

BLOODY BEACHES:
THE MARINES
AT PELELIU

MARINES IN
WORLD WAR II
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

BY BRIGADIER GENERAL
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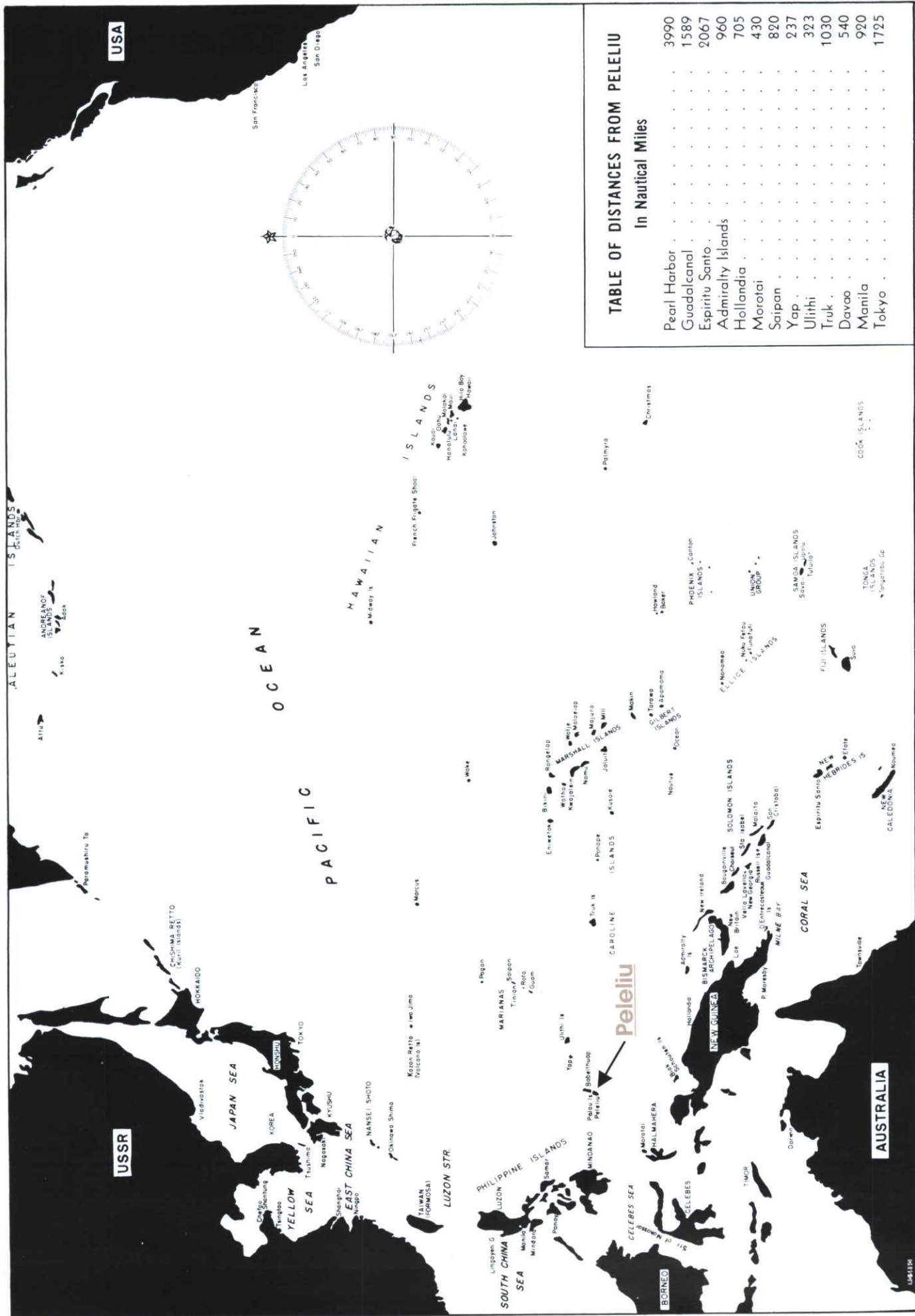


TABLE OF DISTANCES FROM PELELIU

In Nautical Miles

Pearl Harbor	3990
Guadalcanal	1589
Espiritu Santo	2067
Admiralty Islands	960
Hollandia	705
Morotai	430
Saipan	820
Yap	237
Ulithi	323
Truk	1030
Davao	540
Manila	920
Tokyo	1725

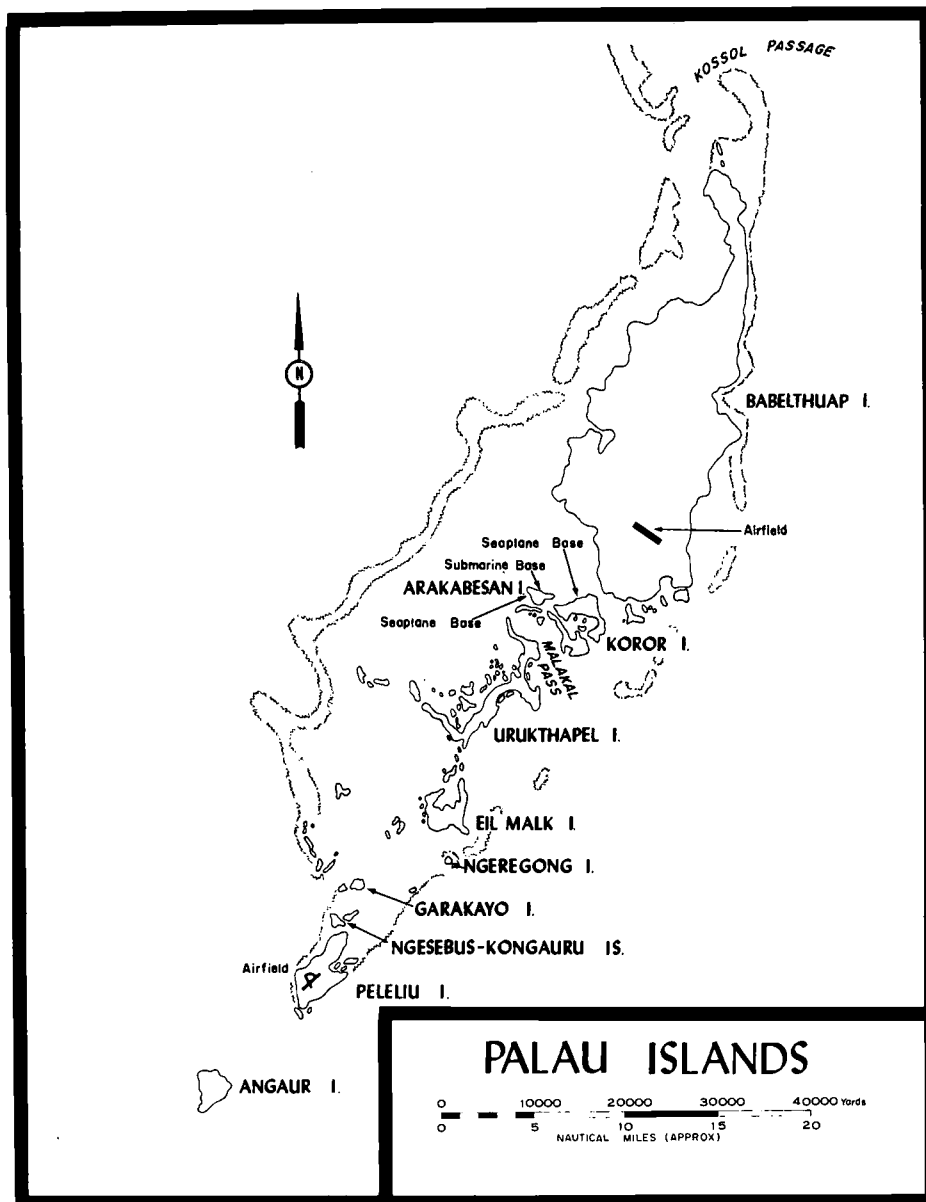
Bloody Beaches: The Marines at Peleliu

by Brigadier General Gordon D. Gayle, USMC (Ret)

On D-Day 15 September 1944, five infantry battalions of the 1st Marine Division's 1st, 5th, and 7th Marines, in amphibian tractors (LVTs) lumbered across 600-800 yards of coral reef fringing smoking, reportedly smashed Peleliu in the Palau Island group and toward five selected landing beaches. That westward anchor of the 1,000-mile-long Caroline archipelago was viewed by some U.S. planners as obstacles, or threats, to continued advances against Japan's Pacific empire.

The Marines in the LVTs had been told that their commanding general, Major General William H. Rupertus, believed that the operation would be tough, but quick, in large part because of the devastating quantity and quality of naval gunfire and dive bombing scheduled to precede their assault landing. On some minds were the grim images of their sister 2d Marine Division's bloody assault across the reefs at Tarawa, many months earlier. But 1st Division Marines, peering over the gunwales of their landing craft saw an awesome scene of blasting and churning earth along the shore. Smoke, dust, and the geysers caused by exploding bombs and large-caliber naval shells gave op-

On the Cover: "Down from Bloody Ridge Too Late. He's Finished - Washed Up - Gone As we passed sick bay, still in the shell hole, it was crowded with wounded, and somehow hushed in the evening light. I noticed a tattered Marine standing quietly by a corpsman, staring stiffly at nothing. His mind had crumbled in battle, his jaw hung, and his eyes were like two black empty holes in his head." Caption by the artist, Tom Lea.



E.L. Wilson

timists some hope that the defenders would become casualties from such preparatory fires; at worst, they would be too stunned to respond quickly and effectively to the hundreds of on-rushing Marines about to land in their midst.

Just ahead of the first wave of troops carrying LVTs was a wave of armored amphibian tractors (LVTAs) mounting 75mm howitzers. They were tasked to take under fire any

surviving strongpoints or weapons which appeared at the beach as the following troops landed. And just ahead of the armored tractors, as the naval gunfire lifted toward deeper targets, flew a line of U.S. Navy fighter aircraft, strafing north and south along the length of the beach defenses, parallel to the assault waves, trying to keep all beach defenders subdued and intimidated as the Marines closed the defenses.

The Divisions and their Commanders

The Peleliu operation was to be conducted by two divisions, one Marine and one Army. In the Pacific area since mid-1942, the 1st Marine Division was a veteran, combat-tested organization which launched the first offensive landing in the Pacific War when it attacked Guadalcanal on 7 August 1942. After a period in Australia of rest, recuperation, and training of newly joined Marines, the division made its second amphibious assault on 26 December 1943 at Cape Gloucester on New Britain Island. When the division landed on Peleliu, its regiments (1st, 5th, and 7th Marines, all infantry, and 11th Marines, artillery) contained officers and enlisted Marine veterans of both landings as well as new troops. Before World War II ended, the 1st Division was to participate in one last battle, the landing on Okinawa.

Major General William H. Rupertus, the 1st Division commander, had been with the division since early 1942. As a brigadier general, he was the assistant division commander to Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift during the Guadalcanal campaign. He took command of the division for the Cape Gloucester operation. General Rupertus was commissioned in 1913 and served as commander of a Marine ship's detachment in World War I. During subsequent years, he was assigned duty in Haiti and China. Following the Peleliu campaign, he was named Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools in Quantico. General Rupertus died of a heart attack on 25 March 1945, while still on active duty.

The Army's 81st Infantry Division – the Wildcats – was formed in August 1917 at Camp Jackson, South Carolina.

MajGen Paul J. Mueller, USA



MajGen William H. Rupertus

It saw action in France at the Meuse-Argonne in World War I, and was deactivated following the end of the war. The division was reactivated in June 1942. It went to several Pacific training bases before its first combat assignment, the landing on Angaur. After securing Angaur, it relieved units of the 1st Marine Division on Peleliu. When Peleliu was secured, the Wildcats began training for Operation Olympic – the assault on Japan proper. The Japanese surrendered unconditionally after suffering two atomic bomb attacks. As a result, instead of invading Japan, the 81st occupied it. On 10 January, the 81st Infantry Division was once more deactivated.

Major General Paul J. Mueller, USA, the commander of the 81st Division, was a graduate of the famous West Point Class of 1915. He commanded an infantry battalion in France in World War I, and during the interwar period he had a succession of assignments to infantry commands, staff billets, and schools. In August 1941 he assumed command of the 81st Infantry Division at Fort Rucker, Alabama, and moved his division during its training period successively from Florida to Tennessee to California before its commitment to the battle for Angaur and Peleliu. General Mueller served on active duty until 1954, when he retired. He died in 1964.



Captions by the artist, Tom Lea

"Going In—First Wave For an hour we plowed toward the beach, the sun above us coming down through the overcast like a silver burning ball . . . Over the gunwale of a craft abreast of us I saw a Marine, his face painted for the jungle, his eyes set for the beach, his mouth set for murder, his big hands quiet now in the last moments before the tough tendons drew up to kill."

Meanwhile, to blind enemy observation and limit Japanese fire upon the landing waves, naval gunfire was shifted to the hill massif northeast of the landing beaches.

That "massif," later to be called the Umurbrogol Pocket, was the first of two deadly imponderables, as yet unknown to the division commander and his planners. Although General Rupertus had been on temporary duty in Washington during most of his division's planning for the Peleliu landing, he had been well briefed for the operation.

The first imponderable involved the real character of Umurbrogol, which aerial photos indicated as a rather gently rounded north-south hill, commanding the landing beaches some 2,000-4,000 yards distant. Viewed in these early photos, the elevated terrain appeared clothed in jungle scrub, which was almost entirely removed by the preparatory bombardment and then subsequent heavy artillery fire directed at it. Instead of a gently rounded hill, the Umurbrogol area was in fact a complex system of sharply uplifted coral ridges, knobs, valleys, and sinkholes. It rose above the level remainder of the island from 50 to 300 feet, and provided excellent emplacements for

cave and tunnel defenses. The Japanese had made the most of what this terrain provided during their extensive period of occupation and defensive preparations.

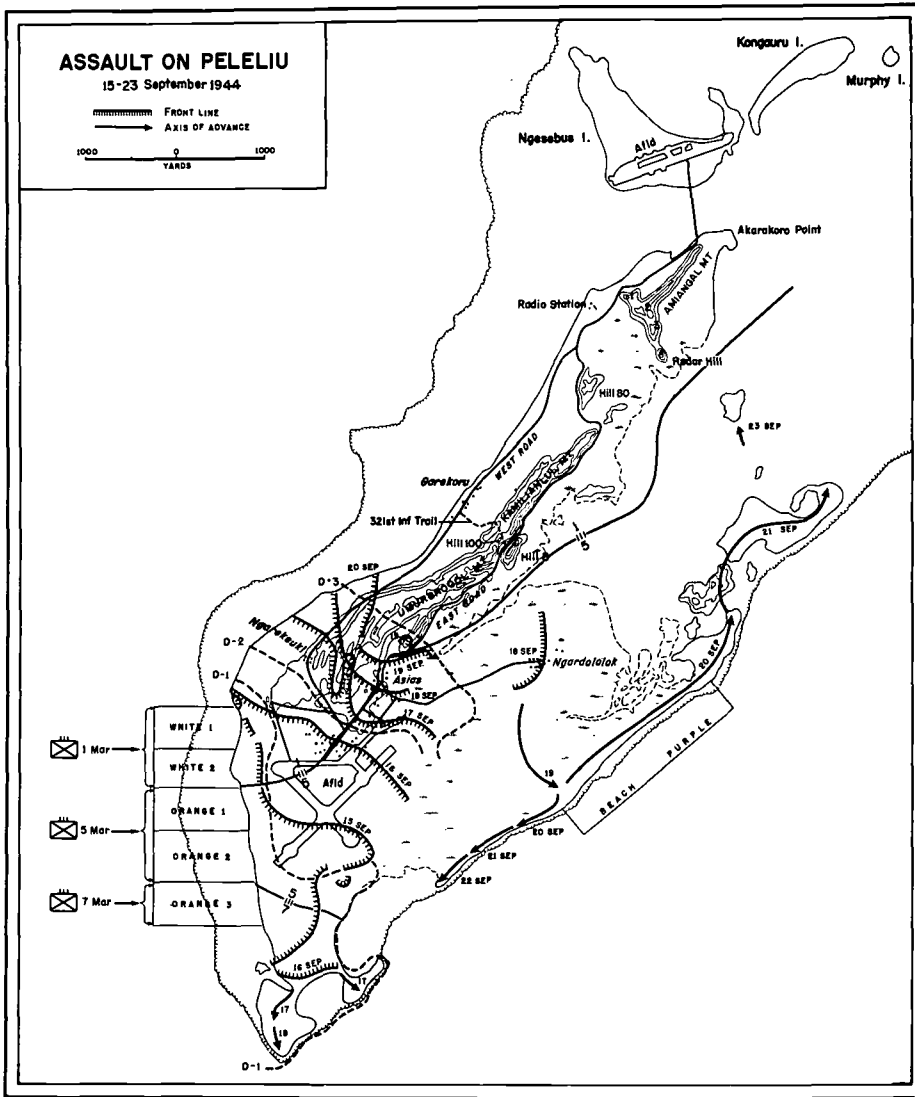
The second imponderable facing the Marines was the plan developed by Colonel Kunio Nakagawa, the officer who was to command the force on Peleliu, and his superior, Lieutenant General Sadae Inoue, back on Koror. Their concept of defense had changed considerably from that which was experienced by General Rupertus at Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester, and, in fact, negated his concept of a tough, but quick campaign.

Instead of relying upon a presumed moral superiority to defeat the

As seen from the air on D-Day, 15 September 1944, Beaches White 1 and 2, on which the 1st and 3d Battalions, 1st Marines, landed. Capt George P. Hunt's Company K, 3/1, was on the extreme left flank of the 1st Marine Division.

Department of Defense Photo (USN) 283745





attackers at the beach, and then to use *bushido* spirit and *banzai* tactics to throw any survivors back into the sea, Peleliu's defenders would delay the attacking Marines as long as they could, attempting to bleed them as heavily as possible. Rather than depending upon spiritual superiority, they would combine the devilish terrain with the stubborn, disciplined, Japanese soldiers to relinquish Peleliu at the highest cost to the invaders. This unpleasant surprise for the Marines marked a new and important adjustment to the Japanese tactics which were employed earlier in the war.

Little or nothing during the trip into the beaches and the touchdown revealed the character of the revised Japanese tactical plan to the five Marine assault battalions. Bouncing across almost half a mile of coral

fronting the landing beaches (White 1 and 2, Orange 1, 2, and 3), the tractors passed several hundred "mines," intended to destroy any craft which approached or ran over them. These "mines" were aerial bombs, set to be detonated by wire control from observation points onshore. However, the preliminary bombardment had so disrupted the wire controls, and so blinded the observers, that the defensive mining did little to slow or destroy the assaulting tractors.

As the tractors neared the beaches, they came under indirect fire from mortars and artillery. Indirect fire against moving targets generates more apprehension than damage, and only a few vehicles were lost to that phase of Japanese defense. Such fire did, however, demonstrate that the preliminary bombardment had not disposed of all the enemy's heavy

fire capability. More disturbingly, as the leading waves neared the beaches, the LVTs were hit by heavy enfilading artillery and antiboat gun fire coming from concealed bunkers on north and south flanking points.

The defenses on the left (north) flank of Beach White 1, assaulted by the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Stephen V. Sabol), were especially deadly and effective. They disrupted the critical regimental and division left flank. Especially costly to the larger landing plan, these guns shortly thereafter knocked out tractors carrying important elements of the battalion's and the regiment's command and control personnel and equipment. The battalion and then the regimental commander both found themselves ashore in a brutally vicious beach fight, without the means of communication necessary to comprehend their situations fully, or to take the needed remedial measures.

The critical mission to seize the "The Point" dominating the division left flank had gone to one of the 1st Regiment's most experienced company commanders: Captain George P. Hunt, a veteran of Guadalcanal and New Britain, (who, after the war, became a long-serving managing editor of *Life* magazine). Hunt had developed plans involving specific assignments for each element of his company. These had been rehearsed until every individual knew his role and how it fit into the company plan. Each understood his mission's criticality.

D-Day and H-Hour brought heavier than expected casualties. One of the company's platoons was pinned down all day in the fighting at the beach. The survivors of the rest of the company wheeled left, as planned, onto the flanking point. Moving grimly ahead, they pressed assaults upon the many defensive emplacements. Embrasures in the pillboxes and casements were blanketed with small-fire arms and smoke, then attacked with demoli-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 94913

The skies over the landing beaches of Peleliu are blackened with smoke rising from the ground as the result of the combined naval and aerial prelanding bombardment, as amphibian tractors rush shoreward carrying the assault waves.

tions and rifle grenades. A climax came at the principal casement, from which the largest and most effective artillery fire had been hitting LVTs on the flanks of following landing waves. A rifle grenade hit the gun muzzle itself, and ricocheted into the casement, setting off explosions and flames. Japanese defenders ran out the rear of the blockhouse, their

clothing on fire and ammunition exploding in their belts. That flight had been anticipated, and some of Hunt's Marines were in position to cut them down.

At dusk, Hunt's Company K held the Point, but by then the Marines had been reduced to platoon strength, with no adjacent units in contact. Only the sketchy radio com-

munications got through to bring in supporting fires and desperately needed re-supply. One LVT got into the beach just before dark, with grenades, mortar shells, and water. It evacuated casualties as it departed. The ammunition made the difference in that night's furious struggle against Japanese determined to recapture the Point.

The Changing Nature of Japanese Tactics

Japan launched its December 1941 surprise attacks in the expectation that its forces could quickly seize a forward line of Pacific and Asian empire. Thereafter, it expected to defend these territories stubbornly enough to tire and bleed the Allies and then to negotiate a recognition of Japanese hegemony.

This strategic concept was synchronized with the fanatic Japanese spirit of *bushido*. Faith in their army's moral superiority over lesser races led the Japanese to expect 19th-century *banzai* tactics to lead invariably to success. Expectations and experience meshed until their 1942 encounters with the Allies, particularly with Americans in the Solomons. Thereafter, it took several campaigns to internalize

the lessons of defeat by modern infantry weapons in the hands of the determined Allies.

To Americans, these Japanese misconceptions were alarming, but cost-effective: It was easier, and less costly, to mow down *banzai* attacks than to dig stubborn defenders out of fortified positions.

By spring of 1944, the lessons had permeated to the highest levels of Japan's army command. When General Hideki Tojo instructed General Inoue to defend the Palaus deliberately and conservatively, he was bringing Japanese tactics into support of Japanese strategy. Henceforth, Japanese soldiers would dig in and hunker down, to make their final defenses as costly as possible to the attacking Americans.



Marines and corpsmen scramble ashore and seek any cover they can to escape the incoming murderous enemy mortar and artillery fire. Behind them, smoking and abandoned, are amphibian tractors which were hit as they approached the beach.

The next afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond G. Davis' 1/1 moved its Company B to establish contact with Hunt, to help hang onto the bitterly contested positions. Hunt's company also regained the survivors of the platoon which had been pinned at the beach fight throughout D-Day. Of equal importance, the company regained artillery and naval gunfire communications, which proved critical during the second night. That night, the Japanese organized another and heavier – two companies – counterattack directed at the Marines at the Point. It was narrowly defeated. By mid-morning, D plus 2, Hunt's survivors, together with Company B, 1/1, owned the Point, and could look out upon some 500 Japanese who had died defending or trying to re-take it.

To the right of Puller's struggling 3d Battalion, his 2d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Russell E. Honsowetz commanding, met artillery and mortar opposition in landing, as well as machine-gun fire from still effective beach defenders. The same was true for 5th Marines' two assault battalions, Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Boyd's 1/5 and Lieutenant Colonel Austin C. Shofner's 3/5, which fought through the beach defenses

and toward the edge of the clearing looking east over the airfield area.

On the division's right flank, Orange 3, Major Edward H. Hurst's 3/7 had to cross directly in front of a commanding defensive fortification flanking the beach as had Marines in the flanking position on the Point. Fortunately, it was not as close as the Point position, and did not inflict such heavy damage. Nevertheless, its enfilading fire, together with some natural obstructions on the beach caused Company K, 3/7, to land left of its planned landing beach, onto the right half of beach Orange 2, 3/5's beach. In addition to being out of position, and out of contact with the company to its right, Company K, 3/7, became intermingled with



Situated in a cave overlooking the airfield is this heavy caliber Japanese antitank gun. It had a field of fire which included the invasion beaches and the airfield.

Damaged heavily in the D-Day bombardment, this Japanese pillbox survives on the southern promontory of White Beach. Now vacant, its gun lies on the beach.

Caption and photograph by Phillip D. Orr

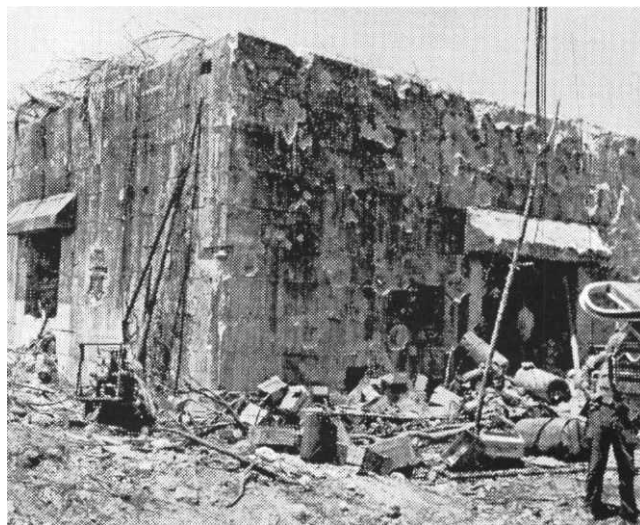


Naval Gunfire Support for Peleliu

In their earlier operations, especially at Guadalcanal, the primary experience of 1st Division Marines with naval gunfire was at the receiving end. On New Britain, the character and disposition of Japanese defenses did not call for extensive pre-landing fire support, nor did subsequent operations ashore. The naval gunfire to which the Guadalcanal veterans were exposed frequently and heavily damaged planes and installations ashore. Its effect upon dug-in Marines was frightening and sobering, but rarely destructive.

During the planning for Peleliu, the division staff initially had no trained naval gunfire (NGF) planner. When one arrived, he was hampered by the cumbersome communications link back to higher headquarters, Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith's Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (FMFPac), in Honolulu, which would provide the essential targeting information for the division's NGF plan. FMFPac also would plan and allocate the available gunfire resources to the targets deemed important by the division staff's planners. The preoccupation of FMFPac with the ongoing Marianas campaigns, as well as illness on the staff of Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf, Commander, Naval Gunfire Support Group, further limited and constrained the preparations. Heavy ammunition expenditures in the Marianas reduced ammunition availability for Peleliu.

Surprisingly, during the delivery of U.S. preparatory fires, there was no Japanese response. This prompted Oldendorf to report all known targets destroyed, and to cancel preparatory fires scheduled for D plus 3. An unintentional benefit of this uncoordinated change in naval gunfire plan may have resulted in there being more shells available for post-landing NGF support. But the costliest



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 95115

effect of inadequate NGF was that the flanking positions north and south of the landing beaches were not taken out. The selection of naval gunfire targets could certainly have been done with more careful attention. Colonel Lewis B. Puller, the 1st Marines commander, had specifically asked for the destruction of the positions dominating his landing on the division left flanks. Failure to do so was paid for in blood, courage, and time during the critical battle for the Point.

Subsequent to D-Day there were numerous instances of well-called and -delivered naval gunfire support: night illumination during the night of 15-16 September, the destruction of two major blockhouses earlier reported "destroyed," and effective support of the Ngesebus landing toward the end of the battle.

Company K, 3/5, a condition fraught with confusion and delay. Major Hurst necessarily spent time regrouping his separated battalion, using as a coordinating line a large anti-tank ditch astride his line of advance. His eastward advance then resumed, somewhat delayed by his efforts to regroup.

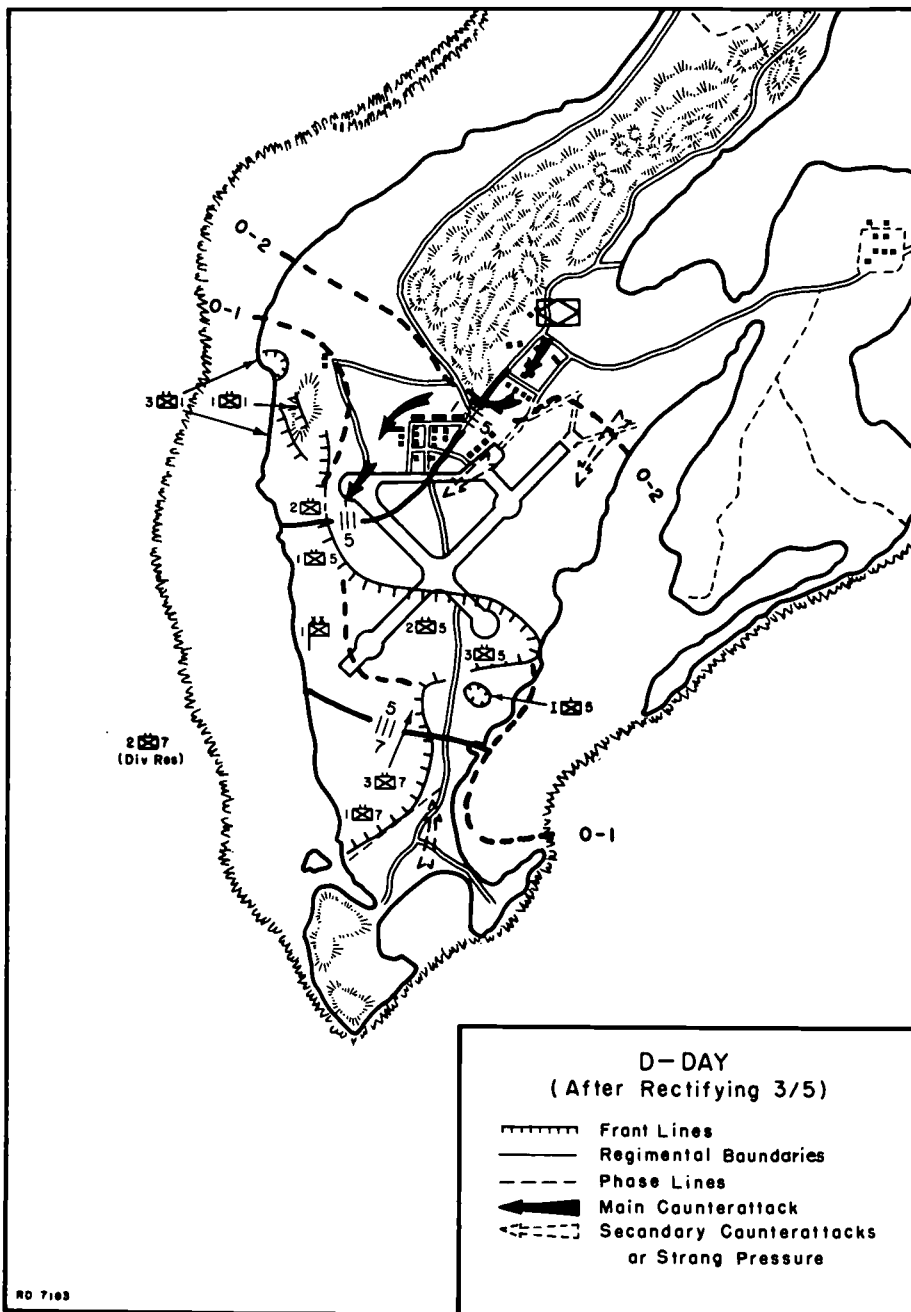
Any delay was anathema to the division commander, who visualized momentum as key to his success. The division scheme of maneuver on the right called for the 7th Marines (Colonel Herman H. Hanneken) to land two battalions in column, both over Beach Orange 3. As Hurst's leading battalion advanced, it was to be followed in trace by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Gormley's 1/7.

Gormley's unit was to tie into Hurst's right flank, and re-orient southeast and south as that area was uncovered. He was then to attack southeast and south, with his left on Hurst's right, and his own right on the beach. After Hurst's battalion reached the opposite shore, both were to attack south, defending Scarlet 1 and Scarlet 2, the southern landing beaches.

At the end of a bloody first hour, all five battalions were ashore. The closer each battalion was to Umurbrogol, the more tenuous was its hold on the shallow beachhead. During the next two hours, three of the division's four remaining battalions would join the assault and press for the momentum General Rupertus

deemed essential.

Following close behind Sabol's 3/1, the 1st Marines' Colonel Puller landed his forward command group. As always, he was eager to be close to the battle, even if that location deprived him of some capacity to develop full supporting fires. With limited communications, and now with inadequate numbers of LVTs for follow-on waves, he struggled to ascertain and improve his regiment's situation. His left unit (Company K, 3/1) had two of its platoons desperately struggling to gain dominance at the Point. Puller's plan to land Major Davis' 1st Battalion behind Sabol's 3/1, to reinforce the fight for the left flank, was thwarted by the H-hour losses in LVTs. Davis' companies had



to be landed singly and his battalion committed piecemeal to the action. On the regiment's right, Honsowetz' 2/1 was hotly engaged, but making progress toward capture of the west edges of the scrub which looked out onto the airfield area. He was tied on his right into Boyd's 1/5, which was similarly engaged.

In the beachhead's southern sector, the landing of Gormley's 1/7 was delayed somewhat by its earlier losses in LVTs. That telling effect of early opposition would be felt throughout the remainder of the day. Most of Gormley's battalion landed on the correct (Orange 3) beach, but

a few of his troops were driven leftward by the still enfilading fire from the south flank of the beach, and landed on Orange 2, in the 5th Marines' zone of action. Gormley's battalion was brought fully together behind 3/7 however, and as Hurst's leading 3/7 was able to advance east, Gormley's 1/7 attacked southeast and south, against prepared positions.

Hanneken's battle against heavy opposition from both east and south developed approximately as planned. Suddenly, in mid-afternoon, the opposition grew much heavier. Hurst's 3/7 ran into a blockhouse, long on

the Marines' map, which had been reported destroyed by pre-landing naval gunfire. As a similar situation later met on Puller's inland advance, the blockhouse showed little evidence of ever having been visited by heavy fire. Preparations to attack and reduce this blockhouse further delayed the 7th Marines' advance, and the commanding general fretted further about loss of momentum.

The Japanese Defenses

On the enemy's side, Lieutenant General Sadae Inoue, a fifth generation warrior of stout military reputation, commanding the 14th Infantry Division, fresh from the Kwangtung Army in China, met in Tokyo in March 1944 with Japanese Premier Hideki Tojo, who was also Minister of War. Tojo had concluded that Japan was no longer able to hold the Palau against growing Allied naval dominance in the Western Pacific. Instead, he had decided to sell the Palau to the United States at the highest possible cost to Americans in blood and time. He ordered Inoue to take his division to the Palau, to take command of all Japanese forces there, and to defend the Palau Islands as long as possible, denying its use to the Americans—and killing as many as possible in the undertaking.

As his division sailed to the Palau, Inoue flew ahead, reconnoitered his new locale by air for two days, and concluded that Peleliu (with satellite air strips on Angaur and Ngesebus) was the key to his defenses. Earlier U.S. attention to Peleliu during the Task Force 58 March strikes seemed to confirm that judgment. To defend Peleliu, Inoue immediately settled upon a commander, a mission, and a force level. Peleliu had for some time been under occupation and administrative command of a rear admiral, who had used his forces' construction resources and capability to build blockhouses and many reinforced concrete structures above ground, while improving existing



Caption by the artist, Tom Lea

"The Beach . . . My First View as I Came Around From the Ramp of our LVT We ground to a stop, after a thousand years, on the coarse coral . . . And we ran down the ramp and came around the end of the LVT, splashing ankle-deep up the surf to the white beach. Suddenly I was completely alone. Each man

drew into himself when he ran down that ramp, into that flame. Those Marines flattened in the sand on that beach were dark and huddled like wet rats in death as I threw my body down among them."

caves and tunnels under Peleliu's rich concealment of overlying jungle, scrub, and vines.

In these underground installations, the admiral's personnel had well survived the Task Force 58 March attacks. Above ground, planes and installations were demolished. As Task Force 58 departed, the Japanese emerged, repaired what they could, but continued to focus upon underground installations. Together with a few Korean labor troops, their numbers totaled about 7,000, most of them lacking training and leadership for infantry action.

Leadership arrived in the person of Colonel Nakagawa, with his 6,500-man *2d Infantry Regiment (Reinforced)*. They had long battle experience in China. They were armed with 24 75mm artillery pieces, some 13-15 light tanks, about 100 .50-cal. machine guns, 15 81mm heavy mortars, and about 30 dual-purpose anti-aircraft guns. Already on the island were a large number of very heavy (141mm) mortars, naval

anti-aircraft guns, and rudimentary rocket launchers for sending up large, unguided naval shells. Most significant, the regiment had Colonel Nakagawa and his battle-disciplined officers and noncommissioned officers. Nakagawa had already been awarded nine medals for leadership against the Chinese and was viewed as a "comer" within his officer corps.

Immediately upon arrival, Nakagawa reconnoitered his prospective battle area from the ground and from the air. He identified the western beaches, the Marines' White and Orange Beaches, as the most probable landing sites. He immediately ordered his troops to dig in and construct beach defenses. At this time, a bureaucratic conflict arose. Vice Admiral Seiichi Itou, who was the senior officer and the senior naval officer on Peleliu, resented being subordinate to an Army officer much junior to him.

From Koror, Lieutenant General Inoue dispatched Major General Kenjiro Murai to Peleliu, to assume

island command and to maintain "liaison" with Colonel Nakagawa. Murai was young, highly regarded, and, as the personal representative of Lieutenant General Inoue, was considered senior to the admiral. He left Nakagawa's operational mission firmly in Nakagawa's hands, as Inoue intended. Throughout the campaign, Nakagawa exercised operational control, and was assisted and counseled, but not commanded, by General Murai.

Nakagawa had a sound appreciation of his mission, of the situation, and of American firepower. He turned his attention to the fullest use of his principal advantage, the terrain. He so deployed and installed his forces to inflict all possible damage and casualties during the anticipated landing, and then to defend in depth for as long as possible. On Peleliu, that offered a vertical as well as a horizontal dimension to the defense.

He surveyed and registered artillery and mortar weapons over the



Caption by the artist, Tom Lea

"The Price Lying there in terror looking longingly up the slope to better cover, I saw a wounded man near me, staggering in the direction of the LVTs. His face was half bloody pulp and the mangled shreds of what was left of an arm hung down like a stick, as he bent over in his stumbling, shock-crazy walk. The half of his face that was still human had the most terrifying look of abject patience I have ever seen. He fell behind me, in a red puddle on the white sand."

width and depth of the reef off both eastern and western beaches, with planned heavy concentrations along the fringe of the western reef. In this he anticipated the American need to transfer follow-on waves from landing craft to the reef-crossing amphibian vehicles. He registered weapons on, and immediately inland from, the water's edge, to subject landing troops to a hail of fire. Off-shore he laid 500 wire-controlled "mines."

Colonel Nakagawa directed construction of beach obstacles, using

rails and logs, and ordered anti-tank ditches dug. He emplaced troops in machine gun and mortar pits along, and inland from, the beaches, augmented by all the available barbed wire. On the north and south flanks of the beach, he constructed concrete emplacements to shelter and conceal antitank and anti-boat artillery sited to enfilade the expected waves of landing craft.

Inland, he incorporated the already-built blockhouse and adjacent reinforced buildings into mutu-

ally supporting defensive complexes, with interconnecting communication lines and trenches.

Although believing the western beaches to be the most probable route of attack, he did not leave the southern (Scarlet) and eastern (Purple) beaches undefended. He committed one battalion to organize defenses in each area. The Purple Beaches were thoroughly organized, with contingent orders to the defenders to move into central Peleliu if the battle developed from the west, as expected. But the battalion committed to the south, Scarlet Beach, had orders to defend those stronger, more permanent emplacements to the end. Nakagawa assigned about 500 infantry and artillery to defend Ngesebus and about 1,000 naval personnel to defend northern Peleliu. Not under his command were the 1,500 defenders of Angaur.

The major part of his force and effort was committed to the 500 caves, tunnels, and firing embrasures in the coral ridges of central Peleliu. The naval units' extensive earlier tunneling into the limestone ridges rendered occupants largely immune to general bombardments. Only lucky hits into the mouths of caves, or point-blank direct fire could damage the hidden defenses and their troops. The tunnels were designed for, or adapted to, various purposes: barracks, command centers, hospitals, storage and ammunition magazines, cooking areas complete with fresh water springs and seepage basins, and of course firing embrasures with elaborate concealment and protective devices, including a few sliding steel doors. Colonel Nakagawa expected very heavy prelanding bombardments. He expected his troops to survive them, and then to carry out his mission of delaying and bleeding the Americans.

On Koror, Lieutenant General Inoue was busy with the bulk of his forces, preparing for expected attacks against Babelthuap. The Allied



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 95253

Engaged in the bitter struggle to establish the Peleliu beach-head, Marine riflemen get only momentary shelter behind an

LVT, while other Marines atop the amphibian tractor fire at enemy targets. The name of the LVT was more than prophetic

"Stalemate" plan had indeed called for invasion of Babelthuap. As the anticipated invasion drew near, Inoue issued a proclamation to his troops, clearly reflecting Tojo's instructions to delay and bleed. He pointed out the necessities to anticipate and endure the naval bombardment and to use the terrain to inflict casualties on the attackers. Without actually ordering troops to die, he included the words, "we are ready to die honorably." He went on to say that dying, and losing the territory to the enemy, might contribute to the opening of a new phase of the war.

cure the eastern half of the island. Shortly after the scheduled H plus one schedule, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, Major Gordon D. Gayle commanding, landed over Beach Orange 2, in trace behind 3/5. It

moved directly east, through the dunes and scrub jungle, into and out of the antitank barrier, and to the west edge of the clearing surrounding the airfield. Passing through the lines of 3/5, Gayle's battalion at-

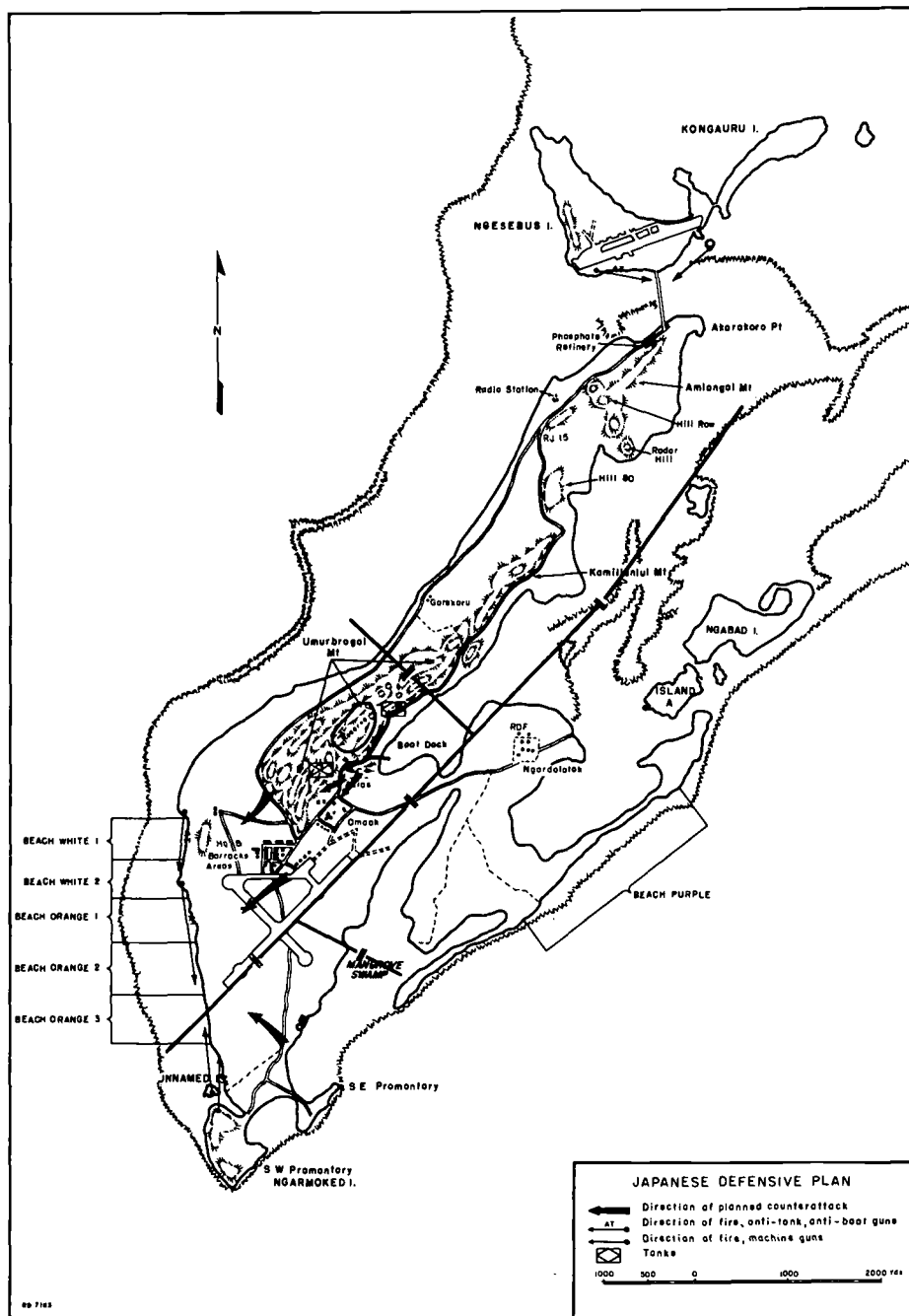
Embrasures in this well-sited, heavily reinforced position, possibly in the Pocket, indicate the location of Japanese weapons which devastated attacking Marines.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 107934



The Assault in the Center

As the 1st Marines battled to secure the left flank, and as the 7th Marines fought to isolate and then reduce the Japanese defenses in the southern end of Peleliu, the 5th Marines, Colonel Harold D. Harris commanding, was charged to drive across the airfield, cut the island in two, and then re-orient north and drive to se-



Sherman medium tanks, one-third of which had been left behind at the last moment because of inadequate shipping, were landed as early as possible, using a novel technique to cross the reef. This tank landing scheme was developed in anticipation of early Japanese use of their armor capability.

Movement of this fire and logistical support material onto a beach still close to, and under direct observation from, the commanding Umurbrogol heights was an inescapable risk mandated by the Peleliu terrain. So long as the enemy held observation from Umurbrogol over the airfield and over the beach activity, there was no alternative to driving ahead rapidly, using such fire support as could be mustered and coordinated. Continuing casualties at the beaches had to be accepted to support the rapid advance. The commanding general's concern for early momentum appeared to be eminently correct. Units on the left had to assault toward the foot of Umurbrogol ridges, and quickly get to the commanding crests. In the center, the 5th Marines had to make a fast advance to secure other possible routes to outflank Umurbrogol. In the south, the 7th Marines had to destroy immediately those now cut-off forces before becoming freed to join the struggle against central Peleliu.

tacked west against scattered resistance from dug-outs and bomb shelters near the southern end of the airfield, and through the scrub area slightly farther south. The 3d Battalion's mission was to clear that scrub, maintaining contact with 3/7 on its right, while 2/5 was to drive across the open area to reach the far side of the island. Advancing in its center and right, 2/5 battled completely across the island by mid-afternoon, echeloned its left rearward to keep contact with 1/5, and moved to re-orient its attack northward. The 2d Battalion's right flank tied for a while into 3/5 in the woods to the south

of the airfield, but then lost contact.

By this time, the antitank ditch along the center and right of Orange Beaches 1 and 2 was notable for the number of command posts located along its length. Shofner's 3/5 was there, as was Harris' 5th Marines command post. Then an advance element of the division command post under Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, the assistant division commander, landed and moved into the antitank ditch within sight of the airfield clearing area. Simultaneously, important support weapons were moving ashore.

The 1st Tank Battalion's M-48A1

The movement of the 5th Marines across the airfield and to the western edge of the lagoon separating the airfield area from the eastern peninsula (Beach Purple), created a line of attacking Marines completely across that part of the island oriented both east and north, toward what was believed to be the major center of Japanese strength. The 7th Marines, pushing east and south, completed splitting the enemy forces. Colonel Hanneken's troops, fully engaged, were generally concealed against observation from the enemy still north of the airfield and from the heights of Umurbrogol. There was a gap be-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 96745

Cpl Peter P. Zacharko stands by a captured Japanese 141mm mortar, which rained shells down on the landing beaches and on the Marines as they proceeded inland.

tween the 5th's right and the 7th's left, but it did not appear to be in a critical sector.

Nevertheless, it was by now apparent that the D-Day phase-line objectives were not going to be met in either the south or the north. Alarmed at the loss of the desired momentum, General Rupertus began committing his reserve. First, he ordered the division reconnaissance company ashore, then, pressing commanders already on the island, he ordered his one remaining uncommitted infantry battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Spencer S. Berger's 2/7, to land. No commander ashore felt a need for 2/7, but Colonel Hanneken said he could find an assembly area

where it would not be in the way. General Rupertus ordered it to land, remarking to his staff that he had now "shot his bolt!" Ashore, it was apparent that what was needed on this hectic beachhead was not more troops, but more room in which to maneuver and more artillery.

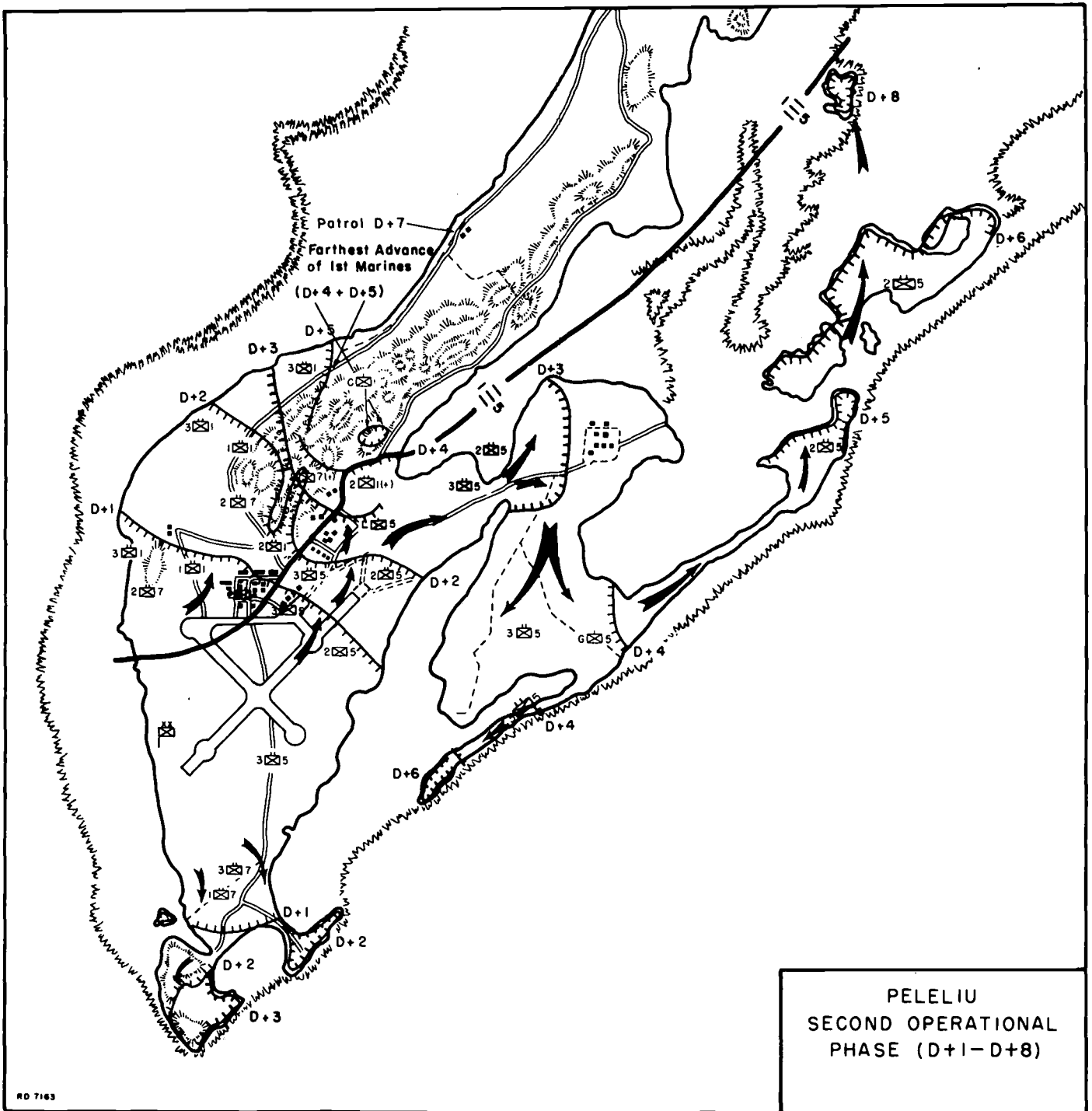
General Rupertus began to make plans to land himself and the main elements of his command group. Advice from the ADC ashore, and his chief of staff, Colonel John T. Selden, convinced Rupertus to stay on the flagship. He compromised that decision by ordering Colonel Selden ashore. By now, the shortage of LVTs was frustrating the timely landing of following waves. In consequence,

neither Selden's small CP group, nor Berger's 2/7, could get past the transfer line in their landing craft, and had to return to their ships despite their orders to land.

Into this division posture, at about 1650, Colonel Nakagawa launched his planned tank-infantry counterattack. All Marine commanders had been alerted to the Japanese capability to make an armored attack on D-Day, and were well prepared. The attack emerged from the area north of the airfield and headed south, generally across the front of the 1st Marines' lines on the eastern edge of the airfield clearing. The attack moved directly into the 5th Marines' sector where Boyd's 1/5 was set in, and stretched across the southern area of the airfield. Marines in 2/1 and 1/5 took the attackers under fire, infantry and tanks alike. A bazooka gunner in 2/1's front hit two of the tanks. The commanding officer of 1/5 had his tanks in defilade, just behind his front lines. They opened up on the Japanese armor, which ran through the front lines and virtually into his forward command group. Boyd's lines held fast, taking the attackers, infantry and tanks alike, under fire with all available weapons.

Major John H. Gustafson, in 2/5's forward command post mid-way across the airfield, had his tank platoon close at hand. Although the enemy had not yet come into his zone of action, he launched the platoon of tanks into the melee. Accounts vary as to just who shot what, but in a very few minutes it was all over. The attacking tanks were all destroyed, and the Japanese infantry literally blown away.

Colonel Nakagawa's attack was courageous, but proved to be a total failure. Even where the tanks broke through the Marine lines, they induced no Marine retreat. Instead, the Japanese armor became the focus of antitank fire of every sort and caliber. The light Japanese tanks were literally blown apart. More than 100



were reported destroyed. That figure, of course, reflected the amount of fire directed their way; each Marine grenadier, antitank gunner, and tanker thought he had killed the tank at which he shot, and so reported.

With the counterattack over and the Japanese in apparent disarray, 2/5 immediately resumed its attack, moving north along the eastern half of the airfield. The battalion advanced halfway up the length of the airfield clearing before it stopped to organize for the night. It was the

maximum advance of the day, over the most favorable terrain in the division front. It provided needed space for artillery and logistic deployment to support the continuation of the attack the next day.

However, that relatively advanced position had an open right, south, flank which corresponded to a hole in the regimental command structure. At that stage, 3/5 was supposed to maintain the contact between north-facing 2/5 and south-oriented 3/7. But 3/5's battalion command

and control had been completely knocked out by 1700. The battalion executive officer, Major Robert M. Ash, had been killed earlier in the day by a direct hit upon his landing LVT. About the time of the Japanese tank attack, a mortar barrage hit the 3/5 CP in the antitank ditch near the beach, killing several staff and prompting the evacuation of the battalion commander. As of 1700, the three companies of 3/5 were not in contact with each other, nor with the
(Continued on page 16)

A Horrible Place

Among the few civilian news correspondents who chose to share the fate of the Marines on shore on Peleliu was Robert "Pepper" Martin, of *Time*, who furnished the following description of what it was like there:

Peleliu is a horrible place. The heat is stifling and rain falls intermittently – the muggy rain that brings no relief, only greater misery. The coral rocks soak up the heat during the day and it is only slightly cooler at night. Marines are in the finest possible physical condition, but they wilted on Peleliu. By the fourth day there were as many casualties from heat prostration as from wounds

Peleliu is incomparably worse than Guam in its bloodiness, terror, climate and the incomprehensible tenacity of the Japs. For sheer brutality and fatigue, I think it surpasses anything yet seen in the Pacific, certainly from the standpoint of numbers of troops involved and the time taken to make the island secure.

On the second day, the temperature reached 105 degrees in the shade and there was very little shade in most places where the fighting was going on, and arguably no breeze at all anywhere. It lingered around that level of heat as the days dragged by (temperatures as high as 115 were recorded). Water supply presented a serious problem from the outset. This had been anticipated and in actual fact the solution proved less difficult than expected; the engineers soon

discovered that productive wells could be drilled almost anywhere on the comparatively low ground, and personnel semi-permanently stationed near the beach found that even shallow holes dug in the sand would yield an only mildly repulsive liquid which could be purified for drinking with halizone tablets. But it continued necessary to supply the assault troops by means of scoured-out oil drums and five-gallon field cans. Unfortunately, steaming out the oil drums did not remove all the oil, with the result that many or most of the troops drinking water from the drums were sickened. When the captains of the ships in the transport area learned of this and of the shortage of water, they rushed cases of fruit and fruit drinks to the beaches to ease the problem somewhat.

The water situation presented a problem even in the case of troops operating on comparatively level and open ground. Once the fighting entered the ridges, terrain difficult merely to traverse without having to fight, the debility rate shot upward so alarmingly that an emergency call was sent to all the ships off-shore to requisition every available salt tablet for issue to the 1st Marines.

The statement that heat prostrations equalled wound casualties is apt to be misleading. Most of those evacuated were returned to duty after a day or two of rest and rehabilitation; hence, their absence from the frontlines did not permanently impair the combat efficiency of their units. But such numerous cases did strain the already overburdened Medical Corps elements.

The antitank ditch dug by the Japanese along the center and right of Orange Beaches 1 and 2 soon after the landing became the locations of command posts of various units. Both

the 5th Marines' and 3/5's CPs were located there, as was the 7th Marines', shown here. BGen Oliver P. Smith with the advance element of the division CP set up in the ditch also.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 94939



Special Reef-crossing Techniques

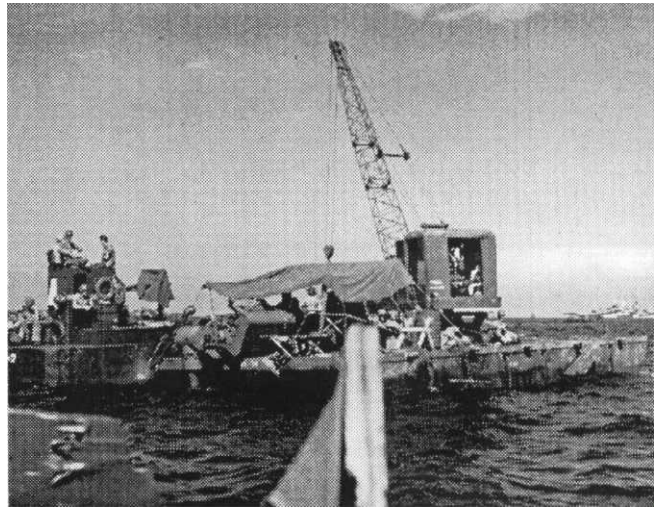
Inasmuch as Peleliu's fringing reef would not permit landing craft within 700 yards of the beach, such craft deposited tanks at the reef's edge. There the depths permitted tanks to operate in most areas, without being submerged, but not in all. A plan was devised to form tanks into small columns, each to be led by an LVT. So long as the LVT was grounded on the reef, the tanks could follow in trace. But when the LVT encountered a depth which floated it, tanks halted while the LVT literally "felt" out a suitable shallow path. Then the tanks followed, still in small columns, and so arrived at the shore at the earliest possible hour. The technique was one of the keys to timely employment of armor ashore before D-Day was over.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 95624.



Two other reef-crossing innovations were used on D-Day. A large number of amphibious trailers were incorporated into the logistic plan, to be towed behind landing craft, and later, at reef's edge they would be taken in tow by amphibian tractors. Ashore, trucks took them into tow, enabling critical supplies to be moved well forward to supply points just in rear of the fighting. Newly available crawler cranes were emplaced on barges near the reef's edge. They could lift nets full of ammunition and other vital supplies from boats to tractors at the transfer line. Other such crawler cranes were landed early and positioned by the shore party to lift net-loads from LVTs to trucks for expeditious delivery forward.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 95354.



(Continued from page 14)

battalions to their right and left.

The 5th Marines commanding officer ordered his executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis W. Walt, to take command of 3/5 and to redeploy so as to close the gap between 5th and 7th Marines. Major Gayle moved 2/5's reserve company to his right flank and to provide a tie-in position. Walt located and tied in his 3/5 companies to build a more continuous regimental line. By 2230, he had effected the tie-in, just in time. Beginning then, the salient which the 5th Marines had carved between Peleliu's central and southern defenders came under a series of sharp counterattacks that continued throughout the night. The attacks came from both north and south. None of them enjoyed any notable

success, but they were persistent enough to require resupply of ammunition to forward companies. Dawn revealed scores of Japanese bodies north of the Marine lines.

Elsewhere across the 1st Division's front there were more potentially threatening night counterattacks. None of them succeeded in driving Marines back or in penetrating the lines in significant strength. The most serious attack came against the Company K, 3/1, position on the Point, at the 1st Marines' left.

In the south, the 7th Marines experienced significant night attacks from the Japanese battalion opposing it. But the Marines there were in comfortable strength, had communications to bring in fire support, including naval gunfire illumination. They turned back all attacks without

a crisis developing.

At the end of the first 12 hours ashore, the 1st Marine Division held its beachhead across the intended front. Only in the center did the depth approximate that which had been planned. The position was strong everywhere except on the extreme left flank. General Smith, from his forward command post was in communication with all three regimental commanders. The report he received from Colonel Puller, on the left, did not afford an adequate perception of 1st Marines' tenuous hold on the Point. That reflected Colonel Puller's own limited information. The other two regimental reports reflected the situations adequately.

In addition to the three infantry regiments, the 1st Division had almost three battalions of light ar-



Caption by the artist, Tom Lea

"This is Sad Sack Calling Charlie Blue We found the battalion commander [LtCol Edward H. Hurst, CO, 3/7] sitting on a smashed wet log in the mud, marking positions on his map. By him sat his radioman, trying to make contact with company commands on the portable set propped up in the mud. There was an infinitely tired and plaintive patience in the radioman's voice as he called code names, repeating time and again, 'This is Sad Sack calling Charlie Blue. This is Sad Sack calling Charlie'"

tillery ashore and emplaced. All 30 tanks were ashore. The shore party was functioning on the beach, albeit under full daylight observation by the enemy and under intermittent enemy fire. The division necessarily had to continue at full press on D plus 1. The objective was to capture the commanding crests on the left, to gain maneuver opportunities in the center, and to finish off the isolated defenders in the south.

At least two colonels on Peleliu ended their work day with firm misconceptions of their situations, and with correspondingly inaccurate reports to their superiors. At day's end, when General Smith finally got a telephone wire into the 1st Marines' CP, he was told that the regiment had a firm hold on its beachhead, and was approximately on the O-1 objective line. He was not told about, and Colonel Puller was not fully aware of, the gaps in his lines, nor of the gravity of the Company K, 3/1, struggle on the Point, where only 38

Marines were battling to retain the position.

Colonel Nakagawa, on the other hand, had reported that the landing attempt by the Marines had been "put to route." Inconsistently, he had also reported that his brave counter-attack force had thrown the enemy into the sea.

The Assault Continues

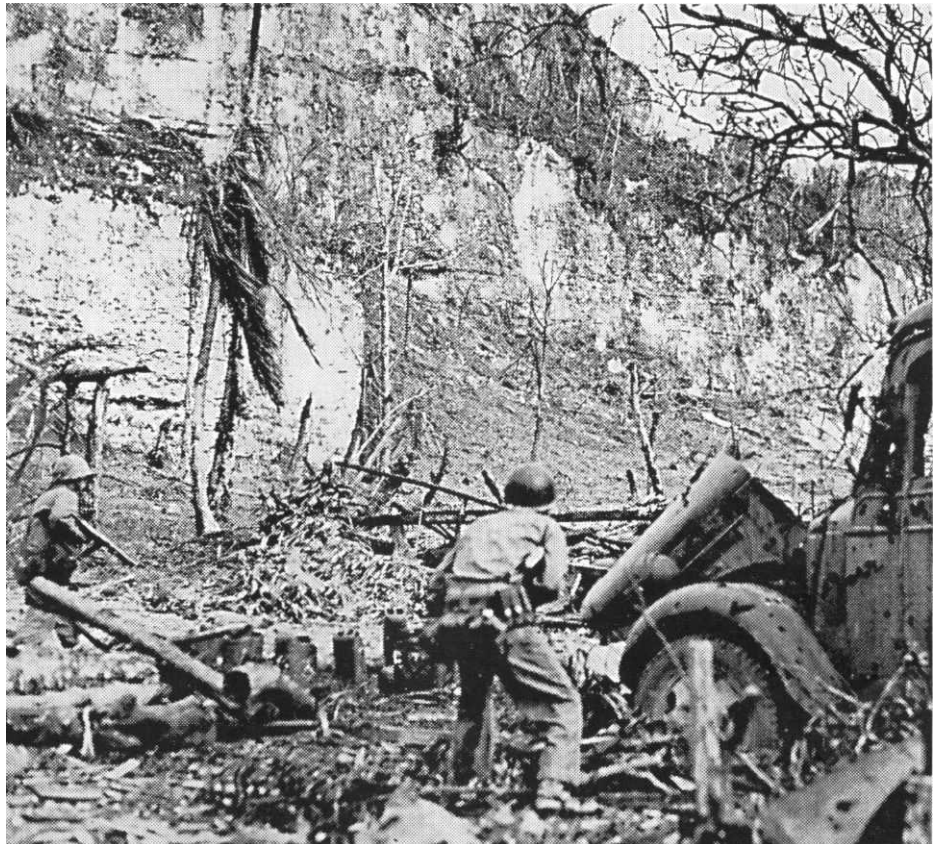
With the dawn of a new day, the two opposing commanders at Peleliu awoke from whatever sleep they may have gotten to face immediate grim prospects.

General Rupertus, having been frustrated by his earlier effort to land his division reserve into the southern sector of his beachhead, was now aware that his northern sector stood most in need of help, specifically on the extreme left flank. Rupertus ordered 2/7 into Puller's sector for employment there.

At division headquarters afloat,

Wary riflemen of the 5th Marines advance through a devastated Japanese bivouac area to the northeast of the Peleliu airfield. The concealed enemy troops took full advantage of the rocky terrain, forcing the Marines to clear out each nook and cranny.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 96763





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 95921

At about 1650 on D-Day, Col Nakagawa launched his tank-infantry attack from the north of the airfield and headed south across the front of the 1st Marines' lines. The 1st Marine Di-

vision had been prepared for such an eventuality, and the attack was a total failure. More than 100 enemy tanks and their covering troops were reported as being literally blown apart.

more had been learned about the extent of Marine D-Day casualties: 1,111, of whom 209 were killed in action (KIA). While this was not a hefty percentage of the total reinforced divisional strength, the number was grim in terms of cutting-edge strength. Most of those 1,111 casualties had been suffered in eight of the division's nine infantry battalions. Except in the center, Rupertus was not yet on the O-1 line, the first of eight planned phase lines.

Having received less than a comprehensive view of the 1st Marines' situation, Rupertus was more determined than ever to move ashore quickly, to see what he could, and to do whatever he could to re-ignite the lost momentum. That he would have to operate with a gimpy leg from a sandy trench within a beach area still under light but frequent fire, seemed less a consideration to him than his need to see and to know (General Rupertus had broken his ankle in a preassault training exercise, and his foot was in a cast for the entire operation.).

Over on Colonel Nakagawa's side, despite the incredible reports being sent out from his headquarters, he could see from his high ground a quite different situation. The landing force had not been "put to route." Ashore, and under his view, was a division of American Marines deployed across two miles of beach-head. They had been punished on D-

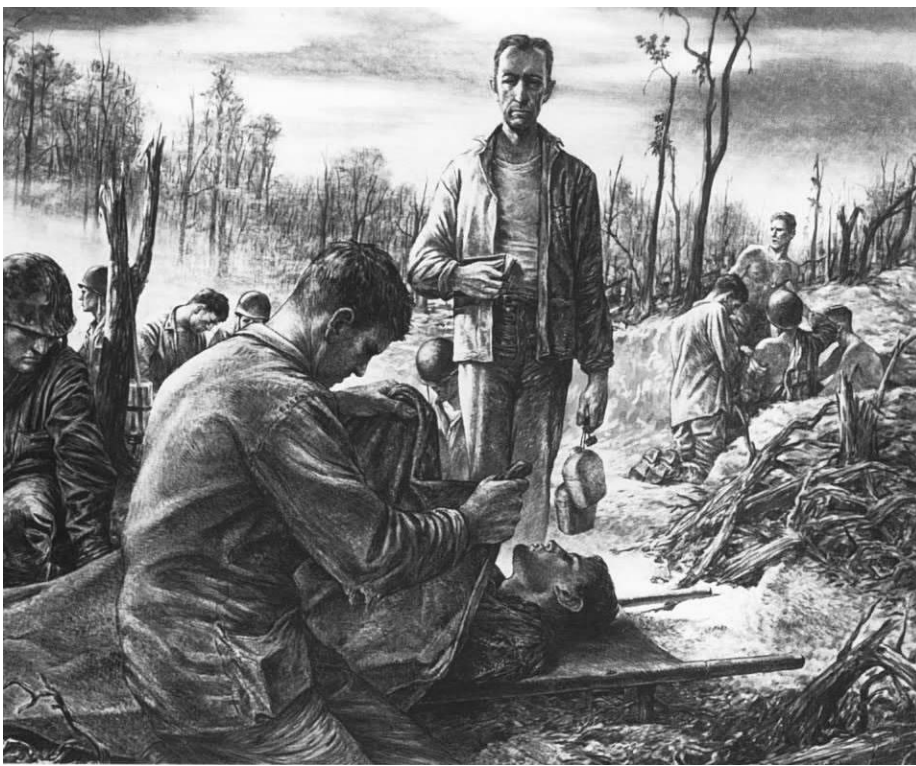
Day, but were preparing to renew the fight. Predictably, their attack would be launched behind a hail of naval gunfire, artillery, and aerial attacks. They would be supported by U.S. tanks which had so readily dispatched the Japanese armor on D-Day.

In his own D-Day counterattack, Nakagawa had lost roughly one of

Apparently covered by a returning 1st Marine Division veteran's graffiti, this Japanese light tank remains on the northwest corner of the Peleliu airfield. Its turret blown off, it is the only one left from the failed enemy attack of 1944.

Caption and photo by Phillip D. Orr





Caption and photo by Phillip D. Orr.

"Sick Bay in a Shellhole: The Padre Read, 'I am the Resurrection and the Light' About thirty paces back of the Jap trench a sick bay had been established in a big shell crater made by one of our battleship guns . . . In the center of the crater at the bottom a doctor was working on the worst of the stretcher cases. Corpsmen, four to a stretcher, came in continually with their bloody loads . . . The padre stood by with two canteens and a Bible, helping. He was deeply and visibly moved by the patient suffering and death. He looked very lonely, very close to God, as he bent over the shattered men so far from home."

his five infantry battalions. Elsewhere he had lost hundreds of his beach defenders in fighting across the front throughout D-Day, and in his uniformly unsuccessful night attacks against the beachhead. Nevertheless, he still had several thousand determined warriors, trained and armed. They were deployed throughout strong and well-protected defensive complexes and fortifications, with ample underground support facilities. All were armed with the discipline and determination to kill many Americans.

As he had known from the start, Nakagawa's advantage lay in the terrain, and in his occupation and organization of that terrain. For the present, and until that time when he would be driven from the Umurbrogol crests which commanded the airfield clearing, he held a dominating position. He had impressive observation over his attackers, and

hidden fire to strike with dangerous effect. His forces were largely invisible to the Americans, and relatively impervious to their fire superiority. His prospects for continuing to hold key terrain components seemed good.

The Marines were attacking fortified positions, against which careful and precise fire preparations were needed. They were, especially on the left, under extreme pressure to assault rapidly, with more emphasis upon speed than upon careful preparation. With enemy observation and weapons dominating the entire Marine position, staying in place was to invite being picked off at the hidden enemy's leisure. General Rupertus' concern for momentum remained valid.

This placed the burden of rapid advance primarily upon the 1st Marines on the left, and secondarily upon the 5th in the airfield area. In

the south, the 7th Marines already held its edge of the airfield's terrain. The scrub jungle largely screened the regiment from observation and it was opposed by defenses oriented toward the sea, away from the airfield.

Puller's 1st Marines, which had already suffered the most casualties on D-Day, still faced the toughest terrain and positions. It had to attack, relieve Company K, 3/1, on the Point, and assault the ridges of Umurbrogol, south to north. Supporting that assault, Honsowetz had to swing his east-facing 2/1 leftward, and to capture and clear the built-up area between the airfield and the ridges. This his battalion did on D plus 1 and 2, with the 5th Marines assisting in its zone on the right. But then he was at the foot of the commanding ridges, and joined in the deadly claw-scratch-and-scramble attack of Davis' 1/1 against the Japanese on and in the ridges.

As Colonel Puller was able to close the gaps on his left, and swing his entire regiment toward the north, he pivoted on Sabol's 3/1 on the left. Sabol, aided by Company B, 1/1, established contact with and reinforced Company K on the Point. Then he headed north, with his left on the beach and his right near the West Road along the foot of the westernmost features of the Umurbrogol complex. In Sabol's sector, the terrain permitted tank support, and offered more chances for maneuver than were afforded in the ridges further to the right. Hard fighting was involved, but after D-Day, Sabol's battalion was able to move north faster than the units on his right. His advance against the enemy was limited by the necessity to keep contact with Davis' 1/1 on his right.

The relative rates of movement along the boundary between Sabol's flatter and more open zone and Davis' very rough zone of action, brought the first pressing need for reserves. Tactically, there was clear necessity to press east into and over

A Paucity of Reserves

Planning for the seizure of the southern Palau (Angaur and Peleliu-Ngesebus) had been the responsibility of III Amphibious Corps (Major General Roy S. Geiger). But General Geiger and his staff had been fully occupied during the critical planning weeks, up to and including the capture of Guam, from 21 July to 10 August. The Guam operation ended more than a month later than originally contemplated. Meanwhile, someone else had to fill the corps planning function for the Palau undertaking. A temporary headquarters, X-Ray Corps, under Major General Julian C. Smith was established. The two major tactical tasks of the southern Palau operation were assigned to the Army 81st Infantry Division (Angaur) and 1st Marine Division (Peleliu-Ngesebus). The 81st Division was also tasked to set aside one RCT as corps reserve.

This partition of division level-planning effort was convenient, but it slipped into a gross imbalance in force allocation which was neither recognized nor corrected as plans

progressed toward operations. The 1st Marine Division had nine infantry battalions with which to attack more than 10,000 defending Japanese on Peleliu. Major General Paul J. Mueller's 81st Infantry Division had six infantry battalions with which to attack 1,500 (earlier reported as 2,500) Japanese defenders on Angaur. Terrain and circumstances on the two objective islands were similarly imbalanced. Peleliu was considerably larger and had far more complex terrain. Its defensive fortifications were obviously far more developed, and it offered fewer predictable landing beaches than Angaur. Only the subsequent rapid shifting of plans and higher-level responsibilities can account for such force allocation imbalance not having been corrected at Corps or Expeditionary Troops level. The effect of all these imbalances was still further magnified between 13 and 17 September. Higher level changes in plans and naval decisions stripped III Corps of all its reserves.

the rough terrain, and systematically reduce the complex defenses. That job Davis' 1/1, Honsowetz's 2/1, and Berger's 2/7 did. But more troops than Sabol had also were needed to advance north through the open terrain to begin encirclement of the rough Umurbrogol area, and to find avenues into the puzzle of that rugged landscape. By 17 September, reserves were badly needed along the 1st Division's left (west) axis of advance. But on 17 September, neither the division nor III Amphibious Corps had reserves.

As Sabol's 3/1 fought up the easier terrain on the 1st Marines' left, Davis' 1/1 drove into the center with his left on the break between coral ridge country and Sabol's more open flat zone. Among his early surprises, as he approached the foot of the ridge area, was another of the blockhouses Admiral Oldendorf had reportedly destroyed with pre-D-Day gunfire. Although it had been on the planning map for weeks, those who first encountered it, reported the emplacement as "not having a mark on it!"

The blockhouse was part of an impressive defense complex. It was connected to and supported by a web of pillboxes and emplacements, which

it in turn supported. The walls were four-feet thick, of reinforced concrete. Happily, Davis was given a naval gunfire support team which called in the fires of the the USS *Mississippi*. Between them, they made fairly short work of the entire complex, and 1/1 could advance until it ran into the far more insoluble Japanese ridge defense systems.

Major Davis, who was to earn a Medal of Honor in the Korean War in 1950, said of the attack into and along or across those ridges, "It was the most difficult assignment I have ever seen."

During the 1st Marines' action in the first four days of the campaign, all three of its battalions battled alongside, and up onto Umurbrogol's terrible, cave-filled, coral ridges. Berger's 2/7, initially in division reserve, but assigned to the 1st Marines on D plus 1, was immediately thrown into the struggle. Puller fed two separate companies of the battalion into the fight piecemeal. Shortly thereafter, 2/7 was given a central zone of action between Colonel Puller's 1st and 2d Battalions. The 1st Marines continued attacking on a four-battalion front about a 1,000 yards wide, against stubborn and

able defenders in underground caves and fortifications within an incredible jumble of ridges and cliffs. Every advance opened the advancing Marines to new fire from heretofore hidden positions on flanks, in rear, in caves above or below newly won ground.

Nothing better illustrated the tactical dilemmas posed by Umurbrogol than did the 19 September seizure of, then withdrawal from, Hill 100, a ridge bordering the so-called Horseshoe Valley at the eastern limit of the Pocket. It lay in the sector of Lieutenant Colonel Honsowetz' 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, to which Company B of Major Ray Davis' 1st Battalion was attached. Company B, 1/1, having landed with 242 men, had 90 men left when its commander, Captain Everett P. Pope, received Honsowetz' order to take what the Marines were then calling Hill 100. The Japanese called it *Higashiyama* (East Mountain).

Initially supported by tanks, Pope's company lost that support when the two leading tanks slipped off an approach causeway. Continuing with only mortar support, and into the face of heavy defending mortar and machine-gun fire, Pope's Marines