

CENTRAL PACIFIC DRIVE

History of U.S. Marine Corps

Operations in World War II



VOLUME III

HISTORICAL BRANCH, G-3 DIVISION, HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS

Central Pacific Drive

HISTORY OF U. S. MARINE CORPS
OPERATIONS IN WORLD WAR II

VOLUME III

by

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Foreword

This book, the third in a projected five-volume series, continues the comprehensive history of Marine Corps operations in World War II. The story of individual campaigns, once told in separate detail in preliminary monographs, has been reevaluated and rewritten to show events in proper proportion to each other and in correct perspective to the war as a whole. New material, particularly from Japanese sources, which has become available since the writing of the monographs, has been included to provide fresh insight into the Marine Corps' contribution to the final victory in the Pacific.

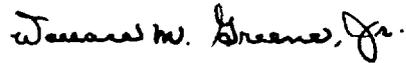
During the period covered in these pages, we learned a great deal about the theory and practice of amphibious warfare. But most of all we confirmed the basic soundness of the doctrine which had been developed in prewar years by a dedicated and farsighted group of Navy and Marine Corps officers. These men, the leaders and workers in the evolution of modern amphibious tactics and techniques, served their country well. Anticipating the demands of a vast naval campaign in the Pacific, they developed requirements and tested prototypes for the landing craft and vehicles which first began to appear in large numbers at the time of the Central Pacific battles. Many of the senior officers among these prewar teachers and planners were the commanders who led the forces afloat and ashore in the Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas.

Allied strategy envisioned two converging drives upon the inner core of Japanese defenses, one mounted in the Southwest Pacific under General MacArthur's command, the other in the Central Pacific under Admiral Nimitz. Although Marines fought on land and in the air in the campaign to isolate Rabaul, and played a part significant beyond their numbers, it was in the Central Pacific that the majority of Fleet Marine Force units saw action. Here, a smoothly functioning Navy-Marine Corps team, ably supported by Army ground and air units, took part in a series of amphibious assaults that ranged in complexity from the seizure of tiny and heavily-defended islets, where there was little room for maneuver and no respite from combat, to large islands where two and three divisions could advance in concert.

It was my privilege to take part in much of this campaign, first as operations officer with Tactical Group 1 in the Marshalls and later in the same capacity with the 2d Marine Division in the Marianas. I prize the

associations formed then with the officers and men who won the victories, not only those of the Marine Corps but also those of the other services in our joint commands. Sparked by knowledge hard-won at Tarawa, we were able to plan and execute effectively the operations at Kwajalein and move forward, on incredibly short notice, to Eniwetok, seizing there the islands that guarded the lagoon from which most of our ships staged for the Marianas. In the fighting for Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, Marines proved conclusively that their demonstrated effectiveness in short-term amphibious assault carried over to extended combat ashore.

As the narrative in this volume clearly shows, victory against a foe as determined and as competent as the Japanese could not have been won without a high cost in the lives of the men who did the fighting. Our advance from Tarawa to Guam was paid for in the blood of brave men, ordinary Americans whose sacrifice for their country should never be forgotten. Nor will it be by those who were honored to serve with them.



WALLACE M. GREENE, JR.
GENERAL, U.S. MARINE CORPS
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

Reviewed and approved
8 December 1965

Preface

The series of Central Pacific operations that began at Tarawa in November 1943 marked a period of steadily increasing momentum in our drive toward the Japanese home islands. To a great extent, these operations were periods of trial—and occasionally of error—when our amphibious striking force, the Fifth Fleet and the V Amphibious Corps, tested and proved the basic soundness of the doctrine, tactics, and techniques developed by the Navy and Marine Corps in the years before World War II. This was a time of innovation too, when new weapons, improved methods of fire support, and organizational developments all played a large part in our victories. The lessons learned in the Gilberts, reaffirmed and applied with increasing effect in the Marshalls and Marianas, were of priceless value in shortening the war.

Our purpose in publishing this operational history in durable form is to make the Marine Corps record permanently available for study by military personnel and the general public as well as by serious students of military history. We have made a conscious effort to be objective in our treatment of the actions of Marines and of the men of other services who fought at their side. We have tried to write with understanding about our former enemies and in this effort have received invaluable help from the Japanese themselves. Few people so militant and unyielding in war have been as dispassionate and analytical about their actions in peace. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Mr. Susumu Nishiura, Chief of the War History Office, Defense Agency of Japan and to the many researchers and historians of his office that reviewed our draft manuscripts.

This volume was planned and outlined by Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., senior historian assigned to the World War II historical project. Mr. Bernard T. Nalty, originally assigned as the author of this volume, wrote the narrative of the Gilberts and Marshalls campaigns and began the story of Saipan before he left the Marine Corps to become an historian with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In his work, Mr. Nalty made use of the research material gathered for the monographs prepared by Captain James R. Stockman, *The Battle for Tarawa*, Lieutenant Colonels Robert D. Heintz, Jr. and John A. Crown, *The Marshalls: Increasing the Tempo*, and Major Carl W. Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End*. Mr. Edwin T. Turnbladh finished the work on Saipan begun by Mr. Nalty and wrote the part concerning Tinian, using much of the research data amassed by Major Hoffman for his monograph, *The Seizure of Tinian*. Shortly after he had started working on the Guam narrative, Mr. Turnbladh left the Marine Corps to become an Air Force research analyst, and Mr. Shaw completed the book, revising and editing it for publication. In his research on the Guam operation, Mr. Shaw frequently consulted the material assembled for Major Orlan R. Lodge's monograph, *The Recapture of Guam*. The

appendices concerning casualties, command and staff, division table of organization, and chronology were prepared by Mr. George W. Garand; the remainder were completed by Mr. Shaw. Successive Heads of the Historical Branch—Colonel William M. Miller, Major John H. Johnstone, Colonel Thomas G. Roe, Colonel Joseph F. Wagner, Jr., and Lieutenant Colonel Richard J. Schening—made the final critical review of portions of the manuscript. The book was completed under the direction of Colonel Frank C. Caldwell, present head of the branch.

A number of leading participants in the actions described have commented on the preliminary drafts of pertinent portions of the book. Their valuable assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Several senior officers, in particular General David M. Shoup, Admiral Harry W. Hill, Lieutenant General Julian C. Smith, and Rear Admiral Charles J. Moore, made valuable additions to their written comments during personal interviews.

Special thanks are due to the historical agencies of the other services for their critical readings of draft chapters of this book. Outstanding among the many official historians who measurably assisted the authors were: Dr. John Miller, Jr., Deputy Chief Historian, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army; Mr. Dean C. Allard, Head, Operational Archives Branch, Naval History Division, Department of the Navy; and Dr. Robert F. Futrell, Historian, U.S. Air Force Historical Division, Research Studies Institute, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base.

First Lieutenant John J. Hainsworth, and his predecessors as Historical Branch Administrative Officer, First Lieutenant D'Arcy E. Grisier and Chief Warrant Officer Patrick R. Brewer, ably handled the many exacting duties involved in processing the volume from first drafts through final printed form. Many of the early preliminary typescripts were prepared by Mrs. Miriam R. Smallwood and the remainder were done by Miss Kay P. Sue, who expertly handled the painstaking task of typing the final manuscript for the printer. Much of the meticulous work demanded by the index was done by Miss Sue and Miss Linnea A. Coleman.

The maps were originally drafted by Corporal Robert F. Stibil; later revisions and additions were made by Corporal Thomas L. Russell. Official Department of Defense photographs have been used throughout the text.



W. R. COLLINS

MAJOR GENERAL, U.S. MARINE CORPS
ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF, G-3

Contents

PART I LAUNCHING THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OFFENSIVE

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. Early Plans for a War with Japan	3
2. The Central Pacific in Global Strategy	8
3. The Central Pacific Battleground	14

PART II THE GILBERTS OPERATION

1. Preparing to Take the Offensive	23
2. The Assault on Betio	53
3. Amphibious Victory	72
4. Completing the Capture	92
5. The Importance of GALVANIC	103

PART III THE MARSHALLS: QUICKENING THE PACE

1. FLINTLOCK Plans and Preparations	117
2. D-Day in the Marshalls	142
3. FLINTLOCK: Completing the Conquest	155
4. Westward to Eniwetok	181
5. The CATCHPOLE Operation	196
6. The Fruits of Victory	220

PART IV SAIPAN: THE DECISIVE BATTLE

1. Background to FORAGER	231
2. American and Japanese Preparations	251
3. Saipan: The First Day	263
4. The Conquest of Southern Saipan	280
5. The Fight for Central Saipan	305
6. Northern Saipan: End of the Campaign	332

PART V ASSAULT ON TINIAN

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. The Inevitable Campaign	355
2. J-Day and Night	377
3. Southward on Tinian	393
4. The Island Secured	411

PART VI THE RETURN TO GUAM

1. Preparing for Guam	431
2. W-Day	457
3. Consolidating a Foothold	479
4. Continuing the Offensive	503
5. Seizure of Northern Guam	535
6. Finish in the Marianas	568

APPENDICES

A. Bibliographical Notes	587
B. Guide to Abbreviations	597
C. Military Map Symbols	601
D. Chronology	602
E. Fleet Marine Force Status—30 October 1943	607
F. Table of Organization F-100—Marine Division	618
G. Marine Task Organization and Command List	620
H. Marine Casualties	636
I. Unit Commendations	638
Index	650

ILLUSTRATIONS

Betio Island Two Weeks After the Battle	41
Assault Troops on Betio	41
Damaged LVTs at Betio	58
Rubber Raft Carrying Wounded Marines	58
Squad Leader Points Out the Enemy	82
Reinforcements Wade Ashore at Betio	82
Machine Gun Ammunition Bearers	88
Flamethrower Smoke Over a Japanese Bombproof	88
Light Tanks and Artillery Leave Betio	96
Soldiers of 2/165 Assault Makin	96
Roi-Namur Under Bombing Attack	138
105mm Ammunition Being Unloaded At Mellu Island	146
24th Marines at Namur	146

ILLUSTRATIONS—Continued	PAGE
Marine Light Tank on Namur	164
Japanese Prisoners on Roi-Namur	164
Army 37mm Antitank Gun on Kwajalein	178
Marine 105mm Howitzers Set Up to Fire on Engebi	178
22d Marines Assault Waves Approach Engebi	202
Navy Fighter Attacks at Eniwetok Atoll	202
Marine Heavy Machine Guns on Eniwetok Island	212
Navy Corpsmen on Eniwetok Island	212
Riflemen of 22d Marines on Parry Island	223
Marianas Invasion Force at Eniwetok	223
Fire Team on Saipan	272
Japanese Medium Tanks Knocked Out at Saipan	272
Hand Grenades Tossed by Marines on Saipan	296
Skirmish Line of 27th Division Infantrymen	296
Marines Dig In on Saipan	324
Company CP in Garapan	324
Truck-Mounted Rocket Launchers	344
Flame Tank Hits Enemy Cave on Saipan	344
Observation Plane Over Northern Saipan	349
Supporting Cruiser Fires on Tinian	349
Medium Tanks Land on Tinian	386
2d Division Marines Advance on Tinian	386
Machine Gun on a Half-Track Lays Down Searching Fire	416
Pack Howitzer Fires on Enemy Caves on Tinian	416
3d Division Assault Troops on the Asan Beaches	464
Flamethrower Blasts Enemy Dugout on Guam	464
Shermans and Riflemen of the 1st Brigade Advance	513
Firing Line of 3d Division Riflemen	513
Pontoon Barge Off Guam	532
Guamanian Women in Refugee Camp	532
Column of 305th Infantry Moves Cross-Island	536
Jungle Trail Scouted by Marine Tanks and Infantry	536
Army Tanks Hit and Aflame At Yigo	558
Jungle Patrol Near Tarague	558
Corsairs of MAG-21 on Orote Airfield	581
B-29s Approach North Field on Guam	581

MAPS

1. Gilbert Islands	24
2. Tarawa Atoll, November 1943	33
3. Betio Island, 21-22 November 1943	69

MAPS—Continued	PAGE
4. Makin Island, Showing Landings 20 November 1943	94
5. Conquest of Tarawa Atoll	99
6. Apamama Atoll	101
7. Marshall Islands	119
8. Kwajalein (Carillon) Atoll	126
9. Capture of Roi, 1 February 1944	162
10. Capture of Namur, 1–2 February 1944	168
11. Kwajalein Island, 1–4 February 1944	176
12. Eniwetok (Downside) Atoll	184
13. Seizure of Eniwetok Atoll, 18–22 February 1944	198
14. Southern Marianas	236
15. Saipan, Showing Japanese Defense Sectors	259
16. D-Day at Saipan	265
17. Saipan, 16–22 June 1944	287
18. Saipan, 23–30 June 1944	310
19. Saipan, 2–4 July 1944	334
20. Saipan, 5–8 July 1944	338
21. Tinian and Southern Saipan, Showing Japanese Defense Sectors and American Artillery Groupments	357
22. Tinian, 24–26 July 1944	382
23. Tinian, 27 July—1 August 1944	400
24. Guam, Showing Terrain Relief	438
25. Guam, Showing Japanese Dispositions, 21 July 1944	445
26. Southern Beachhead, 22–24 July 1944	481
27. 3d Marine Division Progress, 22–26 July 1944	490
28. Capture of Orote Peninsula, 25–30 July 1944	519
29. Guam, 28 July—4 August 1944	527
30. Guam, 5–10 August 1944	551
31. Schematic Sketch of Japanese Tank Action in 3d Marines Zone, 8–10 August	563
I. Scene of Battle 1943–1944	Map Section
II. Betio Island, Showing Main Japanese Defenses	Map Section
III. Betio Island, Landing and Situation 1800, 20 No- vember	Map Section
IV. Betio Island, Situation 1800 D+3.	Map Section
V. Roi and Namur Islands, Japanese Defenses Based on Post-Battle Study	Map Section
VI. Banzai Attack	Map Section
VII. W-Day on Guam, 21 July 1944	Map Section
VIII. Japanese Counterattack Plan, 25–26 July 1944	Map Section

PART I

Launching the Central Pacific Offensive

Early Plans for a War with Japan

Between November 1943 and August of the following year, American forces captured a series of key outposts in the Gilbert, Marshall, and Mariana Islands. Under the direction of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, amphibious forces advanced almost 2,000 nautical miles, thrusting from Tarawa on the outer fringe of the enemy's defenses to within aerial striking distance of the Japanese homeland. Although this Central Pacific campaign saw the introduction of many new weapons, the strategy of attacking directly westward against Japan had for several decades been under study by American war planners. (See Map I, Map Section.)

THE EVOLUTION OF ORANGE PLAN

American acquisition from Spain of Guam and the Philippine Islands was followed within a few years by the emergence of Japan as a world power. The question arose whether the Philippines, at the end of a long and vulnerable line of communications, could be defended against the modern armed forces of Japan. Since both the American Army and Navy would take part in defending these islands, the Joint Board, an agency created to develop plans and policies which would most effectively use the available forces of both services, turned its attention to developing a coordinated plan for a pos-

sible war in the Pacific. Defending the Philippines, however, seemed so difficult a task that President Theodore Roosevelt, writing in 1907, termed the islands "our heel of Achilles."¹

War plans of this era derived their titles from the code name of the probable enemy, and because Japan was designated ORANGE, the plan dealing with a conflict in the Far East was called ORANGE Plan. The earliest drafts required the Army to defend the Philippines until the fleet could shepherd reinforcements across the Pacific. Planners believed that the Japanese Navy would challenge the approach of the American armada and that the ensuing battle would decide not only the fate of the Philippines but the outcome of the war.

Naval strategists realized that before a relief expedition could be dispatched to the Far East, Japan certainly would have seized Guam, thus depriving the United States of its only fleet anchorage between Pearl Harbor and Manila Bay. Either Guam would have to be retaken or some other site occupied as a coaling and repair station. Whichever course of action was adopted, a landing force made up from the various ships' crews could not be used. With Japanese battleships lurking just over the hori-

¹ Henry F. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1931), p. 408.

zon, the Philippine relief expedition could not afford to have any large number of Bluejackets and Marines serving ashore and absent from their battle stations.²

Since the recapture of Guam or the taking of some other island—Truk was most frequently designated the prime objective³—was an integral part of the war at sea, such missions fell to the naval services and specifically to the Marine Corps, which was especially suited to those operations. During the Spanish-American War, a Marine battalion had landed at Guantanamo Bay to obtain a coaling station for the American ships blockading Cuba. Following the war, Marine units inherited the mission of occupying and defending advanced naval bases, and some naval officers began to urge that specially equipped defense forces be incorporated into each American squadron. Various planners cooperated in applying the lessons learned at Guantanamo Bay to the situation in the Pacific.

Among the first Marines to claim for their Corps an important role in an ORANGE war were Major Dion Williams and Captain Earl H. Ellis. Writing in 1912, Williams offered

² Capt William R. Shoemaker, USN, "Strategy of the Pacific: An Exposition of the ORANGE War Plan," dtd Aug14; Admin and StratSecs, ORANGE Plan, dtd Mar16 (NA folder no. 40, OP 29 folder no. 5, OAB, NHD).

³ RAdm Charles J. Moore cmts on draft MS and interview by HistBr, G-3, dtd 26Nov62, hereafter *Moore comments* (Gilberts Comment File, HistBr, HQMC). Admiral Moore, who served as Admiral Spruance's chief of staff, noted: "This Truk operation became an obsession of the Navy and Marine Corps and was not eliminated as an objective until the raid on Truk on 17 February 1944."

tables of organization for a brigade to accompany the battle fleet and assist it by occupying poorly defended anchorages, emplacing weapons, and guarding against counterattack.⁴ Ellis, whose study appeared a few years later, agreed with the basic theory set forth by Williams, but he prophesied that the day might come when the enemy had fortified those islands suitable as advanced bases. Should this happen, the Marine contingent would be called upon to seize a defended beach. The capture of the objective rather than its subsequent defense would become the primary task of the Marines supporting the battle fleet.⁵

As a result of World War I, during which Japan and the United States had been allies, America's potential enemy gained control over the former German possessions in the Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas. The Philippines were more vulnerable than before and Guam now was ringed by Japanese outposts. By 1921, the Marine Corps had evaluated recent gains by Japan and developed a realistic framework for its own operational and logistical planning. Staff officers believed that Guam and probably the Philippines would fall to the enemy shortly after the outbreak of war, and that Marine Corps units, in cooperation with Army troops, would face the task of seizing bases in the Marshalls, Carolines, Marianas, and Philippines. In addition, they assumed

⁴ Maj Dion Williams, "The Naval Advanced Base," dtd 26Jul12 (NA folder no. 29, OP 29 folder no. 6, OAB, NHD).

⁵ Capt Earl H. Ellis, "The Security of Advanced Bases and Advanced Base Operations," ca. 1913 (IntelSec, DivOps and Trng Files, HistBr, HQMC).

that the Marine Corps was to take part in the final advance from the Philippines to Japan itself.⁶

Earl Ellis, now a major, concentrated on one segment of a war against ORANGE and devised Operation Plan 712, which dealt with the systematic reduction of the Marshall Islands. He also outlined the tactics to be used against such objectives as Eniwetok, Wotje, and Maloelap. Although his theories were limited by the equipment then available, he made several sound recommendations, urging among other things that troops fighting ashore have at their disposal the on-call fire of supporting warships. Yet, the amphibious assault depicted by Ellis was understandably crude in comparison to the skilfully coordinated landings of World War II.⁷

Whatever the flaws in his theory, Ellis's plan marked a complete break with tradition. No longer would Marines be used primarily to defend advanced bases. Instead, they would seize these bases from the enemy.

During the 1920s and 1930s, various Marine Corps officers elaborated upon Ellis' amphibious doctrine. Key Pacific islands were studied as potential battlefields, new types of landing craft were tested, and more efficient landing techniques came into use. Thus did the Marine Corps devote its energies to preparing for whatever amphibious missions might be assigned it in an ORANGE war.⁸

⁶ MarCorps War Plan against ORANGE, Resume, 1921 (War Plans File, HistBr, HQMC).

⁷ Maj Earl H. Ellis, OPlan 712, 1921 (War Plans File, HistBr, HQMC).

⁸ For the story of the Marine Corps role in

Framing the broad strategy for a possible war in the Pacific remained the task of the Joint Army and Navy Board. The ORANGE Plan, actually a preferred course of action rather than a detailed war plan, needed little revision, and the missions first assigned the services before World War I remained much the same as World War II approached. The Army was to deny Manila Bay to the enemy for as long a time as possible, while the Navy, capturing en route as many bases as it might need, steamed westward to defeat the Japanese fleet and break the siege of the Philippines. Although some planners doubted that the Philippine garrison could hold out until help arrived, and in fact believed that the islands were indefensible, the basic concept persisted throughout the 1930s.⁹ Finally, on the eve of war with the Axis powers, ORANGE Plan, which had presumed that Japan would

the development of amphibious doctrine and equipment, see LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. I (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1958), pp. 8-34, hereafter Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*.

⁹ Development of Joint Army-Navy War Plan ORANGE (RG 115, WPD 2720-22, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.); Louis Morton, "Strategy and Command: Turning the Tide, 1941-1943—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II," MS in OCMH, pt II, pp. 24-31, 38-41, hereafter *Morton MS*. See Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), *passim*, for a discussion of the strong body of Army opinion which held that the islands could not be successfully defended with the forces available.

be the only enemy, was incorporated into an overall strategy designed to meet the needs of a two-ocean conflict.

STRATEGY FOR A GLOBAL WAR

As early as 1937, the United States Navy had sent a representative to Great Britain to discuss the employment of the American fleet in the event that these two nations should go to war with Japan. During the conversations, the possibility that Japan might join forces with Italy and Germany was explored. The British Admiralty was satisfied that, in the event of another world war, the United States Navy should concentrate in the Pacific, leaving the effort in the Atlantic to Great Britain and her continental allies.¹⁰ By June 1939, American planners were fully aware that Japan, possibly without the aid of Germany and Italy, might take advantage of the European crisis to seize British, French, or even American holdings in the Orient. Because the potential enemies might either act independently or combine their efforts, the Joint Board in June 1939 ordered that five new war plans be written, the RAINBOW series, each of which might incorporate the features of several "color" plans such as ORANGE. These new plans were designed to meet danger from various sources. Two of them dealt with the defense of the western hemisphere, two others with a war in the Pacific, and still another, RAINBOW 5, with a war in Europe or Africa that pitted the United States, France, and Great Britain against Germany and Italy.

¹⁰ *Morton MS*, pt. III, p. 2.

Although a greatly expanded RAINBOW 5 eventually became the basis of America's World War II strategy, work on this particular plan got off to a discouraging start, for France suddenly collapsed, and the Axis nations signed a formal military alliance. A two-ocean war now seemed probable, a conflict in which winning the battle of the Atlantic would be of more consequence than a victory in the Pacific. In the words of Admiral Harold R. Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations, "if Britain wins decisively against Germany we could win everywhere; but . . . if she loses the problem confronting us would be very great; and, while we might not *lose everywhere*, we might, possibly, not win anywhere."¹¹ During January 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced a policy that emphasized the greatest possible aid to Britain, and a series of Anglo-American conferences began that same month which saw the two nations agree upon defeating Germany and Italy before turning their full might against Japan.¹²

Since the United States was now committed to assuming a strategic defensive on the outbreak of war in the Pacific, joint planners began rewriting RAINBOW 5 to include the probability that Japan would cooperate with her Axis partners in any future conflict.

¹¹ Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare; 1941-1942—The War Department—The U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), p. 25.

¹² *Morton MS*, pt. III, pp. 34-35, 37; Louis Morton, "American and Allied Strategy in the Far East," *Military Review*, v. 29, no. 9 (Dec49), p. 33, hereafter Morton, "Strategy."

Essentially, this revision consisted in delaying indefinitely the Central Pacific campaign advocated by the ORANGE Plans. Instead of seeking immediately a decisive sea battle in Philippine waters, the Navy would be restricted in its early operations to attacks upon the Marshalls designed to prevent the enemy from concentrating

his forces against Singapore. In brief, the naval offensive against Japan, to which the Navy and Marine Corps had devoted so much thought, became but a single element in a global strategy designed primarily to crush Germany and Italy as rapidly as possible.¹³

¹³ Morton, "Strategy," pp. 37-38.

The Central Pacific in Global Strategy

The devastating raid on Pearl Harbor, coupled with the destructive attacks on airfields in the Philippines, enabled Japan to seize the initiative in the Pacific. Since many of its battleships had been disabled by enemy bombs and torpedoes, the American Navy could do nothing to divert the Japanese from Singapore. This bastion fell, the Netherlands Indies were overwhelmed, and the inadequate garrison holding out in the Philippines was encircled. Instead of conducting extensive raids in the Marshalls and preparing for an eventual drive across the Pacific, the United States and her Allies were trying desperately to hold a perimeter that extended from Burma through Australia to Hawaii and the Aleutians. As the triumphant Japanese pushed southward, existing American war plans were abandoned, and the security of Australia became the principal task of the Allies in the Pacific area.

Like the United States, Japan early in the war revised her Pacific strategy. The enemy's change of plans, however, was not caused by unforeseen setbacks but by the ease with which she had gained her primary objectives. Originally, Japan's principal aim was the conquest of the Netherlands Indies, Malaya, the Philippines, and Burma, areas rich in natural resources. Once these regions were taken, the

Japanese empire, now self-sufficient in oil, tin, and rubber, would be capable of defending a perimeter that stretched from the Kuriles, along the outer Marshalls, through the Bismarck Archipelago, across the Netherlands Indies, to Malaya and Burma. With Malaya, the Philippines, and the Netherlands colonies firmly in her control, Japan, rather than pausing as planned to consolidate these gains, decided to expand still farther.

These secondary conquests were in a sense defensive, for the enemy wished only to protect his earlier gains. Japan hoped to seize Port Moresby in New Guinea, capture Midway, establish outposts in the Aleutians, and isolate Australia by taking New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa. Should these operations succeed, Australia would be useless as an Allied base, and the United States fleet would be confined within a triangle bounded by Alaska, Hawaii, and Panama.

This series of operations ended in disaster for the overextended enemy. The Battle of the Coral Sea stopped the immediate threat to Port Moresby. A month later the Japanese fleet met defeat off Midway, a blow that caused the cancellation of the offensive aimed at the line of communication with Australia. The attempt to gain a foothold in the Aleutians did succeed, but before the summer of 1942 had ended

the Americans took the initiative by landing at Guadalcanal in the lower Solomons.¹

*THE CASABLANCA
CONFERENCE*²

Since the war against the Axis powers was a combined effort, both the United States and Great Britain had a major voice in determining Allied strategy. The agency charged with developing the program of Allied military operations and allocating the resources of the two nations was the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), which was composed of the principal military advisers of President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the CCS gave to the United States primary responsibility for the war against Japan, excluding operations in defense of Malaya, Sumatra, and Burma. Thus, planning for the Pacific war fell to the American Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

By the end of 1942, Japan had lost the initiative, and the JCS could begin exploring the most effective ways of damaging the enemy. A limited offensive had already been approved for the South and Southwest Pacific Areas, an

¹ See Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, pp. 235-374, for the story of Marine operations in the Guadalcanal campaign.

² Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: CCS, Minutes of the 55th-60th Meetings 14-18Jan43 (ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.); John Miller, Jr., "The Casablanca Conference in Pacific Strategy," *Military Affairs*, v. 13, no. 4 (Winter 49), p. 209.

operation undertaken to protect the line of communication to Australia. Now the JCS had to determine whether the advance northward and westward from Australia would prove more decisive than a drive across the Central Pacific and then to convince the other members of the CCS of the wisdom of its strategy.

The conference of Allied leaders at Casablanca in January 1943 gave American planners their first opportunity to present to the British their detailed views on Pacific strategy. Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, expressed his belief that an eventual goal of any Pacific offensive should be the Philippines. These islands lay astride the sea lanes over which rubber, oil, and tin were transported to Japan from the conquered territories. Submarines and aircraft operating from the Philippines could halt the flow of raw materials needed by Japanese industry.

Turning to the problem of selecting of the best route of advance toward the Philippines, King urged a move across the Central Pacific. Both the admiral and General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, hoped to outflank the defenses that the Japanese were preparing in the area north of Australia. This could be done by striking westward through the Marshalls and Carolines to the Marianas. Since planes flying from the Marianas could strike Japan while submarines based in these islands isolated the Philippines, King looked upon them as important intermediate objectives on the way westward.

British strategists, however, were not

willing to expand the effort against Japan at the expense of the European war. They agreed that limited offensives were necessary but wanted to undertake only those operations which would help protect India and Australia. British planners believed that the Allies should seize the key enemy base at Rabaul on New Britain, and recover Burma, while remaining on the defensive elsewhere in the Pacific.

Actually, a compromise was easily reached, once the JCS had agreed informally to avoid becoming involved in a series of offensives throughout the Pacific. The Burma operation could not begin immediately, and it appeared that Rabaul might fall in the near future. A Central Pacific campaign, limited in scope, would maintain pressure on the enemy during the period between the capture of Rabaul and the attack from India. After General Marshall stated that the move toward the Carolines would be undertaken with resources available in the Central Pacific Areas, the CCS recommended that the heads of state accept this broadening of the war against Japan. President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, the final arbiters of Allied strategy, agreed with their advisers.

COORDINATING PACIFIC STRATEGY

Late in February 1943, Admiral King discussed with Admiral Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CinCPac), means of carrying out the policies decided upon at Casablanca. Although General Douglas MacArthur, responsible for directing the war in the Southwest Pacific, had

disclosed only the general outline of his proposed operations, King and Nimitz attempted to plot the course of events in the Central Pacific. Nimitz wished to remain temporarily on the defensive, gradually whittling down Japanese strength while augmenting his own. During this build-up, submarines and aircraft would carry the war to the enemy. King agreed that to strike westward with the men, ships, and planes available in 1943 was to take a very considerable calculated risk, but he considered that the American forces must keep the initiative and that they had to be used in order to justify their allocation by the CCS.³

As a result of their conference, the two admirals agreed to a limited thrust in the general direction of the Philippines, but neither the objectives nor the timing of the attack were selected. In the meantime, the JCS had been arranging a conference of representatives from the Central Pacific, South Pacific, and Southwest Pacific Areas. At this series of meetings held in Washington, beginning on 12 March 1943, American planners heard additional details concerning the strategic design that had been prepared by General MacArthur.

Delegates to the Pacific Military Conference, as these meetings were termed, did not learn of MacArthur's planned return to the Philippines, for his representatives concerned themselves with immediate operations for the capture of Rabaul. ELKTON, the Rabaul plan,

³ FAdm Ernest J. King and Cdr Walter Muir Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1952), pp. 431-432, hereafter King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*.

called for continuing cooperation between the South and Southwest Pacific Areas in the capture of airfield sites on New Guinea, New Georgia, and Bougainville and in the seizure of two mighty bases—Kavieng on New Ireland and Rabaul itself.

Since a minimum of 79,000 Japanese troops were believed to be stationed in the area through which General MacArthur proposed to advance, his representatives told the conference that five additional divisions and as many air groups would be needed to sustain the offensive. Unfortunately, the JCS could spare neither the men nor the aircraft which MacArthur needed and had no choice but to order ELKTON revised. Instead of seizing Rabaul as quickly as possible, Allied forces in the South and Southwest Pacific would, during 1943, occupy Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands, continue the war in New Guinea, land on New Britain, and advance along the Solomons chain by way of New Georgia to Bougainville. These changes enabled MacArthur and Admiral William F. Halsey, who directed operations in the South Pacific theater, to get along with fewer troops, planes, and ships, some of which might now be employed in the Central Pacific.⁴ Although the Pacific Military Conference brought about a tailor-

⁴ John Miller, Jr., *CARTWHEEL: The Reduction of Rabaul—The War in the Pacific—The U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1959), pp. 12–19. For the story of the role of the Marine Corps in operations against Rabaul, see Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Maj Douglas T. Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. II (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1963), hereafter Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*.

ing of ELKTON to fit the resources available for the operation, no attempt was made to coordinate this offensive with the attack scheduled for the Central Pacific. The JCS postponed this decision until the next meeting of the CCS which was scheduled to convene at Washington in May 1943.

During the discussions held at Washington the American Strategic Plan for the Defeat of Japan, a general statement of the strategy which would finally force the unconditional surrender of that nation, was presented for British approval. As at Casablanca, Admiral King urged that a powerful blow be struck through the Central Pacific, a more direct route toward the enemy heartland than the carefully guarded approach from the south. In Admiral Nimitz' theater, the American fleet could disrupt Japanese supply lines and hinder any effort to strengthen the defenses in the region. The vast expanse of ocean was dotted with potential naval bases, so the attackers could select their objectives with a view to inflicting the maximum strategic damage with the fewest possible men, ships, and aircraft. In short, the Central Pacific offered an ideal opportunity to use carrier task forces in conjunction with amphibious troops to launch a series of swift thrusts across hundreds of miles of water.

Admiral King, however, did not intend to abandon the Solomons-New Britain-New Guinea offensive. Allied forces fighting in this area could not simply suspend their operations and begin shifting men and equipment to the Central Pacific. Such a maneuver would alert the enemy to the im-

pending offensive and weaken the defenses of Australia. Rather than hurl all Allied resources into a single drive, the American strategist desired two offensives, a major effort through the Central Pacific and a complementary push from the South and Southwest Pacific. Exact timing and the judicious use of available strength would keep the Japanese off balance and prevent their deploying men and ships from the southern defenses to the Carolines and Marshalls.⁵

After listening to Admiral King's arguments, the CCS accepted the American position with one major modification. Originally, the American plan had called for the Allies, while continuing the offensive against Germany, "to maintain and extend unremitting pressure against Japan with the purpose of continually reducing her military power and attaining positions from which her ultimate unconditional surrender can be forced."⁶ British members of the CCS considered this statement to be permission to strike at Japan without regard to the war against Germany, and all the American representatives except King agreed that the language was too strong. Finally, the British suggested that the effect of any extension of the Pacific war on overall strategy should be considered by the CCS before actual operations were begun, a sentence to this effect

⁵ Philip A. Crowl and Edmund G. Love, *Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls—The War in the Pacific—The U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1955), pp. 12–14, hereafter Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*.

⁶ King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 441.

was inserted, and the document approved.⁷ Included among the goals proposed for 1943–1944 were the seizure of the Marshalls and Carolines as well as certain operations in Burma and China, the reconquest of the Aleutians,⁸ and a continuation of the effort in the South and Southwest Pacific Areas.⁹

FINAL APPROVAL FOR THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OFFENSIVE

As soon as the Washington Conference adjourned, King hurried to San Francisco to discuss with Nimitz the attack against the Marshalls. He repeated his conviction that the Mariana Islands formed the most important intermediate objective on the road to Tokyo and recommended that the conquest of the Marshalls be the first step in the march westward. Because the resources available to Admiral Nimitz would determine the final selection of targets, the two officers also discussed the possibility of striking first at the Gilberts, a group of islands believed to be more vulnerable than the Marshalls.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The invasion of Attu, one of the two Aleutian outposts seized by the Japanese, had begun on 11 May. Since Japan was unable to mount an offensive from this quarter, Attu could have been ignored, but its recapture, along with the planned reconquest of Kiska, would put additional pressure on the enemy, drive him from the fringes of the Western Hemisphere, and release American ships and troops for service elsewhere.

⁹ CCS 239/1, Operations in the Pacific and Far East in 1943–1944, dtd 22May43 (ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

¹⁰ King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, pp. 443–444.

In the meantime, General MacArthur was informed of the proposed offensive in Nimitz' theater, an attack which was to be launched in mid-November by the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions. Neither the strategic plan nor its means of execution coincided with MacArthur's views. The general believed that the best avenue of approach to the Philippines was by way of New Guinea. ELKTON was but the first phase of MacArthur's promised return to the Philippines, and even this plan would be jeopardized by the loss of the two Marine divisions, then under his command.

MacArthur objected to the JCS that a campaign in the Central Pacific would be no more than a diversionary effort and that the withdrawal of the Marine units would delay the seizure of Rabaul. American strategists were able to effect a compromise by ordering the release of the 2d Marine Division, then in the South Pacific, while leaving the 1st Marine Division under MacArthur's control. Instead of capturing Rabaul, the South and Southwest Pacific forces were to neutralize and bypass this fortress.¹¹

Even before MacArthur had voiced his objections to the proposed Central Pacific operations, appropriate agencies of the JCS were at work selecting objectives for Admiral Nimitz. So little intelligence was

available on the Marshalls that planners urged the capture instead of bases in the Gilberts from which American reconnaissance planes could penetrate the neighboring island group. The defenses of the Gilberts appeared to be weaker than those of the Marshalls, and the proposed objective area was near enough to the South Pacific to permit naval forces to support operations in both places. Finally, control of the Gilberts would reduce Japanese threats to American bases in the Ellice Islands and Samoa and shorten as well as protect the line of communication to New Zealand and Australia.¹² On 20 July, the JCS directed Nimitz to begin planning for the capture of Nauru Island and of bases in the Gilberts. Well within American capabilities, this limited offensive would open the way into the Marshalls, which in turn would provide the bases for a later move to the Marianas.¹³

The following month, the CCS, meeting at Quebec, added the Gilbert Islands to a list of proposed Central Pacific operations designed to carry the war to the Marianas by the end of 1944.¹⁴ At last the stage was set for a Central Pacific offensive similar in concept to the campaign outlined in the earliest ORANGE Plans.

¹¹ Moore *Comments*.

¹² Crowl and Love, *The Gilberts and Marshalls*, pp. 21-24.

¹⁴ King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 489.

¹¹ Miller, *CARTWHELL*, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-225.

The Central Pacific Battleground

In American military terminology, the scene of the proposed offensive was the Central Pacific Area, a subdivision of the Pacific Ocean Areas that extended from the western coast of North America to the shores of China and reached from the equator northward to the 42d parallel. Canton Island, just south of the equator, was included in the Central Pacific, but the Philippines and those parts of the Netherlands Indies that lay in the northern hemisphere were not.¹ Admiral Nimitz, Allied commander-in-chief throughout the Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPOA), retained immediate control over operations in the Central Pacific. Within this area lay Micronesia, a myriad of islands of varying size and type, the region in which the forthcoming Central Pacific battles would be fought.

*THE GEOGRAPHY OF MICRONESIA*²

That part of Micronesia nearest Japan is the Mariana group of 15 vol-

¹The Pacific Ocean Areas contained three subdivisions: the North Pacific Area north of the 42d parallel, the Central Pacific Area, and south of the equator, the South Pacific Area. Australia, its adjacent islands, most of the Netherlands Indies, and the Philippines formed the Southwest Pacific Area under General MacArthur.

²Unless otherwise noted, the material in

canic islands. The Marianas curve southward from the 20th to the 13th parallel north latitude, with the center of the chain lying at about 144 degrees east longitude. The islands themselves, five of which were inhabited at the outbreak of war, are by Micronesian standards vast and mountainous. Guam, the largest, boasts an area of 228 square miles and peaks rising to over 1,000 feet. The highest elevation in the entire group is 3,166 feet on smaller Agrigan. Although the temperature is warm but not unpleasant, rains occur frequently, and there is the threat of typhoons and an occasional earthquake. Saipan, near the center of the Marianas, lies 1,285 nautical miles southeast of Yokohama. (See Map I, Map Section.)

South of the Marianas are the Carolines, a belt of over 500 volcanic islands and coral atolls extending eastward from Babelthup in the Palaus, 134 degrees east longitude, to Kusaie at 163 degrees. The long axis of this group coincides roughly with the seventh parallel north latitude. At the approximate center of the Carolines, 590

this section is derived from: *Morton MS*, Introduction, p. 14; R. W. Robson, *The Pacific Islands Handbook, 1944*, North American ed., (New York: Macmillan Co., 1945), pp. 132-175; Fairfield Osborne, ed., *The Pacific World* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1944), pp. 155-159.

miles southeast of Saipan, is Truk, site of a Japanese naval base. The climate in this area is healthful, but the average temperatures are slightly higher than in the Marianas. Some of the larger Caroline Islands are covered with luxuriant vegetation.

Northeast of Kusaie are the Marshalls, a group of 32 flat coral atolls and islands scattered from 5 to 15 degrees north latitude and 162 to 173 degrees east longitude. The highest elevation in the entire group is no more than 40 feet. Kwajalein, the largest atoll in the world, lies near the center of the Marshalls, 955 miles from Truk. The climate is hot and humid.

On a map, the Gilberts appear to be an extension of the Marshalls, an appendix of 16 atolls that terminates three degrees south of the equator. Tarawa, slightly north of the equator, is 540 nautical miles southeast of Kwajalein and 2,085 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor. Heat and humidity are extreme during the rainy season, the soil is poor, and portions of the group are occasionally visited by droughts.

The most striking feature of the Micronesian battlefield is its vastness. An island as big as Guam is little more than a chip of wood afloat in a pond. Although the total expanse of ocean is larger than the continental United States, the numerous islands add up to less than 2,000 square miles, a land area smaller than Delaware.

At one time, all of Micronesia except for the British Gilberts had belonged to Spain. The United States seized Guam during the Spanish-American War, and Spain later sold her remaining Central Pacific holdings to Ger-

many. After World War I, the League of Nations made Japan the mandate power in the Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas (except Guam). Under the terms of the mandate, a reward for participating in the war against Germany, the Japanese were to govern and develop the islands, but were forbidden to fortify them. This bar to fortification was reinforced by the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922.

In 1935, however, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations without surrendering her authority over the Pacific isles. Because of the strict security regulations enforced throughout the region, Japan succeeded in screening her activities for the six years immediately preceding the attack on Pearl Harbor. As late as 1939, a Japanese scholar assured the English-speaking peoples that his nation was not using the islands of Micronesia for military purposes.³ The strength of the defenses in this area would not be accurately determined until the Central Pacific campaign was underway.

THE ROLE OF THE MARINE CORPS

Throughout his arguments for an offensive across Micronesia, Admiral King had desired to use Marines as assault troops, for the Marine Corps had pioneered in the development of amphibious doctrine, and its officers and men were schooled in this type of operation.⁴ Major General Holland M.

³ Tadao Yanaihara, *Pacific Islands under Japanese Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 305.

⁴ King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 481.

Smith, who would command the V Amphibious Corps (VAC) for most of the Central Pacific campaign, had directed the amphibious training of Army troops that had participated in the invasion of North Africa. The same staff which would accompany him westward had helped him prepare elements of the 7th Infantry Division for the Attu operation.⁵ Experienced leadership would not be lacking, but veteran Marine divisions were at a premium.

Three Marine divisions, two of them proven in combat, were overseas when Admiral Nimitz received the JCS directive to prepare plans for a blow at the Gilberts. The 2d Marine Division, which was recovering from the malarial ravages of the Guadalcanal campaign, continued to train in the temperate climate of New Zealand after its release to Admiral Nimitz and incorporation into General Holland Smith's amphibious corps. The other malaria-riddled veteran unit of the battle for Guadalcanal, the 1st Marine Division, was in Australia. This division was left in General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area to execute a part of the revised ELKTON plan, the landing at Cape Gloucester on New Britain. The 3d Marine Division, untested in combat and new to Vice Admiral William F. Halsey's South Pacific Area, was completing its movement from New Zealand to the southern Solomons where it would train for the invasion

of Bougainville, an operation that was to begin in November 1943. Although still in training in the United States, the 4th Marine Division was scheduled to be ready by the end of 1943 for service in the Central Pacific.

Also present in the South Pacific were several other Marine combat organizations larger than a battalion in size. The 1st Raider Regiment was committed to the Central Solomons offensive; one battalion was already fighting on New Georgia, and another had just landed on that island. The 1st Parachute Regiment, an airborne unit in name only, was preparing in New Caledonia for possible employment during the advance into the northern Solomons. The 22d Marines, a reinforced regiment that eventually would see action in the Central Pacific, was at this time standing guard over American Samoa.⁶

Like the ground combat units, the bulk of Marine Corps aviation squadrons overseas at the time were stationed in the distant reaches of the South Pacific. An exception was the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing. Although the wing, at the time of the JCS directive, was preparing to shift its headquarters from Hawaii to Samoa and most of its squadrons were staging southward, one fighter and one scout-bomber squadron were in the Ellice group near the northern boundary of the South Pacific Area. Since the planes based in the Ellice Islands were short range craft and the pilots unused to carrier operations, neither unit could participate in the Gilberts

⁵ Jeter A. Isely and Philip Crowl, *The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War, Its Theory, and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 61-63, hereafter Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*.

⁶ StaSheet, FMF Gnd, dtd 31Jul43 (HistBr, HQMC).

invasion.⁷ At Tarawa, the 2d Marine Division would be supported by Navy carrier squadrons.

TACTICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE MARINE DIVISION

The Marine division that figured in Admiral Nimitz' plans for the Gilberts was organized according to the E series tables of organization adopted in April 1943. With an authorized strength of 19,965 officers and men, the division was constructed in a triangular fashion—three infantry regiments, each of which had three infantry battalions. This arrangement enabled the division commanding general to hold in reserve an entire regiment without impairing the ability of his command to attack or to remain on the defensive. A regimental commander could exercise this same option with his battalions, and the battalion commander with his rifle companies, as well as with a headquarters company and a weapons company. An infantry regiment was authorized a basic strength of 3,242, a battalion 953, and a rifle company 196.

Supporting the divisional infantry components were an engineer regiment of three battalions (engineer, pioneer, and naval construction), an artillery regiment with three battalions of 75-mm pack howitzers and two of 105mm howitzers, Special Troops, and Service Troops. Special Troops, its total

strength 2,315, consisted of a light tank battalion which included the division scout company, a special weapons battalion equipped with antitank and anti-aircraft guns, and the division headquarters battalion which contained headquarters, signal, and military police companies. Service, motor transport, amphibian tractor, and medical battalions, with a total of 2,200 officers and men, made up Service Troops. The division chaplains, doctors, dentists, hospital corpsmen, and the Seabees of its naval construction battalion were members of the U. S. Navy.

The infantry units, too, had their own support elements. A weapons company armed with heavy machine guns, 37mm antitank guns, and self-propelled 75mm guns was under the direct control of each regimental commander. The battalion commander had his own company of heavy machine guns and 81mm mortars, and a company commander could rely on the light machine guns and 60mm mortars of his weapons platoon.

The basic structure of both division and regiment was altered when necessary. Troops normally under corps control, such as reconnaissance, medium tank, or artillery units, might be used to reinforce the division. For amphibious operations, each regiment was made a combat team by the addition of troops from the artillery and engineer regiments, the amphibian tractor, medical, motor transport, service, tank, and special weapons battalions. These attachments increased the strength of the regiment to as much as 5,393. Some of the additional troops were reassigned to the infantry battalions, so that the combat team

⁷ StaSheet, Air, dtd 31Jul43 (HistBr, HQ-MC); Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), pp. 222, 224, 438-439, hereafter Sherrod, *Marine Air History*.

generally consisted of three landing teams, each with its own engineer, artillery, medical, and tank support.⁸

THE ENEMY'S BASIC TACTICAL ORGANIZATION

During the drive westward, Marine divisions would be opposed by Japanese *Special Naval Landing Forces* as well as by the enemy's infantry divisions. When employed in the attack, a *Special Naval Landing Force* usually consisted of two infantry companies and a heavy weapons unit, plus communications, engineer, medical, supply and transportation elements. With a strength of 1,000–1,500, this organization was comparable in size to a Marine battalion reinforced as a landing team. Artillery support for the landing force was provided by from 8 to 24 guns and howitzers ranging from 70mm to 120mm.

On the defense, however, a *Special Naval Landing Force* could be reinforced to a strength of 2,000, with an appropriate increase in the number of automatic weapons and the addition of antitank guns, mortars, or both. In addition, the Marines might expect to encounter, among the naval units, trained guard forces. Construction or pioneer units, both types composed in part of Korean laborers, were engaged in building airfields and defensive installations throughout Micronesia. The strength of these organizations

⁸ OrgChart, MarDiv, dtd 15Apr43 (SubjFile: T/Os, HistBr, HQMC). A copy of this table of organization and equipment is contained in Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*, pp. 571–573.

depended on the particular project assigned them, and their zeal for combat and state of training varied according to the policies of individual island commanders.

Like the Imperial Navy, the Japanese Army habitually altered the strength and composition of its field units to meet the task at hand. The standard infantry division consisted of some 20,000 men organized into a cavalry or reconnaissance regiment, an infantry group of three regiments, and artillery, engineer, and transportation regiments. Signal, hospital, water purification, ordnance, and veterinary units were considered parts of the division headquarters. For the most part, the Japanese adhered to the triangular concept, for each of the three infantry regiments of 3,845 men contained three 1,100-man battalions. If judged necessary, the size of a division could be increased to over 29,000 officers and men.

Usually, these reinforcements were troops not assigned to any division, for the Japanese Army had created a bewildering variety of independent units. Some were larger than the ordinary infantry regiment; others as small as a tank company. By combining independent units or attaching them to divisions, the enemy was able to form task forces to capture or defend a particular place.⁹

These were the forces that would battle for Micronesia. With many potential anchorages in the region, Admiral Nimitz could feint with his carriers before striking with his as-

⁹ WD, TM-E 30-480, *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces*, dtd 15Sep44, pp. 19–21, 76–81.

sault troops. Yet, the task of destroying the individual enemy would inevitably fall to the infantryman supported by aircraft, naval gunfire, and all the firepower organic to the Marine division.

PART II

The Gilberts Operation

Preparing to Take the Offensive ¹

PLANNING FOR OPERATION GALVANIC

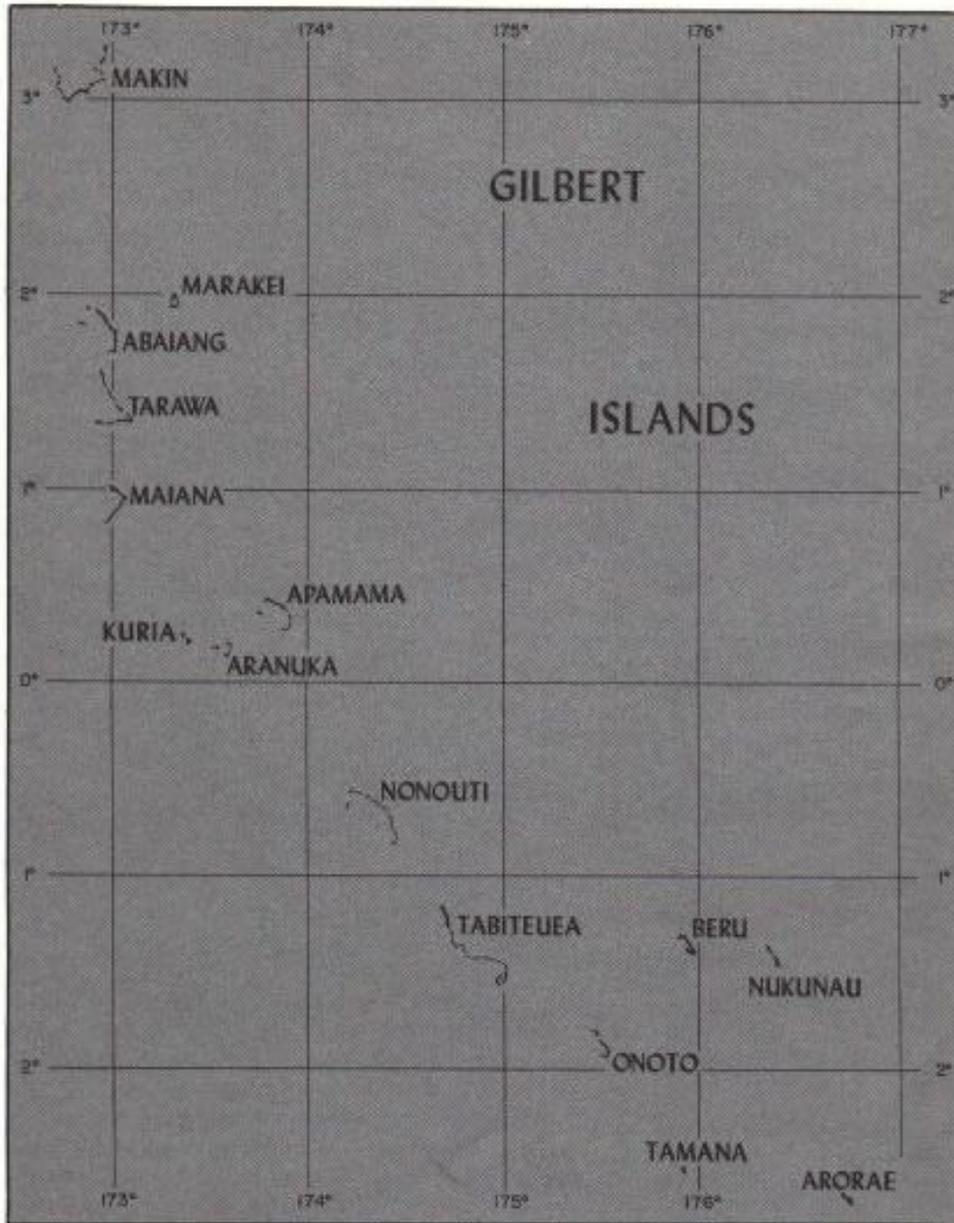
The summer of 1943 saw a revival of the strategy contained in both ORANGE and RAINBOW Plans as well as rigorous training in amphibious techniques, methods that stemmed from further elaboration of the theories of amphibious warfare first advanced by Major Earl Ellis. The Central Pacific offensive, for so many years the key-

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: CinCPac OPlan 1-43, dtd 5Oct43, hereafter *CinCPac OPlan 1-43*; ComCenPacFor OPlan 1-43, dtd 25Oct 43, hereafter *ComCenPacFor OPlan 1-43*; V PhibFor AR Gilbert Islands, dtd 4Dec43, hereafter *V PhibFor AR*; CTF 54 OPlan A2-43, dtd 23Oct43; CTF 53 OpO A101-43, dtd 17Oct 43, hereafter *CTF 53 OpO A101-43*; VAC AR GALVANIC, dtd 11Jan44, hereafter *VAC AR*; VAC OPlan 1-43, dtd 13Oct43; 2d Mar Div OpO No. 14, dtd 25Oct43, hereafter *2d MarDiv OpO No. 14*; TF 11 AR Baker Island, Sep43 (Baker Island Area OpFile, HistBr, HQMC); Samuel Eliot Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls, June 1942-April 1944—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, v. VII (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960 ed.), hereafter *Morison, Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*; Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*; Capt James R. Stockman, *The Battle for Tarawa* (Washington: HistSec, DivPubInfo, HQMC, 1947), hereafter *Stockman, Tarawa*. Unless otherwise noted, all documents cited in this part are located in the Gilberts Area Op File and the Gilberts CmtFile, HistBr, HQMC.

stone of American naval planning, was about to begin with operations against the Gilbert Islands.² The attack on this group of atolls would test the Marine Corps concept of the amphibious assault, an idea originated by Ellis and greatly modified by his successors. The major had been confident that a defended beach could be taken by storm, and since his death new equipment and tactics had been perfected to aid the attackers, but the fact remained that such an operation had never been tried against a determined enemy dug in on a small island. Was Ellis' conclusion still valid? Could an army rise out of the sea to overwhelm prepared defenses? These questions soon would be answered. (See Map I, Map Section.)

On 20 July the JCS ordered Admiral Nimitz to begin preparing for the capture, development, and defense of bases in the Gilbert group and on Nauru Island. This directive also provided for the occupation of any other islands that might be needed as air bases or naval facilities for the carrying out of the primary mission. GALVANIC was the code name assigned to the Gilberts-Nauru venture. The operation was intended to be a preliminary step to an attack against the Marshalls.

² It is interesting to note that the Gilberts did not appear as an objective in the ORANGE Plans. *Moore Comments*.



MAP 1

R.F. STIBIL

At the same time, a lodgement in the Gilberts, in addition to bringing the Marshalls within range of land-based bombers, also would insure the safety of Samoa and shorten the line of communication to the South and Southwest Pacific.

The bulk of the Pacific Fleet, the Central Pacific Force under Vice Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, was committed to the Gilberts operation. As commander of the GALVANIC expedition, Spruance was the immediate subordinate of Admiral Nimitz. The actual landings would be conducted by V Amphibious Force, headed by Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner. This organization, established on 24 August 1943, was similar to the amphibious force that had carried out the Attu invasion. Within Turner's force was V Amphibious Corps (VAC), organized on 4 September and commanded by Marine Major General Holland M. Smith. The general had with him the same staff, with representatives from all services, that had aided in preparing for the Aleutians offensive. Like the original Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, the new VAC was to train and control the troops required for future operations in the Pacific Ocean Areas.

Nimitz had entrusted GALVANIC to a group of experienced Navy and Marine Corps officers. Spruance had commanded a carrier task force at the Battle of Midway; Turner had led the amphibious force that landed the Marines at Guadalcanal and Tulagi and had directed a similar force in operations against New Georgia; and Holland Smith had helped train troops for amphibious operations in Europe, North Africa, and the Aleutians. Pre-

parations for the Gilberts invasion had been placed in capable hands.

The man who would actually command the amphibious phase of the Tarawa operation, Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill, reported to Admiral Turner on 18 September 1943. Hill, a veteran battleship and escort carrier group commander fresh from the South Pacific battles, was designated Commander, Amphibious Group 2. His group would transport, land, and support the assault troops at Tarawa, while a similar group, which Admiral Turner retained under his direct command, would be part of the attack force at Makin. When Hill arrived, the projected D-Day for GALVANIC was 1 November, which was later changed to 20 November, a date which provided only two months to weld a widely scattered force of ships and troops into an effective team.³

The major Marine unit available to Turner's amphibious force was the 2d Marine Division, commanded by Major General Julian C. Smith. This division had fought at Guadalcanal and was currently reorganizing in New Zealand. The division commander, a Marine Corps officer since 1909, joined the unit after it had sailed from Guadalcanal; but during his career he had seen action at Vera Cruz, in Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Nicaragua, and had served in Panama and Cuba as well. In the words of the division historian, Julian Smith's "entirely unassuming manner and friendly hazel eyes clothed a determined personality

³ Adm Harry W. Hill interview with HistBr, G-3, HQMC and cmts on draft MS, dtd 4Oct 62, hereafter *Hill interview/comments*.

that could be forcefully displayed in decisive moments. His concern for his men was deep and genuine.”⁴

Because of the scope of the proposed Central Pacific campaign and the need in other theaters for Marine amphibious divisions, Army troops appeared certain to be needed for GALVANIC and later operations. Preliminary training, administration, and logistical support of these Army divisions fell to the Commanding General, Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas, Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson. In carrying on his work, General Richardson was subject to the direction of Admiral Nimitz.

When the JCS first began exploring the possibility of a thrust into the Gilberts, Admiral King had urged that only Marines be used in the operation. General MacArthur's needs for amphibious troops and the shortage of transports to bring a second Marine division to the Central Pacific prevented the carrying out of King's recommendation. General Marshall, on 29 July offered an Army unit instead, the 27th Infantry Division then in Hawaii, close to the scene of future combat. Although the unit had received no amphibious training, this was a deficiency that Holland Smith's VAC could solve.

A part of the New York National Guard, the 27th Division had been inducted into the federal service in the fall of 1940. Upon the outbreak of war, the unit had been ordered from Fort

McClellan, Alabama, to various installations in California. After standing guard on the Pacific coast, the division sailed in March 1942 for the Hawaiian Islands. In command of the 27th Division when it was assigned to Operation GALVANIC was Major General Ralph C. Smith, who had studied and later lectured at France's *Ecole de Guerre* and who was considered a keen tactician.⁵

During the planning for and fighting on Guadalcanal, a naval officer, Admiral Turner, had the final responsibility for the conduct of operations, both afloat and ashore. The views of the admiral, a man sure in his opinions and forceful in presenting them, did not always coincide with those of the landing force commander, Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, when the question was the proper employment of troops. General Vandegrift, who recognized the absolute necessity of naval control of the assault, wanted unquestioned authority over operations ashore. A dispatch to Admiral King proposing this command setup was drafted in late October 1942 by the Commandant, Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, who was on an inspection trip to the South Pacific, signed by Admiral Halsey, and endorsed by Admiral Nimitz. On his return to Washington, Holcomb indicated to King that he concurred in the concept that the landing force and naval task force commanders should have equal authority, reporting to a joint superior, once the landing phase of the amphibious assault was com-

⁴ Richard W. Johnston, *Follow Me! The Story of the 2d Marine Division in World War II* (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 89, hereafter Johnston, *Follow Me!*

⁵ Edmund G. Love, *The 27th Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1949), pp. 11-22.

pleted.⁶ Although such a change in doctrine evolved eventually, in the relatively brief operations against the small atolls of the Central Pacific, the role of the naval commander in tactical operations remained paramount.

In setting up the planning machinery for GALVANIC, Admiral Spruance followed the Guadalcanal precedent and made VAC completely subordinate to Turner. Holland Smith, a man just as forceful and outspoken as Turner, objected vigorously and successfully to this setup. Spruance so revised his system that Holland Smith and Turner faced each other as equals throughout the planning phase. On the surface it would seem that the Navy officer and the Marine had equal voice in shaping plans for GALVANIC, but Spruance naturally looked upon Turner as his principal amphibious planner. The decisions of the force commander, however, depended upon the scheme of maneuver advanced by the corps commander, in this case Holland Smith.⁷

In one respect, their dislike for Nauru as an objective, Spruance, Turner, and Holland Smith were in complete agreement. They did not want to divide the available naval forces and conduct two simultaneous amphibious operations separated by 380 miles, with the enemy naval base at Truk beyond the reach of any land-based reconnais-

sance planes. Admiral Spruance vigorously protested the selection of Nauru and argued for the substitution of Makin Atoll in its stead. He recalled:

Kelly Turner and I both discussed this situation with Holland Smith at length. It appeared to me that Nauru had been useful to the Japanese as a position from which to search to the southward the area between the Gilbert and Ellice Groups on the east and the Solomons on the west. Once this area was controlled by us, Nauru was not needed by us, and we could keep it pounded down. On the other hand, Makin was 100 miles closer to the Marshalls where we were going, and it tied in well from the point of view of fleet coverage with an operation against Tarawa. The more we studied the details of capturing Nauru, the tougher the operation appeared to be, and finally it seemed doubtful that the troops assigned for it could take it. The transports available for trooplift were the limiting factor. Makin . . . was an entirely suitable objective, and its capture was well within our capabilities.⁸

The upshot of these discussions was that Holland Smith offered a revised estimate of the situation, endorsed by Turner, that led to a revision of the concept of GALVANIC. On 19 September, the general pointed out that at least one entire division would be required to seize rocky, cave-riddled Nauru. In addition, this island lacked a lagoon as an anchorage for small craft and had only a tiny airfield. This estimate was presented to Nimitz on 24 September, while Admiral King was in Pearl Harbor for a conference with CinCPac, and Spruance recommended to both that the Nauru portion of the plan be scrapped. Proposed sub-

⁶ Gen Thomas Holcomb interview by LtCol Robert D. Heintz, Jr., dtd 12Apr49, cited in Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, p. 342.

⁷ Adm Raymond A. Spruance, "The Victory in the Pacific," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, v. 91, no. 564 (Nov46), p. 544; *Moore comments*.

⁸ Adm Raymond A. Spruance ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 24Jul62.

stitute for this target was Makin Atoll, which boasted a lagoon and ample room for airstrips. The defenses of Makin appeared weaker than those of Nauru, its beaches better, and its location near enough to Tarawa to permit the concentration of American shipping. Convinced by the arguments of the GALVANIC commanders, "Admiral King agreed to recommend to the JCS the substitution of Makin for Nauru."⁹

There was little quarrel with the selection of Tarawa as an objective of the GALVANIC forces. Although this atoll was heavily defended, its capture would cut in half the distance that American bombers would have to fly in raiding the Marshalls. Also, Betio Island in this atoll was the nerve center for the Japanese defense of the Gilberts. The responsible planners believed that the Gilberts could not be neutralized with the American strength then available until Tarawa was overrun.

The capture of Apamama was also thought necessary if the Americans were to consolidate their hold on the Gilberts. Again, the primary consideration was to gain an air base from which to strike the Marshalls. This atoll promised to be the least difficult of the three objectives that Central Pacific planners wished to include in GALVANIC.

The JCS promptly agreed to the substitution of Makin for Nauru, and on 5 October, Admiral Nimitz issued Operation Plan 13-43, containing the revised concept of GALVANIC. This document assigned Admiral Spruance the

mission of capturing, developing, and defending bases at Makin, Tarawa, and Apamama. The operation was designed to gain control of the Gilberts and by so doing to smooth the way into the Marshalls, improve the security and shorten the line of communication with Australia, and support operations in the South Pacific, Southwest Pacific, and Burma areas by exerting pressure on the Japanese. (See Map 1.)

*THE INTELLIGENCE EFFORT*¹⁰

Although the Gilberts group was not included by popular journalists among "Japan's Islands of Mystery," American planners knew very little about the one-time British possession. Charts and tide tables provided by the Navy Hydrographic Office proved unreliable. In fact, the maps prepared by the Wilkes expedition of 1841 were found to be as accurate as some of the more modern efforts. If the assault troops were to get ashore successfully, detailed intelligence had to be obtained on beach conditions, tides, and the depth of water over the reefs that fringed the atolls. Principal sources of such information were photographs taken from aircraft and submarines as well as interviews with former residents of the islands.

American photo planes, both land-

¹⁰ Additional sources for this section include: VAC G-2 Study, TO Gilbert Islands, Nauru, Ocean, dtd 20Sep43, pp. 21-48, 61-67; 2d MarDiv Est of Sit-Gilberts, dtd 5Oct43; 2d MarDiv SupplEst of Sit, dtd 25Oct43; 2d MarDiv D-2 Study of Makin Island and Little Makin, n.d.; 2d MarDiv D-2 Study of Tarawa, n.d.; IntelEst, Anx D to 2d MarDiv OpO No. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*

based Liberators (B-24s) and carrier aircraft, soared over Tarawa on 18-19 September and again on 20 October. Makin was photographed on 23 July and 13 October. Of the two atolls, Tarawa received better coverage, for only vertical aerial photos of Makin reached the joint intelligence center. Without oblique prints, photo interpreters had difficulty in estimating beach conditions and determining the exact nature of shore installations.

In spite of this handicap, and the inability of interpreters to gauge the depth of water from aerial photographs alone, other information was evaluated in conjunction with the photographs and the work done by intelligence officers proved to be extremely accurate. The remarkable ability of the aerial camera to locate enemy positions and the skill with which these photographs were analyzed enabled the interpreters to estimate the size of the enemy garrison from a picture that showed the shoreline latrines on Betio.

In commenting on this impressive bit of detective work, the 2d Division operations officer (D-3),¹¹ later called the picture they used "the best single aerial photo taken during WWII."¹² Using it, he was able to select the spot where he thought "the headman's CP was, since it was the only place with a

baffle and sufficient room to drive a vehicle between the baffle and the door."¹³ He also was able to determine which of the latrines were probably used by officers by the difference in type. Figuring that the Japanese would assign more men per latrine than an American force, he was able to present intelligence officers with an interesting problem and method of finding the size of the garrison. Utilizing these factors, the D-2 (intelligence) section came up with a figure that Japanese documents later indicated was within a few men of the actual count. The D-3 commented: "This didn't help much in determining strategy and tactics, but it provided the valuable knowledge of enemy strength. By the laws of chance we happened to strike it right."¹⁴

Additional and extremely valuable data on reefs, beaches, and currents was obtained by the submarine *Nautilus*. This vessel had been fitted out to take pictures of the atolls through her periscope. None of the cameras issued for this mission could take an intelligible picture, but fortunately one of her officers owned a camera that would work? For 18 days *Nautilus* cruised through the Gilberts, pausing to take panoramic shots of Apamama, Tarawa, and Makin. The negatives did not reach Hawaii until 7 October, but the photos were developed, interpreted, and

¹¹ During much of World War II, Marine division general staff officers were designated D-1, D-Z, D-3, and D-4, and comparable corps staff officers as C-1, etc. Eventually, the Marine Corps adopted the Army system of designating all general staff officers at division and above as G-1, etc.

¹² Gen David M. Shoup interview with Hist Br, G-3, HQMC and *cmts* on draft MS, dtd 14Aug62, hereafter *Shoup interview/comments*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Tests of this camera, made with the cooperation of VAC and 27th Division G-2 officers, "resulted in the development of a holding frame, sequence timing for stereo overlap, etc." Col Cecil W. Shuler comments on draft MS, dtd 12Dec62.

the information contained in them disseminated in time for the invasion.

Intelligence officers also were able to gather together 16 persons familiar with the Gilberts. Travelers, traders, or former residents of the British colony, they were attached to Admiral Turner's staff. Those most familiar with Tarawa were sent to Wellington where the 2d Marine Division was training, while those who knew Makin best were assigned to the 27th Infantry Division in Hawaii. Additional intelligence on Makin came from Lieutenant Colonel James Roosevelt, who had fought there as executive officer of the 2d Marine Raider Battalion during the raid of 17-18 August 1942.

Tarawa, the intelligence officers found, was the sort of objective that Earl Ellis had pictured when he first began his study of the amphibious assault. The target for which the 2d Marine Division had been alerted to prepare was a coral atoll triangular in shape, two legs of the triangle being formed by reef-fringed chains of islands and the third by a barrier reef. The southern chain measured 12 miles, the northeastern 18 miles, and the western or reef side 12½ miles. A mile-wide passage through which warships could enter the lagoon pierced the coral barrier. (See Map 2.)

Key to the defenses of Tarawa was Betio, southwestern-most island in the atoll, just three and one-half miles from the lagoon entrance. On Betio the Japanese had built an airfield, and bases for planes were what the Americans wanted. Like the rest of Tarawa, this island was flat; indeed, the highest point in the entire atoll was but 10 feet above sea level. Betio, com-

pletely surrounded by reefs, was only 3 miles long and some 600 yards across at its widest point. The Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas, after weighing all the evidence estimated that between 2,500 and 3,100 Japanese troops were crammed onto the island. The intelligence officers also reported that the enemy might have 8 or 9 coastal defense guns including 8-inch guns¹⁶, 12 heavy anti-aircraft guns, 12 medium anti-aircraft guns, and emplacements for 82 anti-boat guns and 52 machine guns or light cannon. The fighting on Betio would be bloody, but a difficult problem had to be solved before the Marines could come to grips with the enemy. A way had to be found to cross the reefs that encircled the island. (See Map II, Map Section.)

The best solution would have been to land the division in amphibian tractors (LVTs), for these vehicles, like the legendary river gunboats of the American Civil War, could navigate on the morning dew. Unfortunately, the tractors were in short supply, so that most of the troops would have to come ashore in LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel), boats which drew about 3½ feet of water. Because the assault on Betio had been scheduled for 20 November, a day on which the difference between high and low tide would be slight, the attackers could not rely on any flood of water to float them over the troublesome reef. The success of the operation well might de-

¹⁶ The determination of the caliber of these guns was made by relating their size in aerial photographs to the known dimensions of wrecked aircraft on the airfield at Betio. *Shoup interview/comments.*

pend upon an accurate estimate on the depth of the water off Betio.

The first estimate made by amphibious force intelligence officers predicted that during the period of lowest tides no more than two feet of water would cover the reefs off the northern coast of Betio. Turner's staff also was aware that during the lowest period, tides at the island might ebb and flow several times in a single day. There was the remote possibility of a freak "dodging tide," a tide with an eccentric course that could not be foreseen or predicted. Such tides had been reported, but few of the islanders had experienced one. On the other hand, those officers responsible for GALVANIC could take heart from the fact that some of the island traders who had sailed among the Gilberts predicted that there would be five feet of water, more than enough for the landing craft. Some of the Americans chose to be optimistic.

Among those who entertained doubts concerning the depth of water over reef at Betio was Major F. L. G. Holland, a New Zealander and former resident of Tarawa Atoll. Assigned to the staff of General Julian Smith, Holland did not accept the estimate of five feet, but he could not disprove the tide tables prepared by his fellow experts. He could, however, point out that during the neap period tides ebbed and flowed irregularly and warn the Marines to expect as little as three feet of water at high tide.

After listening to the New Zealand major, Julian Smith decided to prepare for the worst. The troops embarked in LCVPs were briefed to be ready to face the possible ordeal of wading ashore in

the face of Japanese fire. The best that Julian Smith could foresee was a 50-50 chance that landing craft would clear the reef.

Hydrographic and reef conditions also helped dictate the choice of landing beaches. On the south or ocean side of Betio, the reef lay about 600 yards from the island proper, but heavy swells rolled in from the open sea, a factor which might complicate the landings. To land directly from the west would mean crossing both the barrier and fringing reefs as well as battling strong and unpredictable currents. Aerial photographs showed that the enemy defenses were strongest on the seaward side and that the beaches were heavily mined.¹⁷ The choice, then, narrowed to the lagoon side where the reef, though wide, rose gradually to the surface. In addition, the island itself would serve as a breakwater to ships maneuvering within the lagoon.

Makin, northernmost of the Gilberts, was the objective of a reinforced regiment of the 27th Infantry Division. Like Tarawa, this atoll was shaped like a distorted triangle. Southeast of the spacious lagoon lay the large islands of Butaritari and Kuma. A long reef

¹⁷ VAC and 2d Division planners could plainly see the seaward beaches were mined, but the lagoon side was a different matter. The enemy troops there "were in the business of working on their defenses—unloading steel rails, concrete, etc., besides their regular logistic support within the lagoon. . . . The question was what you would do if you were on the island," General Shoup recalled. "Chances are you would mine everything but the place you use daily—that would be the last place to be sewed up. This conclusion was a very definite factor in our decision to land where we did." *Ibid.*

formed the northern leg of the triangle, but the western portion, made up of scattered islets and reefs, was for the most part open to the sea. Butaritari, some six miles in length, was the principal island in the atoll. Intelligence officers discovered that the western part of the narrow island was swampy and somewhat overgrown. Much of Butaritari, however, had been given over to the cultivation of coconut palms and of the native staple food, taro. (See Map 6.)

Photographs of Butaritari, best clue to Japanese strength, led planners to believe that only 500 to 800 troops were available for the defense of the island. This total included an infantry company, a battery of four heavy anti-aircraft guns, and two anti-aircraft machine gun batteries. Most of the enemy installations were located in the vicinity of Butaritari Village within an area bounded on east and west by antitank ditches.

Unlike the reef off Betio, the coral outcropping around Butaritari was not considered a particularly difficult obstacle. Along the lagoon shore and off the southern part of the west coast at the island, the reef was considered to be so close to the beaches or so flat that it could be crossed quickly. Even if the LCVs grounded at the edge of the reef, intelligence officers felt that the soldiers could wade ashore without difficulty.

Apamama, according to intelligence estimates, should cause its attackers no trouble at all. As late as 18 October, the atoll was not occupied by any organized defensive force. The only emplacement that photo interpreters could locate was for a single

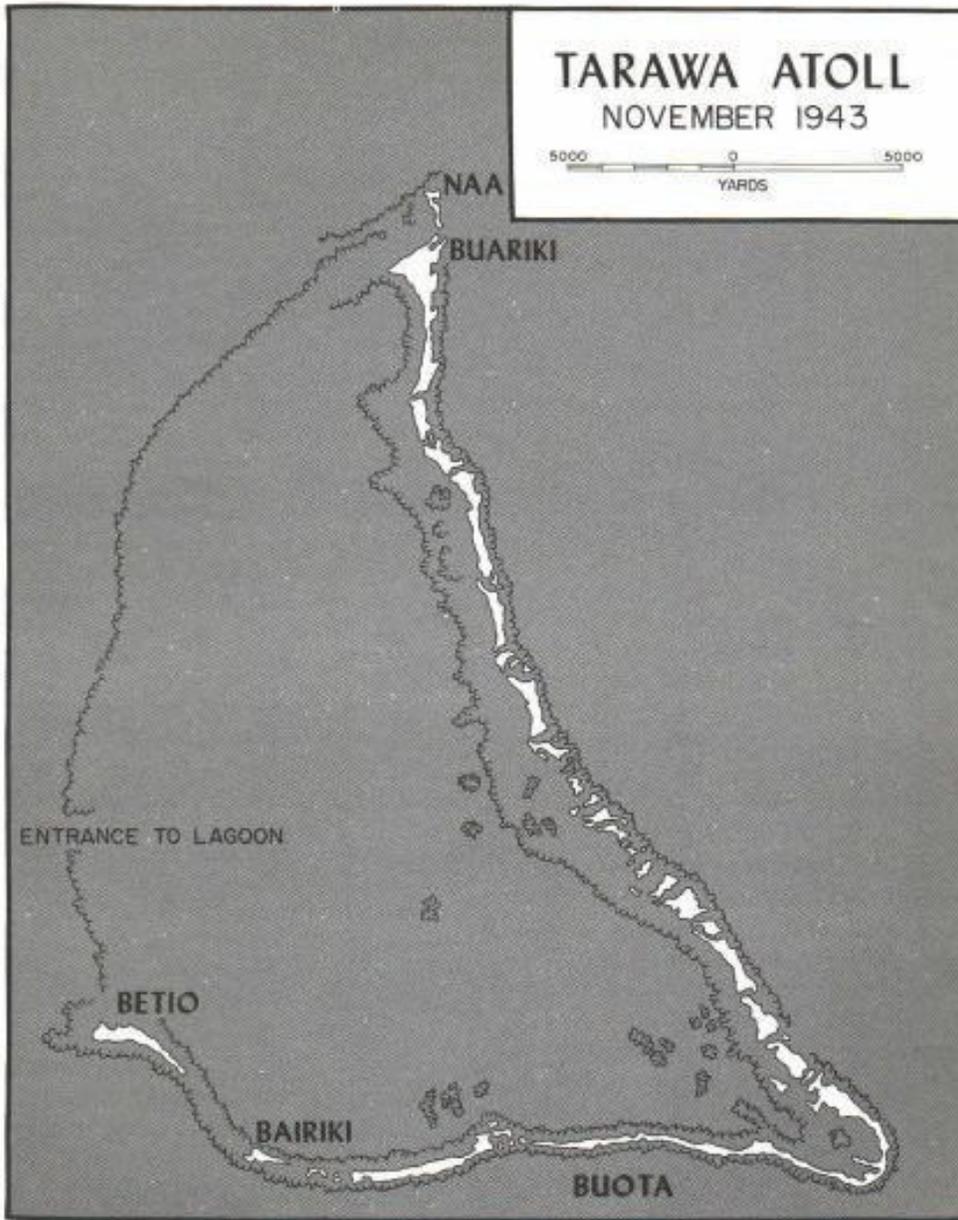
pedestal-mounted 5-inch naval gun, a weapon that appeared to have been abandoned. It was thought possible, however, that several coastwatchers might lurk among the islands that formed the atoll.¹⁸ (See Map 5.)

TASK ORGANIZATION AND COMMAND STRUCTURE

The basic organization for GALVANIC was established by Operation Plan 1-43, issued by Admiral Spruance on 25 October. The task organization consisted of three major groups: Rear Admiral Charles A. Pownall's Carrier Task Force (TF 50), Admiral Turner's Assault Force (TF 54), and Defense Forces and Land-based Air (TF 57) commanded by Rear Admiral John H. Hoover. The Assault Force was divided into two attack forces. One of these, the Northern Attack Force (TF 52) remained under Turner's command and was assigned to capture Makin. The other, Southern Attack Force (TF 53) under Admiral Hill, was to seize Tarawa and Apamama.

Admiral Pownall's TF 50 was to play an important part in the forthcoming operation. In addition to establishing and maintaining aerial superiority in the area, the carrier pilots were to aid the amphibious assault by neutralizing Japanese defenses, helping to spot the fall of supporting naval gunfire, and flying observation missions over Makin, Tarawa, and Apamama. They also had the mission of searching ahead of the convoys, providing fighter cover for

¹⁸ 2d MarDiv OPlan No. 1, dtd 30Oct43.



MAP 2

R. F. STIBIL

the operation, and guarding against submarine attack.

The land-based planes of TF 57 were to help gain mastery of the skies over the Gilberts. Flying from airstrips on Baker Island and in the Ellice, Phoenix, and Samoan groups, Admiral Hoover's aircraft, including the planes of the Seventh Air Force, were to blast those bases from which the enemy might interfere with GALVANIC. In addition, this force was to bomb the assault objectives and conduct long-range searches.

Before preparing the command relationships paragraph of Admiral Spruance's operation order, his chief of staff, Captain Charles J. Moore, had long discussions with the commanders involved. Continual revisions were made to clarify Holland Smith's position and to satisfy him regarding the role of the landing force commanders at Tarawa and Makin. At each objective, Julian Smith and Ralph Smith were to take independent command of their own forces, once they were established ashore, but "their gunfire support and logistic support and they, themselves, remained under the command of their respective Assault Task Commanders."¹⁹ In the case of Holland Smith as a tactical corps commander, the naval leaders considered—although the Marine general disagreed—that he had no function in directing the operations of the two independent commanders ashore at Betio and Makin. He could do nothing without the functioning of the Task Force

Commander who controlled the ships."²⁰

General Holland Smith was to sail in the Assault Force flagship and command the landing force; however, Admiral Spruance made directives issued by the general subject to the approval of Admiral Turner, since the employment of troops was governed by "the capabilities of the surface units to land and support them."²¹ The operation plan issued by Turner followed this definition of Holland Smith's duties. The general was to advise the Assault Force commander on the employment of the landing force and the use of reserves, but at both Makin and Tarawa the Attack Force commanders would exercise authority through the commanders ashore. Although Spruance directed that the assault troops would be free of naval control after the beachhead had been secured, his command alignment did not follow the theories advanced by the Marines who had fought at Guadalcanal. Unquestionably, the Central Pacific commander determined that GALVANIC, with two widely separated landings either of which might attract the Japanese battle fleet, was an operation which required naval control throughout all its stages.²²

As he had done concerning his role in planning, Holland Smith protested his tactical command position to Spruance. The naval officer replied that VAC retained operational control over three garrison units: the 2d and 8th Marine Defense Battalions and the 7th Army

¹⁹ *Moore Comments.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *ComCenPacFor OPlan 1-43*, p. 11.

²² *Moore Comments.*

Defense Battalion; overall command of assault troops would be exercised by Turner through Holland Smith. "It is considered essential," Spruance continued, "that the responsibility for the assault be placed on the Commander Fifth Amphibious Force. He will require the benefit of your knowledge of amphibious training and operations to ensure the success of the operation with the minimum losses to the troops engaged."²³ In response to a query from General Richardson, who received a copy of this letter, as to whether Admiral Turner or General Holland Smith was the "immediate superior combat commander" of Army troops engaged in GALVANIC, Admiral Nimitz replied that the "immediate superior combat commander of the Commanding General, 27th Infantry Division (Army), is the Commanding General, 5th Amphibious Corps, Major General Holland Smith, USMC."²⁴

THE SCHEME OF ATTACK

The overall plan for GALVANIC called for the 2d Marine Division (less one regiment in corps reserve) to storm Tarawa, while the 165th Infantry of the 27th Division took Makin. Elements of the Marine reserve regiment

²³ ComdrCenPacFor ltr to CG, VAC, ser 0081, dtd 14Oct43 (S-1 File, Comd Relationships, HistBr, HQMC).

²⁴ CinCPOA ltr to CGAFPOA, ser 00249, dtd 25Oct43 (OAB, NHD). General Richardson's request for clarification of the tactical command structure was made to insure that it was in accord with Army doctrine and that the corps commander would be the superior officer from whom the 27th Division commander received his combat orders. CGAFPOA ltr to CinCPOA, dtd 17Oct43 (OAB, NHD).

could be employed at either objective, depending upon the enemy's reaction, or used to occupy Apamama. When and where the reserve would be committed was a decision that Admiral Turner alone would make. The force commander, however, might rely upon the advice of Holland Smith.

At both Makin and Tarawa, it was planned that the first few waves would churn ashore in amphibian tractors, vehicles that had been ferried to the objective in tank landing ships (LSTs). Off the atolls, the landing ships would stop, open the huge doors in their bows and disgorge the tractors down a lowered ramp into the water. Since the assault troops would be in transports, it was necessary that they first climb down heavy nets to enter LCVPs from which they later would transfer to LVTs. The tractors would then maneuver to form waves, each one destined for a particular beach. Plans called for minesweepers to sweep the lagoon entrance, anchor buoys to mark the cleared channel, and take position at the line of departure. At this line, the waves were to be guided into lanes leading directly to the assigned beach and at a given signal sent racing across the line toward the island.

The procedure planned for later waves was slightly different, for LVTs had been reserved for the leading assault elements. Since no transfer was necessary, the same LCVPs in which the infantrymen and artillerymen left their transports would carry them to the rendezvous area for the formation of assault waves, to the line of departure where the shoreward movement would be coordinated, and finally to the embattled beachhead. Two Landing

Ships, Dock (LSDs), the USS *Ashland* and *Belle Grove*, had been assigned to carry the medium tanks for Operation GALVANIC. These ships would perform basically the same service for the Landing Craft, Medium (LCMs) and the tanks they carried that the smaller LSTs did for the amphibian tractors. The holds of the LSDs would be flooded to enable the landing craft to float through an opening in the stern. Once afloat, the LCMs would head for the rendezvous area for assignment to the proper boat wave, the first leg in their journey into battle.

D-Day at both objectives was to be ushered in with an aerial attack. From 0545 to 0615 carrier planes would bomb and strafe enemy troops and installations. After the aviators had completed their final runs, the fire support ships would begin a 2½-hour hammering of the objectives. Scheduled to blast Butaritari Island at Makin were four old battleships, four cruisers, and six destroyers. Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, was destined to shudder under the weight of high explosives thrown into it by three battleships, five cruisers, and nine destroyers. Never before had such powerful sea-borne batteries been massed against such small targets. The result, naval gunfire planners optimistically hoped, would be devastating, although few experienced officers looked for total destruction of the enemy defenses.²⁵

²⁵ The commanding officer of the transport group which landed the Marines at Tarawa, recalled stating his doubts of the efficacy of this fire "very forcibly during a conference at Wellington, N.Z. I had witnessed a similar bombing and bombardment of Gavutu Island, in the Solomons, where I landed a Marine

When the naval guns had ceased their thundering, the carrier planes would return for a five-minute attack on the invasion beaches as the assault waves were moving ashore.

Naval gunfire, to be delivered on D-Day and after, was scheduled for both objectives. When the ships opened fire depended upon the enemy's reaction, for any Japanese batteries that threatened the unloading would have to be silenced. Preparatory fires on D-Day, divided into two phases, were to begin after the first air strike. First, the support ships would deliver 75 minutes of pre-arranged neutralization and counterbattery fire, if necessary closing the range to as little as 2,000 yards in order to knock out protected coastal defense guns. The second phase, to last for 45 minutes, called for an increasingly heavy bombardment of assigned areas with the combined purposes of destroying emplacements along the invasion beaches and neutralizing enemy defenses throughout the islands. At Tarawa, the support ships were positioned to fire from the west across Betio, since fire from the south might cause ricocheting shells that could fall into troop assembly areas on the lagoon side of the island.²⁶ Once the assault troops were ashore, certain warships could be called upon to blast specific targets that impeded the American ad-

Paratroop outfit. From daylight to noon this little island was subjected to repeated bombing attacks and bombardment by cruisers and destroyers. The results had been most disappointing." RAdm Herbert B. Knowles ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 1Sep62, hereafter *Knowles ltr*.

²⁶ *Hill interview/comments.*

vance. During the preparatory shelling, however, all ships were to fire for the most part into areas rather than at selected strongpoints.

Target destruction fires were to be delivered simultaneously with the neutralization of the remainder of the area in which the target was located. The idea of combining neutralization with destruction did not appeal to the 2d Marine Division staff, but naval planners were determined to rain down explosives on the whole of Betio in order to devastate the island in the shortest possible time. The final approved naval gunfire support plan was an amalgam of the desires of the naval and landing force commanders. In commenting on the planning period, General Julian Smith recalled:

We Marines, all of whom had studied, and in some cases seen in actual combat, the effect of land artillery fire, ships' gunfire, and aerial bombardment, found naval officers unduly optimistic as to the results to be obtained from the bombardment, but never any lack of willingness on their part to listen to our problems and to cooperate most fully in assisting in their solution.²⁷

The plan prepared by the 2d Marine Division had its origin early in August, when Admiral Spruance visited General Julian Smith's headquarters at Wellington, New Zealand. At this time the admiral verbally assigned the capture of Tarawa Atoll to the division. During the conference, the problem of the

reef at Betio was discussed, and division planners made a tentative decision to land the first three waves in amphibian tractors. The final judgment would depend upon the results of tests of the ability of LVTs to clamber over coral ledges.

Following these talks, the division received its first written directives, documents based on the original Gilberts-Nauru concept. Since the Marines' objectives were Tarawa and Apamama, the later substitution of Makin for Nauru did not disrupt staff planning.

The 2d Marine Division was attached to VAC on 15 September, and on 2 October, Julian Smith and members of his staff flew to Pearl Harbor to coordinate plans with Holland Smith, Turner, and Hill. During the time between his conversations with Spruance and his trip to Pearl Harbor, Julian Smith had been devising a plan for the conquest of Betio. A striking feature of this tentative scheme was the landing of artillery on an island adjacent to Betio prior to the main assault. At Pearl Harbor, Julian Smith learned that the enemy was considered capable of launching a combined air and submarine attack within three days after the American ships arrived off the atoll. Landing howitzers in anticipation of the assault on Betio would forewarn the Japanese, and the enemy might be able to catch the transports before these vessels could be unloaded. Another unpleasant fact that came to light at this time was the decision to hold one regiment of Julian Smith's command in corps reserve. The 2d Marine Division would lack even the strength to make simultaneous assaults against Betio and a secondary objective which

²⁷ LtGen Julian C. Smith, "Tarawa," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, v. 79, no. 11 (Nov 53), p. 1170, hereafter Smith, "Tarawa"; VAC NGF Spt Plan, dtd 13Oct43, Anx B to VAC OPlan 1-43, dtd 5Oct43; TF 53 NGF Spt n.d., Encl A to TF 53 Rpt of Tarawa Ops, dtd 13Dec43, hereafter *TF 53 AR*.

might serve as the site for artillery. One alternative remained—a direct frontal attack without the prelanding support of division artillery.

Aware that an assault of the type confronting him was the most costly of operations, Julian Smith asked for definite orders. “I discussed the matter fully with the Corps commander,” he later recalled, “and when informed that the decision to make the attack directly on Betio was final and must be accomplished by the Second Marine Division less the combat team assigned to Corps reserve, I requested that my orders be so worded as I did not feel that the plan should be my responsibility.”²⁸ Orders were promptly issued by VAC to seize Betio before occupying any of the remaining islands in the atoll.

After the approval of the 2d Division plan, Julian Smith and his party returned to New Zealand. On 19 October, Admiral Hill and key members of his staff followed to go over last-minute details before the issuance of the final plans. Hill brought with him a rough draft of Admiral Spruance’s communications plan, whose final version was not available to Task Force 53 until three weeks later, just an hour before the ships left their staging area for the target. When he reached New Zealand, Hill got his first look at his flagship, the USS *Maryland*. The battleship still had 20 yard workmen on board making the necessary alterations for its role as command center for the Tarawa operation.²⁹

²⁸ Smith, “Tarawa,” p. 1167; LtGen Julian C. Smith ltr to ACoF, G-3, HQMC, hereafter *Julian Smith ltr*.

²⁹ Hill interview/comments.

The 2d Marine Division operations order, completed on 25 October, called for Combat Team 2 (2d Marines, reinforced, with 2/8 attached) to make the assault landings. The remaining two battalions of the 8th Marines, along with the regimental headquarters, were held in division reserve, while the 6th Marines remained under corps control. Elements of the 10th Marines, division artillery, a part of Combat Team 2, would be landed as quickly as possible to support operations ashore. From the 18th Marines, Julian Smith’s engineers, came another part of the combat team, demolitions and flamethrower men to assist the infantry battalions, as well as the shore party that had the task of speeding supplies to the front lines.

Combat Team 2 planned to assault Beaches Red 1, Red 2, and Red 3, all on the lagoon side of the island and each the objective of one battalion landing team. As a result of the removal of one regiment from Julian Smith’s control, the 2d Marine Division had only an estimated two-to-one numerical edge in infantry over the defending Japanese. Instead of reinforcements, Combat Team 2 would have to rely on the effect of the massive preliminary bombardment in its effort to drive completely across the island, capture the airfield, change direction, and launch a two-battalion thrust down the long axis of the objective. (See Map III, Map Section.)

Minor adjustments had to be made throughout the planning phase. Experiments proved that amphibian tractors could crawl across a coral reef, but these vehicles were in short supply. The 2d Division had 100 tractors, all of

them primitive LVT(1)s which had been designed primarily as cargo carriers and lacked armor protection. Julian Smith's staff obtained sheets of light armor which were fixed to the tractors while the division was in New Zealand. Many of these LVTs, veterans of the Guadalcanal fighting, had outlived their usefulness, but mechanics managed to breathe new life into 75 of them. Each LVT(1) had room for 20 fully equipped men in addition to its crew of 3. Unless the division commander received more LVTs, he did not have enough vehicles for the first three assault waves.³⁰

The nearest source of additional tractors was San Diego. Although there was neither time nor shipping to get large numbers of these vehicles to New Zealand, 50 LVT(2)s were shipped to Samoa. Members of the 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion went to that island to form a new company which would join the division off Tarawa. The new LVT(2) was an improved version of the tractor already in use by the division. Horsepower had been boosted from 146 to 200, a change which enabled the LVT(2) to move slightly faster while carrying 4 more men or 1,500 more pounds of cargo than its predecessor. Also, the new model could cruise for 75 miles in the water, compared to 50 miles for the LVT(1). Tests were ordered in which the new tractors ran 4,000 yards with a full battle load to determine the time it would take the LVT(2), which proved

capable of making at least four miles an hour.³¹ Each LVT(2) was equipped with portable armor plate for the front, sides, and cab. These plates could be used during assault landings or removed if there was no danger of enemy fire.

Another proposed refinement in the basic plan was a request for additional aerial bombardment. Lieutenant Colonel David M. Shoup, division operations officer, urged that Seventh Air Force planes drop one-ton "daisy-cutters" on and beyond the invasion beaches during the ship-to-shore movement. In addition to killing Japanese, the heavy bombs would shatter buildings that otherwise might provide cover for enemy snipers. This request, although endorsed by the division and listed in the air operations plan, was not carried out.³² The approach plan prepared by Task Force 53 called for certain of the fire support ships to separate from the main group as the transports neared the transport area. These warships would steam to designated positions to the south, west, and northwest of Betio. Two minesweepers were to lead the destroyer screen into the lagoon. Next to pass through the gap in the barrier reef would be an LSD carrying the medium

³¹ *Hill interview/comments.*

³² *Ibid.* General Shoup was later told that three B-24s with these bombs on board actually took off, but that one crashed on takeoff, one flew into the water, and the third did not reach its destination. *Shoup interview/comments.* A search of Seventh Air Force records in the USAF Historical Archives failed to reveal any mention of this request. Dr. Robert F. Futrell, USAF Historian, ltr to Head, Hist Br, G-3, HQMC, dtd 20Aug62.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1166. For details concerning various models of the LVT, see ONI, ND, *Supplement No. 1 to ONI 226, Allied Landing Craft and Ships* (Washington, 1945).

tanks of the division and finally the initial waves of landing craft.

Planning for the employment of the 27th Infantry Division was handicapped by the substitution of Makin Atoll for Nauru Island. In addition, there was a difference of opinion between General Ralph Smith, the division commander, and General Holland Smith of VAC. The corps commander preferred to assault Butaritari from the lagoon side, bringing the maximum strength to bear against a small portion of the coast. On the other hand, the Army general wanted to land two battalions on the west coast of the island and two hours later send a single battalion ashore near the waist of objective. This second blow would be delivered from the lagoon. Ralph Smith's views prevailed, and the Marine general gave rather reluctant approval to the scheme.

Assigned to the Makin operation was the 165th Regimental Combat Team (RCT). With a total of 6,470 men, this heavily reinforced unit outnumbered the estimated defenders of Butaritari by roughly 8-to-1. Three reinforced companies from the 105th Infantry, 582 officers and men in all, had been assigned to the landing force. One of these companies would, if LVTs became available, spearhead each of the assault battalions. This mixing of units was brought about by the shortage of amphibian tractors. Since it seemed for a time that none of these vehicles would be available, Ralph Smith scheduled all assault elements of the 165th Infantry to train with and land from LCVPs, while reserving the tractors for the men of the 105th. Thus, there would be no need to adjust his plans if the

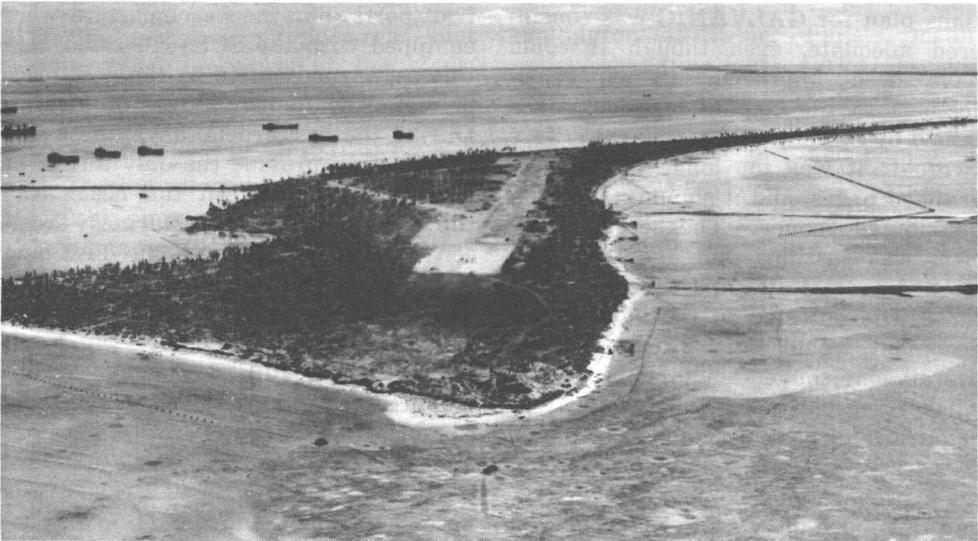
promised tractors did not arrive, for the men from the 105th could remain in reserve. On the other hand, if the LVTs did appear, they could be used by the detachments from the 105th Infantry, and again no violence would be done to the basic landing plan.

In Ralph Smith's opinion, the rapid capture of the tank barrier guarding the western limits of the main defenses was of the greatest importance. It was to gain this end that he had proposed two separate landings followed by a pincers movement against the enemy stronghold. Such a maneuver, however, would depend on close coordination between the attacking units and reliable communications with the artillery batteries that had landed over the western beaches. Another solution to the problem posed by the tank barrier would have been to rake the obstacle with naval gunfire. At the time, however, neither Ralph Smith nor his staff were impressed with the effectiveness of seaborne artillery. Instead of seeking aid from sharpshooting destroyers, they preferred a combination of land weapons—infantry, artillery, and armor.

COMMUNICATIONS AND SUPPLY ³³

In general, the overall communica-

³³ Additional sources for this section include: CinCPac Comm Plan, n.d., Anx A to CinCPac OPlan 1-43, dtd 5Oct43; Rpt of GALVANIC Comm, dtd 4Dec43, Encl D to *V PhibFor AR*; TransArea Debarkation and Unloading Plan, n.d., and Unloading and Beach Pty Plan, n.d., Apps 1 and 2 to Anx D to *TF 53 OpO A101-43*; SigRpt, dtd 4Dec43 with Suppl, dtd 3Jan 44, and TQM Report, dtd 30Dec43, Encl F to *VAC AR*.



BETIO ISLAND as it appeared two weeks after the battle, looking west over GREEN Beach. (USAF B-65141AC)



ASSAULT TROOPS cross the log wall behind the RED Beaches and move inland on Betio. (USMC 64032)

tions plan for GALVANIC was considered adequate, even though it could have been improved. Principal objections to the communications annex issued by Spruance's headquarters were twofold: it was too long, 214 mimeographed pages, and it should have been distributed sooner. The second criticism was justified, but the staff had worked against an impossible deadline; those who objected to the bulk of the document would later admit that an overall plan, huge though it might be, was preferable to several briefer, less detailed, and possibly conflicting plans.

Secrecy was the watchword during the preparation for GALVANIC, and this mood of caution was to prevail during the approach of the expeditionary force. Since strict radio silence was necessary, only VHF (Very High Frequency) and TBS (Talk Between Ships) equipment could be used within the convoys. Visual signals were substituted whenever possible for routine radio messages, but signalmen proved rusty at first. Although speed came with practice, the vast number of visual signals, which reached as many as 80 per day off Tarawa, led to the establishment, en route to the target, of areas of operational responsibility within the task force. Had this practice not been adopted, hours would have been lost in passing messages from ship to ship to insure that every element of the force had got the information. As it was, certain vessels were to pass on information to ships within specified sectors.

Keeping contact between ships and shore was certain to be the most difficult aspect of the GALVANIC communications problem. Neither LSTs,

transports, nor the beachmasters were equipped with the SCR-610 radio, and this set turned out to be the best piece of signal equipment ashore on Betio.³⁴ During the first crucial days, these sets would often provide the only means of radio contact between the beach and the task force. The Marines themselves were saddled with the TBX and TBY, two low power sets whose general worthlessness brought the postoperation comment that: "light weight but powerful and rugged portable equipment having full frequency range and capable of sustained operation does not appear available in any standard type."³⁵ The TBX lacked the necessary range, and the TBY was not sufficiently waterproof.

Both the Marines and soldiers had wire equipment with which to establish communications within the beach-head area. Unfortunately, the generator armature of the standard EE-8 field telephone and the drop coil of its companion switchboard were not waterproof and therefore unreliable in amphibious operations. Also, to avoid damage by troops and tracked vehicles as well as short circuits caused by dampness, it was desirable to string telephone wires above the ground, something that could not easily be done in the face of enemy fire.

³⁴ "The SCR-610 and the ship-carried SCR-608 were Army radios 'appropriated' by the Navy transports that served in the Aleutians and were now to take part in GALVANIC. We had to dole them out where most needed and never had anywhere near enough of them during the GALVANIC Operation." *Knowles ltr.*

³⁵ V PhibFor Rpt of GALVANIC Comm, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

GALVANIC could not succeed unless a steady current of supplies was kept moving from the holds of the transports to the front lines. First step in this process was the rapid unloading of cargo, and to gain speed both the Army and Marine divisions combat loaded their shipping. Cargo was so stowed that items needed early in the fighting were at the top of the holds and close to the hatches. Because vessels were dispatched to the 2d Marine Division piecemeal, as quickly as they were released from other duties, the division staff could not predict how much cargo space would be available. Sometimes the blueprints provided by the arriving ships were outdated and no help to the hard-pressed planners. The Marines, nevertheless, managed to do a creditable job; in fact, the only snag in unloading came as a result of the re-arranging of cargo in ships at anchor off Tarawa.

The vessels carrying the 27th Infantry Division troops also were effectively combat loaded. Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Ferris, division G-4, organized a transport quartermaster school and sent his students to Pearl Harbor to learn the characteristics of naval transports as well as loading techniques. In addition, the supply section of the Army division resurrected the stowage plans drawn up for the Attu operation, studied them, and used them as guides for plans of their own.

In handling cargo, the Army division had a decided advantage over its Marine counterpart. While the 27th Infantry Division had some 1,800 sled and toboggan type pallets, the 2d Marine Division had almost none, a deficiency caused when the necessary

materials to build them failed to reach Wellington in time. Pallets meant easier handling of cargo because several heavy boxes could be lashed to a wooden platform, stowed and unloaded as a single unit, and hauled intact to the using unit.

At Makin, the scheme of maneuver and the relatively small Japanese garrison indicated that cargo could be ferried to the beach without serious enemy interference. Sailors and a part of a company from the 105th Infantry were to act as ship unloading details. On the beachhead, the 102d Engineer Battalion, reinforced by small detachments from the 165th Infantry, would provide shore parties to sort supplies and rush them inland. One engineer company was attached for this purpose to each assault battalion.³⁶

Tarawa, however, offered a far greater logistical challenge. The assault waves were to slam directly into the enemy's defenses on Betio, and the craft carrying supplies for the 2d Marine Division also might encounter fierce opposition. Landing craft were certain to be sunk, so extra service would be required of the survivors. Every man was expected to do his duty and more. "Use your brains . . . and guts," urged Captain Herbert B. Knowles, transport group commander; "keep the boats moving, and get the stuff to the Marines."³⁷

As soon as the assault waves had hit the beach and landing craft became

³⁶ SP Ops, Anx 4 to 27th InfDiv AdminO 11, dtd 26Oct43; see also Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*, pp. 48-49, 102.

³⁷ TF 53 Unloading and Beach Pty Plan, *op. cit.*

available, Marines and sailors would begin unloading cargo from the transports. Supplies were to be loaded into the boats according to a fixed priority, but dispatchers would not send the boats shoreward unless told to do so by the commander of the regiment for whom the cargo was destined. En route to the beach, all supply craft had to report to control officers who made sure that the incoming boats were headed toward the proper sector and that a shore party was on hand to unload them. LVTs, LCVPs, and LCMs all might haul supplies, but the last, with its 30-ton capacity, was considered most valuable.

An orderly logistical effort also required that beach party and shore party units land with the assault battalions. In charge of each beach party was a naval officer, the beachmaster, who assisted the shore party commander, and also supervised marking the beaches, evacuating the wounded, and the other tasks performed by his men. A Marine officer commanded the shore party, which was primarily concerned with unloading the incoming boats, sorting supplies, and storing them or moving them inland. At Betio some of these activities could be concentrated at the long pier near the waist of the island. This structure was accessible to landing craft, for its jutting beyond the reef, and a boat channel had been dredged along its western side.

Since protracted fighting was expected at neither Makin nor Tarawa, both divisions limited the amount of supplies to be carried to the target area. The transports assigned the 165th RCT carried the assault troops,

their equipment and weapons, 5 units of fire per weapon, plus 10 days' rations, 2 days' K rations, and such miscellaneous items as medical supplies, ordnance spare parts and cleaning equipment, and fuel enough to last the vehicles on board for 7 days. Stowed in the assault cargo ship assigned to the Makin landing force were 24 days' B rations for the entire command, 15,000 gallons of water, 8 days' motor fuel, and additional ammunition. Three LSTs carried still other supplies.

The 2d Marine Division also attempted to keep a tight rein on its supplies. To be embarked with the convoy carrying the assault and garrison forces were 30 days' B rations, 5 days' C or K rations (later changed to 3 days' K and 10 days' C), 2 days' D rations, and enough water to provide 2 gallons per day to each member of the command for a period of 5 days.³⁸ Within five days, water distillation equipment would be operating. Enough maintenance supplies, fuels, and lubricants to last 30 days were loaded in the transports. Also on hand were construction, medical, and aviation supplies for 30 days. Although antiaircraft weapons were allotted 10 units of fire, coast defense guns and all other weapons received 5.

³⁸ The usual components of standard rations were: D, an emergency individual ration—a special chocolate bar; C, the individual combat ration—canned hash, stew, or meat and beans, biscuits, sugar, powdered coffee, and candy; K, another emergency or combat ration—breakfast, dinner, and supper units, each consisting of tinned luncheon meat, biscuits, sugar, and gum; B, a rear-area unit ration—canned meats, dried or canned fruit and vegetables, canned bread, or biscuits.

The number of vehicles was to have been reduced to the minimum necessary for operations on an island the size of Betio, but as planning progressed the number of trucks, tanks, half-tracks, LVTs, and trailers thought vital for the attack continued to increase. Eventually, the Marines lifted to the target more vehicles than they could use. The final total, including LVTs, for the assault echelon was 732 wheeled and tracked vehicles plus 205 trailers. The Makin landing force made a similar miscalculation, bringing with it 372 tracked or wheeled vehicles, and 39 trailers.³⁹

TRAINING AND PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS

Upon assuming command of the 2d Marine Division on 1 May 1943, Julian Smith inherited a veteran unit but one that still was suffering the effects of the Guadalcanal fighting. The division had arrived in New Zealand with 12,500 diagnosed cases of malaria, many of whom eventually were evacuated to the United States. So serious was the health problem that as late as 10 October malaria victims were being admitted to the hospital at the rate of 40 per day. Even as the new commanding general was taking charge, the first replacements began arriving. More would follow until the organization reached combat strength. Fitting these men into the division team was one of the problems facing the new commander and his staff.

³⁹ Details of Loading of GALVANIC Ship, Encl 1 to *V PhibFor AR*; VAC AdminO 4-43, dtd 13Oct43; *2d MarDiv OpO No. 14*.

In addition to shattering the health of the division, the Guadalcanal campaign weakened it in a tactical sense. At Guadalcanal, the 2d Marine Division had fought for the most part as a collection of combat teams rather than as a tightly organized unit. The lessons of jungle warfare had to be put aside, and the various elements of the command welded into an effective and well-coordinated striking force capable of seizing a defended atoll.⁴⁰

Late in September, as transports became available, the transition from jungle fighters to amphibious assault troops began in earnest. First the battalion landing teams, then the regiments practiced off Paekakariki, at Hawke Bay, and in Wellington Harbor, while a few LVTs were sent to the Fijis to test their ability against reefs similar to those that guarded Betio. After these preliminary landings, the Marines returned to camp to rest, repair equipment, and prepare for what they thought was going to be a full-scale division exercise.⁴¹

During this period, the same few ships did most of the work with the Marines, since new arrivals destined for the transport group of the Southern Attack Force needed "to have engineering work done, boats from the scrapped boat pool ashore overhauled and supplied them, and some semblance of communications equipment furnished."⁴² The group commander, Captain Knowles, commented:

Most of these ships arrived lacking full crews, full boat complements and woefully

⁴⁰ Smith, "Tarawa," pp. 1165-1166.

⁴¹ *Shoup interview/comments*.

⁴² *Knowles ltr*.

lacking in communications facilities. Some of these ships had been diverted to Wellington while still on 'shakedown' operations. The transport group commander did not know that he was destined for anything except conduct of amphibious training with 2nd Mar. Div. until about the middle of the month; then he had to organize 3 divisions of transports and get them ready for sea by 1 November. His flagship *Monrovia* had been stripped of everything useful in the way of communication facilities except basic commercial ship radios. At Efate we had to install a small command station above the ship's bridge plus sufficient signal yards and signal flags to do the job ahead. Had we not had extra naval personnel and Army SCRs (both 'appropriated' at the end of the Aleutian Operation) we would have been in an even sorrier mess than we were. The few ships that had been in the Aleutians furnished officers and men to give at least a minimum of [experienced] personnel to new arrivals.⁴³

Marine Division had a strong leavening of combat experienced men spread throughout its units. These veterans gave emphasis to the constant theme in training—keep the attack moving. Should officers fall or units become disorganized, noncommissioned officers would have to assume command, and this would often happen at Betio. Also emphasized were local security and fire discipline during the night, tactics that would forestall Japanese infiltration and local counterattacks. One criticism of the division training program was its failure to spend enough time drilling infantrymen, tank crews, and demolitions men to act as integrated teams in reducing strongpoints. At the time no one realized the tenacity with which the enemy

would fight even after the island seemed doomed to fall.⁴⁴

The 27th Infantry Division, untried in combat, was also new to the techniques of amphibious warfare. Preparing this division for Operation GALVANIC was a task shared between General Richardson's headquarters and Holland Smith's VAC. The Army command handled training for ground combat as well as certain phases of pre-amphibious training, while the Marine headquarters concentrated on the ship-to-shore movement. Logistical planning and routine administration for Army troops also lay within the province of General Richardson.

In actual practice, the distinction between ground, pre-amphibious, and amphibious matters tended to disappear. The 27th Infantry Division was first introduced to amphibious warfare in December 1942, when two officers from the unit attended a school offered at San Diego by Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet. The information gained at San Diego was passed on to other division officers in a school conducted in Hawaii. After the division had been selected to provide troops for GALVANIC, the tempo of training increased, and those portions of amphibious training which could be carried out ashore were undertaken at Army installations. In addition, the division began organizing liaison parties to direct naval gunfire and drilling its supply personnel in the complexities of combat loading. Ship-to-shore exercises, however, awaited

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1168; Maj Arthur J. Rauchle ltr to CMC, dtd 12Jun47; 2d MarDiv, 3/2, and 3/6 WarDs, Oct-Nov43 (Unit Rpt File, Hist Br, HQMC); Johnston, *Follow Me!*, pp. 94-95.

Admiral Turner's ships and General Holland Smith's instructors.

While the training of Army troops for GALVANIC was getting underway, VAC found itself preoccupied with two demanding tasks, organization of the corps itself and planning for the scheduled operation. In the meantime, General Richardson went ahead with his training program, absorbing the necessary amphibious doctrine from War Department manuals, Navy and Marine Corps publications, and the recorded experience of other Army divisions. Of particular value were notes prepared by the 9th Infantry Division during its indoctrination under Holland Smith as well as the original loading plans for the Attu landing. By the time that VAC began to assert itself in the training setup, Richardson had come to look upon the Marine organization as simply another echelon to clutter up the chain of command. The Army general believed that Admiral Turner, who controlled the necessary ships, was the logical person to train troops for the ship-to-shore movement, and felt that there was no need at the time for a corps of any sort.⁴⁵

Thus, on the eve of GALVANIC both Richardson and Holland Smith were complaining about the status of VAC. The Marine general objected because his headquarters had been restricted in its exercise of tactical command, and the Army general urged that the corps be abolished completely. Their respective higher headquarters gave each

essentially the same advice: to make the best of the situation. This they did, and preparations for combat continued.⁴⁶

Training of the 27th Infantry Division came to a climax with a series of amphibious exercises held in the Hawaiian Islands. Bad weather and poor beaches hampered the earlier efforts, and the rehearsals were of questionable value. During the first two rehearsals, the troops landed, but no supplies were put ashore. Because of rock-strewn beaches, assault craft did not advance beyond the line of departure in the third or dress rehearsal. Preserving scarce LVTs from possible damage was judged more important than any lessons the troops might learn.

Preparations for the Gilberts invasion included certain preliminary combat operations, some remotely connected with GALVANIC, and others designed specifically to batter the assault objectives. American might first made itself felt in the Gilberts in February 1942 when carrier planes lashed at Makin Atoll. In August of the same year, Marine Raiders startled the Japanese by making a sudden descent on Butaritari Island. In April of the following year, after a series of reconnaissance flights, heavy bombers of the Seventh Air Force, operating from Funafuti and Canton Island, began harassing Nauru and targets in the Gilberts.

These early aerial efforts were sorely handicapped by the lack of bases close to the Gilberts. To remedy this situation, the 7th Marine Defense Battalion occupied Nanomea Atoll in the Ellice

⁴⁵ LtGen Robert C. Richardson, Jr., USA, ltr to LtGen Thomas T. Handy, USA, dtd 5 Nov 43 (OPD File 384 PTO-Sec II, RG 115, WW II RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

⁴⁶ *Morton MS*, ch. 23, pp. 22-25.

Islands and the 2d Marine Airdrome Battalion established itself at Nukufetau in the same island group. Both landings were made during August 1943. A third air base was established in September at Baker Island, an American possession which had gone unoccupied since the coming of war. The last of these fields to be completed, that at Nukufetau, was ready on 9 October.

The Seventh Air Force began its systematic support of GALVANIC on 13 November by launching 18 Funafuti-based B-24s against Tarawa. On the following day, the hulking bombers divided their attention between Tarawa and Mille in the Marshalls. Gradually the list of targets was expanded to include Makin, Jaluit, Maloelap, and even Kwajalein. Between 13 and 17 November, planes of the Seventh Air Force dropped 173 tons of high explosives on various targets in the Gilberts and Marshalls and destroyed 5 enemy aircraft. Admiral Hoover's land-based naval planes and patrol bombers also began their offensive on 13 November, but limited themselves to night strikes against Nauru, Tarawa, and Makin. (See Map I, Map Section and Map 7.)

The Navy was far from reluctant to risk its carrier planes against Japan's island fortresses. In fact, Admiral Pownall's fast carriers went into action even before the Seventh Air Force had launched its intensive aerial campaign. On 17 and 18 September, planes from three aircraft carriers blasted Makin, Apamama, Tarawa, and Nauru. The naval aviators were assisted by B-24s from Guadalcanal, Canton Island, and Funafuti, aircraft which carried cam-

eras as well as bombs, and other Liberator bombers struck the Gilberts on the following day as the carriers were withdrawing. Next the carriers attacked Wake Island on 5 and 6 November.

The final phase of this campaign of preliminary aerial bombardment took place on 18 and 19 November. Seventh Air Force planes blasted Tarawa and Makin and helped carrier aircraft attack Nauru. After pounding Nauru, Admiral Pownall's fliers on 19 November dropped 130 tons of bombs on Jaluit and Mille. Air power had done its best to isolate the objectives and soften their defenses for the amphibious assault.⁴⁷

THE ENEMY ⁴⁸

Japan seized control of the Gilberts on 10 December 1941 in a move designed to gain bases from which to observe American activity in the South Pacific. Since the occupied islands were considered mere observation posts, little was done to fortify them. A handful of men were posted at

⁴⁷ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan—The Army Air Forces in World War II*, v. 4, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950) pp. 290–302 hereafter Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; TF 50 AR GALVANIC, 10–27Nov43, dtd 4Jan44; CinCPac–CinCPOA WarD, Nov43, dtd 28Feb44 (CinCPac File, HistBr, HQMC).

⁴⁸ Additional sources for this section include: JICPOA Buls 4–44, Study of Japanese Instls on Butaritari Island, Makin Atoll, dtd 14Jan 44, and 8–44, Japanese Fors in the Gilbert Islands, n.d (IntelFile, HistBr, HQMC); VAC G–2 Study and Rpt, Betio, dtd 23Dec43; 2d MarDiv and JICPOA Study of Japanese Def of Betio Island, Tarawa, dtd 20Dec43.

Tarawa, coastwatchers were scattered throughout the island group, and a sea-plane base along with some rudimentary defenses were built on Makin. Apparently the Japanese became convinced that geography plus the battering given the American Fleet at Pearl Harbor had made the Gilberts invulnerable, for the small garrisons were shortly reduced. On 17 August 1942, when the hatches of two American submarines eased open and 221 Marines began paddling toward Butaritari Island, only 70 Japanese could be mustered to oppose them.⁴⁹

Although Japanese strategists dismissed the Makin raid as an attempt to pin down troops in the Central Pacific while new operations were launched to the southwest, the vulnerability of the Gilberts certainly shocked them. Unless these outlying islands were garrisoned in some strength, they would fall to the Americans and serve as bases for a thrust into the far more valuable Marshalls. Reinforcements were started toward the Gilberts, fortifications were thrown up throughout the group, and British citizens overlooked since the occupation were hunted down.

While the Gilberts were being reinforced, Japanese strategy was being revised. As early as March 1943, the Imperial Navy was thinking in terms of "interception operations," in which its ships would fall upon and annihilate any American fleet attempting to land troops along the fringes of Micronesia. Operations of this sort would be pos-

⁴⁹ Chief, War Hist Off, Def Agency of Japan ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 19Nov62, hereafter *Japanese Gilberts comments*.

sible only if the defending garrison were strong enough to hold the attackers at bay until Japanese aircraft, submarines, and surface craft could reach the area.⁵⁰

In May 1943, Japanese naval leaders conferred at Truk, and out of these discussions evolved a plan to counter any American thrust into the Gilberts. Should Nimitz choose to attack, Japanese bombers from the Bismarcks would swoop down on his convoys, land at fields in the Gilberts and Marshalls, refuel, rearm, and return to action. Meanwhile, short-range planes were to be shuttled into the threatened area by way of Truk and other bases. Fleet units would steam eastward from Truk to cooperate with Bismarcks-based submarines in destroying the already battered invasion force.

This scheme for the defense of the Gilberts was but a single aspect of *Z Operation*, an overall plan of defense. This larger concept called for the establishment of an outer perimeter stretching from the Aleutians through the Marshalls and Gilberts to the Bismarcks. Vigorous action by the Imperial Fleet coupled with a stubborn fight by the island garrisons would thwart any American attempt to penetrate the barrier. The type of strategy espoused

⁵⁰ Mil HistSec, Japanese Research Div, HQ, AFFE, Japanese Monographs No. 161, Inner South Seas Islands Area NavOps, Pt. 1: Gilbert Islands (Nov41-Nov43) and No. 173, Inner South Seas Area NavOps, Pt. 2: Marshall Islands (Dec41-Feb44); Takushiro Hattori, *Dai Toa Senso Zenshi [The Complete History of the Greater East Asia War]* (Tokyo: Masu Publishing Company, 1953—MS translation in 4 vols. at OCMH), II, pt. 5, p. 43, hereafter Hattori, *Complete History*.

in *Z Operation*, modified because of American successes in the Aleutians, was reviewed at an Imperial conference held during September 1943 and was considered acceptable.⁵¹

Betio Island, in keeping with defensive theory advanced as part of *Z Operation*, was heavily fortified. The basic defensive pattern selected for the island called for a series of strongpoints with the spaces between them covered by fire. American assault forces were to be cut down at the beach. Should the invaders manage to gain a foothold on the island, determined counterattacks would be launched to hurl them back into the sea.

In command at Tarawa was Rear Admiral Keiji Shibasaki of the *3d Special Base Force*. He had at his disposal 1,122 members of this force and 1,497 men of the *Sasebo 7th Special Naval Landing Force (SNLF)*. In addition to these combat troops, the admiral had a large contingent of laborers, 1,247 from the *111th Construction Unit* and 970 from the *4th Fleet Construction Department Detachment*. Since many of the laborers were Koreans and most were untrained, Shibasaki could rely on no more than about 3,000 effectives.

The defenses of Betio were cleverly integrated, with coast defense guns, automatic weapons, and various kinds of obstacles complementing one another. Upon approaching the island, the invader would have to brave the fire of 20 coastal defense guns, ranging in size from 80mm to 8-inch. Concrete tetrahedrons scattered along the reef would be encountered next; these

had been placed to force assault craft to follow routes swept by fire from the smaller coastal defense weapons, automatic cannon, and machine guns. To scourge the incoming waves, the Japanese on Betio had, in addition to the weapons already mentioned, 10 75mm mountain howitzers, 6 70mm guns, 9 37mm field pieces, at least 31 13mm machine guns, and an unknown number of 7.7mm machine guns.⁵² The defenders could also press into service dual-purpose antiaircraft weapons and the 37mm guns of seven light tanks. To make the firepower of this arsenal more effective, the Japanese strung double-apron barbed-wire fences between reef and beach and along the beaches themselves. (See Map II, Map Section.)

Admiral Shibasaki planned to destroy the enemy forces as they landed, but he did not overlook the possibility that the attackers might gain a lodgment on the island. A log fence just inland of the beaches, antitank ditches, and other obstacles were arranged to confine the assault force to a tiny strip of coral sand, where it could be wiped out.

If the ring of defenses along the shores of Betio could be penetrated, the attackers would find the inland defenses organized in a more haphazard fashion. The command posts, ammunition dumps, and communications centers were housed in massive bunkers of reinforced concrete, structures that were built to withstand even direct hits by high explosive naval shells or ae-

⁵² So great was the destruction on the island that a postoperation count of light machine guns was impossible.

⁵¹ Hattori, *Complete History*, III, p. 4-5.

rial bombs. These positions, however, were not designed primarily for defensive fighting. Although some fitted into patterns of mutual defense, most of them had blind spots, not covered by fire, from which flamethrower or demolition teams could close for the kill.

Far less formidable were the defenses of Butaritari Island. There Lieutenant Junior Grade Seizo Ishikawa commanded no more than 384 combat troops, 100 of them marooned aviation personnel and the remainder members of his *3rd Special Base Force Makin Detachment*. Also present, but of doubtful effectiveness, were 138 men of the *111th Construction Unit* and 276 from the *4th Fleet Construction Department Detachment*.

Japanese defenses on Butaritari were concentrated around King's Wharf, about one-third of the way down the lagoon side of the island from its western foot. At the base of the wharf, the Japanese had built their seaplane base. The perimeter was bounded on the southwest by an antitank ditch linked to an earthen barricade. This obstacle, about 2,000 yards from King's Wharf, stretched almost across the island but was defended by only one antitank gun, a single pillbox, six machine gun emplacements, and numerous rifle pits. A similar ditch-and-barricade combination was located about the same distance from King's in the opposite direction and marked the northeastern limits of the main defenses. Six machine guns, three pillboxes, and a string of rifle pits guarded this barrier. Throughout the principal defensive area, the majority of heavy weapons pointed seaward, so the greatest threat to an assault from the lagoon

lay in the trio of 80mm guns emplaced at the base of King's Wharf. (See Map 6.)

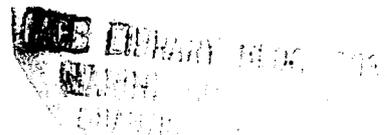
ON TO TARAWA

The departure from Wellington of the 2d Marine Division was shrouded in secrecy. Announced destination of the division was Hawkes Bay, the site of most amphibious exercises, and a rumor was planted that the troops would be back in Wellington in time for a scheduled dance. "With regard to the dance," reminisced Julian Smith, "one of the Division wits remarked that maybe we didn't leave many broken hearts in New Zealand but we certainly left a lot of broken dates."⁵³

Instead of steaming to Hawkes Bay, the transports joined Admiral Hill's Southern Attack Force at Efate in the New Hebrides, where rehearsals were held. During the first of these, troops landed at Mele Bay while the support ships simulated a bombardment of Pango Point. The second rehearsal saw the division land again at Mele Bay and the warships actually pump shells into Erradaka Island. At this time, the commander of the assault regiment, Colonel William McN. Marshall, fell ill. To replace the stricken leader, Julian Smith selected his operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel David M. Shoup, who was spot promoted to colonel.

On 13 November, Task Force 53 set sail for Tarawa, but not until the following day did Julian Smith announce to his men the name of the island which they were to assault. "I know

⁵³ Smith, "Tarawa," p. 1169.



...," read his message to the division, "you will decisively defeat and destroy the treacherous enemies of our country; your success will add new laurels to the glorious tradition of our Corps."⁵⁴ An intensive briefing for all hands followed this announcement, and the mighty task force bored onward toward its goal.

The first contact with the enemy came on 18 November, when a carrier plane sighted a Japanese aircraft far in the distance. On the following morning, a four-engine patrol bomber was picked up on radar, intercepted, and destroyed. No waves of bombers challenged Hill's ships as they began their final approach to Tarawa. At 2033, 19 November, USS *Ringgold*, the destroyer leading the task force, picked up Maina Atoll, and Hill's ships altered course to close with their objective.

Around midnight the fire support sections began steaming to their assigned stations. Transports crammed with Marines eased into unloading areas. Finally, at 0507 on 20 November, shore batteries on Betio opened fire, and the battle was underway.

General Holland Smith did not accompany the Tarawa expedition, for he had been ordered to embark in Admiral Turner's flagship, and the latter officer had taken personal command of the Makin task force. The admiral reasoned that since Makin was nearer to the Marshalls, Japanese surface units, if they chose to intervene, would prob-

⁵⁴ Quoted in Stockman, *Tarawa*, p. 86.

ably strike the Northern Attack Force.

Events during the approach of the Northern Attack Force seemed to bear out Turner's theory. On 18 November a Japanese bomber attacked a group of LSTs but was beaten off by anti-aircraft fire. Another bomber appeared the following afternoon and fell victim to Navy fighters. A night attack, delivered against the LSTs on 19 November, ended with the destruction of one enemy bomber and the escape of a second.⁵⁵ The Japanese, however, did not contest the final maneuvering of the task force, and at first light on 20 November the preliminary bombardment began.

The Japanese were never able to carry out the ambitious program of counterattacks against a Gilberts invasion force envisioned in their *Z Operation* plan. The carrier aircraft that were to have sortied from Truk and the Bismarcks had been severely depleted in a series of air battles over Rabaul in early November, as Admiral Halsey's and General MacArthur's fliers struck the enemy base in covering strikes for the landing at Bougainville.⁵⁶ Although it was not known at the time, Admiral Turner's Assault Force was insured against an enemy attack in any significant strength.

⁵⁵ Four Japanese bombers failed to return from attacks made on the 19th and 10 from attacks mounted on the 20th. *Japanese Gilberts Comments*.

⁵⁶ For the story of this significant series of aerial assaults see Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*, pp. 481-486.

The Assault on Betio¹

PREPARATIONS PRIOR TO H-HOUR

The transports halted at approximately 0355,² and the Marines of Combat Team 2 began groping down the sides of their ships toward the LCVPs waiting below. The troopships, victims of an unexpectedly strong current, had halted in the wrong area and

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *VAC AR*; *TF 53 AR*; 2d MarDiv Rpt on GALVANIC, dtd 22Dec43, hereafter *2d MarDiv OpRpt*; 2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl, 19Nov-4Dec43, hereafter *2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl*; 2d MarDiv ADC Jnl, 19-21Dec43; 2d Mar Rpt of Ops, Betio Island (including 1/2, 2/2, 3/2, 2/8, WpnsCo, and H&S Co ARs), dtd 21Dec43, hereafter *2d Mar Op Rpt*; 2d Mar UJnl, 12-24Nov43; 8thMar SAR (including 3/8 AR), dtd 1Dec43, hereafter *8th Mar SAR*; 18th Mar CbtRpt (including 1/18, 2/18, and 3/18 CbtRpts), dtd 23Dec43, hereafter *18th Mar CbtRpt*; 10th Mar Rpt of Ops, Tarawa, (including 1/10, 2/10, 3/10, 4/10, and 5/10 Notes on or Rpts of Ops), dtd 22Dec43, hereafter *10th Mar OpRpt*; 2d PhibTracBn SAR, dtd 23Dec43, hereafter *2d PhibTracBn SAR*; 2d TkBn SAR, dtd 14Dec43, hereafter *2d TkBn SAR*; BGen Merritt A. Edson, "Tarawa Operation," lecture delivered at MCS, Quantico, Va., 6Jan44, cited hereafter as *Edson Lecture*; Stockman, *Tarawa*; Johnston, *Follow Me*; Isley and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*.

² *TF 53 AR*, Anx A, p. 18. The times for various actions of the task force contained in this document have been accepted as accurate. Stockman, *Tarawa*, p. 11, maintains that disembarkation had begun by 0320.

masked certain of Admiral Hill's fire-support ships. The task force commander at 0431³ ordered the transports to stop disgorging the troops and steam northward to their proper positions. As the larger vessels glided off into the night, the landing craft attempted to follow, but some of the LCVPs became separated from their assigned ships. Rounding up these strays further delayed unloading, subsequent transfer of men from landing craft to amphibian tractors, and the final formation of the assault waves.

From 0507, when enemy shore batteries first opened fire, until 0542, American warships attempted to reduce these troublesome batteries and neutralize known enemy positions. The naval guns then fell silent to enable carrier planes to scourge the objective. Admiral Hill ceased firing to prevent possible collisions between shells and planes as well as to allow the dust raised by explosions to settle before the pilots began diving toward their targets. Unexpectedly, the aircraft failed to appear. One explanation for this failure is that the request for a dawn attack may have been misunderstood, with the result that the strike was scheduled in-

³ Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*, holds that this maneuver took place at 0550. Other sources indicate that the transports actually shifted position sometime between 0430 and 0510.

stead for sunrise. This seems logical, for the fast carriers, from which the planes were to be launched, had been excused from the Efate rehearsals where any misinterpretation of orders would have come to light. Another version maintains that the principal commanders of Task Force 52 had agreed to a strike at 0610 because pilots diving from sun-filled skies toward the darkened earth could not locate their targets. This change, the account continues, was incorporated into the overall plan for both task forces, the information was passed to the carrier pilots, but somehow word did not reach Admiral Hill at Efate. Since the planes materialized over both Makin and Tarawa within a few minutes of sunrise, this too seems plausible.⁴ Whatever the reason, the enemy was granted a brief respite from the storm of high explosives that was breaking around him.

Earlier that morning, when the *Maryland* had opened fire against Betio, the concussion from her main batteries had damaged her radio equipment, leaving Admiral Hill without any means of contacting the tardy planes. While Hill waited, Japanese gunners took advantage of the lull to hurl shells at the transports. The admiral scanned the skies until 0605, at which time he again turned his guns on the island. After the supporting warships had resumed firing, the transports, which had unloaded all troops in the initial assault waves, steamed out of range of the determined enemy gunners. At 0613, the

aircraft finally appeared over Betio, naval gunfire again ceased, and for about 10 minutes the planes swept low over the objective, raking it with bombs and machine gun fire. Because the Japanese had taken cover in concrete or log emplacements, neither bomb fragments nor bullets did them much harm. Yet, the blossoming explosions looked deadly, and as the pilots winged seaward, the warships returned to their grim task of battering the island. This resumption of naval gunfire marked the beginning of the prelanding bombardment.

A few minutes after sunrise, the minesweeper USS *Pursuit*, carrying on board a pilot familiar with the atoll, began clearing the entrance to Tarawa lagoon. Astern of this vessel was another minesweeper, USS *Requisite*. Smoke pots laid by LCVPs were used to screen the sweeping operation.⁵ Two destroyers, the USS *Ringgold* and *Dashiell*, waited off the entrance until a passage had been cleared. Fortunately for both *Pursuit* and *Requisite*, the pair of destroyers were in position to silence, at least temporarily, the shore batteries that had opened fire on the minesweepers. Once a path had been cleared, the *Pursuit*, assisted by an observation plane, began marking the line of departure, assault lanes, and those shoals which might cripple ships or small craft. In the meantime, the other minesweeper steamed out to sea to pick up the destroyers and lead them into the lagoon.

The enemy batteries, so recently silenced, again began firing as the destroyers came through the passage. A

⁴ Cf. Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*, p. 219n; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*, p. 156.

⁵ Hill interview/comments.

shell sliced through the thin skin of the *Ringgold*, penetrated to the after engine room, but failed to explode. Another dud glanced off a torpedo tube, whistled through the sick bay, and thudded to a stop in the emergency radio room. Moments after the guns of the ship had been unleashed at the supposed artillery position, a vivid explosion rocked the area. One of the destroyer shells must have touched off the enemy ammunition supply.

At 0715, the *Pursuit*, which had taken position astride the line of departure, switched on her searchlight to guide the waves of LVTs through the curtain of dust and smoke that hung between the minesweeper and the assembly area. While the *Ringgold* was fighting her duel with Japanese cannoners, the *Pursuit* tracked the approaching waves on radar. The minesweeper reported to Admiral Hill that the assault waves were 24 minutes behind schedule and could not possibly reach the beaches by 0830, the time designated as H-Hour.⁶ Lieutenant Commander Robert A. Macpherson, flying spotter plane off the *Maryland*, also reported that the LVTs could not meet the schedule, so Hill, in the *Maryland*, radioed instructions to postpone H-Hour until 0845.⁷

When the task force commander issued this order the erratic radios of the *Maryland* were still misbehaving. Though in contact with surface craft, Hill could not raise the aircraft that were scheduled to attack Betio just before H-Hour.⁸ While his communica-

tions men were struggling with the balky radio sets, the admiral at 0823 received a report from Lieutenant Commander Macpherson that the amphibian tractors had just crossed the line of departure.⁹ Since tests had indicated the lead LVT(2)s could make 4-4½ knots, he granted them an additional 40 minutes in which to reach the beach and announced that H-Hour would be 0900.

At this point, carrier planes reappeared over Betio and began strafing the assault beaches, delivering what was supposed to have been a last-minute attack. The cessation of main battery fire on the *Maryland* enabled its support air control radio to reach the planes so that Hill could call off the premature strike. The aviators finally made their runs between 0855 and 0900.

While the fliers were waiting their turn, the task force continued blasting the island. Five minutes before H-Hour, Hill's support ships shifted their fires inland, the planes strafed the beaches, and at 0900 the bombardment, except for the shells fired by the two destroyers in the lagoon, was stopped.

Awesome as it had been, the preliminary bombardment did not knock out all the defenses. The coast defense guns had been silenced, many of the dual purpose antiaircraft weapons and antiboat guns had been put out of action, but most of the concrete pillboxes and emplacements protected by coconut logs and sand survived both bombs and

are the transmitters, receivers, and antenna so close to each other as to cause mutual interference, but several of the installations, particularly SAC [Support Air Control] equipment were made entirely inoperative during main battery gunfire." *TF 53 AR*, Anx A, p. 62.

⁹ *Hill interview/comments.*

⁶ USS *Pursuit*, *Requisite*, and *Ringgold* ARs, dtd 6, 13, and 1Dec43.

⁷ *Hill interview/comments.*

⁸ In regard to the communication setup on his flagship, Admiral Hill reported: "not only

shells. Of major importance, however, was the effect of the preliminary bombardment on Japanese communications. According to some of the prisoners taken during the battle, the preinvasion shelling had ripped up the enemy's wire and forced him to rely on messengers. Since these runners often were killed or pinned down by bursting shells, few messages got through.

Betio has been compared in shape to a bird, whose legs were formed by the 500-yard pier that passed just beyond the fringing reef. On 20 November, as H-Hour drew near, the bird appeared lifeless, the plumage on its carcass badly charred. Colonel Shoup had decided to use three of his landing teams in the assault and hold one in reserve. Major Henry P. Crowe's 2/8, attached for this operation to the 2d Marines, was given the job of storming Beach Red 3. This objective was the bird's belly, the invasion beach that lay east of the long pier. Ordered to land on Crowe's right was Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Amey's 2/2. Amey was to attack Beach Red 2, the breast of the bird, which included the base of the pier and stretched 500 yards westward to an indentation in the shoreline. Major John F. Schoettel's 3/2 would land to the right of Amey's battalion, assaulting Beach Red 1, a crescent-shaped portion of the coast that measured about 500 yards in width and served as throat and lower bill for the bird of Betio. The legs, or long pier, were reserved for the 2d Scout-Sniper Platoon, which was to secure its objective immediately before the assault waves landed. In regimental reserve was 1/2 commanded by Major Wood B. Kyle. (See Map III, Map Section.)

THE LANDINGS

The precisely arranged waves of amphibian tractors that roared across the line of departure had difficulty in making headway toward the island. At the time, the slowness of the assault waves was blamed upon "overloading, wind, sea, and an ebb tide, together with poor mechanical condition of a number of the leading LVTs."¹⁰ Students of the operation, as well as the men who fought at Betio, have since absolved the wind, sea, and tide of some of the responsibility for the tardiness of the assault waves. The time lost earlier in the morning when the transports had first shifted their anchorage could not be made up. Because they had missed the rehearsals, the drivers of the new LVT(2)s were not familiar with signals, speeds, and load limitations, a factor which slowed both the transfer of men from the LCVPs and the forming of assault waves. The waves had to dress on the slowest tractors, and fully loaded LVT(1)s could not keep up with the LVT(2)s. The older vehicles were not in sound enough mechanical condition to maintain even 4 knots during their long journey from assembly area to the assault beaches.¹¹

While the assault waves were moving from the line of departure toward the Betio reef, Japanese shells first began bursting over the Marines huddled inside the amphibian tractors. These air bursts proved ineffectual, as did the

¹⁰ CinCPac Monthly Rpt, Nov43, Anx E (CinCPac File, HistBr, HQMC).

¹¹ Isley and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*, pp. 227-228; MajGen Thomas E. Watson ltr to CMC, dtd 17Jun47, hereafter *Watson ltr; Hill interview/comments*.

long-range fire of machine guns on Betio, and none of the tractors was damaged. Upon crossing the reef, the LVTs swam into a hail of machine gun and antiboat fire, but even so casualties among the troops were relatively light. Few of the LVTs failed to reach the beach.

The first unit to land on Betio was First Lieutenant William D. Hawkins' 2d Scout-Sniper Platoon,¹² a part of which gained the end of the pier at 0855. Hawkins, with engineer Second Lieutenant Alan G. Leslie, Jr., and four men, secured the ramp that sloped downward from the pier to the edge of the reef. Next, the platoon leader ordered the men who had remained in the boat to scramble up the ramp. When enemy fire began crackling around the gasoline drums that the Japanese had stored at the end of the pier, Hawkins waved the men back into their LCVP. With his four scouts and Leslie, who was carrying a flamethrower, he began advancing shoreward along the pier, methodically destroying or clearing anything that might shelter enemy snipers. Blazing gasoline from Leslie's weapon splattered against two shacks that were thought to be serving as machinegun nests, the flimsy structures ignited like twin torches, but unfortunately the flames spread to the pier itself. Although the gap burned in the pier by this fire would later handicap the movement of supplies, this difficulty was a small price to pay for driving the enemy from a position that gave him

¹² A scout-sniper platoon from the 8th Marines also saw action at Betio. There is no record of the employment of a similar unit by the 6th Marines.

the opportunity of pouring enfilade fire into the assault waves.

After the Japanese on the pier had been killed, Hawkins and his handful of men rejoined the rest of the section in the LCVP and moved along the boat channel toward the island. Beyond the end of the pier, Hawkins tried unsuccessfully to commandeer an LVT to carry his men to the beach. In the meantime, the second boatload of scout-snipers was being held off the reef on order of a control officer. The platoon leader finally made contact with them, got hold of three LVTs, and started the entire platoon toward shore. Two tractor loads, Hawkins among them, landed in the proper place and reported to the regimental command post, but the third group came ashore on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2 to join in the fighting there. The difficulties in getting ashore experienced by the 2d Scout-Sniper Platoon were typical of the Betio operation.¹³

Two of the assault battalions hurled against Betio made the last part of their shoreward journey unaided by naval gunfire. Dust and smoke screened the movement of the LVTs, so that the distance yet to be traveled could not be accurately gauged. At 0855, according to plan, all but two ships in Hill's task force lifted their fires to avoid striking either the advancing tractors or the planes which were beginning their final 5-minute strafing of the beaches. Out in the lagoon, however, the destroyers *Ringgold* and *Dashiell* continued to loft 5-inch shells into Red 3. These ships, whose officers

¹³ H&S Co OpRpt of Sct-Sniper Plat, dtd 15Dec43, Encl J to 2d MarDiv OpRpt.



DAMAGED LVTs and the bodies of Marines killed during the landing on Betio are grim witnesses to the fury of D-Day. (USMC 63578)



RUBBER RAFT is used to float wounded men across the lagoon reef to LCVPs waiting offshore at Betio. (USMC 63454)

were able to follow the progress of the tractor waves, did not cease firing until 0910.

The first assault battalion to reach its assigned beach was Major Schoettel's 3/2, which landed on Red 1 at 0910. On the right half of that beach, and at the extreme right of Combat Team 2, the Marines of Company I leaped from their LVTs, clambered over the log beach barricade, and began advancing inland. On the left of the beach, astride the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2, was a Japanese strongpoint, which raked Company K with flanking fire before that unit could gain the shelter of the barricade. After getting ashore, Company K was to have tied in with the troops on neighboring Red 2. Since the company commander could see no Marines in that direction, he made contact with Company I and did not attempt to advance toward his left.¹⁴ During the next two hours, these assault companies of 3/2 would lose over half their men.

Little better was the lot of Company L and the battalion mortar platoon. These units, boated in LCVPs, grounded on the reef 500 yards offshore. While wading toward Red 1, Company L suffered 35 percent casualties.

The next battalion to touch down on Betio was Major Crowe's 2/8, which reached Red 3 at 0917, just seven minutes after the destroyers in the lagoon had ceased firing. The fire of these warships had kept the Japanese underground as the Marines neared the beach, and the enemy did not have time

to recover from the effects of the barrage before the incoming troops were upon him. Two LVTs found a gap in the beach barricade and were able to churn as far inland as the airstrip before unloading their men. The other amphibians halted before the log obstacle, discharged their troops, and turned about to report to the control boats cruising in the lagoon. Of the 552 men in the first three waves that struck Red 3, fewer than 25 became casualties during the landing.

The most violently opposed landing was that made by Lieutenant Colonel Amey's 2/2. Company F and most of Company E gained Red 2 at 0922, but one platoon of Company E was driven off course by machine gun and antiboat fire and forced to land on Red 1. Although Company G arrived only three minutes behind the other companies to lend its weight to the attack, the battalion could do no more than carve out a beachhead about 50 yards in depth. Losses were heavy, with about half the men of Company F becoming casualties.

NOTHING LEFT TO LAND

Behind the first three waves of amphibian tractors, came two waves of LCVPs and LCMs carrying additional infantrymen, tanks, and artillery. When the leading waves had crawled across the reef, they discovered that the depth of water over this obstacle varied from three feet to a few inches. Since standard landing craft had drafts close to four feet, they were barred from approaching the beach. Infantrymen and pack howitzer crews had to transfer to LVTs or wade ashore with their weapons and equipment. The tanks

¹⁴ Rpt of Capt James W. Crain, n.d., in Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs, dtd 22Dec43, hereafter *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs*.

were forced to leave the LCMs at the edge of the reef and try to reach Betio under their own power.

The men who attempted to wade to the island suffered the heaviest casualties on D-Day. Japanese riflemen and machine gunners caught the reserve elements as they struggled through the water.¹⁵ The only cover available was that provided by the long pier, and a great many men died before they reached this structure. During the movement to the beach, platoons and sections became separated from their parent companies, but junior officers and noncommissioned officers met the challenge by pushing their men forward on their own initiative. On D-Day, few reserve units reached Betio organized in their normal combat teams.

Like the reserve and supporting units, the battalion command groups were unable to move directly to their proper beaches. All the battalion commanders, each with a part of his staff, had embarked in landing craft which took position between the third and fourth waves as their units started toward the island. As was true with the assault waves, the least difficulty was encountered at Red 3, but establishing command posts on Red 2 and Red 1 proved extremely hazardous.

The first landing craft to slam onto the reef off Red 3 was that carrying Major Crowe, a part of his communications section, and other members of his battalion headquarters. On the way in, one of Crowe's officers told him that if things did not go well on the first

day, the staff could swim back to the transport, brew some coffee, and decide what to do next. "Jim Crowe," recalled First Lieutenant Kenneth J. Fagan, "let out with his bull bellow of a laugh and said it was today, and damn soon, or not at all."¹⁶ When his boat grounded on the reef, Crowe fitted action to these words, ordered his men to spread out and start immediately for the island, and reached Betio about four minutes after his assault companies. Such speed was impossible on Red 2 and Red 1, beaches that had not received a last-minute shelling from the pair of destroyers in the lagoon.

Off Red 2, Lieutenant Colonel Amey's LCM also failed to float over the reef, but the commander of 2/2 was fortunate enough to flag down two empty LVTs that were headed back to the transports. These amphibian tractors became separated during the trip toward the island, and the one carrying Amey halted before a barbed wire entanglement. The battalion commander then attempted to wade the rest of the distance, but after he had taken a few steps he was killed by a burst from a machine gun. Lieutenant Colonel Walter I. Jordan, an observer from the 4th Marine Division and the senior officer present, was ordered by Colonel Shoup to take command until Major Howard J. Rice, the battalion executive officer, could get ashore.¹⁷ Although Rice was a mere 13 minutes behind the first assault waves, he was in no posi-

¹⁶ Quoted in *Watson ltr.*

¹⁵ Capt James R. Stockman, Notes on an Interview with Col David M. Shoup, dtd 26 May 1947, hereafter *Shoup-Stockman interview.*

¹⁷ *Shoup interview/comments*; Rpt of LtCol Walter I. Jordan, dtd 27Oct43, in Rpts by SplObservers on GALVANIC, Encl G to VAC AR, hereafter *Jordan Rpt.*

tion to relieve Jordan of responsibility for 2/2. The executive officer was pinned down and out of contact with his unit, so Jordan retained command until he was relieved of this task by Shoup.

Though the beachhead held by Jordan's men was admittedly precarious, the most disturbing news came from neighboring Red 1, where 3/2 was in action. There the battalion commander, Major Schoettel, was unable to get ashore until late in the afternoon. At 0959, Schoettel informed Colonel Shoup that the situation on Red 1 was in doubt. "Boats held up on reef of right flank Red 1," said his next message, "troops receiving heavy fire in water." Shoup then ordered the battalion commander to land his reserve over Red 2 and attack westward. To this the major replied, "We have nothing left to land."¹⁸

Colonel Shoup and his regimental headquarters experienced difficulties similar to those that had plagued the battalion commanders. At the reef, Shoup happened upon an LVT which was carrying wounded out to the transports. The colonel had these casualties transferred to his LCVP, commandeered the amphibian tractor, and started toward the left half of Red 2. As the tractor neared the island, it entered a maelstrom of fire and a hail of shell fragments "started coming down out of the air. It was strong enough to go through your dungarees and cut you," Shoup recalled. Then, as the command group continued its way

shoreward, he said, "a kid named White was shot, the LVT was holed, and the driver went into the water. At that point I said, 'let's get out of here,' moved my staff over the side and waded to the pier. From then on it was a matter of getting from the pier on down. You could say my CP was in the boat, then in the LVT, and then on the pier on the way in, but there was very little business conducted."¹⁹ After determining what portion of Red 2 was in the hands of 2/2, Shoup established his command post on that beach at approximately 1200.

Even before he reached the island, Colonel Shoup kept a close rein on the operations of his command. At 0958, in the midst of his exchange of messages with Major Schoettel, he directed his reserve battalion, 1/2, to land on Red 2 and attack westward toward the embattled Marines on Red 1. Shoup's plan, however, was slow of execution, for only enough LVTs could be rounded up to carry Companies A and B. Company C had to wait until noon for transportation. While Major Kyle's battalion was moving toward Red 2, the leading waves of amphibian tractors drew heavy fire from the right hand portion of the beach. As a result, some of the vehicles veered from course to touch down on Red 1, and the 4 officers and 110 men that they carried joined in the fighting there. The remainder of the LVTs bored onward to the left half of Red 2, where the bulk of Kyle's command aided in expanding the beachhead. Not until the morning of the second day was the entire battalion ashore on Betio.

¹⁸ LT 3/2 to CO CT 2, ser no. 27, CO CT 2 to LT 3/2, ser no. 28, and LT 3/2 to CO CT 2, ser no. 30, in *2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl.*

¹⁹ *Shoup interview/comments.*

3/8 IS COMMITTED

At his command post in the *Maryland*, General Julian Smith was convinced that a foothold had been won, but he realized how vital it was that the attack be kept moving. Because the 6th Marines had been placed under the control of Turner, Julian Smith had but two battalion landing teams as his own reserve. These two units were Major Robert H. Ruud's 3/8 and 1/8 commanded by Major Lawrence C. Hays, Jr. The commanding general could select the regimental headquarters of the parent 8th Marines to control either or both of its battalions.

At 1018 on the morning of D-Day, Julian Smith radioed Colonel Elmer E. Hall, commanding officer of the 8th Marines, to send 3/8 to the line of departure where it would come under the tactical control of Colonel Shoup. Since Shoup was more familiar with the situation on Betio, it was logical that he, rather than Hall, should determine where this portion of the reserve would be landed. Ruud's battalion became a part of Shoup's command at 1103 and was promptly ordered to land on Red 3 in support of Crowe's 2/8.

Since Shoup and his party were moving alongside the pier at this time, he could watch what was happening to the incoming Marines. As soon as their boats grounded on the reef and the ramps were lowered, Ruud's men started wading toward the island. Landward of the reef, the water proved deep, in places well over a man's head. Some Marines, weighted down by the equipment, plunged into deep water and drowned; others were killed by enemy bullets and shell fragments. Only 100

men from Ruud's first wave, approximately 30 percent of the total, survived the ordeal to set foot on Betio.

From the pier, Shoup and his staff signalled frantically to the men of the second wave, directing these troops to seek the shelter of the pier. This structure, however, offered little protection, so the toll claimed by Japanese gunners continued to mount. "Third wave landed on Beach Red 3 were practically wiped out," reported Ruud—who had lost radio contact with Shoup—to Hall. "Fourth wave landed on Beach Red 3," he continued, "but only a few men got ashore and the remainder pulled away under heavy MG and 37mm fire."²⁰ Shortly after the fourth wave landed, the battalion commander received a message to "Land no further troops until directed." The remainder of the battalion gathered off the end of the pier and was finally ordered in about 1500. By 1730, all of 3/8 was ashore, and, on Shoup's orders, Ruud deployed one of his companies to plug a gap directly inland from the pier between 2/8 and 1/2.²¹ Company K, which had landed in the first waves, was already attached to Crowe's battalion and continued to serve with 2/8 through the rest of the battle.

SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

In spite of the light losses suffered by the LVTs that carried the assault waves, the number of amphibian tractors available to the division dwindled

²⁰ LT 3/8 to CO CT 8, ser no. 88, *2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl.*

²¹ Col Robert H. Ruud comments on draft MS, dtd ca. 10Aug62.

rapidly as the day progressed. Some were destroyed while bringing supplies or reinforcements to the island, others were so badly damaged that they sank upon reaching the deep water of the lagoon, and a few either broke down or ran out of gas. To reduce losses to a minimum, the LVTs had to be restricted to the boat channel that paralleled the long pier, but even so Japanese gunners still managed to cripple some of the incoming amphibians.

General Julian Smith realized that he could not afford a stalemate at the beaches. Strength would have to be built up rapidly and the attack pressed vigorously if Betio were to be taken with a minimum of losses. Yet, after the assault waves had gained a foothold, the operation bogged down, for the reef effectively barred landing boats, and the number of LVTs available for duty was fast diminishing. Since the battle was raging only a few yards inland, the reserve units that attempted to wade ashore were under fire from the moment they stepped into the water. Those who survived the trek from reef to beach found themselves in the thick of the fight as soon as they set foot on the island.

Reserve units became so disorganized while wading toward shore that battalion and even company control was virtually impossible. The resultant confusion was offset by the grim determination of the individual Marines, who simply kept coming in spite of all the enemy could hurl at them. For a distance of 400 yards, Japanese machine gunners or riflemen grazed the water with streams of bullets. The only cover available to the Marines was that afforded by the pier, and even from

here they had no opportunity to fight back. All the attackers could do was take their punishment and keep moving. Many Marines were hit in the water, but the survivors waded onward, moving doggedly to join their comrades ashore.

During the early morning, the situation on Betio was literally cloudy, for the explosions of shells and bombs had sent a column of dust and smoke towering above the island. As the morning wore on, the smoke from burning emplacements and buildings continued to cloak parts of the island so that it was impossible, even from the air, to see much of the island at one time. Neither Julian Smith nor Colonel Shoup could observe much of the action ashore. The general had remained in the *Maryland*, the best place, given adequate communications, from which to control his division.²² The movements of the commander ashore were restricted and his communications, especially with the unit on Red 1, unreliable. Colonel Shoup, however, was by no means pinned down. "Once ashore," he recalled, "I was never off my feet for over 50 hours, standing for the most time protected by an enemy pillbox with 26 live Japs therein."²³

By noon, the situation ashore began to come into sharper focus. Colonel Shoup made contact with his subordinates, and requests for medical supplies, ammunition, and air support

²² The transport group commander offered the opinion that Julian Smith "could have had much more ready communication means (radio, boats, etc.) than were available to him on the *Maryland*" on board the comparatively close-in transport flagship. *Knowles ltr.*

²³ *Shoup-Stockman interview.*

began trickling back to the *Maryland*. Julian Smith also profited from observation flights made during the afternoon by naval pilots. Little information, however, could be had concerning the battle on Red 1.

THE FIGHTING ASHORE

A source of grave concern throughout the morning was the fate of 3/2 on Beach Red 1. Actually, Major Schoettel's men, though isolated from the other Marines on Betio, had fared better than Julian Smith suspected. The assault companies had received a severe scourging as they started moving inland, but Major Michael P. Ryan, commander of Company L, managed to organize an effective fighting force from remnants of several units. By midafternoon, his contingent could boast portions of every company of 3/2, four platoons and part of the headquarters of 2/2, as well as the 113 officers and men of 1/2 who had been driven off course during their attempt to reach Red 2. Among the members of 2/2 who ended up on Red 1 was Major Rice, the battalion executive officer, who had with him a usable radio. This set provided Ryan his only link with Colonel Shoup's command post.

During the afternoon, Ryan's Marines consolidated their beachhead on Betio's beak, clearing an area 500 yards deep and 150 yards wide. The farthest penetration made by this conglomerate command was to the antitank ditch 300 yards from the south coast of the island, but this advanced position could not be held with the number of men at Ryan's disposal. For this reason he pulled back to within 300 yards of the

tip of the beak and dug in for the night.

The key to Ryan's success was the pair of medium tanks that reached Red 1 about 1130. All Shermans employed at Betio were from the Company C, I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC) Tank Battalion, the entire company having been attached to the 2d Marine Division for GALVANIC. Company C joined the division at Efate and made the voyage to Tarawa in the USS *Ashland*, a new LSD.

On D-Day morning, a total of six medium tanks started toward Red 1 in LCMs, but the coxswains of these craft could find no place to unload. Fortunately, Major Schoettel happened upon these boats as they were circling off the reef and ordered them to run up on the reef and lower their ramps. The Shermans then nosed into the water to begin a 1,200-yard journey to the island. Reconnaissance parties waded in front of the tanks, carefully marking potholes with flags, so none of the tanks drowned out before reaching the beach. As the lumbering vehicles approached a gap already blown in the log barricade, the platoon leader saw to his horror that the coral sands were littered with wounded and dead. Rather than risk crushing those Marines who were still alive, he led the platoon back into the water, drove to a position off Green Beach, and waited for engineers to pierce the barrier. During this second move, four tanks wandered into potholes, drowning out their engines.²⁴ Both the surviving Shermans were hit during Ryan's advance. One was gutted by flames, but the other, with only its bow machine gun still in work-

²⁴ *Ibid.*

ing order, was used to protect the flank of the beachhead during the night.

Ryan's men held the beak of the Betio bird, but the head, throat, back, and most of the breast were controlled by the enemy. The nearest American troops were elements of 1/2 and 2/2 fighting on that part of Red 2 near the pier, an area some 600 yards from the Red 1 perimeter. That part of the line manned by 1/2, originally Shoup's reserve, extended from a point about 350 yards inland from the base of the pier along the triangular plot formed by the runway and west taxiway then veered toward the beach. The area between 1/2 and the edge of the water was the zone of 2/2, the battalion that had stormed Red 2.

Both medium tanks and artillery reached Red 2 before D-Day had ended. Three Shermans that had landed on Red 3 crossed the boundary and halted in a previously selected assembly area. This trio of tanks supported 2/2 in its advance toward the runway by rolling up to pillboxes and firing at point blank range through the openings in these structures. Two of the Shermans were knocked out, but one of these was retrieved on the following morning.

The artillery that arrived on Red 2, 1/10 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Presley M. Rixey, had first been destined for Red 1. A member of Colonel Shoup's command post group, Rixey had landed before noon. In the meantime, his 75mm pack howitzers and their crews were boated at the line of departure awaiting further orders. During the afternoon it became apparent to both Shoup and Rixey that Red 1 was no place to land artillery, and they finally decided to bring the battalion

ashore over Red 2. Since the boats carrying the unit could not cross the reef, LVTs had to be found. Two gun sections, one from Battery A and one from Battery B, were transferred to amphibian tractors and at dusk ordered ashore. Also ordered to land were three howitzers and crews of Battery C, elements that were believed to be in LVTs but which had not yet actually been shifted from their original landing craft. The two sections in the tractors moved rapidly to Red 2. The other three were boated to the edge of the pier where the artillerymen plunged into the water and began wading ashore carrying their dismantled pack howitzers. None of the guns reached the beach until after dark, and the crews could do little more than wait, ready to move into position at dawn.²⁵

Inland of the pier, at the dividing line between Red 2 and Red 3, responsibility passed to elements of 3/8 and Crowe's 2/8. Its initial blow at the midsection of Betio had carried a part of Crowe's battalion into the triangle formed by the runway and taxistrip, but on the left flank his men collided with a powerful strongpoint near the base of the Burns-Philp pier. During the afternoon, some 70 Marines from 3/8 were sent into the triangle to hold that sector of the line. A group of men, survivors of various battalions whose weapons had been lost or ruined by water, were found crouching under the Burns-Philp pier, led ashore, re-armed, and fed into the battle being waged on Crowe's left flank.²⁶

Throughout D-Day, the Marines of

²⁵ *Shoup interview/comments.*

²⁶ *Watson ltr.*

2/8 attempted to batter their way through the fortifications inland of Burns-Philp pier in order to advance eastward along Betio's tail. Four medium tanks from the Company C, IMAC Tank Battalion, threw their weight and firepower into this effort but to no avail. One Sherman was destroyed by a friendly dive bomber, a second bulled its way into an excavation used by the enemy as a fuel dump and was burned when an American plane set the gasoline aflame, and a third was disabled by Japanese gunners. Although damaged by an enemy shell, the fourth tank continued to fight.

REBUILDING A RESERVE

General Julian Smith's decision to land 3/8 left him with but a single landing team in division reserve. Early in the afternoon, it began to appear as though it might be necessary to land 1/8, the last of the reserve, to help the five battalions already in the fight. If this were done, the general would be left with no reserve except for his support group, made up of elements of the 10th Marines (artillery), the 18th Marines (engineers), Special Troops, and Service Troops. In short, he would be forced to rely upon an assortment of specialists in case of an emergency.

There was present, however, an organized unit which might spell the difference between victory and defeat. This was the 6th Marines, designated as corps reserve and under the control of Admiral Turner. Having informed Holland Smith of the situation at Betio, the division commander at 1331 requested the release of the 6th Marines to his control. Admiral Hill seconded

Julian Smith's request and within 50 minutes Turner's message of approval arrived. "Meanwhile," commented Julian Smith, "consideration was being given to a plan to organize the support group into provisional battalions."²⁷

Once the 6th Marines had been released to him, Julian Smith felt it safe to land 1/8. At 1343, Colonel Hall's regimental headquarters and his remaining landing team, commanded by Major Hays, was ordered to proceed to the line of departure and wait there for further orders. The division commander then asked Colonel Shoup to recommend the best site for a night landing by this battalion.

This message concerning Hall's unit never reached Colonel Shoup, another of the communications failures so typical of the Tarawa operation. The radios of the *Maryland* had proved balky, and the portable sets carried ashore by the assault troops were little better. Water, shell fragments, bullets, and rough handling played havoc with communications equipment, but some radios were repaired with parts pirated from other damaged sets. Both the TBYS and the MUs, the latter light-weight hand sets, were exceptionally vulnerable to water damage, and the TBX the more durable and somewhat waterproof battalion radio, was so heavy that it could hardly be called portable.

Colonel Hall's headquarters and 1/8, "cramped, wet, hungry, tired, and a large number . . . seasick,"²⁸ waited throughout the afternoon at the line of departure. At 1625, Julian Smith sent

²⁷ Smith, "Tarawa," p. 1173.

²⁸ LtCol Rathvon McC. Tompkins ltr to CMC, dtd 13Jun47.

a message ordering Hall to land on the north shore of the extreme eastern end of the island. These last uncommitted elements of the 8th Marines were to have gone ashore at 1745 and to have attacked to the northwest, but the orders failed to reach the regimental commander.

To observe the general progress of the battle, a scout plane was launched from the *Maryland* at 1548. Colonel Merritt A. Edson, division chief of staff, and Lieutenant Colonel Arnold F. Johnston, the operations officer, contacted the plane and asked the fliers to report any movements in the area where 1/8 was waiting. As the observation craft circled overhead, an artillery battery from 1/10 started toward Red 2. Since Hall was believed to have received his orders, the artillerymen were mistaken for a portion of 1/8. The thought that Hall was landing on the wrong beach caused consternation at division headquarters, but his supposed position was duly plotted on the situation map. Not until midnight did the division staff discover that Hall's command was still waiting on the line of departure.

*THE FLOW OF SUPPLIES AND INFORMATION*²⁹

In assessing the work of his shore party, Lieutenant Colonel Chester J. Salazar admitted that carefully pre-

²⁹ Additional source for this section include: Rpts of LtCol Chester J. Salazar and Maj George L. H. Cooper, dtd 22Dec43, in *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs*; Rpt of LtCol Evans F. Carlson, dtd 27Oct43, in Rpts by SplObservers on GALVANIC, Encl G to VAC AR, hereafter *Carlson Rpt*; MajGen Leo D. Hermle ltr to

pared and basically sound standing operating procedure had to be abandoned during the Tarawa operation. Elements of the shore party had difficulty in finding the combat units to which they were assigned. Salazar's demolitions men and bulldozer operators were needed to blast or bury enemy positions, and the assault battalions could not spare riflemen to serve as stevedores on the crowded, hard-won beachheads. Finally, there were not enough LVTs to move supplies directly to the battalions from the ships offshore.

With Colonel Shoup throughout the morning of D-Day was Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson, leader of the previous year's Makin raid, who had been assigned to GALVANIC as an observer. Because of the continuing difficulty in keeping radio contact with division, Shoup at 1230 asked Carlson to make his way to the *Maryland* and sketch for Julian Smith an accurate picture of what was happening ashore. The commander of Combat Team 2 could then be certain that higher headquarters knew his basic plan for the conquest of Betio—to expand southward and to unite the beachheads before attempting a final thrust. The division could best help by landing reserves on Red 2. As the two men parted, Shoup told Carlson, "You tell the general and the admiral that we are going to stick and fight it out."³⁰

Before starting toward the lagoon, Carlson noticed some Marines from Ruud's 3/8 clinging to the pier and unable to get into the fight. With

CMC, dtd 9Jun47; Maj Ben K. Weatherwax ltr to CMC, dtd 17Jun47.

³⁰ *Shoup-Stockman interview.*

Shoup's permission, Carlson interrupted his journey to bring several LVT-loads of able-bodied infantrymen to the island, returning each time with wounded men whom he had transferred to boats at the reef. This done, he left his tractor at the reef, embarked in an LCVP, and at 1800 reported to Julian Smith in the *Maryland*.

Early in the afternoon the division commander ordered Brigadier General Leo D. Hermle, assistant division commander, to prepare to land his command post group on order. General Hermle was told at 1343 to go to the end of the pier, form an estimate of the situation, and report his findings to General Julian Smith. On the way to the pier he attempted to learn the location of Shoup's command post but could not contact the regimental commander by radio. At 1740, Hermle reported that he had reached the pier and was under fire. He tried a short time later to radio to the *Maryland* details of the action ashore, but again he was victim of a communications failure. He then entrusted the information to a messenger.

While he was on the pier, Hermle managed to establish intermittent radio contact with Shoup and Crowe, who informed him that ammunition and water were desperately needed ashore. Since many Marines from 3/8 had taken cover beneath the pier, Hermle had enough men available to organize carrying parties to bring these vital items to the island. Supplies, which kept arriving by boat throughout the night, were unloaded by the carrying parties and manhandled to the beach. En route to Betio, the Marines doing this important

job had to wade through a 50-yard area that was exposed to Japanese fire.

In addition to the able-bodied men who were formed into carrying parties, a number of wounded Marines had gained protection of the pier. Captain French R. Moore (MC), USN, assistant division surgeon and a member of Hermle's party, had the wounded collected, given first aid, and evacuated in landing craft that had finished unloading supplies. The captain later returned to the transport area with a boatload of seriously wounded men.

General Hermle's radio link with Shoup and Crowe was severed early in the evening. About 1930, the assistant division commander sent Major Rathvon McC. Tompkins and Captain Thomas C. Dutton to find Shoup's command post and learn where and when the regimental commander wanted the reserves to land. The two officers, after working their way across a 600-yard strip of coral swept by enemy machine gun fire, reached their goal. They found out the needed information, but it was 0345 before they could report back to Hermle.

Although he had obtained answers to Julian Smith's questions, Hermle lacked a rapid means of communicating this intelligence to the division commander. For this reason, the assistant division commander and his party ventured into the lagoon to use the radio on the destroyer *Ringgold*. Word that Shoup wanted 1/8 to land near the pier on Red 2 was dispatched to the *Maryland* at 0445.

General Hermle next was ordered to report to Julian Smith in the battleship. Here he learned that at 1750 an order had been issued giving him com-

mand of the troops ashore. Because of a communications failure, the message had gone astray. Command ashore was to remain the responsibility of Colonel Shoup.

The transports had been unloading water, plasma, ammunition, and other supplies throughout the day, but judging from the requests that continued to pour in from the island, few of these articles were finding their way to the front lines. Captain Knowles, commander of the transport group, who shared with the division supply section responsibility for coordinating the logistical effort, directed the Assistant D-4, Major Ben K. Weatherwax, to go to Betio and find out what had gone wrong. The major was to contact either General Hermle or Colonel Shoup.

Weatherwax left the transport USS *Monrovia* at 2100 and went to the *Pursuit*, where he obtained directions for landing. He approached Betio by way of the pier, climbing out of his boat on the beach side of the gap burned in the structure by Hawkins' men. Had the major landed at the end of the pier instead of following the boat channel, he would have met General Hermle and learned the details of the logistical situation. As it was, he reached the beachhead, made his way to Shoup's command post, and there learned that the troops ashore needed still more of the types of supplies that already had been sent them. Weatherwax then encountered the same problem that had plagued Hermle—inability to reach the *Monrovia* by radio. He finally went along the pier until he found a boat and arrived at the transport just before dawn. There, he in-

formed Captain Knowles of the supply situation and of the need for getting additional tanks ashore. The transport group commander gave Weatherwax authority to order in any boat with a tank aboard to any beach where there was a good chance for the armor to land.³¹

THE EVENING OF D-DAY

As daylight waned on 20 November, the position of the Marines on Betio seemed precarious. The front lines were perilously close to the beach, and the enemy had effectively dammed the torrent of supplies that was to have sustained the embattled riflemen. Small boats dashed to the end of the pier and unloaded. Carrying parties managed to keep a trickle of supplies moving toward the island, an effort that was supplemented by the work of the surviving LVTs. During the afternoon these tractors had carried water, ammunition, and medical supplies directly to the beaches. In the meantime, the transports were unloading as rapidly as possible. Soon the waters around the line of departure were dotted with landing craft waiting for an opportunity to dart toward the pier and unload their cargoes.

The picture ashore seemed equally confused, with the assault battalions confined to small, crowded areas. Forward progress had been slow, a matter of a few feet at a time. It was worth a man's life to raise his head a few inches. Yet, a Marine could not fire his weapon unless he exposed himself, however briefly. Shoup's men did this

³¹ *Knowles ltr.*

and even more. "A surprising number . . .," the colonel would recall, "displayed a fearless eagerness to go to the extreme for their country and fellow men."³²

At dusk, the Marines held two separate portions of Betio Island. On the right, Major Ryan's composite unit, isolated from the remainder of Colonel Shoup's command, had withdrawn to a compact perimeter on the island beak. Another perimeter fanned out from the base of the long pier. The segment nearest Ryan's lines was manned by troops from 1/2 and 2/2 and curved from the water into the triangle formed by runway and taxiway. Within this triangle, the left-hand portion of the line was held by 3/8, while 2/8 had responsibility for the sector facing the strongpoint at the base of Burns-Philp pier. The larger perimeter was not a continuous line, for this beachhead was defended by small groups of Marines who had taken advantage of whatever cover they could find.

Most of the Marines on Betio prepared for the night with the uneasy feeling that a Japanese counter-attack was inevitable. On the con-

trol vessels and transports there was a restless feeling that at any moment reports would come flooding in telling of a Japanese attempt to hurl the invaders into the sea. In the *Maryland*, the division staff strained to pick up the sounds of rifle fire that would herald the enemy attack. Silence reigned. Marine fire discipline was superb; few shots were wasted on imagined targets. Enemy weapons too were quiet, for the expected attack never came.

According to Julian Smith, Admiral Shibasaki lost the battle by failing to counterattack on that first night, for never again would the beachhead be so vulnerable. Shibasaki's failure was probably due to a collapse of his communications. The fact that few field message blanks were captured during the course of the battle seems to indicate a reliance on wire communication. Naval gunfire ripped out the carefully strung wire, and the Japanese command post was isolated from troops it was to direct.³³ Important as this lapse in control may have been, it was the combat effectiveness of Shoup's Marines, men who overcame incredible obstacles to maintain cohesive fighting teams, that promised failure to any enemy assault.

³² Gen David M. Shoup, "Some of My Thoughts" (Gen David M. Shoup Personal Folder, HistBr, HQMC). This folder contains notes, impressions, and reminiscences dating from early in the general's career until his appointment as CMC.

³³ Smith, "Tarawa," pp. 1173-1174; Major Eugene P. Boardman ltr to CMC, dtd 16Jun47.