recalled their appearance on the battlefield: "We scrutinized the men of the 8th Marines with that hard professional stare of old salts sizing up another outfit. Everything we saw brought forth remarks of approval."

General Buckner also took an interest in observing the first combat deployment of the 8th Marines. Months earlier he had been favorably impressed with Colonel Wallace's outfit during an inspection visit to Saipan. Buckner went to a forward observation post on 18 June, watching the 8th Marines advance along the valley floor. Japanese gunners on the opposite ridge saw the official party and opened up. Shells struck the nearby coral outcrop, driving a lethal splinter into the general's chest. He died in 10 minutes, one of the few senior U.S. officers to be killed in action throughout World War II.

As previously arranged, General Roy Geiger assumed command; his third star became effective immediately. The Tenth Army remained in capable hands. Geiger became the only Marine — and the only aviator of any service — to command a field army. The soldiers on Okinawa had no qualms about this. Senior Army echelons elsewhere did. Army General Joseph Stillwell received urgent orders to Okinawa. Five days later he relieved Geiger, but by then the battle was over.

The Marines also lost a good commander on the 18th when a Japanese sniper killed Colonel Harold C. Roberts, CO of the 22d Marines, who had earned a Navy Cross serving as a Navy corpsman with Marines in World War I. General Shepherd had cautioned Roberts the previous evening about his propen-

# Subsidiary Amphibious Landings

**A**lthough overshadowed by the massive L-Day landing, a series of smaller amphibious operations around the periphery of Okinawa also contributed to the ultimate victory. These subsidiary landing forces varied in size from company-level to a full division. Each reflected the collective amphibious expertise attained by the Pacific Theater forces by 1945. Applied with great economy of force, these landings produced fleet anchorages, fire support bases, auxiliary airfields, and expeditionary radar sites for early warning to the fleet against the *kamikazes*.

No unit better represented this progression of amphibious virtuosity than the Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMFPac) Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion, commanded throughout the war by Major James L. Jones, USMC. Jones and his men provided outstanding service to landing force commanders in a series of increasingly audacious exploits in the Gilberts, Marshalls, Marianas (especially Tinian), and Iwo Jima. Prior to L-Day at Okinawa, these Marines supported the Army's 77th Division with stealthy landings on Awara Saki, Mae, and Keise Shima in the Kerama Retto Islands in the East China Sea. Later in the battle, the recon unit conducted night landings on the islands guarding the eastern approaches to Nakagusuku Wan, which later what would be called Buckner Bay. One of these islands, Tsugen Jima contained the main Japanese outpost, and Jones had a sharp firefight underway before he could extract his men in the darkness. Tsugen Jima then became the target of the 3d Battalion, 105th Infantry, which stormed ashore a few days later to eliminate the stronghold. Jones' Marines then sailed to the northwestern coast to execute a night landing on Minna Shima on 13 April to seize a fire base in support of the 77th Division's main landing on Ie Shima.

The post-L-Day amphibious operations of the 77th and 27th Divisions and the FMFPac Force Recon Battalion were professionally executed and beneficial, but not decisive. By mid-April, the Tenth Army had decided to wage a campaign of massive firepower and attrition against the main Japanese defenses. General Buckner chose not to employ his many amphibious resources to break the ensuing gridlock.

Buckner's consideration of the amphibious option was

not helped by a lack of flexibility on the part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who kept strings attached to the Marine divisions. The *Thirty-second Army* in southern Okinawa clearly represented the enemy center of gravity in the Ryukyu Islands, but the JCS let weeks lapse before scrubbing earlier commitments for the 2d Marine Division to assault Kikai Shima, an obscure island north of Okinawa, and the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions to tackle Miyako Shima, near Formosa. Of the Miyako Shima mission Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith observed, "It is unnecessary, practically in a rear area, and its capture will cost more than Iwo Jima." General Smith no longer served in an operational capacity, but his assessment of amphibious plans still carried weight. The JCS finally canceled both operations, and General Buckner had unrestricted use of his Marines on Okinawa. By then he had decided to employ them in the same fashion as his Army divisions.

Buckner did avail himself of the 8th Marines from the 2d Marine Division, employing it first in a pair of amphibious landings during 3-9 June to seize outlying islands for early warning radar facilities and fighter direction centers against *kamikaze* raids. The commanding general then attached the reinforced regiment to the 1st Marine Division for the final overland assaults in the south.

Buckner also consented to the 6th Marine Division's request to conduct its own amphibious assault across an estuary below Naha to surprise the Japanese Naval Guard Force in the Oroku Peninsula. This was a jewel of an operation in which the Marines used every component of amphibious warfare to great advantage.

Ironically, had the amphibious landings of the 77th Division on Ie Shima or the 6th Marine Division on Oroku been conducted separately from Okinawa they would both rate major historical treatment for the size of the forces, smart orchestration of supporting fires, and intensity of fighting. Both operations produced valuable objectives – airfields on Ie Shima, unrestricted access to the great port of Naha – but because they were ancillary to the larger campaign the two landings barely receive passing mention. As events turned out, the Oroku operation would be the final opposed amphibious landing of the war.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 126987





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 124752

This is the last photograph taken of LtGen Simon B. Buckner, Jr., USA, right, before he was killed on 19 June, observing the 8th Marines in action on Okinawa for the first time since the regiment entered the lines in the drive to the south.

sity of "commanding from the front." "I told him the end is in sight," said Shepherd, "for God's sake don't expose yourself unnecessarily." Lieutenant Colonel August C. Larson took over the 22d Marines.

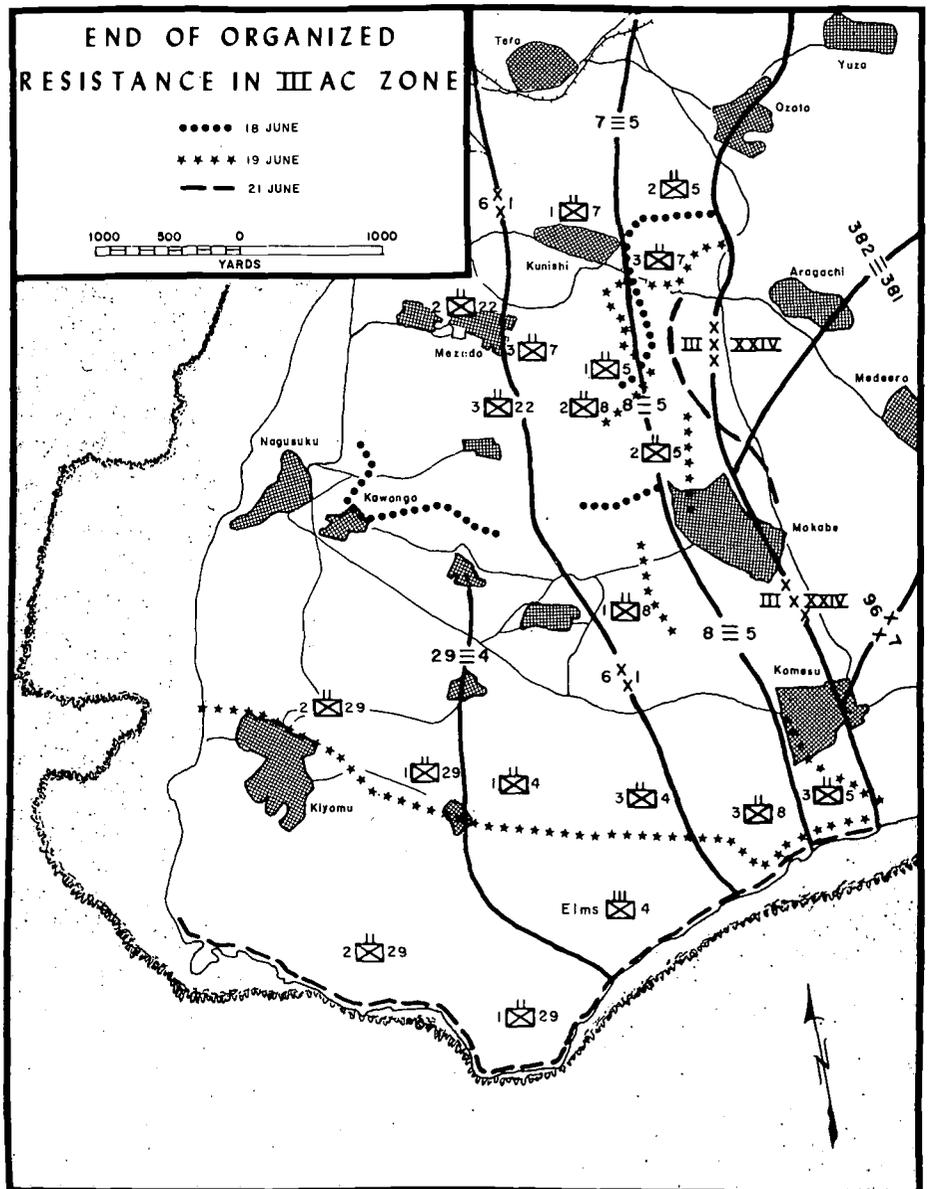
When news of Buckner's death reached the headquarters of the *Thirty-second Army* in its cliff-side cave near Mabuni, the staff officers rejoiced. But General Ushijima maintained silence. He had respected Buckner's distinguished military ancestry and was appreciative of the fact that both opposing commanders had once commanded their respective service academies, Ushijima at Zama, Buckner at West Point. Ushijima could also see his own end fast approaching. Indeed, the XXIV Corps' 7th and 96th Divisions were now bearing down inexorably on the Japanese command post. On 21 June Generals Ushijima and Cho ordered Colonel Yahara and others to save themselves in order "to tell the army's story to headquarters," then conducted ritual suicide.

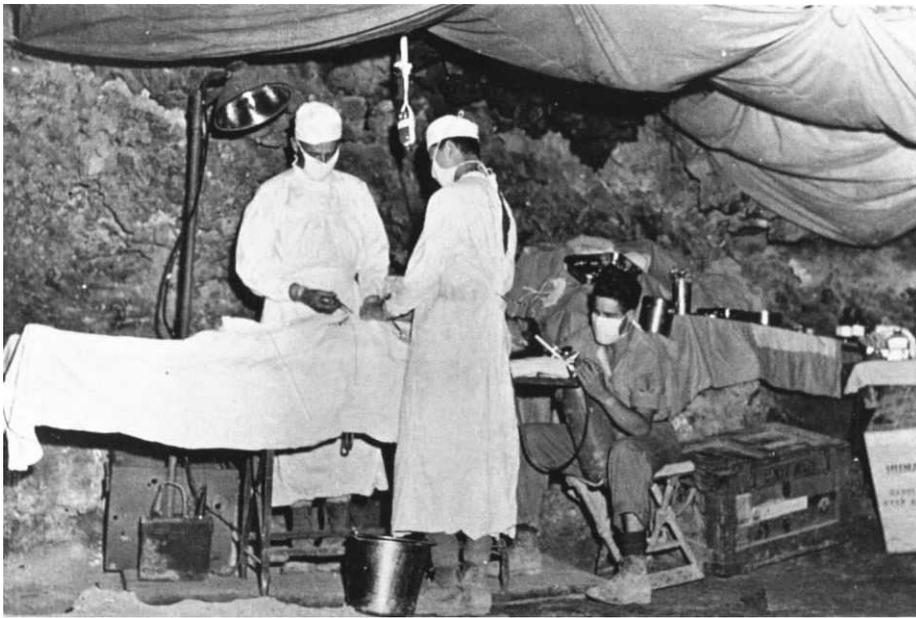
General Geiger announced the end of organized resistance on Okinawa the same day. True to form, a final *kikusui* attack struck the fleet that night and sharp fighting broke out on the 22d. Undeterred, Geiger broke out the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing

band and ran up the American flag at Tenth Army headquarters. The long battle had finally run its course.

## Legacy

There was little elation among the exhausted Marines in southern Okinawa at the official proclamation of victory. The residual death throes of the *Thirty-second Army* kept the battlefield lethal. The last of General Ushijima's front-line infantry may have died defending Kunishi Ridge and Yuza Dake, but the remaining hodgepodge of support troops sold their lives dearly to the last. In the closing period 17-19 June, die-hard Japanese survivors wounded Major Earl J. Cook, CO of 1/22; Major William C. Chamberlin, S-3 of the





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 123155

Okinawa's caves behind front lines were used as temporary hospitals for emergency operations and treatment, at times when casualties could not be rushed to the rear or to a hospital ship standing in the transport area off of the landing beaches.

8th Marines; and Lieutenant Colonel E. Hunter Hurst, CO of 3/7. Even the two Marines who had survived so long in the shell crater on Sugar Loaf saw their luck run out in the final days. Private First Class Bertoli died in action. A Japanese satchel charge seriously wounded Corporal Day, requiring an urgent evacuation to the hospital ship *Solace*.

Okinawa proved extremely costly to all participants. More than 100,000 Japanese died defending the island, although about 7,000 uncharacteristically surrendered at the end. Native Okinawans suffered the most. Recent studies indicate as many as 150,000 died in the fighting, a figure representing one third of the island's population. The Tenth Army sustained nearly 40,000 combat casualties, including more than 7,000 Americans killed. An additional 26,000 "non-battle" casualties occurred; combat fatigue cases accounted for most of these.

Marine Corps casualties overall — ground, air, ships' detachments — exceeded 19,500. In addition, 560 members of the Navy Medical Corps organic to the Marine units were killed or wounded. General Shepherd described the corpsmen on Okinawa

as "the finest, most courageous men that I know . . . they did a magnificent job." Three corpsmen received the Medal of Honor (see sidebar). As always, losses within the infantry outfits soared out of proportion. Colonel Shapley reported losses of 110 percent in the 4th Marines, which reflected both the addition of replacements and their high attrition after joining. Corporal Day of 2/22 experienced the death of his regimental and battalion commanders, plus the killing or wounding of two company commanders, seven platoon commanders, and every other member of his rifle squad in the battle.

The legacy of this great battle can be expressed in these categories:

- *Foreshadow of Invasion of Japan.* Admiral Spruance described the battle of Okinawa as "a bloody, hellish prelude to the invasion of Japan." As protracted a nightmare as Okinawa had been, every survivor knew in his heart that the next battles in Kyushu and Honshu would be incalculably worse. In a nutshell, the plans for invading Japan specified the Kyushu landings would be executed by the surviving veterans of Iwo Jima and Luzon; the reward of the Okinawa survivors would be the landing

on the main island of Honshu. Most men grew *fatalistic*; nobody's luck could last through such *infernós*.

- *Amphibious Mastery.* By coincidence, the enormous and virtually flawless amphibious assault on Okinawa occurred 30 years to the month after the colossal disaster at Gallipoli in World War I. By 1945 the Americans had refined this difficult naval mission into an art form. Nimitz had every possible advantage in place for Okinawa — a proven doctrine, specialized ships and landing craft, mission-oriented weapons systems, trained shock troops, flexible logistics, unity of command. Everything clicked. The massive projection of 60,000 combat troops ashore on L-Day and the subsequent series of smaller landings on the surrounding islands represented the fruition of a doctrine earlier considered hare-brained or suicidal.

- *Attrition Warfare.* Disregarding the great opportunities for surprise and maneuver available in the amphibious task force, the Tenth Army conducted much of the campaign for Okinawa in an unimaginative, attrition mode which played into the strength of the Japanese defenders. An unrealistic reliance on firepower and siege tactics prolonged the fighting and increased the costs. The landings on Ie Shima and Orokua Peninsula, despite their successful executions, comprised the only division-level amphibious assaults undertaken after L-Day. Likewise, the few night attacks undertaken by Marine and Army forces achieved uncommon success, but were not encouraged. The Tenth Army squandered several opportunities for tactical innovations that could have hastened a breakthrough of the enemy defenses.

- *Joint Service.* The squabble between the 1st Marine Division and the 77th Division after the Marines seized Shuri Castle notwithstanding, the battle of Okinawa represented joint service cooperation at its finest. This was General Buckner's greatest



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 125699  
*1st Division Marines and 7th Infantry Division soldiers cheer exuberantly at Okinawa atop Hill 89, where the Thirty-second Army commander took his life.*

achievement, and General Geiger continued the sense of teamwork after Buckner's death. Okinawa remains a model of interservice cooperation to succeeding generations of military professionals.

- *First-Rate Training.* The Marines who deployed to Okinawa received the benefit of the most thorough and practical advanced training of the war. Well-seasoned division and regimental commanders, anticipating Okinawa's requirements for cave warfare and combat in built-up areas, conducted realistic training and rehearsals. The battle produced few surprises.

- *Leadership.* Many of those Marines who survived Okinawa went on to positions of top leadership that influenced the Corps for the next two decades or more. Two Commandants emerged – General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., of the 6th Marine Division, and then-Lieutenant Colonel Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., CO of 4/11. Oliver P. Smith and Vernon E. Megee rose to four-star rank. At least 17 others achieved the rank of lieutenant general, including George C. Axtell, Jr.; Victor H. Krulak; Alan Shapley; and Edward W. Snedeker. And Corporal James L. Day recovered from his wounds and returned to Okinawa 40 years later as a major general to com-

mand all Marine Corps bases on the island.

During the taping of the 50th anniversary commemorative video of the battle, General "Brute" Krulak provided a fitting epitaph to the Marines who fell on Okinawa. Speaking extemporaneously on camera, he said:

The cheerfulness with which they went to their death has stayed with me forever. What is it that makes them all the same? I watched them in Korea, I watched them in Vietnam, and it's the same. American youth is one hell of a lot better than he is usually credited.



## For Extraordinary Heroism

**T**he Secretary of the Navy awarded Presidential Unit Citations to the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions, the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, and Marine Observation Squadron Three (VMO-3) for "extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces during the invasion of Okinawa." Marine Observation Squadron Six also received the award as a specified attached unit to the 6th Marine Division.

On an individual basis, 23 servicemen received the Medal of Honor for actions performed during the battle. Thirteen of these went to the Marines and their organic Navy corpsmen, nine to Army troops, and one to a Navy officer.

Within IIIAC, 10 Marines and 3 corpsmen received the award. Eleven of the 13 were posthumous awards. Most, if not all, deceased Medal of Honor recipients have had either U.S. Navy ships or Marine Corps installations named in their honor. The Okinawa Medal of Honor awardees were:

Corporal Richard E. Bush, USMC, 1/4; HA 1/c Robert E. Bush, USN, 2/5; \*Maj Henry A. Courtney, Jr., USMC, 2/22; \*Corporal John P. Fardy, USMC, 1/1; \*PFC William A. Foster, USMC, 3/1; \*PFC Harold Gonsalves, USMC, 4/15; \*PhM 2/c William D. Halyburton, USN, 2/5; \*Pvt Dale M. Hansen, USMC, 2/1; \*Corporal Louis J. Hauge, Jr., USMC, 1/1; \*Sgt Elbert L. Kinser, USMC, 3/1; \*HA 1/c Fred F. Lester, USN, 1/22; \*Pvt Robert M. McTureous, Jr., USMC, 3/29; and \*PFC Albert E. Schwab, USMC, 1/5.

\* Posthumous award

## Sources

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The author benefited from interviews with LtGen Victor H. Krulak, USMC (Ret), BGen Frederick P. Henderson, USMC (Ret), Mr. Benis M. Frank, and Dr. Eugene B. Sledge.

The author is also indebted to MajGen James L. Day, USMC (Ret) and LtCol Owen T. Stebbins, USMCR (Ret), for extended personal interviews – and to the entire staff of the Marine Corps Historical Center for its professional, courteous support.



Marines in the Seizure of Iwo Jima

in Asheville, North Carolina, wrote *Closing In: Marines in the Seizure of Iwo Jima* and *Across the Reef: The Marine Assault on Tarawa* in this series. His book, *Utmost Savagery: The Three Days of Tarawa* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995), won the 1995 General Wallace M. Greene Award of the Marine Corps Historical Foundation. He is also co-author (with Lieutenant Colonel Merrill L. Bartlett) of *Sea Soldiers in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983).

## About the Author

Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret), served 29 years on active duty as an assault amphibian officer, including two tours in Vietnam and service as Chief of Staff, 3d Marine Division, in the Western Pacific. He is a distinguished graduate of the Naval War College and holds degrees in history from North Carolina, Jacksonville, and Georgetown.

Colonel Alexander, an independent historian



**WORLD WAR II**



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