

FLINTLOCK: Completing the Conquest¹

On D plus 1, after the capture of the outlying islands, General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division was to storm Roi-Namur. At Roi, where the enemy had built an airfield, Colonel Louis R. Jones would land two reinforced battalions of the 23d Marines on the Red Beaches along the lagoon coast of the island. Namur, to the east of the sandspit that joined the twin islands, was the objective of another reinforced regiment, the 24th Marines, commanded by Colonel Franklin A. Hart. There two assault battalions were to strike northward across the island after landing on the Green Beaches. LVTs of the 4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion were to carry the Roi battalions, and the

Marines destined for Namur would rely on the 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, veteran of the D-Day landings. (See Maps 9 and 10.)

LAND THE LANDING FORCE

Admiral Conolly and his staff were quick to profit from the mistakes of D-Day. The long journey through heavy seas from the transfer area to the beaches had been too much for the short-legged LVTs.² The original plan for D plus 1 called for the landing force to transfer to LSTs and there load in the tractors. When the Marines had entered the assault craft, the parent LSTs were to lower their ramps and launch the tractors. The LVTs would then battle the waves to enter the lagoon, move to a position off the objective, and form for the assault. Although this plan spared the troops the discomfort of transferring at sea from one type of landing craft to another, it did not reduce the distance which the tractors had to travel. To avoid the delays of D-Day and move the LVTs closer to their line of departure, Conolly invoked his rough weather plan. The troop transfer arrangement was left unchanged, but the LSTs were

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 AR*; *TF 53 AR Roi-Namur*; *VAC AR FLINTLOCK*; *4th MarDiv Ar*; *4th MarDiv Jnl*; 4th MarDiv CommOpsRpts, dtd 29Mar44; 4th MarDiv D-3 Rpts, 31Jan-12Feb44; 7th InfDiv Rpt of Participation in FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 8Feb44; 7th InfDiv SAR, Kwajalein Island, dtd 27Mar44; 20th Mar Rpt on FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 16Mar44; 23d Mar Rpt on FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 4Mar44; 23d Mar Jnl, 31Jan-4Feb44; 24th Mar Prelim Rpts on Roi-Namur Op, dtd 10Feb44 (including rpts of 1/24, 2/24, and 3/24); 1/23 OpRpt, dtd 10Feb44; 2/23 OpRpt, dtd 14Feb44; 3/23 Rec of Events, 31Jan-5Feb44, dtd 12Feb44; 1st Armd PhibBn, Cmts on LVT(A) (1)s during FLINTLOCK Ops, dtd 3Feb44; 4th TkBn Rpt on FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 20Apr44; *10th AmTracBn Rpt*; Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*.

² The LVT(2)s had only power-driven bilge pumps. When the gasoline supply was exhausted, these failed, and the unfortunate vehicle usually foundered.

directed to enter the lagoon before launching their tractors.³

This change, however, could not prevent a repetition of many of the difficulties that had marred the D-Day landings. The principal offenders were the LVTs and LSTs, for the two types did not cooperate as well as they should have. The troubles of the 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion began on the night of 31 January as its vehicles were returning from ALBERT and ALLEN.

Some of the parent LSTs failed to display the pre-arranged lights, so that many tractors became lost in the gathering darkness. The boats that were to guide the LVTs fared no better, and the battalion soon became disorganized. Since the tractors did not carry identifying pennants, the LST crews could not easily determine which vehicles had been entrusted to their care. Concerned that they would be unable to refuel their own LVTs, the captains of a few landing ships refused to give gasoline to strangers. The commander of the tractor battalion felt that the trouble stemmed from the feeling, apparently shared by many of the LST sailors, that the LVTs were boats rather than amphibious vehicles. "They should be made to appreciate the fact that LVTs are not boats," he admonished, "cannot maneuver or operate in the manner of boats, nor are they tactically organized in the manner of boat units."⁴

³ Rough Weather AltnPlan, dtd 26Jan44, Anx V to TF 53 OpO A157-44, dtd 8Jan44.

⁴ 10th AmTracBn Rpt, p. 2. At the conclusion of the operation, the action reports of the transport division commander and Admiral Conolly both voiced the view the LVTs used

Although the bulk of the battalion vehicles either reached the haven of the LSTs or remained for the night on one of the captured islands, seven tractors were not yet accounted for when FLINTLOCK ended.⁵ As dawn approached, the battalion commander realized that the LSTs had not retrieved enough tractors to execute the morning's operations. He notified Admiral Conolly who put into effect a replacement scheme. The company commander, Company A, 11th Amphibian Tractor Battalion was ordered to send a specific number of LVTs to certain of the landing ships to make up the shortage.

The ordeal of the 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion did not affect the preparations of the Roi-Namur landing force. As soon as there was daylight enough for safe navigation, the LSTs carrying the 4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion began threading their way into the lagoon. At 0650, the old battleship USS *Tennessee* opened fire against a blockhouse on the sandspit that linked Roi with Namur, while other vessels commenced hammering Namur. The bombardment of Roi, delayed by the passage of LSTs between the support units and the island, began at 0710. Carrier planes arrived over the twin islands, and howitzers of the 14th Marines joined in the shelling. W-Hour, the hour of the landings, was set for 1000.

Meanwhile, the LSTs had arrived in

for assault waves should be regarded and organized as boats and manned by carefully-trained Navy crews. TF 53 AR Roi-Namur, p. 10; ComTransDiv 26 AR, *op. cit.*

⁵ 10th AmphTracBn Rpt of LVT(2) Activities in Kwajalein Op, dtd 17Feb44, p. 2.

position to disgorge the tractors assigned to the 23d Marines. Like those LVTs used on D-Day, the tractors loaded on the weather decks of the ships had to be lowered by elevators to join the vehicles stored on the tank decks and then be sent churning toward the beaches. Before the convoy sailed, tests had shown that the LVT(2)s were too long for the elevators. As a result, an inclined wooden plane was built on the elevator platform. If the tractor was driven up this ramp, it was sufficiently tilted to pass down the opening with a few inches to spare. Maneuvering the vehicles into position was a time-consuming job, an impossible task unless clutch and transmission were working perfectly. Yet, this was the only method of getting these LVTs into the water.

The elevator in one LST broke down midway through the launching, leaving nine tractors stranded on the weather deck. The Marines assigned to these vehicles were sent to the tank deck and placed, a few at a time, in the LVTs loading there. On another LST, the ramp was so steep that few vehicles could negotiate it. Drivers pulled as far up the incline as they could, then stopped, while a crew of men with a cutting torch trimmed the splash fenders at the rear of the tractors until clearance was obtained.⁶

At 0825, all fire-support ships had acknowledged Conolly's message confirming 1000 as W-Hour, but within a few minutes General Schmidt was sending Colonel Hart some disquieting news. "We are short 48 LVTs as of 0630," the

commanding officer of the 24th Marines had reported. The commanding general now replied: "Every effort being made to get LVTs. Use LCVPs for rear waves and transfer when LVTs are available."⁷ A two-hour search for amphibian tractors proved fruitless. Because of the night's confusion, the necessary number of LVTs was not at hand.

Both regiments were falling behind schedule, although sailors and Marines alike were trying desperately to get the assault craft into formation. When Admiral Conolly asked the commander of the transport group if a postponement was necessary, he immediately received the reply: "Relative to your last transmission, affirmative."⁸ At 0853, the time of the attack was delayed until 1100.

The schedule of fires was adjusted to meet this new deadline, and the task of destruction continued. At 0925, another crisis arose. A salvage boat sent to ABRAHAM by the transport USS *Biddle* reported: "Japs are counterattacking from CAMOUFLAGE. Send support immediately."⁹ This message was instantly relayed to Conolly, and even though aerial observers could not locate the enemy troop concentration, the admiral took no chances. Torpedo bombers, warships, and artillery batteries hurled high explosives into the southern part of Namur, but by

⁷ CO 24th Mar msg to CG 4th MarDiv, dtd 0630, 1Feb44 and CG 4th MarDiv msg to CO 24th Mar, dtd 0830, 1Feb44, 4th MarDiv Jnl.

⁸ ComTransGru msg to CTF 53, dtd 0841, 1Feb44, 4th MarDiv Jnl.

⁹ SalvBoat 8 msg to *Biddle*, dtd 0925, 1Feb44, 4th MarDiv Jnl.

⁶ *Croizat ltr*; Maj Theodore M. Garhart ltr to CMC, dtd 14Nov52.

1000 it was clear that the report of a counterattack had been incorrect.

When this sudden flurry of action ended, support ships returned to their tasks, firing deliberately and accurately until 1026 when the shelling was stopped to permit an airstrike. A glide-bombing attack followed by strafing runs kept the enemy occupied. As the planes were departing, the naval bombardment resumed.

Colonel Jones arrived at the line of departure 15 minutes before W-Hour. Although he had ample time to transfer with his staff to the pair of LVTs that had been assigned him, the tractors could not be found. He eventually would land from an LCVP.¹⁰

Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Dillon's 2/23, the force destined for Red 3, loaded into LVTs, left the LSTs, and then moved to the line of departure without waiting for the other assault battalion. Within a few minutes, 1/23, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hewin O. Hammond, had reached the line and begun the final adjustment of its formation prior to the storming of Red 2. Somehow, Hammond's battalion had failed to learn of the postponement of W-Hour, and the men of the unit felt that they "failed miserably" to meet the deadline.¹¹ Actually they were a few minutes ahead of schedule. (See Map 9.)

W-Hour came, then passed and still the 23d Marines remained at the line of departure. Although Jones' troops were ready, Hart's 24th Marines was not. Since 0630, control officers had

been trying without success to round up enough LVTs to carry the two assault battalions of the regiment. The transport group commander began releasing LCVPs to Hart, but contacting the boats and directing a sufficient number to the proper LSTs were difficult tasks. In spite of Admiral Conolly's decision to delay the attack, the Namur landing force needed still more time.

Hart soon became convinced that his assault waves could not possibly cross the line of departure in time to complete the 33-minute run to the Green Beaches by 1100. He requested another postponement and received word that "W-hour would be delayed until the combat team could make an orderly attack." This message led him to assume that "he was to report when his waves were in position and ready to move."¹² Satisfied that his schedule had been made more flexible, the regimental commander began making last-minute changes in the composition of his assault waves.

Because of the shortage of amphibian tractors, neither 3/24, the battalion destined for Green 1, nor 2/24, which was to attack Green 2, had enough LVTs for all its rifle companies. Lieutenant Colonel Francis H. Brink, commanding 2/24, noted that the company scheduled to remain in reserve had its full quota of vehicles, so he designated it as an assault company and placed the unit with the fewest tractors in reserve. Lieutenant Colonel Austin R. Brunelli of 3/24 ordered the tractors assigned to his

¹⁰ BGen Louis R. Jones ltr to Dir, Div-PubInfo, HQMC, dtd 11Apr49.

¹¹ 1/23 OpRpt, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹² 24th Mar Rpt of FLINTLOCK Op, p. 7, dtd 10Mar44, Encl D to 4th MarDiv AR.

reserve to be divided between the assault companies. (See Map 10.)

When the two battalions reached the line of departure, each was but two companies strong. Control officers assigned to work with 2/24 found the situation especially confusing, for Company E, the unit originally designated battalion reserve and consigned to the fourth wave, was now the left element on the second and third waves. Additional time was lost as the company commander attempted in vain to explain the change, but his unit finally was formed in a single wave as the discarded plan had directed.¹³

To replace the absent reserves, Colonel Hart turned to Lieutenant Colonel Aquilla J. Dyess, commanding officer of 1/24, the regimental reserve, and ordered him to release one company to each of the assault battalions. While the LCVPs carrying these two units were moving into position, the third rifle company rejoined 2/24. The arrival of this unit, embarked in seven LVTs and two LCVPs,¹⁴ brought Brink's battalion up to full strength. As a result, one of Dyess' companies was returned.

While the composition of the Namur assault force was thus being altered,

¹³ LtCol John F. Ross, Jr. ltr to Head, HistBr, HQMC, dtd 21Jan53. Commenting on the differing solutions to this problem of the shortage of tractors, the commander of 2/24 believed in retrospect, that Brunelli's procedure "was probably better than mine. At the time," he noted, "I considered shifting tractors between scattered LSTs a time-consuming project in which I could lose control of some I already had." BGen Francis H. Brink ltr to ACofs, G-3, HQMC, dtd 20Oct62, hereafter *Brink ltr.*

¹⁴ *Brink ltr.*

Colonel Jones' Marines were waiting impatiently at the line of departure. At 1107, the colonel asked the control vessel *Phelps* why the attack was being delayed. Five minutes later, the red flag dropped from the yardarm of the destroyer, the signal which was to send both regiments toward their objective.¹⁵ LCI gunboats, armored amphibians, and finally the LVTs carrying the assault battalions charged toward Roi. At 1150, naval gunfire was lifted from the Red Beaches, the gunboats and armored amphibians fired as long as the safety of the incoming troops permitted, and at 1157 the 23d Marines was reported to have reached Roi.

The signal to launch the attack came as a surprise to Colonel Hart, for he was under the impression that his regiment would not make its assault until all its elements were in position. He attempted to intercept Brunelli's 3/24, which had responded to the control ship signal, but when he saw that the regiment on his left was moving toward Roi, he realized that such an

¹⁵ Admiral Conolly noted that the order to execute this signal "was a command decision made by me after consultation with General Schmidt and with his full concurrence. With the information on hand that the 24th RCT had two battalions formed, and considering the already delayed How Hour and other factors such as gasoline consumption in the waiting tractors, and the waning effects of the bombardment, the Landing Force commander and I had to reach a decision to wait further or go ahead. The decision to go ahead was a calculated risk of the kind responsible commanders must make in time of war." VAdm Richard L. Connolly ltr to Dr. Jeter A. Isely, dtd 31Aug49, encl to Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to CMC, dtd 22Oct62.

action would only add to the confusion. Preceded by LCI(G)s and LVT(A)s, the first waves reached Namur at 1155. The weapons emplaced on ABRAHAM supported the landing of the 24th Marines.

The four battalions that stormed Roi-Namur benefited from an experiment in air support directed by the air coordinator. Bomber pilots who were to participate in the strikes just prior to W-Hour were warned to remain above 2,000 feet. At this altitude, above the maximum ordinate of artillery, naval gunfire, and rockets, they could attack while the other supporting weapons were firing.

Just as the carefully arranged bombing attack was to begin, a rain squall blanketed the area east of the islands where the aircraft were on station. For a time, it seemed that the strike would have to be cancelled, but an opening in the clouds was spotted from the bridge of the *Appalachian*. The Commander, Support Aircraft was notified, and the planes were directed to the rift in the clouds west of Roi-Namur. The bombers were able to change station and complete their runs by the time the first wave was 750 yards from the beaches.

This technique assured the assault troops of a "thorough, accurate, and continuous bombing attack . . . during the critical approach phase."¹⁶ Since

¹⁶ AirSpt: FLINTLOCK, n.d., Encl C to TF 53 AR Roi-Namur. The commander of 2/14, located with his forward observer party on ABRAHAM, witnessed one success of this bombing attack. Planes hit a blockhouse on the eastern end of Namur, which had been "barely visible because of the surrounding jungle. After the bomb drop, it was com-

the naval bombardment was not lifted during the bombing attack, air support on 1 February was more effective than that given on the previous day. When the war had reached the Marianas, coordinated attacks such as this one would become commonplace.

"THIS IS A PIP:" THE CONQUEST OF ROI

Red Beach 2, the objective of Lieutenant Colonel Hammond's 1/23, seemed to be a stoutly defended strip of coral. The battalion zone of action was bounded on the left by Wendy Point, the westernmost tip of the island, and extended on the right to a point within 200 yards of Tokyo pier. The enemy appeared to have built heavy blockhouses on the point and scattered pillboxes along the beach. What was believed to be another blockhouse had been erected not far from the right limit of the zone. (See Map 9 and Map V, Map Section.)

Since flanking fire could be delivered from Wendy Point, that portion of the beachhead had to be secured as quickly as possible. Once the fangs of the blockhouses had been drawn, Hammond's battalion was to attack in the eastern part of its zone to aid the advance of the adjacent 2d Battalion. Armored amphibians played a spectacular role in executing this plan.

Admiral Conolly had not specified whether the armored amphibian bat-

pletely denuded of trees and Japanese military personnel rushed from the blockhouse in an apparent daze. These men were picked off by the Marines stationed on the forward part of ABRAHAM." BGen John B. Wilson, Jr. ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 15Oct62.

talion would support the landings from positions off the beaches or from the island itself. The officer in command of the assault regiment could decide how these vehicles might give the more effective support and place them accordingly.¹⁷ At Red 2 the tractors thundered ashore at 1133, several minutes ahead of the first wave of LVT(2)s, moved inland to seek hull defilade, and turned their 37mm cannon against the Wendy Point fortifications. Companies A and B of Hammond's command were both ashore by 1158. While Company A pushed toward the point, Company B began its advance toward the farthest edge of the runway to its front.

The battalion landed slightly out of position, with the companies somewhat bunched toward the left of the zone. This misalignment was caused when the tractors carrying the adjacent battalion had veered westward from the proper boat lanes. The Marines, however, met only scant fire at Red 2 and advanced with ease to their first objective, the 0-1 Line.

Armored amphibians fired across the island into Norbert Circle to protect the flank of Company A as that unit probed Wendy Point. Instead of the concrete blockhouses they expected, these Marines found a single pillbox that had been blown to shreds by bombs and shellfire. Company B encountered no manned enemy positions between the beach and the 0-1 Line. At 1145, Company C, 4th Tank Battalion, began landing its medium tanks and flame-thrower-equipped light tanks. These

armored vehicles overtook the infantry on the runway and prepared to race across the remainder of the island.

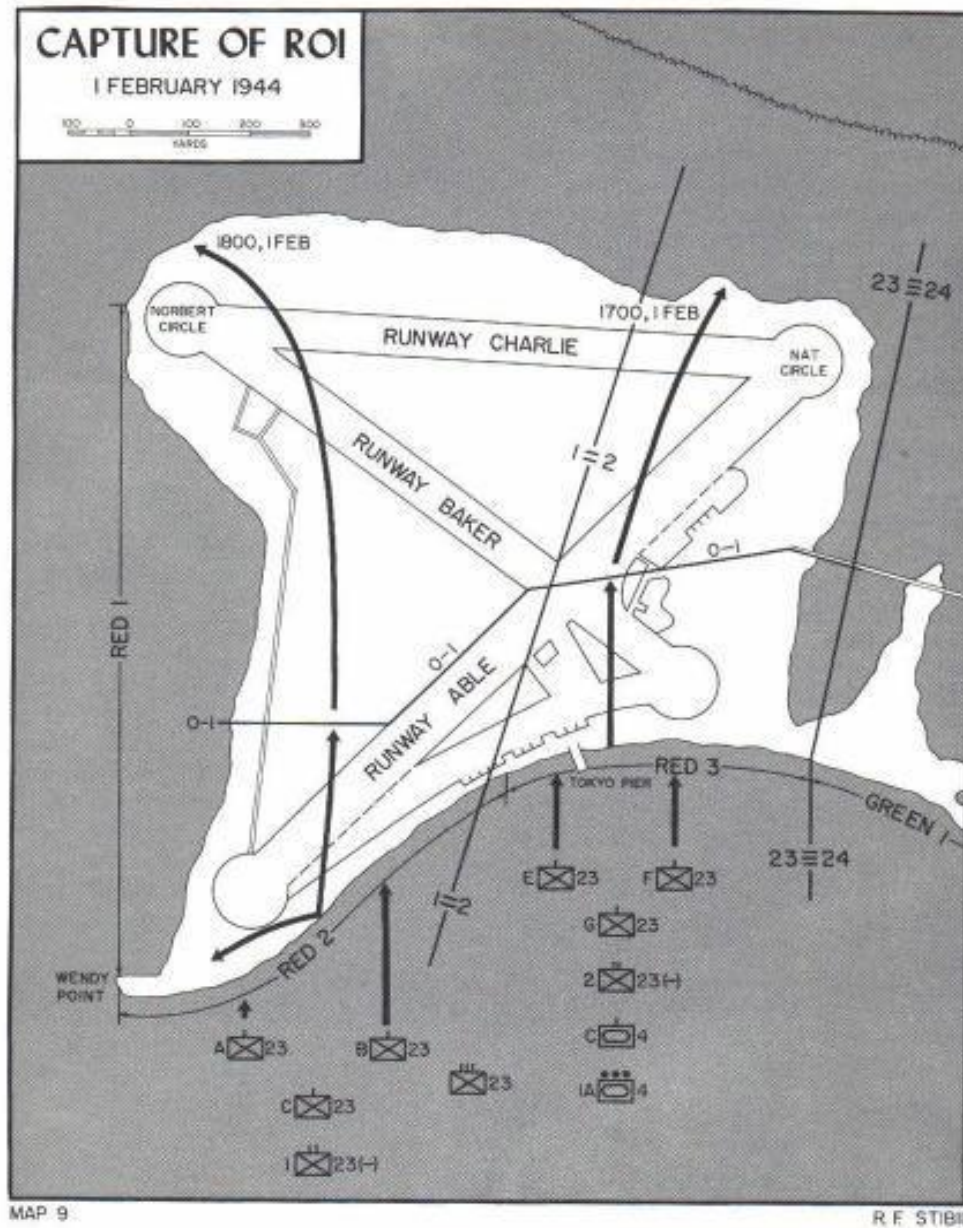
Upon crossing the line of departure, Lieutenant Colonel Dillon's 2/23 found its destination, Red 3, to be covered with a pall of dense smoke. The tractor drivers, unable to orient themselves, tended to drift from their assigned lanes. The LVT(A)s had the most difficult time. A total of 18 of these vehicles, in contrast to the 12 that led the way to Red 2, were crowded into a single wave. One participant recalled that "there was a good deal of 'accordion action,' with the result that several were squeezed out of line from time to time, and there were a number of collisions. . . ." ¹⁸ Worse yet, rockets launched by some of the LVT(2)s fell short and exploded in the water close to the armored amphibians.¹⁹ The LVT(A)s overcame these difficulties and took positions just off the island in order to support the advance of the infantry.

Red 3, objective of 2/23, embraced all of the lagoon coast that lay between the battalion boundary west of Tokyo Pier to the base of the sandspit that linked Roi to neighboring Namur. The sandspit itself lay in the zone of action of the 24th Marines. At approximately 1150, the assault waves began passing through the LVT(A)s and landing on the island. Some tractors rumbled ashore outside the proper zone, a few on either flank. The troops that landed out of place were shepherd-

¹⁷ PhibAtkO (Main Ldgs), p. 4, dtd 8Jan44, Anx B to TF 53 OpO A157-44, dtd 8Jan44.

¹⁸ Maj Ellis N. Livingston ltr to CMC, dtd 8Nov52.

¹⁹ LtCol Louis Metzger ltr to CMC, dtd 13Nov52.



onto Red 3 by alert noncommissioned officers, but those who landed too far to the right had to destroy some Japanese positions before they could cross the regimental boundary.

Resistance on the eastern part of Red 3 was ineffectual. Most of the Japanese seemed dazed by the fierce bombardment which had shattered their prepared defenses. "We received very little enemy fire," recalled an officer who landed there with Company G, "and what fire we did receive came from the northeast corner of Roi."²⁰ To the west, a few defenders had survived both bombs and shells. "Although these enemy troops were few and dazed from the bombardment," stated an officer of Company E, "they were determined to give their all, as evidenced by the two who left their entrenchment to rush the landing troops."²¹

The surviving Japanese did not lack courage, but they were too few and too stunned to offer serious opposition to Dillon's Marines. Tanks started landing shortly after noon, and by 1215 the battalion commander had set up his command post on the island. Companies E and F had reached the 0-1 Line, which extended from the causeway leading toward Namur to the junction of runways Able and Baker, while Company G was busy ferreting out the Japanese who had taken cover in ruined buildings or in the culverts along the runways.

To an aerial observer circling over

²⁰ Maj John J. Padley ltr to Dir, DivPubInfo, HQMC, dtd 16Apr49.

²¹ Maj Carl O. Grussendorf ltr to Dir, DivPubInfo, HQMC, dtd 30Mar49.

Roi, the actions of the assault troops were startling. "Can observe along southwest tip of island;" came one report, "troops seen not to be taking advantage of cover."²² Colonel Jones, who landed at 1204, soon clarified the situation. "This is a pip," crackled General Schmidt's radio. "No opposition near the beach. . . ." ²³ Fifteen minutes later, the commanding officer of the 23d Marines had additional heartening news. "0-1 ours." he reported. "Give us the word and we will take the rest of the island."²⁴

In thrusting across the beach, the assault troops had gained such momentum that they approached the 0-1 Line like so many greyhounds in pursuit of a rabbit. Naval gunfire had drastically altered the landmarks which were to designate the line, and this contributed to a breakdown in control. The individual Marines, moreover, were inspired by their incredibly successful landing to finish off the Japanese as quickly as possible. With a confidence that bordered on recklessness, squads, platoons, and even companies launched an uncoordinated, and completely unauthorized, attack toward the northern shore.

If zest for combat can be considered a crime, the worst offenders were the tank and armored amphibian units. The crews of these vehicles, protected by armor plate, were indifferent to the .256 caliber rifle bullets that were cracking across the island. Upon

²² Air Observer 2 msg, dtd 1210, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl.*

²³ CO, 23d Mar msg to CG, 4th MarDiv, dtd 1311, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl.*

²⁴ CO, 23d Mar msg to CG, 4th MarDiv, dtd 1326, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl.*



MARINE LIGHT TANK moves past the radios of a beachhead CP on Namur to lead the attack. (USMC 70203)



JAPANESE PRISONERS surrender to Marines near a concrete blockhouse at Roi-Namur. (USMC 70241)

reaching the 0-1 Line, the commander of Company C, 4th Tank Battalion, radioed for permission to continue the attack, but interference prevented his message from getting through. He then decided to advance rather than wait at the edge of the runway for further orders.

The company commander later justified his action by pointing out that: "If the enemy had had anti-tank guns in his blockhouses on the northern edge of the airfield, he would have been able to seriously damage any tanks remaining for long on the exposed runways."²⁵ Whatever the danger to the medium tanks might be, plans had called for the assault troops to pause at the 0-1 Line. As it turned out, the menacing blockhouses had been leveled by naval gunfire, and the company commander's aggressiveness prevented Colonel Jones from coordinating the efforts of his regiment.

The tanks roared northward firing cannon and machine guns at every ditch or heap of rubble that might harbor Japanese troops. The Marine infantrymen, trained to protect the tanks and as eager as anyone to advance, also crossed the line, firing frequently and sometimes wildly. A platoon of armored LVTs promptly joined the hunt. The amphibians moved northward along the western coast, some of them in the water, others on land, but all of them firing into trenches and other enemy positions.²⁶

²⁵ Co C, 4th TkBn AR, dtd 25Mar44, p. 1, Encl C to 4th TkBn Rpt of Activities in the FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 31Mar44, hereafter *4th TkBn Rpt*.

²⁶ Maj James S. Scales ltr to Dir, DivPub-Info, HQMC, dtd 16Mar49.

Although this impromptu attack killed numerous Japanese and sent most of the survivors scurrying toward the north, it imposed a hardship on the officers directing the campaign. As the tanks were approaching the northeastern corner of Roi, General Schmidt advised Colonel Jones to "await orders for further attack." "Can you," he continued, "control tanks and bring them back to 0-1 Line for coordinated attack?"²⁷ The tank company commander, in the meantime, was trying to raise Colonel Jones' command post to obtain additional infantry support. Again there was interference on the tank-infantry radio net, and the request was not received. After ranging over the island for about an hour, the Shermans pulled back to the 0-1 Line. Once the tanks began to withdraw, the infantry units followed their example, and by 1445 the colonel was reorganizing his command for a coordinated attack.

This drive was scheduled for 1515, with the two assault battalions advancing along the east and west coast. Once the shoreline had been captured, reserve units could mop up the stragglers who still lurked along the runways. At 1510, 2/23 called for a naval gunfire concentration to be fired against Nat Circle at the northeastern corner of the island. By 1530, the attack was underway.

Supported by the fire of half-tracks mounting 75mm guns, Dillon's Marines pushed resolutely toward Nat Circle. The enemy troops, with little time to

²⁷ Co C, 4th TkBn AR, dtd 25Mar44, p. 1, dtd 1325, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl*.

recover and reorganize after the earlier impromptu tank-infantry attack, were readily overcome. Tanks fought in cooperation with the infantry, and by 1600 organized resistance in the battalion zone was confined to the rubble-strewn tip of Roi. Behind 2/23 moved a company from 3/23, the battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Cosgrove, Jr. Because of the speed with which the assault units were moving, this company could not carry out its mission of supporting the advance by fire and had to content itself with mopping up.

Dillon's troops were approaching Nat Circle by the time Hammond's 1/23 launched its attack. From 1530 to 1600, the 1st Battalion supported by fire the thrust of its adjacent unit, then Hammond ordered his infantrymen and their supporting tanks and half-tracks to strike northward along the west coast. Within 45 minutes, all organized resistance in the zone of action had been crushed. During the advance by 1/23, two of Cosgrove's companies stood ready along the beach to thwart any Japanese attempt to attack across the sandspit from Namur.

By 1800, 1/23, in complete control along the western coast, was preparing defenses in the event of an enemy counterlanding. Tanks, riflemen, 37mm guns, a 75mm self-propelled gun, and demolitions teams combined their efforts to destroy the Japanese defending Nat Circle. At 1802, Colonel Jones was able to report that the coastline was secured and that his men were "mopping up, working toward center

from both sides."²⁸ Three minutes later, Roi was declared secured.

Once the situation on Roi was in hand, General Schmidt was able to concentrate on Namur, where the 24th Marines were facing determined resistance. The tanks supporting 3/23 were withdrawn even before the island was secured and sent across the sandspit. Although the defenders had been destroyed, quiet did not immediately descend upon Roi, for even as the last Japanese were being hunted down, an epidemic of "trigger-happiness" swept the island. Near Nat Circle, 3/23 extended between 3,000 and 5,000 rounds against a nonexistent sniper. Only a handful of these Marines actually knew why they were firing, but those who joined in had a sufficient motive. As members of the reserve battalion, they had played a minor role in a spectacularly successful assault, and, as their commanding officer discovered, "they wanted to be able to say they had fired at a Jap."²⁹ Three Marines were wounded as a result of this outburst.

On the west coast, men from 1/23 opened fire on a group of coral heads in the mistaken belief that these were Japanese troops swimming toward Roi. Observed through binoculars, the coral formations bore no resemblance to human beings, but, as one officer admitted, "to the unaided eye, those coral heads did look like swimmers."³⁰ No

²⁸ CO, 23d Mar msg to CG, 4th MarDiv, dtd 1802, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl*.

²⁹ 3/23 Rpt of Firing in Vic of Southern Hangar on BURLESQUE, dtd 12Feb44, Encl D to 3/23 Rec of Events, *op. cit.*

³⁰ Scales ltr, *op. cit.*

one was injured as a result of this incident.

Colonel Jones had been absolutely correct when he called the Roi landings a "pip." Supporting weapons, especially naval gunfire, had done their work so well that the Japanese were incapable of putting up a coordinated defense. The level terrain enabled Marine tanks to roam the island at will. The fight for Roi had been an easy one. Such was not the case on neighboring Namur.

*THE STORMING OF NAMUR*³¹

The signal to launch the assault on Namur came before the two assault battalions were fully organized. Both Brink's 2/24 and Brunelli's 3/24 had difficulty in getting enough tractors for their commands, and some last-minute arrivals were being fitted into the formation when the destroyer *Phelps* signaled the LVTs to start shoreward. The firepower of supporting weapons helped compensate for the lack of organization. The weapons massed by Lieutenant Colonel Chambers on the northern coast of ABRAHAM added their metal to that delivered by naval guns, artillery pieces, and aircraft. LCI gunboats and LVT(A)s led the assault troops toward the Green Beaches. (See Map 10.)

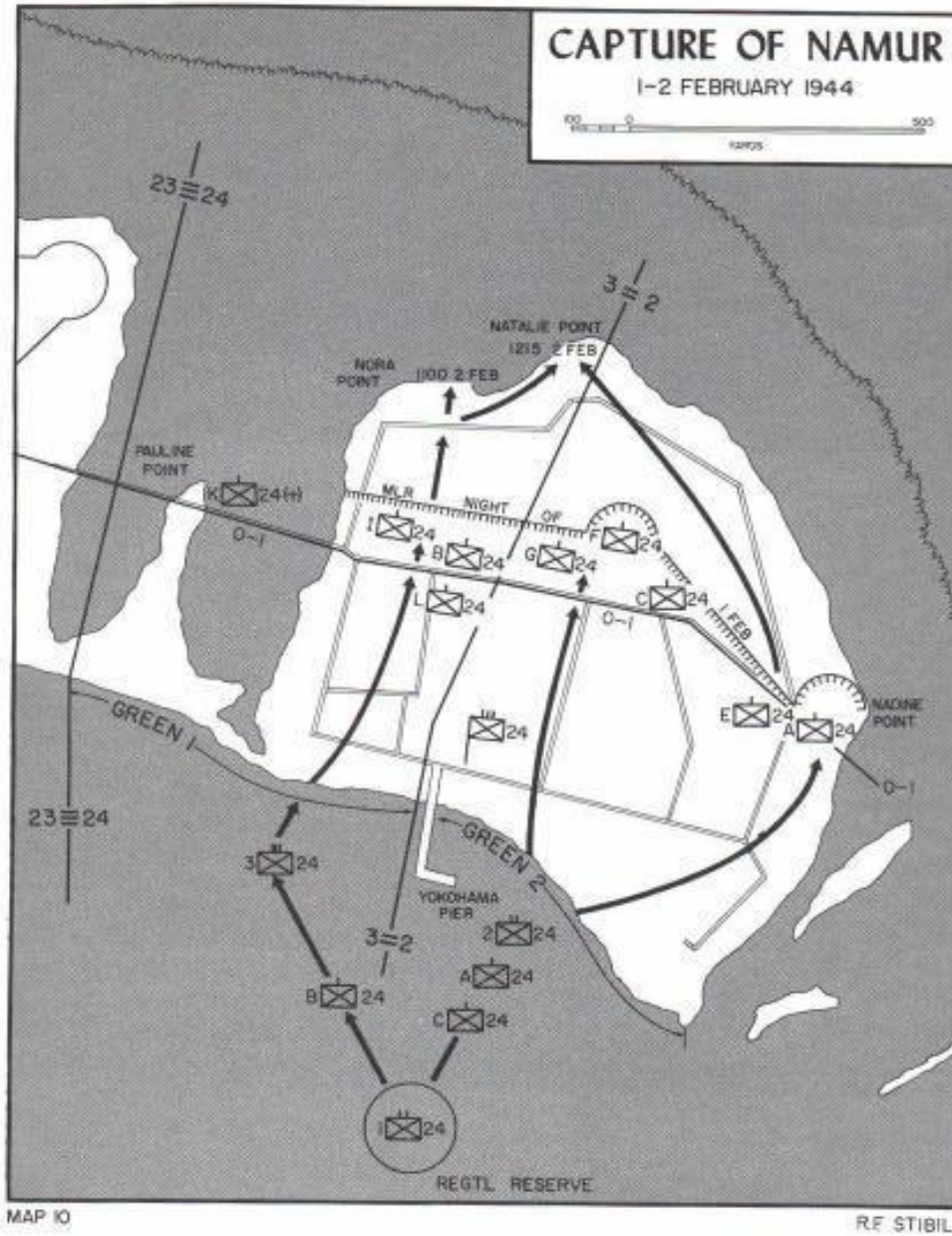
³¹ In addition to the sources already cited, two manuscripts, both of them monographs prepared for the Amphibious Warfare School, MCS, Quantico, Va., have been valuable. They are: LtCol Richard Rothwell, "A Study of an Amphibious Operation: The Battle of Namur, 31Jan-2Feb44," and LtCol Austin R. Brunelli, "Historical Tactical Study: The Capture of Namur Island, February 1-2, 1944."

Unlike the troops who were seizing Roi, the men of the 24th Marines got little benefit from the support of the armored amphibians. These vehicles stopped at the beaches and attempted to support by fire the advance inland. The actions of the LVT(A)s confounded Colonel Hart, the regimental commander, for he had planned that the armored amphibians would precede the assault waves to positions 100 yards inland of the Green Beaches. On the evening prior to the Namur landings, after he discovered that LVT(A)s had supported the landings on the outlying islands from positions offshore, the colonel sent a reminder to his attached armored amphibian unit. To guard any error, he told the unit commander: "You will precede assault waves to beach and land, repeat land, at W-Hour, repeat W-Hour, as ordered."³² Explicit as these orders were, the LVT(A)s nonetheless could not carry them out. The antitank ditches backing the lagoon beaches and the cut-up jumble of trenches and debris proved to be an impassable barrier for the LVT(A)s in the short time that elapsed between the touchdown of the armored amphibians and the landing of the first waves of Marines.³³ As the infantry moved inland, the LVT(A)s furnished support with all guns blazing until their fire was masked by the advance of the assault troops.

The lagoon coast of Namur was divided into Beaches Green 1, the objective of 3/24, and Green 2, where 2/24 was to land. The boundary between

³² 2/24 CbtRpt, dtd 7Feb44, p. 2, in 24th Mar PrelimRpts, *op. cit.*

³³ Metzger *ltr.*



the two beaches was a line drawn just west of Yokohama pier. Green 2 encompassed the eastern two-thirds of the coast, while the remainder of the southern shore and the entire sandspit was designated Green 1. Brink's battalion was slated to land two companies abreast on Green 2, but the first unit ashore landed in the middle of the zone. Part of the other assault company scrambled from its LVTs directly behind the leading company. The rest of these riflemen began advancing inland in the left-hand sector on the battalion zone of action.

On the right, 2/24 landed one company, arranged in a single wave, at 1155. The two waves into which the other assault company had been organized began landing on Green 2 about five minutes later. Smoke and dust, which bedeviled the amphibian tractors bound for Roi, also caused the Namur assault elements to stray from their proper boat lanes.

The Marines of 2/24 had been instructed to leave their tractors, thrust immediately toward their first objective, the 0-1 Line and there reorganize. As the various rifle platoons landed, each sent ahead an assault team to deal with any fortifications that had survived the preliminary bombardment. The remainder of the platoon, divided into two groups, followed in the path of the assault element.³⁴ At the 0-1

³⁴ The assault companies of both 2/24 and of 3/24 were organized into boat teams of 18-20 men, each led by a lieutenant or senior NCO. In the 2d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Brink decided to fight his men as boat teams until they reached 0-1, about 300 yards from the

Line, which ran along the road that extended from the causeway to within a few yards of the eastern shore, the platoons were to pause and reorganize. Here, too, company commanders would regroup their units for the drive across the island.

As was true on Roi, naval gunfire had so devastated Namur that many of the features designated to mark boundaries and phase lines were eradicated. Thick underbrush also made control difficult, for in places visibility was no more than a few feet. The 2/24 assault companies, nevertheless, continued to advance inland, but because they had landed out of position, a gap soon opened between their left flank and the battalion boundary. As landing craft became available, additional elements of the battalion reserve were landed, and Brink ordered these into the opening.

Within two hours after landing, the assault units, Companies E and F, were intermingled along the 0-1 Line. A contingent from Company G and a part of Company E had overcome a knot of resistance and advanced some 175 yards inland along the battalion left flank. The farther the reserve unit moved, however, the more intense grew the opposition. The effort on the left came to a halt, pinned down by fire from a thicket near the battalion boundary and north of the 0-1 Line. As soon as it became available, the remainder of Company G also was committed to aid in securing the open flank, but this group was stopped by a com-

beach, where they would reorganize into platoons. *Brink ltr.*

mination of impenetrable undergrowth and Japanese fire.³⁵

The first wave of LVT(2)s carrying elements of Lieutenant Colonel Brunelli's 3/24 reached Green 1 at about 1155, and within five minutes, Companies I and K were beginning the advance toward 0-1. The final dash to the beach had been hampered by low-hanging clouds of smoke, and units had strayed from formation. In effect, the assault companies simply exchanged platoons, for, as one officer recalled, "the major part of one platoon from Company I landed in the K/24 zone and approximately the same number from K in the I/24 zone."³⁶ These units advanced directly inland, remaining with their "adopted" companies until the 0-1 Line was gained.

The volume of fire that greeted 3/24 was somewhat heavier than that which had been encountered by the battalion on its right. Small groups of Japanese, most of them still groggy from the bombardment, fought from the ruins of their emplacements, but there was no organized defense. The communications center on Namur, from which the defense of the twin islands was to have been directed, had been destroyed. Although the enemy would, as expected, fight to the death, he was no longer capable of launching a coordinated counterattack against the rapidly expanding beachhead.

Company B of Dyess' battalion, which had been assigned as Brunelli's reserve, shore party units, and self-pro-

pelled 75mm guns landed on Green 1, while the assault companies drove inland through the underbrush and debris. Riflemen and demolition teams worked together to destroy the scattered enemy pillboxes and covered emplacements and keep the attack moving. Many Japanese, hidden in the underbrush and shattered rubble, were bypassed by the assault units and left to reserve forces to mop up.

At 1300, three light tanks from Company B, 4th Tank Battalion, arrived on Green 1. Two of them bogged down in soft sand along the beach, and the other vehicle roared some 30 yards inland, tumbled into a shell crater, and threw a tread. Twice, groups of from 15 to 20 Japanese leaped from the shelter of pillboxes to attack the stranded tanks, but the Marines beat off both groups and cleared the structures where the enemy had hidden. Two Japanese were captured and 30 killed as a result of these forays. Later in the day, the remaining two lights of the supporting tank platoon landed and helped get the disabled vehicles back into the fight.

By 1400, 3/24 was reorganizing along the 0-1 Line. Company I had advanced about 150 yards beyond the control line, but Brunelli promptly ordered the unit to withdraw.

Although the enemy resisted the advance of 3/24 with greater vigor, the other battalion of Hart's regiment suffered a higher number of casualties, losses caused only indirectly by the defenders. At 1305, assault teams of 2/24 were attacking a massive concrete building in the vicinity of 0-1. As the Marines were placing shaped charges against the wall, the Japanese in the immediate vicinity took to their heels.

³⁵ Maj Charles T. Ireland, Jr. ltr to CMC, dtd 3Feb53, hereafter *Ireland ltr*.

³⁶ LtCol Albert Arsenault ltr to CMC, dtd 10Feb53.

Once the wall had been breached, the demolitions detail began hurling satchel charges inside. Suddenly, the structure vanished in a pillar of smoke.

At this moment the regimental command post group, in the process of moving ashore, was approximately 300 yards off Namur. While Lieutenant Colonel Homer L. Litzenberg, Jr., the executive officer, watched, "the whole of Namur Island disappeared from sight in a tremendous brown cloud of dust and sand raised by the explosion."³⁷ Two other blasts occurred in rapid succession, and within seconds large chunks of concrete and other debris began raining down on Colonel Hart's command post, causing some injuries.³⁸

The devastation ashore was awesome. An officer who was standing on the beach at the time of the first explosion recalled that "trunks of palm trees and chunks of concrete as large as packing crates were flying through the air like match sticks. . . . The hole left where the blockhouse stood was as large as a fair sized swimming pool."³⁹ This series of blasts killed 20 members of 2/24 and wounded 100 others. Among the injured was Lieutenant Colonel Brink, who refused to be evacuated.

At first, the tragedy was believed to have been caused by a fluke hit by a 16-inch shell on a warehouse filled with explosives. Investigation proved that the satchel charges thrown into the bunker had detonated row upon row of torpedo warheads. This violent blast could

have touched off two smaller magazines nearby, or the enemy may possibly have caused the later explosions in the hope of inflicting additional casualties.⁴⁰

The three explosions, which caused about one-half of its casualties on Namur, were a severe blow to 2/24. Colonel Hart attached Company A of Dyess' command to the battered unit, and a delay ensued as Brink's organization was restored to effectiveness. In the meantime, 3/24 was poised to attack toward the northern coast.

From the undergrowth across the 0-1 Line, a trio of Japanese emplacements were holding Brunelli's Marines at bay. The commanding officer of 3/24 planned to attack at 1630 in conjunction with Brink's unit. In preparation for this effort, light tanks and armored amphibians rumbled inland to fire into the enemy strongpoints. Two of these positions were silenced, but the third, a pillbox near the eastern shore, continued to enfilade the ground along the 0-1 Line.

Company L finally landed at 1531, an unavoidable delay since, as its commander pointed out, the unit "had no means of getting ashore earlier other than swimming."⁴¹ This company relieved Company B as 3d Battalion reserve, assumed responsibility for mopping up, and sent men to strengthen Company I. Company B then moved

³⁷ BGen Homer L. Litzenberg, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 31Jan53.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ 1stLt Samuel H. Zutty ltr to CMC, dtd 28Jan53.

⁴⁰ Capt Joseph E. LoPrete, "The Battle of Roi-Namur," monograph prepared for the Amphibious Warfare School, MCS, Quantico, Va. A platoon leader on Namur, Captain LoPrete commanded one of the two assault teams that attacked the explosives-laden bunker.

⁴¹ LtCol Houston Stiff ltr to CMC, dtd 26Jan53.

into line in place of Company K, which was sent to the sandspit. Company K was to consolidate control over Pauline Point, which extended beyond the front lines, and support by fire the advance on Namur proper.

At 1630, as the advance division command post was being established on Namur, 3/24 launched its drive. Because of the tragic blast, 2/24 was not yet ready to advance. Brunelli's Marines found that the Japanese had recovered from the effects of the bombardment. Although resistance was not coordinated, dense thickets and the enemy's willingness to die fighting combined to slow the offensive.

While 3/24 was attacking, Lieutenant Colonel Brink was busy shuffling his units in an effort to restore 2/24 to fighting trim. Company A moved to the right-hand portion of the battalion zone. To its left was another attached organization, Company C, along with fragments of Companies E and F and approximately half of Company G.⁴² Light tanks of the Headquarters Section and 1st Platoon, Company B, 4th Tank Battalion added their weight and firepower, and at 1730 2/24 joined 3/24 in plunging northward.

Tanks, protected insofar as the foliage permitted by infantrymen, spearheaded both battalions. These

vehicles fired 37mm canister rounds which shredded the stubborn undergrowth in addition to killing Japanese. Whenever the riflemen encountered an especially difficult thicket, they temporarily lost sight of the tanks they were to protect, and the vehicles to the rear had to defend those in front of them. If enemy soldiers attempted to clamber aboard the leading tanks in an attempt to disable them with grenades, 37mm guns in the covering wave would unleash a hail of canister that swept the enemy to oblivion.

Without this sort of protection, a light tank was all but helpless, as proved by an incident in the 3/24 zone. One vehicle from Company B struck a log, veered out of position, and stopped to orient itself. A squad of Japanese swarmed onto the tank, and a grenade tumbled through a signal port which had been left open to allow engine fumes to escape. The blast killed two of the four Marines inside and wounded the others. Another tank and its accompanying rifle squad arrived in time to cut down the fleeing enemy.

Elements of 2/24 managed to make deep penetrations during the afternoon action. On the left, a few riflemen and some tanks reached a position within 35 yards of the north coast. This position, however, could not be maintained, and the men and machines were ordered to rejoin the rest of the battalion about 100 yards to the south. On the right, the elements of 2/24 that were probing Nadine Point encountered vicious machine gun fire. Although these Marines were able to beat off a local counterattack, they could not advance far beyond 0-1.

⁴² The remainder of Company G was having troubles of its own. "No orders for a concerted attack during the afternoon ever reached me," recalled the executive officer. "The situation for my portion of G during the rest of the daylight hours was one of no contact with 2/24, no visible elements of 3/24 on my left, visual contact with a unit of 1/24 on my right, and heavy fire from the front." *Ireland ltr.*

Near 1700, General Schmidt landed and conferred with Colonel Hart. Within an hour, the general had opened his command post on Namur and was shifting his troops to assist the 24th Marines. He ordered Jones' reserve battalion (3/23) and the medium tanks of the combat team to move at once to Namur.⁴³ The Shermans lumbered across the sandspit in time to take part in the afternoon's fighting.

A platoon of these tanks reported to Lieutenant Colonel Brunelli at 1830, when 3/24 had advanced some 175 yards beyond the 0-1 Line. Rather than waste time feeding the Shermans into the battalion skirmish line, Brunelli used them to spearhead a sweep along the west coast. The tanks, a 75mm self-propelled gun, and several squads of infantry brushed aside enemy resistance to secure the abandoned emplacements on Natalie Point, northernmost part of the island. Isolated and low on ammunition, the task force had to withdraw before darkness.

At 1930, Colonel Hart ordered his Marines to halt and defend the ground they already had gained. Except for two bulges, the regimental main line of resistance ran diagonally from a point roughly 100 yards south of Nora Point to the intersection of 0-1 and the eastern coast. Toward the left of Brink's sector, the line curved to include the group of light tanks and riflemen that had been ordered back from near the north shore.⁴⁴ On the far right, the line again veered northward to encompass the elements of 2/24 that had

overrun a part of Nadine Point. As Brink's Marines were digging in, the missing portion of Company G rejoined its parent unit along the battalion boundary.⁴⁵

NAMUR SECURED

The night of 1-2 February was somewhat confusing but not particularly dangerous to the embattled Marines. From the front, the Japanese attempted to harass the assault troops, while to the rear by-passed defenders would pop out of piles of debris, fire their weapons, and quickly disappear. In addition, Colonel Hart's men had to put up with the "eerie noise of the star shell as it flew through the air," a sound which they at first found disturbing.⁴⁶ Since this was their first night of combat, the Marines did engage in some needless shooting at imagined snipers. When some machine gunners along the beach opened fire into the treetops to their front, General Schmidt himself emerged from his command post to calm them.⁴⁷ The troops, however, conducted themselves well enough, and the enemy, although able to launch local attacks, was incapable of making a serious effort to hurl the invaders into the sea.

Darkness found the medium tanks that had crossed over from Roi in difficult straits. The armored unit was located inland from Green 1, but its gasoline and ammunition were on Red 3. Boats could not be found to ferry the needed supplies from Roi, and the tank

⁴³ Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 22Oct62.

⁴⁴ LtCol Frank E. Garretson interview by HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 12Jan53.

⁴⁵ Ireland ltr.

⁴⁶ Zutty ltr, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to CMC, dtd 10Nov52.

crews did not have pumps with which to transfer gasoline from one vehicle to another. They had no choice but to pool all the remaining 75mm shells and divide them among the four Shermans that had the most fuel.

The coming of light proved the wisdom of this arrangement, for the tanks were able to assist Companies I and B in shattering a counterattack. During the night, contact between the two units had been lost, and the enemy was now trying to exploit the gap. While the tanks charged forward, Company L moved into position to contain any breakthrough, and Company K began withdrawing from the sandspit to the island proper.

The Japanese counterattack failed, though the fighting raged for 25 minutes. When Company L arrived to seal the gap, it found that the medium tanks and the men of Companies I and B had broken the enemy spearhead and advanced about 50 yards. All that remained was the task of pushing to the north shore.

Colonel Hart planned to attack at 0900 with two battalions abreast. Enough medium tanks were now available to provide assistance to the riflemen of both battalions. Lieutenant Colonel Brink, injured on the previous day when the blockhouse exploded, yielded command of 2/24 to Lieutenant Colonel Dyess of 1/24. Two rifle companies from 1/24 were to take part in the morning attack of the 2d Battalion, while the third served as reserve for 3/24. Mopping-up was to be carried out concurrent with the advance.

Brunelli's Marines, aided by medium tanks, launched their blow exactly on

schedule. The Shermans concentrated on pillboxes and other concrete structures, firing armor-piercing rounds to penetrate the walls and then pumping high explosives shells into the interior. Nora Point was taken within two hours, and by 1215, 3/24 was in control of Natalie Point on the northern coast.

The medium tanks destined for 2/24 were late in arriving, so the attack by the battalion was delayed until 1006. On the left, a blockhouse had to be destroyed by tanks and self-propelled guns, but elsewhere the Marines moved steadily northward. The final enemy strongpoint proved to be an antitank ditch, part of the defenses along the ocean shore, from which the Japanese were firing at the advancing troops. Light tanks wiped out these defenders by moving to the flank of the ditch and raking it with canister and machine gun fire. Lieutenant Colonel Dyess, who had repeatedly risked his life throughout the morning to keep the attack moving, was killed as he urged his men toward Natalie Point. At 1215, the two battalions met at Natalie Point; Namur had been overrun. The island was declared secured at 1418.

Because of the more determined resistance on Namur, Navy corpsmen assigned to the 24th Marines had a more difficult job than those who served with the 23d Marines on Roi. A corpsman accompanied every assault platoon, "and wherever and whenever a man was hit, he went unhesitatingly to his assistance, often . . . coming directly into an enemy line of fire."⁴⁸ Shell craters became aid stations, as

⁴⁸ 1stLt John C. Chapin memo to Capt William G. Wendell, dtd 8Jan45.

corpsmen struggled to save the lives of wounded Marines. Once again, these sailors had performed their vital work skillfully and courageously.

Colonel Hart's 24th Marines had conquered Namur in spite of serious obstacles. The most spectacular of these was the tragic explosion of the blockhouse, but the shortage of tractors, the incompletely formed assault waves, poor communications, and tangled undergrowth also conspired against the regiment. Colonel Hart remained convinced that "had LVT(2)s and/or LCVPs been available as originally planned, or had the departure . . . been delayed until 1200," the island would have been taken more quickly and with fewer casualties.⁴⁹

The men of both regiments were brave and aggressive, if somewhat lacking in fire discipline. Their primary mission accomplished, the men of the 4th Marine Division could allow their guns to cool, absorb the lessons of the past few days, and prepare for the final phase of the FLINTLOCK operation. To the south, however, the fight for Kwajalein Island still was raging. As the Marines rested, soldiers of the 7th Infantry Division continued to press an attack of their own.

*THE CONQUEST OF KWAJALEIN ISLAND*⁵⁰

At 0930, 1 February, the 32d and 184th Infantry Regiments of General Corlett's 7th Infantry Division landed at

the western end of Kwajalein Island. The preliminary bombardment by field artillery and naval guns, as well as the aerial strikes, had been extremely effective. Admiral Turner, at the request of General Corlett, had ordered two of his battleships to close to 2,000 yards, an extremely short range for these big ships, and level a wall inland of the assault beaches. The captains involved did not believe the figure was correct and asked for clarification, so Turner subtracted 500 yards from his original order, and had them open fire.⁵¹ (See Map 11.)

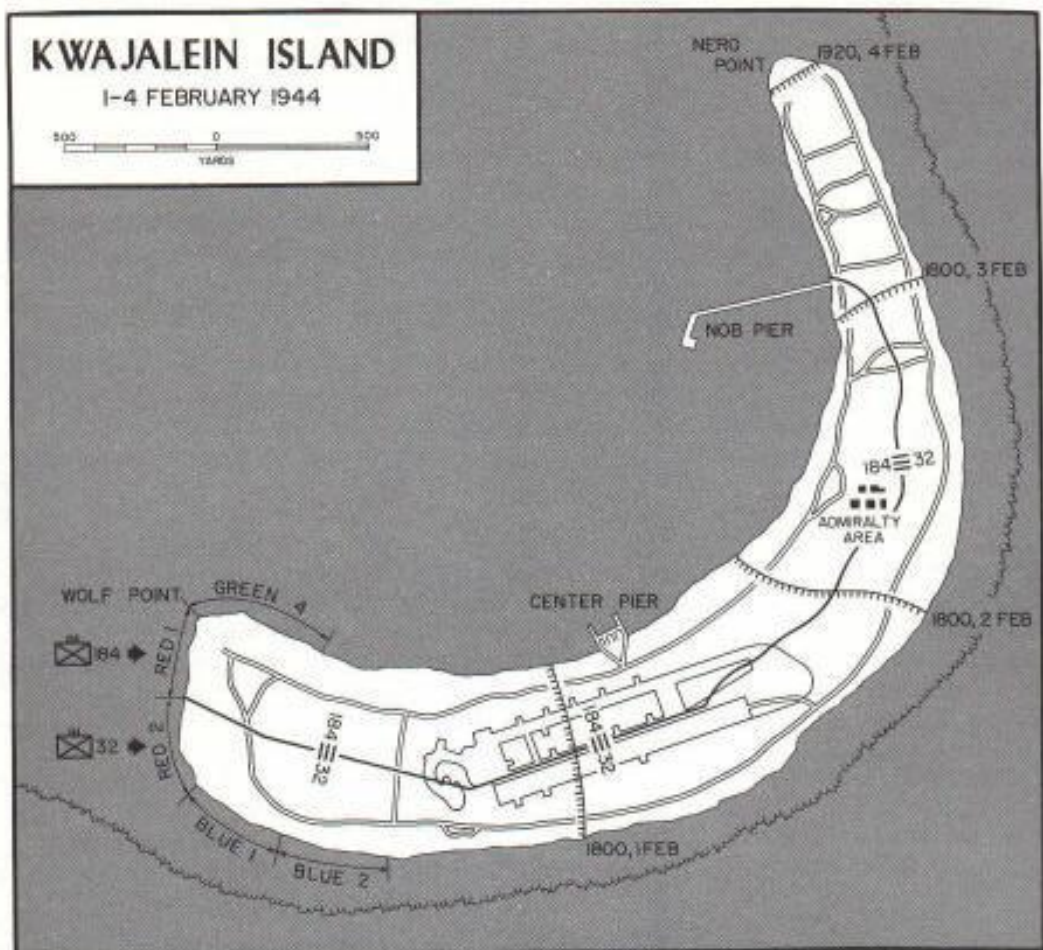
Aided by this kind of fire support, the well-rehearsed assault proceeded relatively smoothly. The formation headed for each of the two landing beaches was shaped somewhat like the letter U. On either flank, extending forward at an angle of about 45 degrees from the base, was a line of LVT(A)s. These vehicles joined the LCI gunboats in neutralizing the beaches and then crawled ashore to protect the flanks of the beachhead. At the base of the U were the troop-carrying LVTs, with both rifle and engineer platoons in the first wave.

The landings were executed as planned. The only difficulty, telescoping toward the right of the assault waves, stemmed from a mechanical characteristic of the tractors used at Kwajalein Island. These vehicles tended to pull toward the left. The drivers attempted to compensate by inclining toward the right, and in their

⁴⁹ 24th MarRpt of FLINTLOCK Op, p. 8, dtd 10Mar44, Encl E to 4th MarDiv AR, p. 8.

⁵⁰ The official Army account of this action is contained in Crowl and Love, *The Gilberts and Marshalls*, pp. 230-282.

⁵¹ MajGen Charles H. Corlett, USA, ltr to CMC, dtd 14Jan53. The closest range reported by the bombardment battleships on the morning of 1 February is 1,800 yards. Dir NHD cmts on draft MS, dtd 27Nov62.



MAP II

R.F. STIBIL

eagerness to remain in the proper lanes they veered too far.⁵²

On the first day, the infantry-engineer teams quickly secured the beaches. No serious opposition was encountered until the attackers had overrun the western third of the airfield. At this point, however, the nature of the battle changed. By the end of the first day, the swift amphibious thrust had become a systematic and thorough offensive designed to destroy a Japanese garrison that was fighting from ruined buildings, shattered pillboxes, and piles of debris. Massive artillery concentrations and close coordination between tanks and riflemen characterized the advance which ended at 1920 on 4 February with the securing of the farthest tip of the island.

As far as Marines were concerned, the most interesting feature of this operation was the logistical plan devised by General Corlett and his staff. Instead of LVTs, the 7th Infantry Division used DUKWs as supply vehicles. Amphibious trucks, filled with items certain to be needed early in the operation, were loaded in LSTs before the convoy left the Hawaiian Islands. These vehicles were sent ashore as needed. As soon as they had unloaded, they reported to the beachmaster. That officer placed the wounded in some of the trucks, but whether or not they carried casualties, all DUKWs next reported to a control officer off the beach. Here a representative of the division medical officer directed the wounded to

vessels equipped to care for them, while the control officer saw to it that the DUKWs maintained an uninterrupted flow of supplies from the LSTs to the assault units.

In general, the so-called "hot cargo" system worked well, for by noon of D-Day DUKWs were already arriving on the island. The only serious breakdown, which occurred that night, was caused by a flaw in the basic plan. As evening approached, two of three LSTs that were feeding cargo to trucks destined for the 184th Infantry were recalled from their unloading area. The remaining ship carried no 75mm ammunition for the tanks assigned to support the next day's advance. As a result, the Shermans were late in getting into action.⁵³

The logistical plan, however, cannot account for the comparative ease with which the assault waves gained Kwajalein's beaches. The tractor and LVT(A) units assigned to the 7th Infantry Division benefited from rehearsals held in Hawaii prior to departure for the target area. By the time these exercises were held, the plan of attack had been completed. Not so fortunate were the tractor units that landed the 4th Marine Division, for their final rehearsal was held even before the landing force scheme of maneuver had been decided upon. The lack of a last-minute rehearsal gravely hampered the Marines.

The D-Day operations also had a more serious effect on the Marine LVT

⁵² LtCol S. L. A. Marshall, USA, "Notes Prepared in the Central and Middle Pacific: The Assault on PORCELAIN" (Hist MS File, OCMH), pp. 1-4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 95; LtCol S. L. A. Marshall, USA, "General and Miscellaneous Materials on Central Pacific: Supply" (Hist MS File, OCMH), pp. 44-45.



ARMY 37MM ANTITANK GUN fires at enemy pillbox on Kwajalein during 7th Infantry Division advance. (USA SC18555)



MARINE 105MM HOWITZERS, transported by DUKWs, set up on an off-lying island to cover the landings on Engebi, Eniwetok Atoll. (USN 80-G-233228)

units than on the Army tractor battalion. On 31 January, General Corlett had employed tractor groups against two islands and held back two other groups, one per assault battalion, for the following day's operation. More complicated was the task facing General Schmidt, whose troops had to seize five small islands. Although he did maintain a reserve for Roi-Namur, these idle tractors had to be augmented by vehicles that took part in the D-Day landings. This was necessary since four battalions were to storm the twin islands. Because of the series of delays and other misfortunes, not enough tractors could be retrieved before nightfall. Thus, the number of landings scheduled for D-Day, the width of the beachheads the 4th Marine Division was to seize, and the lack of rehearsals combined to complicate the Roi-Namur landings.

General Corlett could well be satisfied with the conduct of his veteran division at Kwajalein Island. "I think the Navy did a marvelous job as did the Marines," he later observed, "and I think the Army did as well as either of them."⁵⁴ With the capture of Kwajalein Island on 4 February, the last of FLINTLOCK's principal objectives was secured, but several lesser islands remained to be taken.

*THE FINAL PHASE*⁵⁵

On Roi-Namur the work of burying the enemy dead, repairing battle dam-

age, and emplacing defensive weapons was begun as promptly as possible. Antiaircraft guns of the 15th Defense Battalion were being landed even as the fighting raged. Once the battle had ended, the 20th Marines began clearing Roi airstrip, but on D plus 5, these engineers were relieved of the task by a naval construction battalion. During this same period, various elements of the 4th Marine Division got ready to depart from Kwajalein Atoll.

Badly pummelled by American carrier planes, Japanese air power had been unable to contest the Roi-Namur operation, but early in the morning of 12 February, 12-14 enemy seaplanes struck at Roi. The raiders dropped strips of metal foil to confuse American radar and managed to catch the defenders by surprise. From the Japanese point of view, the attack was a complete success. An ammunition dump, 85 percent of the supplies stockpiled on the island, and roughly one-third of the heavy construction equipment were destroyed. Thirty Americans were killed and an estimated 400 wounded.

The raid on Roi, however, had no effect on the final phase of the 4th Marine Division overall plan. By the time of the aerial attack, Company A, 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, and the 25th Marines had investigated the remaining islands in the northern part of Kwajalein Atoll. On 2 February, Lieutenant Colonel Hudson's 2/25 seized eight islands. No resistance was met,

⁵⁴ Corlett ltr, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Additional sources for this section include: 20th Mar Rpt on FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 16Mar44, pp. 2-4; Col Peter J. Negri ltr to

CMC, dtd 5Feb53; Carl W. Proehl, ed., *The Fourth Marine Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1946), p. 34, hereafter Proehl, *4th MarDiv History*.

and after the first two landings, the planned artillery preparations were cancelled. Lieutenant Colonel O'Donnell led 1/25 against three islands, and Lieutenant Colonel Chambers' 3/25 secured 39 others within four days. Once the final landings were completed, the regiment served for a time as part of the atoll garrison force. (See Map 8.)

While Colonel Cumming's regiment was occupying the lesser islands in the north, the 17th Infantry and the 7th Reconnaissance Troop were performing a similar mission in the southern part of Kwajalein Atoll. Unlike the Marines, the soldiers encountered vicious fighting on some of the objectives. At CHAUNCEY, where the unit had landed by mistake on D-Day, the reconnaissance troop killed 135 Japanese. BURTON required the services of two battalions of the 17th Infantry, but within two days, 450 of the defenders were dead and the 7 survivors taken prisoner. In spite of the frequent opposition, the last of the southern islands was captured on 5 February.

Both assault divisions could look

back on a job well done. According to intelligence estimates, the Northern Landing Force had defeated enemy garrisons numbering 3,563, while the Southern Landing Force accounted for 4,823 Japanese and Koreans. Thus, each division had overwhelmed in a series of landings a total force approximately the same size as the Betio garrison. Yet, American losses in FLINTLOCK were far fewer than the casualties suffered at Betio. The 4th Marine Division had 313 killed and 502 wounded, while the 7th Infantry Division lost 173 killed and 793 wounded.⁵⁶

While the combat troops might pause to congratulate themselves, Admiral Nimitz and his staff continued to look to the future. Planners had to determine how best to capitalize on the stunning victory at Kwajalein Atoll. Should the blow at Eniwetok Atoll, tentatively scheduled for May 1944, be launched immediately?

⁵⁶ A breakdown by unit of casualty figures for the 4th Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division is contained in Heintz and Crown, *The Marshalls*, pp. 169-171. Final official Marine Corps casualty totals for the Kwajalein Operation are listed in Appendix H.

Westward to Eniwetok¹

“Will the enemy attack Eniwetok?” asked Norio Miyada, one of the defenders of the atoll. To him the answer was obvious. “He will strike this island after attacking Roi.” The only problem lay in deciding when the Americans would enter the lagoon. This noncommissioned officer, confident of Japanese aerial superiority in the Marshalls, expected a slow advance. “How will the enemy be able to attack us?” he continued. “Will it be by his hackneyed method of island hopping?”²

REVISING THE TIMETABLE

Actually, Admiral Nimitz looked forward to leapfrogging the central part of the Marshalls group. He planned to vault from Kwajalein to Eniwetok, neutralizing the Japanese bastions in between. Even before FLINTLOCK was launched, troops were preparing

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: CinCPac CATCHPOLE Plan, dtd 29Nov43; TF 51 OPlan A9-44, dtd 7Feb44; TG 51.11 OpO A105-44, dtd 13Feb44; TG 51.11 AtkO A106-44, dtd 9Feb44; TG 51.11 Rpt of Eniwetok Opns, dtd 7Mar44, hereafter *TG 51.11 OpRpt*; VAC MiscOs and Rpts File, Eniwetok; TG 1 OpO 2-44, dtd 10Feb44; TG 1 AdminO 2-44, dtd 10Feb44; TG 1 SAR CATCHPOLE Op, dtd 10Mar44, hereafter *TG 1 SAR*; CominCh, *Marshall Islands*; Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*.

² JICPOA Item No. 8200, Extracts from the Diary of Norio Miyada.

for CATCHPOLE, as the Eniwetok operation was called.

On 1 January 1944, the 2d Marine Division began intensive training for the assault upon Eniwetok Atoll. Within two weeks, the 27th Infantry Division was alerted to ready itself for an attack on Kusaie Island in the eastern Carolines, the second objective in the current CATCHPOLE plan. The target date for Eniwetok had been fixed at 1 May to enable units of the Fifth Fleet to assist in the seizure of Kavieng, New Ireland, an operation that eventually was cancelled.³

Admiral Spruance, however, felt that his warships should strike at Eniwetok before steaming southward to Kavieng. This opinion was shared by Admiral Turner, whose staff prepared a tentative plan to advance promptly to Eniwetok if the FLINTLOCK operation was executed smoothly. General Holland Smith's VAC planners also looked ahead to the rapid capture of Eniwetok, but theirs, too, was a tentative concept.⁴

Execution of the Eniwetok proposals depended upon the intelligence that

³ VAC WarD, Jan44, p. 11. For the story of the Kavieng venture and of the intended part of Marine units in its capture see Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*, p. 501ff.

⁴ VAC G-3 Rpt on FLINTLOCK, dtd 12Feb44, Encl B to VAC AR, FLINTLOCK; TF 51 AR, p. 6; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*, pp. 291-292.

could be obtained concerning the objective and on the cost in lives and time of the Kwajalein campaign. During an aerial reconnaissance on 28 December 1943, the first successful penetration of Eniwetok during the war, cameras were trained only on Engebi Island, site of an airstrip. Within a month, however, the Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas, had amassed enough data to issue a bulletin describing the atoll and its defenses. Last-minute details were provided by the carrier planes which photographed the atoll on 30 January. FLINTLOCK itself brought a windfall of captured documents, among them navigational charts of Eniwetok Atoll. The various parts of the puzzle were assembled, and the task of fitting them together was begun. (See Map 12.)

The fighting within Kwajalein Atoll also was progressing rapidly at a reasonable cost to the attackers. On 2 February, Admiral Turner recommended to Admiral Spruance that the CATCHPOLE operation begin immediately. Turner offered a plan to strike with the 22d Marines and two battalions of the 106th Infantry as soon after 10 February as the necessary ships had taken on fuel and ammunition and the carrier air groups had been brought up to full strength.

Admiral Nimitz, who had received copies of Turner's dispatches, now asked Spruance's views on an amphibious assault upon Eniwetok to be preceded immediately by a carrier strike against Truk. The Fifth Fleet commander favored such a course of action,⁵ and on 5 February, Admiral

Nimitz arrived at Kwajalein to discuss the proposed operation with his principal subordinates. The Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, approved the concept set forth by Admiral Turner. Originally, 15 February was selected as the target date, but D-Day had to be postponed until 17 February to give the fast carriers more time to prepare for their concurrent attack on Truk.⁶

TASK ORGANIZATION

Admiral Hill, commander of the Majuro attack force, reported to Admiral Turner at Kwajalein on 3 February. "I had no forewarning of the possibilities of my being put in command of the Eniwetok operation," Hill recalled, but warning or none, he was given overall command of Task Group 51.11, the Eniwetok Expeditionary Group.⁷ In organizing his force, he followed the pattern he had used for the Majuro landing.

With only seven days for planning, and again only a small segment of a larger hydrographic chart to work

Admiral Spruance related: "I at once went over to see Admiral Kelly Turner and General Holland Smith about it. They were both favorable. When I asked about the time needed to prepare the plans, Holland Smith said he had already prepared a plan while they were coming out from Pearl. This set the operation up, and we covered it with a strike on Truk on 16 and 17 February by Task Force 58." *Spruance 62 ltr.*

⁵Adm Richmond K. Turner ltr to CMC, dtd 13Apr53, hereafter *Turner ltr II*; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*, pp. 291-292.

⁷VAdm Harry W. Hill ltr to CMC, dtd 24Feb53.

⁵ On receiving Admiral Nimitz' request, Ad-

from, Admiral Hill's "first request was for high and low angle photographs taken at high and low tide and particularly in the early morning with its usually still waters."⁸ Using the facilities of Admiral Turner's AGC, a photo-based map was reproduced in quantity for the use of the task group. Right after this map was run off, Admiral Hill was presented with a captured Japanese chart taken from a ship wrecked on the shore of one of the islands of Kwajalein. The enemy map, which was used during the operation, showed the area clear of mines and the preferred channel into the lagoon at Eniwetok.⁹

The Eniwetok Expeditionary Group consisted of: Headquarters, Support Aircraft (Captain Richard F. Whitehead, USN); Expeditionary Troops, commanded by Marine Brigadier General Thomas E. Watson; Carrier Task Group 4, under Rear Admiral Samuel P. Ginder; plus the Eniwetok Attack Force and the Eniwetok Garrison Group, these last two commanded by Admiral Hill. The flagship was the USS *Cambria*, which had served Hill during the conquest of Majuro, but the total number of ships assigned to him was far greater than he had commanded during FLINTLOCK.

The assault troops required eight transports of various types, two attack cargo ships, one cargo ship, an LSD, nine LSTs, and six LCIs. Ten destroyers were assigned to screen the

transports and cargo vessels, while three battleships, three heavy cruisers, and another seven destroyers formed the fire support group. An escort carrier group, three carriers and three destroyers, joined a fast carrier group, three larger carriers and their screen, in providing aerial support for the operation.

General Watson was to have operational control over expeditionary troops once the landing force was established ashore. Since General Smith would not be present at Eniwetok, Admiral Turner charged the Commander, Expeditionary Troops, with duties similar to those carried out by the corps commander at Kwajalein Atoll. "General Watson," Turner has explained, "was in over-all command of all [troop units], but did not exercise detailed tactical command on shore of any one of them."¹⁰ Like Smith during FLINTLOCK, Watson could issue no orders "as to major landings or as to major changes in tactical plans" without the naval commander's approval.¹¹

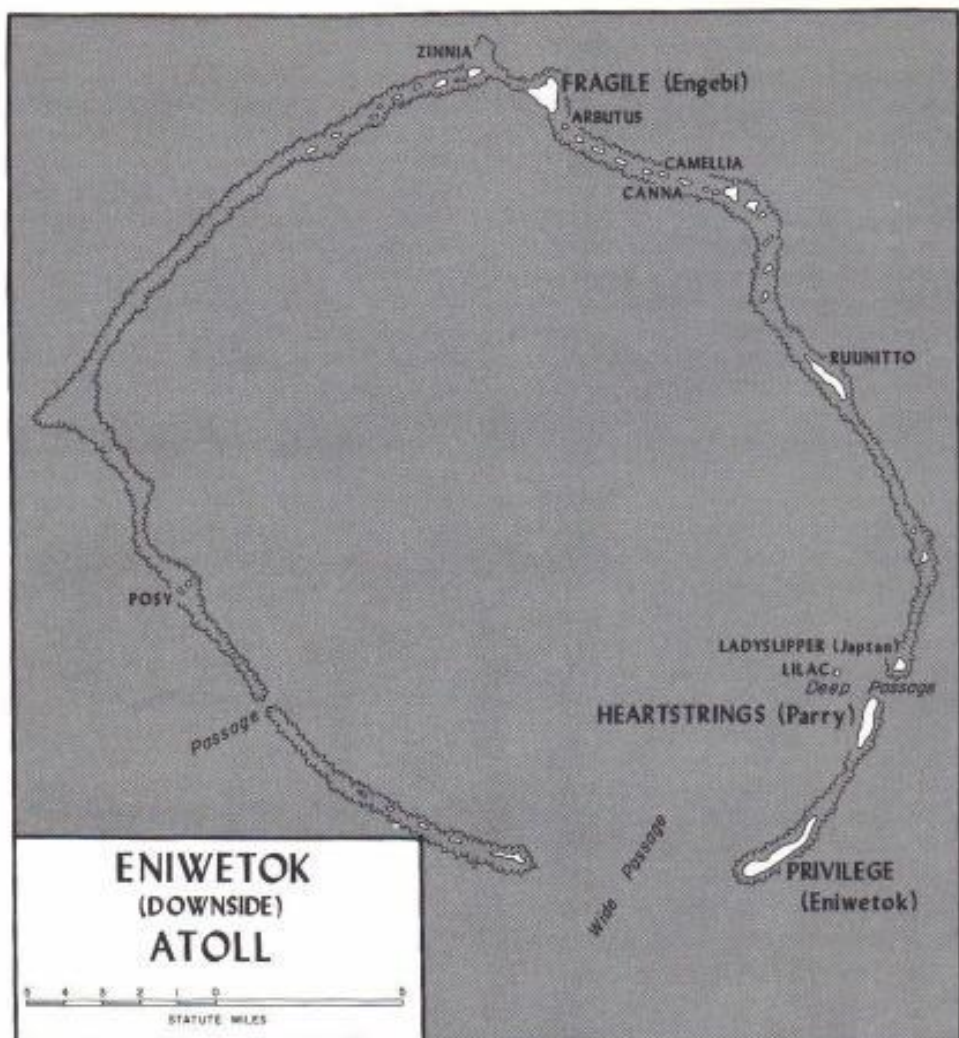
Because Turner's Eniwetok operation plan did not require Watson to report to the attack force commander when he was ready to assume command ashore, a Marine officer on Admiral King's staff interpreted the command arrangement as a modification of the structure used during FLINTLOCK. "Previous orders," he noted, "did not give this command to the ground force commander until he stated he was ready to assume it. In other words, it formerly required positive action on the ground force com-

⁸ *Hill interview/comments Marshalls.*

⁹ *Ibid.* Admiral Hill noted that when the fleet anchorage was established at Eniwetok, it was in the area picked by his staff from the original chart based on aerial photographs.

¹⁰ *Turner ltr II.*

¹¹ *TF 51 OPlan A6-43*, p. 9.



MAP 12

R.F. STIBIL

mander's part. Now it is established before the operation began."¹²

In fact, no change had actually been made, for Watson was, according to Turner, the commander of a small-scale corps. The Marine general in command of the Eniwetok forces was holding a position comparable to that held by Smith at Kwajalein. Both were to "command all landing and garrison forces when ashore."¹³ The command structure remained substantially the same, for as one student of amphibious warfare has pointed out, "there was a distinction without a difference."¹⁴

The Eniwetok landing force was to be provided by Watson's Tactical Group 1, the FLINTLOCK reserve, which had cruised eastward of Kwajalein Atoll while the Northern and Southern Landing Forces had effected their landings. Tactical Group 1 was composed of the 22d Marines, 106th Infantry (less 2/106, assigned to the Majuro operation), the Army 104th Field Artillery Battalion, the Marine 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion, 2d Separate Tank Company, 2d Separate Motor Transport Company, and 2d Separate Medical Company, plus shore party and JASCO units. After 3 February, when the group entered Kwajalein Atoll, further attachments were made to strengthen Watson's command for the CATCHPOLE Operation. The additions were: VAC Reconnaissance Company, Company D, 4th Tank

Battalion (a scout unit), 102 LVTs and 17 LVT(A)s from the 708th Provisional Amphibian Tractor Battalion, and a provisional DUKW unit, provided by the 7th Infantry Division, with 30 amphibious trucks and 4 LVTs. By the time CATCHPOLE began, General Watson had command over some 10,000 assault troops, more than 4,000 of them soldiers.¹⁵

The tactical group was prepared to handle only such administrative chores as might be incident to combat operations. General Watson's staff was small in size and suited only to brief periods of combat. This so-called "streamlined" staff, partly an experiment and partly the result of a shortage of officers with staff experience, was not adequate to the strain imposed by CATCHPOLE. "I can personally attest," stated the group G-3, "that I and all members of the staff came out of the Eniwetok operation utterly exhausted by day and night effort. The streamlined staff idea died a rapid and just death as the staff itself was about to expire."¹⁶

Colonel John T. Walker's reinforced 22d Marines, the largest single component of Tactical Group 1, had spent almost 18 months as part of the Samoa garrison force prior to its transfer to Hawaii. The regiment had undergone rudimentary amphibious training in preparation for FLINTLOCK. Late in December, the 106th Infantry, two battalions strong, was detached from

¹² BGen Omar T. Pfeiffer memo to BGen Gerald C. Thomas, dtd 23Feb44.

¹³ Cf. TF 51 OPlan A9-44, dtd 7Feb44, p. 9 and TF 51 OPlan A6-43, dtd 17Jan44, p. 15.

¹⁴ Cmt of Dr. Philip A. Crowl quoted in Maj Leonard O. Friesz, USA, ltr to CMC, dtd 16Mar53.

¹⁵ The size of Tactical Group 1 varies according to the source consulted. Admiral Turner reported a total of 10,269, 5,760 of them Marines. *TF 51 AR*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Col Wallace M. Greene, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 4Mar53.

the 27th Infantry Division and assigned to Watson's group. The Army unit also received a brief refresher course in amphibious warfare. These exercises, according to the commanding general of the group, were far from realistic. "We were sent to attack a coral atoll," complained General Watson, but "we rehearsed on the large island of Maui on terrain and approaches totally unlike those of the target." Neither artillery shells, naval gunfire, nor aerial bombs added realism to the exercise. The group's artillery battalions did not land from DUKWs, few of the infantrymen landed from LVTs, and the assault teams did not practice moving inland from the beach. "In the attack on Eniwetok," the general concluded, "the infantry, amphibian tractors, amphibian tanks, tanks, aircraft, supporting naval ships, and most of the staffs concerned had never worked together before."¹⁷

As far as the 22d Marines was concerned, thorough training in infantry tactics offset the effect of haphazard rehearsals. Colonel Walker's regiment, in the opinion of the group G-3, was "at its peak in small unit training—training which was anchored firmly around a basic fire team organization (three or four-man teams, depending on the battalion)."¹⁸ Since each rifle squad could be divided into teams, the squad leader's problems of control were greatly eased. In jungle or amid ruined buildings, the teams were cap-

able of fighting independent actions against an enemy pillbox or machine guns. The intense training which it had received in Samoa had made the 22d Marines a spirited, competent unit, one which would distinguish itself in the forthcoming operation.

The 106th Infantry, however, had not received the kind of training that the Marine regiment had undergone in Samoa. An Army officer who was serving in General Smith's VAC planning section, observed that the Army regiment was "far from being in an ideal state of combat readiness." Yet, "many fine and highly trained individuals and small units . . . collectively made up the 106th Infantry."¹⁹

During CATCHPOLE, moreover, Colonel Russell G. Ayers, commanding officer of the 106th Infantry, would labor under still another handicap. He had only two battalions, and if these were committed to an attack, his reserve would have to be provided by the 22d Marines. Thus, the colonel might find himself commanding a hastily combined organization, one third of which was differently trained and unfamiliar to him. "Effective combat units," a member of the VAC staff has pointed out, "are achieved by effective unit training, and can never be replaced by assorted combinations of component units, however highly trained."²⁰

Tactical Group 1, then, had its shortcomings. Its staff was designed to assist the commanding general during brief operations rather than in an involved campaign against a large atoll. The infantry components were not of

¹⁷ TG-1 SplRpt of FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE Ops, dtd 1Mar44, p. 7, hereafter *TG 1 SplRpt*.

¹⁸ Greene ltr of 4Mar53, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ *Anderson ltr.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

equal quality, nor had they received amphibious training beyond what was necessary for them as FLINTLOCK reserve. Still, this group was available at once, and American planners were determined to sustain the momentum of the Marshalls offensive.

In addition to Tactical Group 1, General Watson, as Commander, Expeditionary Troops, had operational control over the Eniwetok Garrison Forces. Although Hill retained control of the landing force until it was set up ashore, Watson was in overall command of the garrison contingent during the landings. Finding the necessary defense forces proved difficult. No extra occupation units had been included in the FLINTLOCK force, for neither the men nor the transports were available. "When the decision was made to capture Eniwetok without waiting for additional forces," Admiral Turner remarked, "we had to rob both Kwajalein Island and Roi-Namur of considerable proportions of their garrisons and carry them forward in order to start the more urgent development of the new base."²¹ The Marine 10th Defense Battalion, the Army 3d Defense Battalion, and the Army 47th Engineers formed the nucleus of the hastily formed Eniwetok garrison.

INTELLIGENCE

"Before departure from Hawaii our information concerning Eniwetok was scanty," commented Admiral Turner, "we had only a few high altitude photographs . . . and our maritime charts were of small scale made from

ancient surveys."²² Navigational charts, current enough to be considered secret by the Japanese, were captured during the Kwajalein operation. Gradually the photographic coverage was expanded, and the enemy order of battle began to emerge.

A complete aerial mosaic of Eniwetok Atoll would disclose a vast lagoon, which measures 17 by 21 miles, enclosed by a ring of islands and reefs. Both principal entrances to this lagoon, Wide Passage just west of Eniwetok Island and Deep Passage between Parry and Japtan, lie along its southern rim. The largest of the 30-odd islands in the atoll are Eniwetok, Parry, Japtan, and Engebi farther to the north. (See Map 12.)

In its study dated 20 January 1944, JICPOA reported an airstrip, fortifications, and large buildings on Engebi. An installation believed to be a radio direction finder was plotted on the map of Parry, and the stretch of Eniwetok Island bore the legend "no known defenses."²³ Within a few weeks, Admiral Nimitz' intelligence officers were offering more disturbing news.

Late in January, JICPOA noted that a mobile unit of the Japanese Army, some 4,000 men, had sailed eastward from Truk. The strength of the Eniwetok garrison, once reported as 700 men concentrated on Engebi Island, was revised drastically upward. By 10 February, enemy strength throughout the atoll was placed at 2,900-4,000 men. "These estimates are made without the advantage of late photo-

²² *Ibid.*

²³ JICPOA InfoBul No. 3-44, Eniwetok, dtd 20Jan44.

²¹ *Turner ltr II.*

graphs," JICPOA explained. "Good photographs should be able to settle the question of the presence of such a large body of troops and furnish a more reliable basis of estimation."²⁴

The photographs for which JICPOA awaited were taken while FLINTLOCK was in progress. Photo interpreters examined every shadow but discovered few signs of enemy activity. On Engebi, already considered the hub of the enemy defenses, the garrison had improved and extended its network of trenches and foxholes. A few foxholes dug near a collection of storehouses were the only indication that Parry was defended. Eniwetok Island bore the scars of about 50 freshly dug foxholes, and other signs indicated that a small number of Japanese occupied its southwestern tip. In short, the last-minute intelligence belied the presence of a large concentration of troops. Both Parry and Eniwetok Islands appeared weakly held. Whatever strength the enemy had seemed to be massed on Engebi.

TACTICAL AND LOGISTICAL PLANS

The CATCHPOLE plan, prepared in the light of the intelligence available to Admiral Hill and General Watson, bore certain similarities to FLINTLOCK. The operation was divided into four phases, the first of which was the capture of three islands adjacent to Engebi. On 17 February, D-Day, the VAC Reconnaissance Company was to seize CAMELLIA (Aitsu) and CANNA (Rujioru) Islands southeast

of Engebi, while the scouts of Company D, 4th Tank Battalion, took ZINNIA (Bogon) northwest of Engebi. Army and Marine artillery batteries would then land at CANNA and CAMELLIA to support the next phase. On 18 February, the second phase of CATCHPOLE was to begin as the 22d Marines stormed lagoon beaches of Engebi. Two objectives, Eniwetok Island and Parry, were included in phase III. As soon as it was certain that additional troops would not be needed at Engebi, the 106th Infantry was to assault Eniwetok Island.²⁵ The Army objective was considered so poorly defended that the understrength regiment was directed to prepare to move on to Parry within two hours after the Eniwetok landing. Both regiments were scheduled to see action during phase IV, the securing of the remaining islands of the atoll.

Naval gunfire also was to follow a schedule similar to that employed in the Kwajalein landings. On D-Day, destroyers and LCIs were to support operations against the lesser islands, while battleships, cruisers, and other destroyers shelled Engebi from positions outside the lagoon. During the afternoon, two of the battleships would enter the lagoon and assist in shattering the enemy's defenses. On D plus 1, the supporting warships were to de-

²⁴ *TF 51.11 OpRpt*, p. 1.

²⁵ The 106th Infantry commander wanted to land artillery on the island opposite Eniwetok, across Wide Passage, but "Hill and Watson said 'no,' as they did not feel that it was warranted since it would take a day out of the schedule to get set up and that there were not enough signs of a garrison on the island to warrant the move." *Hill interview/comments Marshalls*.

stroy beach defenses and other targets. Pausing only when aerial strikes were being executed, battleships, destroyers, and LCIs would hammer the beaches until the assault craft were 300 yards from Engebi's shore, then shift their fire to bombard for five minutes more the area on the left flank of the landing force. The plan called for a heavy cruiser to interdict enemy movement in the northern part of the island for an hour after the landing.

On the morning of the attack upon Eniwetok Island, which would take place as soon as possible after the securing of Engebi, Admiral Hill's cruisers and destroyers were to deliver some 80 minutes of preparatory fire. The heavy cruisers would rain down both destructive and interdictory fires for 30 minutes, then pause if the scheduled aerial attack was delivered. When the planes had departed, destroyers were to join the cruisers in shelling the island. In 25 minutes, after a second air attack, the close support phase was scheduled to begin, with the cruisers ceasing fire when the LVTs were 1,000 yards from the beach and the destroyers shifting to targets on the flanks when the assault waves were 300 yards from shore. The schedule for the Parry landing differed in that the bombardment would last 100 minutes and that a destroyer would join two cruisers in the 50-minute shelling that preceded the first air strike. At all the objectives, LCI(G)s and LVT(A)s were to assist in neutralizing the beach defenses.

Aerial support of the CATCHPOLE operation was scheduled to begin on D minus 1, when carrier planes attacked and also photographed the principal

islands in Eniwetok Atoll. On the following day, fighters, dive bombers, and torpedo bombers were to attack specified targets on Engebi no earlier than 0800 and no later than 0830. Naval gunfire would be lifted during the strike. Planes were to remain on station over the atoll in the event they were needed to support the day's operations. Any unscheduled strikes would be directed by the airborne coordinator and the Commander, Support Aircraft.

The schedule of strikes in support of the Engebi landing called for the planes to attack perpendicular to the beach 35 minutes before H-Hour. The strike had to be completed within 10 minutes, for naval guns and artillery pieces would resume firing at H minus 25. No definite timetable was prepared for the Eniwetok and Parry Island operations, but Admiral Hill indicated his intention of scheduling similar aerial attacks 50 and 25 minutes before the troops reached shore.

The 22d Marines, assault force for the Engebi landing, was directed to load its assigned LVTs with ammunition and water before the convoy sailed from Kwajalein Atoll. The tractors were to be carried to the target area in LSTs. Off the objective, the Marines would load in LCVPs, move to the LSTs, and there embark in the amphibious vehicles. LVT(A)s, manned like the troop carriers by Army crews, had the mission of helping neutralize the beaches and then supporting the advance inland by landing on the flanks of the assault battalions. The group reserve, provided for Engebi by the 106th Infantry, was to remain in

its transports and, if needed, transfer at sea from LCVPs to LVTs.

General Watson, faced with a series of landings, expected a great deal from his amphibian tractor unit. The 708th Provisional Amphibian Tractor Battalion, a composite Army command which included both armored and unarmored tractors, had a total of 119 vehicles. Of these, 17 were LVT(A) (1)s, 46 LVT(2)s, and 56 LVT(A) (2)s, which were simply LVT(2)s with improved armor. Since 8 to 10 tractors were assigned to each of the four or five waves required by each battalion, the 708th would be required to brave enemy fire time and again.

The method of control prescribed for CATCHPOLE differed little from the system used during the conquest of Kwajalein Atoll. Because of the shortage of LVTs, General Watson directed the amphibian tractor battalion commander to embark in the control vessel. After they had landed the assault troops, all LVTs were to report to this vessel. If reserves were needed ashore, the tractors could be routed to a transfer area behind the line of departure where the troops would load from LCVPs. The evacuation of the wounded was left to the supervision of the beachmaster, and a control officer embarked in an LCI was charged with directing empty supply craft to the proper ships.

DUKWs on loan from the 7th Infantry Division helped ease General Watson's supply problems. Firing batteries of both the 104th Field Artillery and 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion were to land on D-Day in amphibian trucks. When this task was finished, the DUKWs were to re-

port to certain of the LSTs to assist in unloading. Two pontoon causeways brought to the objective by Admiral Hill's transport group could be counted upon to speed the unloading of heavier equipment.

In comparison to the huge FLINT-LOCK expedition, Tactical Group 1 carried few supplies, but enough ammunition, water, food, and fuel were loaded to sustain the men, weapons, and machines for five days. The rations carried in the convoy included a two-day supply of types C and K along with one day's D rations. Once the atoll was secured, the stockpile of food was to be increased until there was a minimum of 60 days' B, 8 days' C or K, and 2 days' D rations on hand.

Since ammunition and water were loaded in the tractors of the assault waves, the build-up of supplies would begin at the moment the troops landed. General Watson also directed that boats, each one loaded with a different kind of item, begin collecting at the line of departure as the fourth wave was moving toward the island under attack. Every boat was to fly a particular flag to indicate whether it carried ammunition, rations, fuel, water, or medical supplies. Requests from shore were to be routed through the beachmaster's radio net to the group logistical control officer who would then direct the appropriate landing craft to the proper beach.

The shore party organization appeared to be the weakest part of the logistical scheme. Major John F. Schoettel, the Betio veteran who commanded the composite shore party unit, would have to rely on "low priority combat personnel" to augment his or-

ganization.²⁶ The additional men were to be provided by the battalion upon whose beach the shore party component was working.

Plans and preparations for CATCH-POLE had been completed in a remarkably brief time. Only five days elapsed between Admiral Nimitz' arrival at Kwajalein and General Watson's issuance of his basic operation order; two days later, Admiral Hill's order was dispatched. The enemy too had been busy, trying frantically to convert Eniwetok into a series of fortified islands.

*THE JAPANESE PREPARE*²⁷

The Japanese were slow to begin fortifying Eniwetok Atoll. The war against the United States had been raging for 11 months before 300 construction workers landed at Engebi Island to begin work on an airstrip. In December, 500 Korean laborers joined this original detachment. The runway was completed in mid-1943, and most of the men who built it promptly sailed for Kwajalein. Meanwhile, the first troops, a few sailors of the *61st Guard Force* who arrived from Kwajalein in January 1943, had established lookout stations on Eniwetok and Engebi Islands. By October 1943, a detachment from the Kwajalein guard force had come ashore to garrison the atoll.

Aerial photographs taken late in

²⁶ TG 1 SP Plan, dtd 10Feb44, Anx L to TG-1 OpO 2-44, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Additional sources for this section include: JICPOA Buls 89-44, Japanese Def of Eniwetok Atoll, dtd 12Jun44, and 88-44, 1st PhibBrig, Japanese Army, dtd 5Jun44.

December showed little activity at Eniwetok Atoll. At the time, Warrant Officer Masimori Osano, in command at the atoll guard detachment, had no more than 61 men at his disposal. He assigned 10 of these to man a picket boat, sent 5 to the lookout station on Eniwetok Island, and retained the rest on Engebi, where a total of three lookout posts had been established. To defend Engebi, he had a pair of 120mm guns with about 87 rounds of ammunition, machine guns, rifles, pistols, and hand grenades.

The airstrip itself lay idle until November, when it was pressed into service as a maintenance stop for planes being ferried westward. Accommodations had been built for more than 300 aviation officers and men, but fewer than 50 mechanics or other specialists were on hand by the end of 1943. Although the atoll appeared quiet to the intelligence officers who studied the earliest American photographs, Eniwetok soon would become the scene of hectic activity.

On 4 January 1944, the convoy carrying the *1st Amphibious Brigade* dropped anchor in Eniwetok lagoon to land 2,586 troops and 95 civilian employees of the unit. The brigade boasted three infantry battalions, each with its own mortar, artillery, and engineer components, plus automatic cannon, tank, engineer, signal, and medical units. One battalion reinforced by elements of the brigade signal, engineer, and medical detachments had been detached for service elsewhere in the Marshalls.

Under strict secrecy, this Army amphibious organization had been detached from the *Kwantung Army* in

Manchuria and routed to the Marshalls by way of Fusan in Korea, Saeki in the home islands, and finally Truk.²⁸ JICPOA had noted the arrival of the convoy at Truk but had been unable to track it farther eastward. Documents captured at Kwajalein and prisoner of war interrogations placed the bulk of the brigade at Eniwetok.

Major General Yoshima Nishida, the brigade commander, found the atoll almost defenseless, a condition he immediately began correcting. "We have been working without sleep or rest on the unloading,"²⁹ complained one of Nishida's men on the day after his arrival, but this back-breaking labor marked only the beginning of a hectic period of construction. The Japanese general inspected the atoll, dispatched garrisons to the various islands, and put the troops to work throwing up fortifications.

Additional help came on 13 January, when 200 Okinawan laborers, probably destined for Kwajalein, paused at Eniwetok. Nishida promptly put these men to work alongside the soldiers and the 200 or more Koreans who had remained behind when the airfield construction detachment was transferred. The mechanics and other aviation technicians on Engebi were probably of little help, for these men were in the process of being withdrawn. Evacuees from Kwajalein, however, temporarily swelled the numbers of the aviation unit, and when the American

warships entered the lagoon many were trapped on the atoll.³⁰

The general selected Parry as the site of his command post. Here he concentrated 1,115 combat troops and 232 civilians, aviation mechanics, laborers, and members of a naval survey party. The island garrison force was a 197-man rifle company supported by mortar crews, artillerymen, and engineers—305 men in all. Also present on the island was the brigade reserve, with which he could reinforce the other islands. Since an engineer and an anti-aircraft unit were deployed to Eniwetok Island prior to the American attack, the reserve numbered only 810 by D-Day. The two reserve rifle companies at Nishida's disposal were reinforced by tank, signal, medical, engineer, and automatic cannon units.

Although the enemy expended a tremendous effort to fortify Parry, he accomplished comparatively little. The Japanese, who lacked both time and heavy equipment, suffered from the effects of short rations and an unfamiliar climate. "In all units," wrote a Japanese who visited Parry, "there are many men suffering from exhaustion. The infirmary is full."³¹ The foxholes and trenches which the troops hastily gouged out of the island soil were not lined with rocks or logs, as were the few positions dug before the arrival of the brigade. Often a series of emplacements were linked to form a "spider web." The enemy would con-

²⁸ JICPOA Item No. 7811, Diary of 2dLt Kakino, hereafter *JICPOA Item 7811*.

²⁹ JICPOA Item No. 7603, Excerpts from a Diary of a Member of the 1st PhibBrig, hereafter *JICPOA Item 7603*.

³⁰ On D-Day over 200 such troops were stranded on Parry, Engebi, and Eniwetok Islands. All pilots en route westward from the outer Marshalls had already been evacuated.

³¹ *JICPOA Item 7603*.

struct a large log-protected bunker sunk close to the surface of the earth. Tunnels led from the shelter to an outlying ring of foxholes, and these holes also were connected by other tunnels. The log-roofed bunker itself and the open foxholes were concealed by strips of corrugated iron covered in turn with a layer of sand. The defenders might take refuge in the large shelters during a shelling, then deploy to the foxholes, lift the roofs and open fire. A spider web, carefully camouflaged, was scarcely visible from the ground, let alone from high-flying photographic planes. Although fortifications on Parry were weaker than the steel-and-concrete pillboxes found on other atolls, they were the best Nishida's men could prepare.

The next largest garrison was that on Engebi, where the general had stationed a rifle company and support elements, which included mortars, tanks, and artillery. In addition to the 692 soldiers from the brigade, Engebi boasted 44 members of *61st Guard Force*, and 540 laborers, civilians, and support troops. The existing 120mm guns were incorporated into the defensive scheme, as were the few poor-quality pillboxes. The garrison, however, dug new trenches and foxholes along the lagoon coast.

The Eniwetok Island force consisted of a 779-man composite unit provided by General Nishida plus 24 civilians and 5 lookouts from the naval guard force. This smallest of the atoll garrisons had dug the most durable entrenchments. Mines were planted, and work on a system of concrete pillboxes was begun but never completed.

General Nishida clung to the Japa-

nese tactical doctrine of destroying the invader at the beaches. "If the enemy lands, make use of the positions you are occupying during the daytime," he directed. "Endeavor to reduce losses, and at night strike terror into the enemy's heart by charges and destroy his will to fight."³² Colonel Toshio Yano, in command at Engebi, was convinced the Americans would enter the lagoon, seize islands adjacent to the one he was charged with defending, and then storm the lagoon beaches. In keeping with Nishida's overall plan, the colonel ordered his garrison to "lure the enemy to the water's edge and then annihilate him with withering fire power and continuous attacks."³³

The Japanese, most of their defensive installations undetected by American cameras, awaited Watson's soldiers and Marines. Including the crews of stranded vessels, Nishida's force totaled approximately 3,500 men. Not all were trained for combat, but each of them, with the possible exception of the Korean and Okinawan laborers, would fight to the death.

PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS³⁴

The first carrier strikes against Eniwetok Atoll were delivered in conjunction with the FLINTLOCK operation, for the Engebi field had to be

³² JICPOA Item No. 6637, 1st PhibBrig Plans for Defending Eniwetok Atoll, dtd 28Dec43.

³³ JICPOA Item No. 7539, 3d PhibBn OpO A-38, dtd 10Feb44.

³⁴ Additional sources for this section include: Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*; Crowl and Love, *The Gilberts and Marshalls*.

neutralized to prevent enemy planes from refueling there to bomb the Kwajalein task force. On 30 January, the Americans destroyed the 15 medium bombers based at Engebi and sunk several small craft in Eniwetok lagoon. Between 1 and 7 February, additional raids battered the objective, and the planes returned on the 11th and 13th. These earlier attacks leveled most of the structures built above ground on the various islands. The preparatory strikes began on 16 February, as Admiral Hill's ships neared the lagoon.

Life for the enemy garrison was hell on earth. "When such a small island as Engebi is hit by about 130 bombs a day, and, having lost its ammunition and provisions, lies helpless, it is no wonder that some soldiers have gone out of their minds." The island defenders, this same diarist admitted, were surviving on a single ball of rice each day, for their food had to be sent from Parry in outriggers under cover of darkness. The soldier thought of his family seated at dinner somewhere in Japan: ". . . my family's joy helps me to bear these hardships, when I realize that it is because of just such hardships as these I am now suffering that they are able to eat their rice cakes in peace."³⁵

Conditions were not quite so desperate on Parry, where an occasional issue of rice wine spiced the reduced rations, nor on Eniwetok Island, but the Japanese knew that death was fast approaching. Lieutenant Kakino of the Parry garrison read somber portents in a raid of 12 February. "We cele-

brated the anniversary of the coronation of the Emperor Jimmu, this fourth year of our holy war, under enemy air attack. There must be some meaning for us in that."³⁶

While the defenders of Eniwetok Atoll dug and wondered, American forces were attempting to isolate the objective. Army bombers attacked the eastern Carolines, concentrating on Ponape and Kusaie. The most dangerous of the Japanese bases, however, appeared to be Truk, 669 miles southwest of Eniwetok. This enemy Gibraltar of the Pacific was to be neutralized by Task Force 58, commanded during this action by Admiral Spruance himself.

On 17 February, D-Day at Eniwetok, carrier planes began a 2-day hammering of Truk. The aviators sank 2 auxiliary cruisers, a destroyer, 2 submarine tenders, an aircraft ferry, 6 tankers, and 17 merchantmen, a total of about 200,000 tons of shipping. Over 200 Japanese aircraft were damaged or destroyed. The blow at Truk also included a series of one-sided surface actions in which Spruance's battleships, cruisers, and destroyers sank a light cruiser, a destroyer, a trawler, and a submarine chaser. The larger units of the Imperial Navy had left Truk prior to the raid.

Tactical Group 1, without the benefit of last-minute rehearsals, boarded the transports of Admiral Hill's task group and on 15 February set sail for Eniwetok. The voyage proved uneventful; neither enemy planes nor submarines tried to contest Hill's approach. In the morning darkness of

³⁵ JICPOA Item 7603.

³⁶ JICPOA Item 7811.

17 February, a soldier on Parry Island looked up and "from the sea toward the east . . . saw a light and heard something like airplane motors." As daybreak approached, warships began shelling the atoll. "I thought to myself," he

wrote in his diary, "that finally what must come has come."³⁷ The battle for Eniwetok had begun.

³⁷ JICPOA Item No. 7005, Diary of WO Shionaya, hereafter *JICPOA Item 7005*.