

The CATCHPOLE Operation

*CATCHPOLE AND THE LESSER MARSHALLS*¹

During the early morning of 17 February, an air alarm sounded on Parry Island, and as the defenders sought cover, naval shells came screaming into the island. The bombardment reached its height shortly after sunrise, or so it seemed to the enemy. At 0915, the Japanese watched Hill's bombardment group steam boldly into the lagoon to continue their firing. American planes joined in the action, so that the enemy garrison had no respite from the deluge of explosives. "There were one man killed and four wounded in our unit during today's fighting," noted one of the defenders. "There were some who were buried by shells from the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TG 51.11 OpRpt*; VAC Cmts on *TG 1 SAR*, dtd 1Apr44; VAC NGF Rpt on CATCHPOLE Op, dtd 17Mar44; *TG 1 SAR*, including TG 1 Rpt of Atk on Eniwetok Atoll, dtd 27Feb44; *TG 1 SplRpt*, including VAC ReconCo AR, n.d., Co D (Sct), 4th TkBn AR, n.d., and SplRpt of Casualties and Prisoners, dtd 23Feb44; TG 1 URpts, 1800, 16Feb44-1800, 23Feb44; TG 1 Jnl, 4Nov43-23Feb44, hereafter *TG 1 Jnl*; 22d Mar WarD 1Jan-29Feb44; 1/22 Rpt on FLINTLOCK [actually CATCHPOLE] Op, n.d.; 2/22 Rec of Events, Feb44; 3/22 Rpt on CATCHPOLE Op, dtd 10Apr44, Encl to Capt Buenos A. W. Young ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar53; Heint and Crown, *The Marshalls*; Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*.

ships, but we survived by taking care in the light of past experience. How many times must we bury ourselves in the sand?"²

To American eyes, the hammering of Parry, Engebi, Japtan, and Eniwetok Islands was equally impressive. After 28 moored mines, the first encountered in Central Pacific operations, had been cleared from Wide Passage, Hill's landing ships entered the lagoon. At the same time, the heavy vessels of the task group were passing through Deep Passage, whose current, Hill's staff had judged, was too swift to allow moored mines.³ "To see the force enter this lagoon in column through a narrow entrance and between the shores of islands on either flank, and steam something over 20 miles through the enemy lagoon was," in the words of Admiral Hill's operations officer, "one of the most thrilling episodes which I witnessed during the entire war."⁴

The expedition had gained entry to Eniwetok lagoon without opposition from hostile batteries, although the big ships passed within 200 yards of Parry. Once the maneuver had been completed, a veil of tension was lifted from the task group. Ashore, however, the enemy realized that the decisive

² *JICPOA Item 7005*.

³ *Hill interview/comments Marshalls*.

⁴ Capt Claude V. Ricketts, USN, ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar53.

moment had come. General Nishida reported the entry of the task group to Tokyo and futilely requested reinforcements.⁵

THE PRELIMINARY LANDINGS

While the battleships were concentrating their fire against the larger islands, the destroyers *Heermann* and *McCord* bombarded CAMELLIA and CANNA. As the Marines of the VAC Reconnaissance Company were preparing to transfer from the APD *Kane* to the LST that carried their six amphibian tractors, word came of a change in plans. The boats carrying the company followed these latest instructions and shaped courses toward *LST 29*. There the unit learned that the original scheme was still in effect, so off the company went to *LST 272*, the ship first prescribed in its orders. (See Map 12.)

Two LCIs supported Captain Jones' command as it headed toward CAMELLIA and CANNA. Jones, with two other officers and 57 men, landed on CAMELLIA at 1320 and promptly reported that neither Japanese nor natives were on the island. The only difficulty was that encountered by two of the Army-manned LVTs, which had a hard time plowing through the sand beyond the beach. A similar group, 4 officers and 57 men, landed 10 minutes later on CANNA. This second island yielded 25 natives but no Japanese.

Captain Jones found the villagers to be friendly, cooperative, and in possession of what proved to be fairly accurate information. He forwarded to

⁵ *Ibid.*, citing a message intercept.

General Watson the natives' estimate that 1,000 combat troops guarded each of three major objectives of Tactical Group 1. An additional 1,000 laborers were believed located on Engebi.

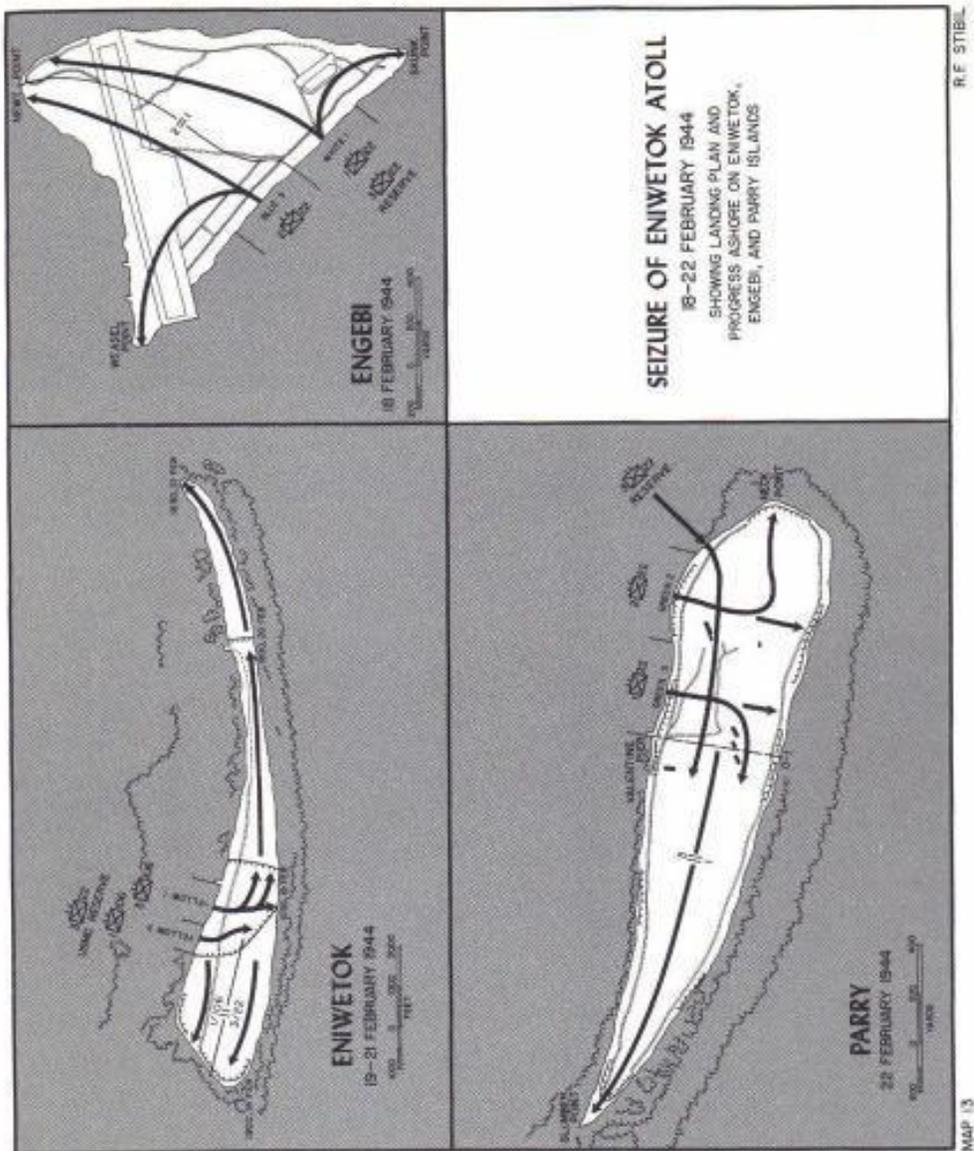
The reconnaissance company now began investigating other islands southeast of Engebi. Five landings were made, but no Japanese were encountered. While Jones' Marines were patrolling, artillery units began landing on CAMELLIA and CANNA.

The reconnaissance and survey party sent by the 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion to CAMELLIA found the island covered with undergrowth but lost little time in selecting firing positions. General Watson, however, feared that the battalion would land too late to register before dark, for the 104th Artillery, bound for CANNA, was making better progress. Actually, both battalions were ashore in time to complete registration by 1902.⁶

While the artillery units were selecting base points and check points as well as plotting harassing fires for the evening of D-Day, underwater demolition teams, screened by naval gunfire, were examining the beaches off Engebi. Leaping from LVTs when the tractors were about 100 yards from the lagoon coast, the Navy men swam to within 50 yards of the shoreline. They located no artificial obstacles on either Blue or White Beach. (See Map 13.)

In the last operation planned for D-Day, Tactical Group 1 ordered the 4th Marine Division scout company to seize ZINNIA, just west of Engebi.

⁶ LtGen Thomas E. Watson ltr to CMC, dtd 1Mar53; MajGen John T. Walker ltr to CMC, dtd 3Apr53, hereafter *Walker ltr.*



In the darkness, the scouts, buffeted by a 25-mile wind and 8-foot waves, were unable to paddle to the island for which they were aiming.⁷ A landing on a neighboring islet gave them an opportunity to reach their original objective, and at 0327 ZINNIA was in American hands. Now the Japanese could not prolong the battle by retreating from island to island. The first phase of CATCHPOLE came to a successful close. The invaders had suffered no losses and encountered no opposition.

THE ATTACK ON ENGEBI

General Watson's plan for 18 February designated 1/22, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Walfried H. Fromhold, and 2/22, under Lieutenant Colonel Donn C. Hart, to storm Engebi, while Major Clair W. Shisler's 3/22 remained in reserve. The 1st Battalion was to seize Beach White 1, immediately to the right of a pier that jutted into the lagoon from the southern shore of the triangular-shaped island. Blue 3, objective of the 2d Battalion, lay just to the left of the pier. The boundary between battalions followed the trail that led northward from the pier to a junction with a second trail. The boundary followed the left fork to the vicinity of the airstrip and then curved slightly toward Newt Point, the terrain feature farthest from the landing beaches. (See Map 13.)

Both assault battalions were reinforced for the operation. The 2d Sep-

arate Tank Company⁸ and an Army platoon of two self-propelled 105mm guns were kept under regimental control. Also, the Marine pack howitzers and the Army 105mm howitzers were to support Colonel Walker's regiment.

Since most of the runway lay within Hart's zone of action, his unit would advance across comparatively open terrain. Shattered buildings just inland of the beaches and a stand of coconut trees near Newt Point were the principal obstacles in the path of 2/22. Most of the enemy troops were located in the 1st Battalion zone in the large coconut grove near the center of the island. Permanent pillboxes had been built at the three corners of the objective, and entrenchments were scattered all along the coastline.

On D-Day, the Engebi garrison had received a severe battering from bombs and naval shells. "One of our ammunition dumps was hit and went up with a terrifying explosion," read the final diary entry of one of the island defenders. "At 1300 the ammunition depot of the artillery in the palm forest caught fire and exploded, and a conflagration started in the vicinity of the western positions."⁹ During the night, Army and Marine field artillery batteries harassed the weary Japanese, and at 0655 on 18 February the fire-

⁸ This unit was equipped with medium tanks obtained from the Army. In six weeks, the Marine crews painted, water-proofed, and otherwise modified the vehicles—in addition to undergoing training. Maj Robert S. Reinhardt, Jr. ltr to CMC, dtd 18Mar53, hereafter *Reinhardt ltr.*

⁹ JICPOA Item No. 8200, Extracts from the Diary of Norio Miyada.

⁷ Col Edward L. Katzenbach, Jr., ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 25Sep62.

support ships began their final bombardment. W-Hour was scheduled for 0845.

Reveille sounded for the 22d Marines at 0400. As the naval guns were flaying Engebi, the two artillery battalions fired their planned concentrations, and Colonel Walker's Marines transferred to vehicles manned by the provisional amphibian tractor battalion. Planes from the escort carrier group delivered their 10-minute strike at about 0800. Midway through the aerial attack, the first assault waves crossed the line of departure, and when the planes had made their final run over the objective, the warships resumed firing.

The boat landing plan called for the tractors to employ a formation similar to that used at Kwajalein Island. The LVTs formed a W in the wake of the LCIs, with the troop carriers at its base and five of the LVT(A)s on each of the projecting wings. At the base of the formation, between the two battalions, were seven additional armored amphibians.

As the 22d Marines bored through the waves, the LCIs hammered the beaches with 40mm shells. Unfortunately, the rockets launched from the gunboats to neutralize the coastal defenses fell short and exploded in the surf. Smoke and dust obscured the vision of tractor drivers and caused some vehicles to wander from course. Mechanical failures, not surprising since the same LVTs had taken part in the several phases of the southern Kwajalein operation, also slowed the first wave of 1/22. In spite of these difficulties, the first of the tractors

reached Engebi some two minutes before the scheduled W-Hour.¹⁰

The armored amphibians and the first wave of tractors were to have advanced inland to a road that ran parallel to the lagoon coast, but fallen coconut trees and other debris stalled the vehicles. They were able, however, to support the advance by firing from positions just across the beaches. Although the attack lost some of its initial momentum, the enemy remained too dazed from the effects of the preliminary bombardment to contain the Marines.¹¹

On the right of the pier, Fromhold's 1st Battalion advanced with Company B on the left and Company A on the right. Behind them, Company C thrust toward Skunk Point in an effort to secure the southeastern corner of the island. During the movement to White 1, the LVTs carrying one platoon of Company A had broken down, so that unit was late in landing. The platoon hurried into position, but as the battalion swept inland, a gap opened between Companies A and C, an opening which the Japanese discovered by accident.

Under relentless pressure from Company C, many of the defenders of Skunk Point sought to escape northward. In doing so, they found themselves within the gap and in position to fire into the exposed flank of Company A. Since this unit was just entering the tangled undergrowth of the coconut grove, an area riddled with spider web

¹⁰ *Walker ltr*; Capt William G. Wendell, Notes of Interview with LtCol Walfried H. Fromhold, n.d., hereafter *Fromhold interview*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

defenses, it could do little to protect its dangling flank. The battalion commander checked the advance of Companies A and B until a platoon of tanks could be dispatched to the scene.¹²

On the opposite side of the pier, Hart's 2/22 thrust rapidly inland after a somewhat confused landing. Although a few tractors had landed as much as 200 yards out of position, junior officers and noncommissioned officers quickly led their men to the proper zones. As soon as order had been restored, the advance got underway.

Companies E and F spearheaded the attack of 2/22. These Marines paused at the nearer edge of the runway while artillery concentrations blanketed the area in front of them. Elements of the 2d Separate Tank Company joined, and when the barrage lifted, both armor and infantry plunged forward. The arrival of the Marine armor proved fortunate, for the Japanese were using light tanks as makeshift pillboxes in this area. Although the enemy tanks were firing from earthen emplacements, they could not survive American shells.

Once the Japanese armor had been silenced, the Marines dashed rapidly toward the opposite shore, bypassing many knots of enemy resistance. Fifteen Japanese were killed attempting to flee across the level ground. A handful of men of Company F reached the coast approximately 300 yards east of Weasel Point, the southwestern tip of Engebi. When this was reported to Major Robert P. Felker, the battalion executive officer, he exclaimed: "My

¹² *Fromhold interview.*

gosh, Fox Company is trying to take the whole island." ¹³ By 1030, when Colonel Walker came ashore, resistance in the 2d Battalion zone was confined to Weasel and Newt Points.

The news which the regimental commander received from the other battalion was not quite so encouraging. Company A, receiving severe fire from the wooded area to its front and from the Japanese within the gap on its right, lacked enough men to push onward. When contact with Company C had been broken, one platoon of Company A had become separated from its parent unit.¹⁴ In addition, the company had been suffering light casualties throughout the morning, and this steady attrition gradually sapped its strength. Since 3/22 was already ashore on White 1, one of its rifle companies was attached to 1/22. Fromhold ordered the fresh unit, Company I, to prepare to pass through Company A.¹⁵

While tanks were assisting a part of Company C in sealing the gap, Company B continued its advance. To keep the attack moving, Fromhold ordered Company I forward and directed the remnants of Company A to mop up. The task facing Company I was grim, for the ground to its front was covered by dense underbrush and fallen trees which screened a series of open trenches and spider web emplacements.

These positions were extremely difficult to locate, for the defenders had

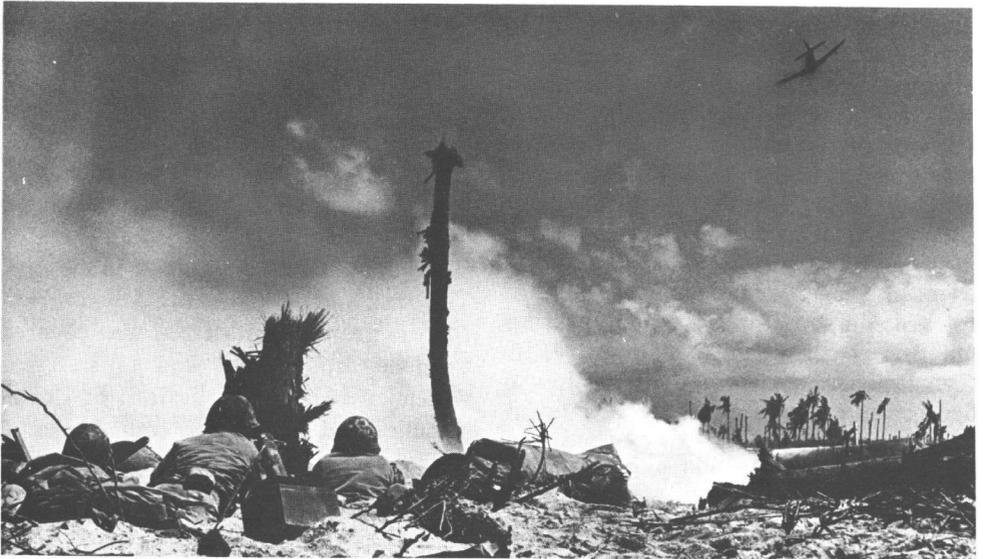
¹³ *Reinhardt ltr.*

¹⁴ LtCol Glenn E. Martin memo to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 12Mar53, Subj: Eniwetok.

¹⁵ *Fromhold interview.*



THREE WAVES of 22d Marines assault troops approach Engebi as smoke and dust from the preliminary bombardment drifts across landing lanes. (USMC A411182)



NAVY FIGHTER PLANE attacks enemy positions ahead of Marines during the fighting at Eniwetok Atoll. (USCG 26-WA-6G-8)

placed pieces of driftwood over their foxholes and the firing ports of their bunkers. The Japanese could push open these "doors" without exposing themselves to Marine riflemen. If a sniper was spotted, he would retreat into the underground maze connecting the several holes that made up a spider web. The attacking Marines soon hit upon a method of destroying completely these underground defenses. When the bunker at the center of the web had been located, a member of the assault team would hurl a smoke grenade inside. Although this type of missile did no harm to the Japanese within, it released a cloud of vapor which rolled through the tunnels and escaped around the loose-fitting covers of the foxholes. Once the outline of the web was known, the bunker and all its satellite positions could be shattered with demolitions.¹⁶ In this way, Fromhold's command punched its way forward.

Near Skunk Point, however, 1/22 encountered concrete pillboxes which were the key to the enemy defenses around the southeastern corner of the island. Two self-propelled 105mm guns from the 106th Infantry Cannon Company, weapons originally sent to the aid of Company A, were withdrawn upon request of Company C and sent to deal with the heavy fortifications. The self-propelled guns fired almost their entire day's allowance of ammunition, 80 rounds, in order to destroy two pillboxes, one of which sheltered 25 to 30 Japanese.

Effective as they were, the self-propelled 105s were not especially popular

with the infantry units which they supported. "They made a very inviting target for mortar and other small arms," commented a veteran of the Skunk Point fighting, "and, consequently, were not a very comforting thing to have around."¹⁷ The 105s, though, had revenge on their Japanese tormentors, for during the afternoon they wiped out an enemy mortar crew.

While 1/22 was battling to secure its portion of Engebi Island, 2/22 overran Weasel Point and that part of Newt Point to the left of the battalion boundary. Both were reported in American hands at 1310, but the fight for the northern corner of the island had been bitter. Woods and undergrowth concealed a maze of underground positions from which enemy riflemen claimed many victims.

General Watson landed at 1400 and 50 minutes later declared that Engebi was secured. Six minutes later, 1/22 reported that Skunk Point had been overrun; only the right-hand portion of Newt Point remained in Japanese hands. The general then ordered 3/22 and the 2d Separate Tank Company to reembark for the Eniwetok Island operation. These units began loading at 1700. Although Company I was thus withdrawn from his control, Fromhold's Companies A and B secured the remainder of Newt Point by 1830.

While the battle for Engebi was raging, the reconnaissance and scout companies continued their exploration of the nearby islands. The two units made a total of eight landings, captur-

¹⁶ Martin memo, *op. cit.*; Walker ltr.

¹⁷ Maj Thomas D. Scott ltr to CMC, n.d., hereafter *Scott ltr.*

ing in the process one Japanese soldier. Machine gun fire wounded three members of the contingent sent to ARBUTUS (Muzinbaarikku),¹⁸ but the bullets were proved to be "overs" aimed at the enemy on Skunk Point.

As night descended upon Eniwetok atoll, General Watson and his staff issued necessary modifications to the group operation order. After analyzing the latest information, stories told by natives that indicated the presence of 1,000 men and a captured brigade document listing a 600-man garrison, the group commander alerted Colonel Ayers' 106th Infantry to prepare for the following day's attack against Eniwetok Island. The regiment would land two battalions abreast instead of in a column of battalions as originally planned. Neither component of the 106th was to be withdrawn until the objective was secured. The general attached 3/22 and the group tank company to reinforce the Army unit. Once this objective had been captured, the composite regiment was to get ready for the Parry operation. Although casualty figures were not complete, fragmentary reports indicated that the 22d Marines had lost 64 killed, 158 wounded, and 81 missing during the Engebi battle. Since the 3d Battalion had committed only one company on 18 February, its losses would not prevent its subsequent use at Eniwetok Island.

While General Watson looked ahead to phase III, Lieutenant Colonels

Fromhold and Hart could view the afternoon's action with satisfaction. The swift overrunning of the island did not leave "the enemy an opportunity to reorganize resistance."¹⁹ There were plenty of individual Japanese who had been bypassed, but they had no semblance of organization. According to the Task Group 1 report, "isolated snipers and pillboxes and Japanese who were in underground shelters" survived the day's fighting. "These positions," the report continued, "were methodically reduced."²⁰ To those who remained on Engebi on the night of 18-19 February, the surviving enemy seemed far from isolated.

Under cover of night, the Japanese crept from their underground shelters and opened fire with grenade dischargers, rifles, and automatic weapons. Those who had lost their weapons helped themselves to the Japanese and American rifles, grenades, and ammunition that lay scattered throughout the island.²¹ As one Marine officer phrased it, "snipers and by-passed areas made movement to and from the front lines exceedingly difficult and resulted in many enemy contacts and a generally uncomfortable first night. . . ." ²² On 19 February, after a formal flag raising, demolition teams and flamethrower operators from the group engineer unit joined the infantry in the systematic destruction of the stubborn Japanese. Over 1,200 Japanese, Okinawans, and Koreans

¹⁸ BGen Donn C. Hart ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 13Nov62.

¹⁹ TG 1 Rpt, p. 5, in *TG 1 SAR*.

²⁰ *Fromhold interview*.

²¹ LtCol John P. Lanigan memo to LtCol John A. Crown, n.d., Subj: Eniwetok.

¹⁸ One of these men died as a result of his wounds en route from the beach to the hospital ship. LtCol Merwin H. Silverthorn, Jr., ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 12Sep62.

were on Engebi when the battle began; only 19 of them surrendered.

PHASE III: ENIWETOK ISLAND

The objective selected for 19 February, Eniwetok Island, is shaped like a war club, its heavy end resting against Wide Passage. The long axis of the island extends from the lagoon entrance northeastward toward neighboring Parry. At Y-Hour, 0900, Colonel Ayers' soldiers were to storm Beaches Yellow 1 and Yellow 2 on the lagoon coast at the thicker end of the club. On the right, 1/106, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Winslow Cornett, was to cross to the farther shore, then secure that portion of the island between the beachhead and Wide Passage. Lieutenant Colonel Harold I. Mizony's 3/106 would thrust to the ocean coast and then use one company to defend the left flank of the beachhead. The remainder of Mizony's command was to remain inland of the Yellow Beaches, ready to assist Cornett's battalion. When the wider portion of the island had been overrun, Cornett faced the task of attacking through Mizony's blocking position with one rifle company and securing the remainder of the objective. The regimental reserve, Shisler's 3/22, was directed to remain afloat off the Yellow Beaches in the event it was needed. The 104th Field Artillery was to land as promptly as possible, move into position, and register to support the Parry landing, an operation tentatively scheduled to begin as soon as Eniwetok Island had come under American control. (See Map 13.)

During phases I and II, Eniwetok Island was battered by bombs and shells. As early as D-Day, one of the garrison soldiers had admitted that "If such raids keep up, they will intimidate us. . . ." ²⁸ The ordeal continued, but the defenders of Eniwetok were not forced to endure as heavy a weight of high explosives as was showered on Engebi and Parry. None of the battleships turned their guns upon Eniwetok; the cruisers and destroyers fired 1,094 8-inch rounds and 4,348 of 5-inch. These shells struck in an area of approximately 130 acres. In contrast, Engebi, some 220 acres, had shuddered under 497 16-inch, 954 14-inch, 673 8-inch, and 4,641 5-inch projectiles. Parry would receive an even heavier bombardment. Although the pounding which the defenders of Eniwetok Island dreaded so intensely was continued into the morning of D plus 2, the garrison, as events would prove, was far from intimidated.

The timetable which Tactical Group 1 was striving to follow imposed a special hardship on the 2d Separate Tank Company, the LCMs assigned to it, and the LSD *Ashland* from which the landing craft operated. Because maneuvering the *Ashland* in the darkness was believed too dangerous, the LCMs, guided by a submarine chaser, were directed to carry the rearmed and refueled tanks from Engebi to Eniwetok Island. Admiral Hill twice postponed Y-Hour to give the armor ample time in which to complete the 25-mile voyage, and the LCMs arrived by 0900,

²⁸ JICPOA Item No. 6808, excerpts from the Diary of Cpl Masamichi Kitama.

the time originally fixed for the landings.²⁴

The bombardment and aerial strikes were executed according to schedule, and at 0909 Hill ordered the two battalions of the 106th Infantry to cross the line of departure. The soldiers gained the Yellow Beaches at 0916. Armored amphibians, ordered to move 100 yards inland, thundered forward a short distance and were halted by a 9-foot embankment. The infantrymen scrambled from their LVTs, some of which had landed out of position, and found themselves confronted by an intricate network of spider webs similar to that which 1/22 had encountered on Engebi.

Mizony's 3/106 had the easier going, for by 1030 a part of one company had reached the ocean shore. In spite of admonitions from General Watson to "push your attack" and "clear beaches,"²⁵ Colonel Ayers' troops could make little progress elsewhere in the regimental zone. By noon, the 106th Infantry had won a beachhead that extended from the left flank of Yellow 1 directly across the island, included some 250 yards of the ocean coastline, and then meandered in an irregular fashion toward the right flank of Yellow 2.

A stubborn enemy, a series of defenses that emerged undamaged from the preliminary bombardment, plus the inadequate rehearsal and lack of amphibious experience combined to rob the regimental attack of its momentum. The Japanese were quick to seize this opportunity to strike back. Lieuten-

ant Colonel Masahiro Hashida withdrew about half of his command into the defensive network dug near the southwestern corner of the island and sent the other half creeping through the underbrush toward Cornett's battalion. Early in the afternoon, 300-400 Japanese leaped up and hit 1/106 on both sides of the trail that ran parallel to the lagoon shoreline.

Although the enemy had the twin advantages of surprise and accurate mortar fire, his penetrations of the American line were short-lived. The fighting was bitter and brief; by 1245 the soldiers had beaten off the Japanese. Cornett's troops, however, reported 63 casualties. Hashida's thrust had been vigorous enough to convince Colonel Ayers that a single battalion could not overrun the southwestern end of the island. Since he had already ordered Mizony's battalion to attack instead of remaining on the defensive as planned, the regimental commander had no choice but to commit his reserve. Major Shisler was directed to land 3/22 during the afternoon, relieve a portion of Cornett's unit, and assume responsibility for the left half of the island. The Marine unit also was charged with maintaining lateral contact during the attack. At approximately 1515, the two battalions began advancing toward Hashida's redoubt.

As daylight waned, Shisler's troops collided with a series of log emplacements carefully hidden in the dense underbrush. These positions had survived naval shells and were impervious to damage from mortar rounds. Marine infantrymen and engineers finally killed or at least stunned the

²⁴ USS *Ashland* Eniwetok AR, dtd 3May44.

²⁵ TG 1 Jnl, msgs nos. 6 and 8, 18-19Feb44.

defenders with bursts from flame-throwers and with satchel charges. Shisler continued to press the attack, but progress was slow.

Across the battalion boundary, which was a line drawn on a map rather than a recognizable terrain feature, 1/106 plodded onward. Cornett's troops lagged a short distance behind the Marines, so a gap soon was opened between the units. To the rear, elements of the 104th Artillery were beginning to come ashore.

Ayers, having experienced a counter-attack earlier in the day, was determined to prevent the Japanese from striking again under cover of darkness. At 1850 the regimental commander informed all battalions that they were to "advance until you have reached the end of island. Call for illumination when necessary."²⁶ At dusk, as the artillery was beginning to register from positions to the rear, a few of the six light tanks attached to the 106th Infantry that had landed at 1745, reported for orders at Shisler's command post.²⁷

When the commander of 3/22 told the officer in charge of the tanks that the attack was to continue throughout the night, the leader of the armored unit, knowing his vehicles were ineffective in the dark, ordered

²⁶ 106th Inf UJnl, msg dtd 1850, 19Feb44 (WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

²⁷ Some of the information concerning the actions of 3/22 on the night of 19 February comes from an interview with LtCol Clair W. Shisler, extracts from which are printed in Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*, pp. 140-141. The present location of the transcript of this interview is not known.

them to the rear.²⁸ Since the tanks would be of no help and the illumination of this portion of the battlefield had not yet begun, Shisler ordered his battalion to defend from its present positions. On the right, however, 1/106 kept plodding along, advancing through an area pockmarked with covered foxholes.

At 1945, Cornett reported that his battalion was in contact with Shisler's Marines, but as the Army unit moved forward, contact once again was broken. By 0333, Cornett's command occupied a 3-company perimeter at the tip of the island along the lagoon coast. The commander of 1/106 indicated that his unit was on line with the adjacent battalion.²⁹ Actually the Marine flank lay over 100 yards to the left rear of the Army position.

Throughout the night, the Marine battalion fought off sporadic attempts at infiltration. When the skies grew light enough, they looked to their right and were startled to discover that the Army battalion had vanished. The soldiers had executed an order which one of Holland Smith's planners, an Army colonel, later branded as "absurd."³⁰ Darkness prevented 1/106

²⁸ Capt Donald J. Myers ltr to CMC, dtd 28Feb53.

²⁹ 106th Inf UJnl, msgs dtd 1837 and 1945, 19Feb44.

³⁰ *Anderson ltr.* Colonel Anderson felt that the night attack had been launched as part of a "race" between the 106th Infantry and 22d Marines. But there are at least two views of every military decision. Colonel Ayers' executive officer pointed out that the night attack was intended to keep pressure on the Japanese and to give the enemy no "respite in which to reorganize and counterattack in force (the invariable Japanese reaction in every previous

from mopping up. Thus Hashida's remnants were able to enter the gap between battalions and, screened by the underbrush, deliver another blow. Thirty to 40 Japanese attacked Shisler's command post at about 0900 and for a time it looked as though its defenses would be shattered.

The enemy struck without warning and pressed his thrust with desperate fury. "In my opinion," wrote an eyewitness to the fight, "what would have been a complete rout for us was prevented by the initiative and resourcefulness of two men—Sergeant Major John L. Nagazyna and Captain Leighton Clark . . . who . . . got many men back on line by threatening, encouraging, cajoling, and dragging them back into position." Under this kind of leadership, the clerks, radiomen, and other specialists hurled back the Japanese. A detachment of riflemen, which arrived just as the enemy struck, helped stiffen the command post defenses. Marine losses in this furious action were 4 killed and 8 wounded among the command group. Since other units in the immediate vicinity also suffered casualties, the attackers may have killed as many as 10 Americans.³¹

Most of Hashida's troops now were fighting with their backs against Wide Passage. No longer was there any threat of a coordinated counterattack,

engagement)." In his opinion, had the attack not continued "the counterattack might well have been more effective," and that Colonel Ayers' "order was a logical application of available means (illumination and continued pressure) to counter a relatively certain Japanese reaction." Col Joseph J. Farley, AUS, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 20Oct62.

³¹ Young ltr, *op. cit.*

but the task of locating and killing these last stubborn defenders occupied most of the day. Again, self-propelled 105mm guns from the Army regiment proved their worth. By 1445, Marines and soldiers had overwhelmed this final pocket of resistance, and the southwestern end of the island was secured.

While 1/106 and 3/22 were fighting their way toward Wide Passage, Mizony's battalion was advancing toward the opposite end of the island. Like Cornett's unit, 3/106 attempted to continue its attack after darkness. The effort was soon frustrated, for "it was impossible to see the camouflaged holes, contact was poor, and the troops as a whole did not seem to have the confidence in themselves that was so apparent during the day."³² The soldiers, halted approximately one-quarter of the way to the narrower tip of the island, resumed their offensive after daybreak, and at dark were still short of their final objective. Not until the afternoon of 21 February was this portion of Eniwetok Island overrun.

During the fight for Eniwetok Island, the 4th Marine Division scout company and the VAC Reconnaissance Company continued operations elsewhere in the atoll. Among the islands seized was a coral outcropping just north of Parry, Japtan, which was occupied on 19 February. On the next day, the 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion emplaced its 75mm weapons here to support the attack upon Parry. LILAC, between Parry and Japtan, also was occupied, and to the southwest across the lagoon, a party of scouts

³² 3/106 S-3 Sum (WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

killed nine Japanese on POSY (Rigili). By the afternoon of 21 February, only Parry remained in Japanese hands. (See Map 12.).

PARRY: THE LAST OBJECTIVE

General Watson had hoped that Eniwetok Island could be overrun quickly, but the assault force had become bogged down. In spite of the disappointing results of the first day's fighting, he alerted the components of the 22d Marines on Engebi to embark for an attack on Parry tentatively scheduled for 0900, 21 February. The two battalions reported for further orders on the afternoon of 20 February. The commanding general, however, decided to strike at Parry on 22 February, after reembarking 3/22 as landing force reserve.

By this time, the effect of the continuous series of landings was beginning to make itself felt. On the evening of 20 February, Watson estimated, on the basis of recent reports, that the 22d Marines had suffered 116 dead, 254 wounded, and 6 missing, and the 106th Infantry, 18 killed, 60 wounded, and 14 missing. Although the effectiveness of Tactical Group 1 remained "very satisfactory," the commanding general admitted "some reduction of combat efficiency."³³

To insure that the Parry landing force would be at peak combat efficiency, he attached to it the 2d Separate Tank Company, VAC Reconnaissance Company, and 4th Marine Division scout unit. He also alerted

the light tank company attached to the 106th Infantry to be available for action on the morning of the Parry assault. Mizony's 3/106 was designated as group reserve, available for employment upon 4-hours' notice. Finally, the 10th Marine Defense Battalion was ordered to organize five 100-man rifle companies for possible use at Parry.

Tactical Group 1 also was experiencing shortages in certain types of munitions. All transports were searched for any demolitions that might have been overlooked during the earlier operations. The shortage was relieved to some extent by an aerial shipment of 775 offensive grenades and 1,500 demolition caps that arrived from Kwajalein before noon of 22 February. General Watson also limited the amount of artillery ammunition to be fired in preparation for the Parry landing. The 105s and 75s were to expend no more than one and one-half units of fire during daylight of 21 February and no more than 2,400 rounds per battalion on the following night. In addition, the 22d Marines lacked the prescribed number of rifles and automatic rifles. Before the operation began, many Marines had discarded these weapons in favor of carbines, but the bullets fired from the lighter weapons lacked the killing power of rifle ammunition. "The BARmen and riflemen," recalled an officer of the 22d Marines, "seemed very happy to discard their carbines and take up their former weapons prior to the Parry landing."³⁴ Rifles and automatic rifles from other

³³ TG 1 URpt, 19-20Feb44, Encl G to TG 1 SAR.

³⁴ Scott ltr.

units were redistributed until the Marine infantry units had their full complement of weapons.

The resistance encountered at Engebi and Eniwetok Islands brought about two changes of plan. Admiral Hill had decided to increase the tonnage of naval shells fired into Parry's defensive installations. On 20 February, while Watson was conferring with his unit commanders, the battleships *Tennessee* and *Pennsylvania*, ships which had not figured in the original bombardment scheme, closed to within 850 yards of the objective to batter suspected defensive installations. On the following day, these vessels increased the range to deliver high trajectory fire, a type judged more effective against underground emplacements.

General Watson now re-examined the frontages assigned the assault battalions in his tentative plan. The landing beaches, designated Green 2 and Green 3, were separated in the original plan by a small pier that jutted 20 yards into the lagoon. Green 2 stretched from this structure northward to within a short distance of the fringing reef. Green 3 extended southward to another longer pier, a structure called Valentine Pier. Together the proposed assault beaches encompassed most of the northern third of the wooded island. The commanding general, deciding that the battalion frontages were too large, compressed the beachhead toward the north, so that the landing area, divided equally between the assault battalions, was flanked by the reef on one side and on the other by an arbitrary line 300

yards south of the shorter pier.³⁵ (See Map 13.)

At Z hour, finally fixed at 0900 on 22 February, Lieutenant Colonel Fromhold's 1/22 would land on Green 3, seize that portion of the island directly to its front, and then reorganize at a phase line just south of Valentine Pier before attacking southward to the narrow tail of the torpedo-shaped objective. On the left, Lieutenant Colonel Hart's 2/22 had the mission of striking across the island, passing into regimental reserve, and then mopping up the northern sector of Parry. Major Shisler's 3/22 was to follow 1/22 ashore and move into position to the right of Fromhold's battalion on the 0-1 Line for the 2-battalion advance southward, with the units separated by a line drawn down center of the long axis of the island.

Tallying the number of casualties, designating reserve units, distributing weapons and ammunition, and revising tactical plans, all of them difficult tasks, were accomplished rapidly. Colonel Walker, commanding officer of the 22d Marines, at 2100 reported: "Assault battalions are embarked on LSTs; all preparations complete."³⁶ Meanwhile, the 104th Field Artillery on Eniwetok Island and the 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion on Japtan joined four destroyers in a night harassment of Parry. On the following morning, Walker's men would storm

³⁵ *Fromhold interview*. The account of this change of plans contained in Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*, p. 144, is based in part on an interview with Col Floyd R. Moore, dtd 1 Mar 53. Apparently, no notes of this conversation have been retained.

³⁶ *TG 1 Jnl*, msg no. 25, 21-23Feb44.

the last enemy bastion in the entire atoll.

Like their comrades elsewhere in the atoll, the members of the Parry garrison were determined to resist to the last man. On the morning of 18 February, the Japanese, though suffering from the effects of reduced rations, bombing, and naval gunfire, were ready for the impending battle. "We thought they would land this morning," wrote one of Parry's defenders in his diary, "but there was only a continuation of their bombardment and no landing. As this was contrary to our expectations, we were rather disappointed." On the following day, Hill's old battleships began hammering the island, driving the Japanese into underground shelters which soon became "unendurably hot." This same Japanese soldier had glanced over the waters of the lagoon and seen "boats . . . entering and leaving . . . at will, making fools out of us." Now as death drew near, he consoled himself with the thought that "When they land, we will pay them back for what they have given us. . . ." ³⁷

Determined as most of them were, the enemy troops on Parry staggered under the blows of American warships, planes, and howitzer batteries. Fire-support ships slammed 143 16-inch, 751 14-inch, 896 8-inch, and 9,950 5-inch shells into an area of 200 acres. Although the battleships had fired more rounds at Engebi, smaller ships more than made up the difference, so that Parry Island rocked under the heaviest weight of metal delivered during the Eniwetok campaign.

³⁷ JICPOA Item 7005.

On 22 February, both artillery battalions began an intense bombardment at 0600, to be joined an hour later by supporting warships. Clouds of dust and smoke rose from the battered island and began rolling out over the lagoon. By 0845, when the first wave crossed the line of departure, the line of lighted buoys that marked the boundary between beaches was no longer visible, nor could the LVT drivers make out many landmarks along the lagoon coast. A "terrific set" in the current off the beaches,³⁸ combined with poor visibility and the fact that not all control officers were aware of the recent revision in plans, insured a confused landing.

During the ship-to-shore movement, three LCI(G)s, supporting the tractors on the right flank, were hit by 5-inch shells from destroyers, which were firing by radar because of the smoke.³⁹ Moments later, an observation plane dived too low, was struck by shells fired toward Parry, and crashed in flames. In spite of these accidents, the assault battalions landed at 0900, but not on their assigned beaches. Both units were some 300 yards south of where they should have been.

On the left, 2/22 landed out of position, but the unit met light resistance along the beach. The heaviest fire came from the vicinity of Valentine Pier in the zone of 1/22. Some of Hart's Marines, however, were killed by enemy mines, and others lost their lives trying to eliminate individual Japanese who fought viciously from foxholes inland of Green 2.

³⁸ Hill interview/comments Marshalls.

³⁹ Ibid.



MARINE HEAVY MACHINE GUNS fire at Japanese defenses 400 yards ahead on the beach at Eniwetok Island. (USN 80-G-216019)



NAVY CORPSMEN administer blood plasma to a wounded Marine on the beach at Eniwetok Island. (USN 216030)

During the day's fighting at the northern end of the island, bulldozers were used to bury many Japanese in their underground spider holes. Army light tanks landed at 1100 to support the Marines, and two 55-man detachments from VAC Reconnaissance Company also took part in the fighting. By 1400, Hart's men had secured their portion of the objective, but mopping up was not yet completed.⁴⁰ On the adjacent beach, 1/22 faced sterner resistance.

On the right flank, the first wave of Fromhold's battalion landed just south of Valentine Pier, one of the few landmarks visible to the tractor crews. The next wave went ashore 200 yards north of that pier, and the third touched down between the first two. As Marine officers and noncommissioned officers attempted to sort out the intermingled units and lead the men inland, the Japanese cut loose with machine guns and mortars.

Because of the confusion and the devastation caused by the preliminary bombardment, Fromhold was unable to check his exact position. Yet, he had no reason to doubt that the tractors had landed his battalion in the proper place so he proceeded to execute the attack as planned. Hand-to-hand fighting raged along the shoreline, as the Marines wiped out the Japanese who manned the beach defenses. The fighting centered around a sand dune separated from the water by a narrow strip of coral. Interlocking bands of machine gun fire grazed the face of the dune to cut down any Marines who sought its protection. Once the auto-

⁴⁰ *Reinhardt ltr.*

matic weapons had been located and destroyed, 1/22 was able to advance inland. The battalion commander described his losses as "fairly heavy."⁴¹

While the bulk of 1/22 was engaged in its fight for the beaches, assault elements of two companies somehow shouldered their way through the melee to thrust across the island. These Marines reached the ocean shore by 1000 and established a defensive perimeter.⁴² In the meantime, the remainder of the battalion had cleared the enemy from the immediate vicinity of Green 3. Supported by Marine medium tanks that had just landed, Fromhold's command plunged forward.

Just inland of the dune, General Nishida had prepared another unpleasant surprise for the advancing Marines. He had emplaced three of his light tanks in this area. Although the vehicles were hidden in pits, he had no intention of using them as improvised pillboxes. Ramps enabled the armor to crawl from their protected positions and thunder down on the beachhead. Fortunately for the Americans, the enemy delayed his tank attack until elements of the 2d Separate Tank Company were ashore. "If they had attacked the infantry before tank support arrived," commented one of Fromhold's officers, "the battle for Parry Island would have been very bloody, indeed."⁴³

⁴¹ *Fromhold interview.*

⁴² LtCol Charles F. Widdecke ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar53.

⁴³ *Scott ltr.* The battalion commander later pointed out that his unit antitank weapons, 37mm cannon and 2.36-inch rocket launchers, had been ineffective during CATCHPOLE, but he did believe that the rocket launcher could

Even though Shermans were at hand to destroy the lighter vehicles with 75mm shells, the fight was far from easy. Deadly fire from enemy cannon emplaced on the right flank raked the battalion, so Fromhold requested the aid of naval gunfire. In doing so, he located the Japanese weapons in relation to where 1/22 should have been, rather than where the unit actually was. The only landmark that the battalion commander had recognized so far was the shattered pier near which he had landed. He had no way of knowing that this was Valentine Pier instead of the shorter structure that lay, also in ruins, farther to the north. Advised by aerial observers of the actual progress of the battalion, higher headquarters rejected his request, but a shore fire control party managed to get through to the supporting warships, and soon American shells began screaming toward the supposed location of the enemy guns.

The first of five salvos struck just as the Marine armor was finishing off the enemy light tanks. Some of the Shermans were hit, one by two shells, yet only one crewman was killed and three wounded. The rounds also fell among the infantry, but these Marines suffered fewer than 10 casualties. The misdirected concentration of naval gunfire took a far heavier toll of Japanese men and equipment. "Our troops were stunned and shocked momentarily," Fromhold has admitted, "but so were the Japs."⁴⁴

be developed into an important implement of war. 1/22 Suggestions for Future Atoll Ops Based on CbtExpc on Engebi and Parry Islands, Eniwetok Island, n.d.

⁴⁴ *Fromhold interview.*

The Marines recovered more quickly than their adversaries and by noon had reached the ocean coast. As the battalion was reorganizing after its advance across the island, a group of 150-200 Japanese were seen marching northward in single file along the shoreline. These defenders may have taken refuge on the reef during the preliminary bombardment and were just now entering the fight. Although the enemy troops carried rifles, carbines, and automatic rifles, they had little chance to use them. As the Marine battalion commander phrased it: "The Japs were caught like rats in a trap and exterminated."⁴⁵ Once its zone of action had been secured, 1/22 was ready for the drive southward, an offensive that would begin when 3/22 relieved that portion of Fromhold's command which was holding the right flank of the beachhead.

The 3d Battalion had been scheduled to land behind 1/22 on Beach Green 3, but because Fromhold's men had landed out of position, the unit was diverted to the extreme left flank of Green 2. Shisler's men landed at 1000, opposed by Japanese small-arms fire, mortar concentrations, and by mines scattered along the shore. Within an hour, 3/22 had advanced southward, neutralizing en route bypassed Japanese defenses, to reach its assigned position along the right half of the 0-1 Line. Colonel Walker, followed by his regimental command post group, landed during the morning. By 1300, General Watson had committed VAC Reconnaissance Company to assist 2/22 and the scout company to aid

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

1/22 in mopping up the captured portion of the island.

During the afternoon, 1/22 on the left and 3/22 on the right were to thrust toward the southern tip of the island, an attack that would be supported by the 2d Separate Tank Company. After a 15-minute artillery bombardment, the Marines started forward at 1330. The defenders fought as viciously as ever, resisting to the death from spider webs and other concealed positions, but close cooperation among armor, infantry, and artillery enabled the attackers to push steadily forward.

Medium tanks neutralized enemy strongpoints with 75mm weapons and machine guns, while the assault teams darted close enough to employ demolitions or flamethrowers. When the armored vehicles had expended their ammunition, they retired a short distance to replenish their magazines. During the interim, a 60mm mortar barrage was called down close to the forward infantry units, while 75mm howitzers pounded the area just beyond that covered by the mortars. Screened by this fire, half-tracks evacuated the wounded and DUKWs delivered supplies to the rifle companies. When the tanks were ready, the advance resumed.⁴⁶

By nightfall, the two battalions were approximately 450 yards from the southern end of the island. Since operations during darkness on so narrow a front might result in firefights between friendly units, the Marines halted for the night. Although an un-

known number of Japanese had survived the day's fighting, Colonel Walker was confident that the battle had been won. At 1930 he announced that Parry was secured.

Marine losses during the night of 22-23 February were few. The enemy sniped continually at the Marines, but illumination provided by the supporting warships deprived the enemy of any moral advantage. Abandoned weapons and ammunition had been carefully collected by the units assigned to mop up the island, so the infiltrators had no ready-made "arsenal" such as they had enjoyed at Engebi. Also, the fire discipline of the regiment had improved once the men became used to night combat.

All that remained for 23 February was the elimination of the defenders trapped at the point of the island. Elements of 3/22 and 1/22 overran the remaining territory by 0900, but some mopping up remained. This task was undertaken by 3/106. On 25 February, the 22d Marines and its attached units sailed from the atoll, leaving behind Colonel Ayers' troops as part of the Eniwetok garrison. Tactical Group 1 was disbanded on 22 March.

CATCHPOLE had proved a complete success. The 22d Marines had been exhausted from its "repeated landing operations," but the "loss in combat efficiency due to fatigue and casualties was compensated for by the outstanding fighting spirit of all hands."⁴⁷ Marine casualties during the entire operation were reported as 254 killed and

⁴⁶ *Scott ltr.*

⁴⁷ TG 1 URpt, 22-23Feb44, Encl G to TG 1 SAR.

555 wounded.⁴⁸ The 106th Infantry, which lost 94 killed and 311 wounded, proved equal to its first test of combat despite the handicaps under which it operated. Perhaps the best indication of the viciousness of the fighting is that only 66 of the enemy surrendered.

Inadequate rehearsals, General Watson maintained, caused most of the difficulties encountered by the 106th Infantry. At Eniwetok Island, he continued, "the assault troops did not move forward rapidly from the beaches . . . did not operate in close cooperation with tanks, and failed to realize the capabilities of and to use to the fullest extent naval gunfire and close support aviation."⁴⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by Colonel Joseph C. Anderson, USA, of the VAC planning staff. "The comments of General Watson relative to the training of troops for this operation are certainly valid," the Army officer has commented, "as the execution by the 106th Infantry (less 2d Battalion) so clearly demonstrated."⁵⁰

The Eniwetok victory brought American forces to within 1,100 miles of the Marianas. An objective tentatively scheduled for May was secured almost three months ahead of time. In addition, a related operation had showed Truk to be far less formidable than anticipated. Now Admiral Nimitz could devote his energies to preparing for a blow against the Marianas while consolidating his grip on the Marshalls.

⁴⁸ Final official Marine casualty totals for the Eniwetok Operation are listed in Appendix H.

⁴⁹ *TG 1 SplRpt*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ *Anderson ltr.*

FLINTLOCK, JUNIOR ⁵¹

The 22d Marines returned to Kwajalein Atoll on 26 February to begin relieving the 25th Marines as the garrison force. The Eniwetok veterans manned defensive positions on several different islands. In the north, 2/22 went ashore on Roi-Namur, 3/22 on ANTON (Edgigen), regimental headquarters and some support units on ALLEN, and the remaining support units on ANDREW. To the south, 1/22 assumed responsibility for BENNETT. If Colonel Walker's troops anticipated a lengthy period of rest, they were mistaken, for Rear Admiral Alva D. Bernhard, the atoll commander, had received orders to neutralize those of the Marshall Islands which were undefended or lightly held.

Admiral Bernhard was charged with a four-part task. Under his direction, the garrison force was to: destroy Japanese installations or materials which might aid enemy air, surface, or submarine forces; capture Japanese or natives sympathetic to the enemy

⁵¹ Additional sources for the following sections include: Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Ailuk, Mejit, Jemo, and Likiep, dtd 12Apr44; Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Bikini, Ailinginae, Rongelap, Rongerik, Utirik, Bikar, and Taka, n.d.; Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Lib, dtd 28Mar44; Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Wothe, Ujae, and Lae, dtd 28Mar44; Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Ailinglapalap and Namu, n.d.; 22d Mar Rpt of Ops into Lesser Marshalls, dtd 6Apr44; 22d Mar, Atoll Hopping: the lesser Marshalls, n.d.; TU 57.10.9 Rpt of Recon of Ailinglapalap, Kili, Ebon, and Namorik, dtd 30Mar44; 2/22 Lesser Marshalls Ops, n.d.; 3/22 Rpt of Ops against Ailinglapalap, Ebon, Namorik, and Kili, dtd 29Mar44; Civil Affairs Rpt of Recon of Ebon, Namorik, and Kili, dtd 6Apr 44; Sherrod, *Marine Air History*.

cause; inform the islanders that American forces were in control of the region; and, establish friendly relations with the natives by assisting them as much as practicable. The admiral and Colonel Walker formed a joint staff to plan and direct the series of landings.

Operation FLINTLOCK, JR., dealt with five areas. Included in the West Group were Wotho, Ujae, and Lae Atolls. The South Group embraced Namu, Ailinglapalap, Namorik, and Ebon Atolls, as well as Kili Island. Bikini, Rongelap, Ailinginae, and Rongerik Atolls formed the North Group, while Bikar, Utirik, Taka, Ailuk, and Likiep Atolls and Jemo and Mejit Islands were assigned to the Northeast Group. Lib Island, due south of Kwajalein Atoll, was designated as a separate area. Before any landing was made, a patrol plane would take photographs of the particular objective. If the defenses did appear weak, Admiral Bernhard could then dispatch a force adequate to the task. A typical expedition might consist of two or more companies from Colonel Walker's 22d Marines, an LST carrying as many as nine LVTs, two LCIs, a destroyer or destroyer escort, and a minesweeper. Marine scout bombers based at Roi had the mission of providing air support for the landings. To each of the forces that he dispatched, the admiral assigned civil affairs and medical specialists as well as interpreters and native guides. (See Map 7.)

FLINTLOCK, JR. began on 8 March, when two reinforced rifle companies from 1/22 arrived off Wotho Atoll. Major Crawford B. Lawton, in command of the force, learned from

natives that only 12 Japanese, survivors of a plane crash, were present. The Marines landed unopposed on the following morning, suffered one casualty from the accidental explosion of a grenade, and cornered the enemy fliers, who committed suicide rather than surrender. Five of the six Japanese weather observers at Ujae Atoll, where the Marines landed on the 10th, killed themselves, but one man elected to become a prisoner of war.

During the securing of Wotho and Ujae, the natives had been friendly, but such was not the case at Lae Atoll. For some time the inhabitants of this third objective remained aloof, though they were not hostile. A short time before the Americans arrived, a box containing a hand grenade had drifted ashore. When the grenade exploded, a child was injured, and the natives for a time blamed the Marines, who had the misfortune of landing while memories of the tragedy were fresh.⁵²

On 14 March, the conquest of the West Group by now completed, Lawton's men returned to Kwajalein. While they were absent, Colonel Walker had been reassigned to VAC headquarters. His successor as regimental commander was his executive officer, Colonel Merlin F. Schneider. During this period, on 11 March, a reinforced platoon from the 1st Battalion had raised the American flag on Lib Island, which was not occupied by the enemy.

Operations against the South Group,

⁵²This story of the Lae occupation was based on comments by LtCol Crawford B. Lawton, n.d., in Heintz and Crown, *The Marshalls*, p. 154. No record of his remarks has been discovered.

delayed when one of the landing craft began shipping water, finally got underway on 19 March. On that day, two separate forces, some 650 Marines in all, set sail from Kwajalein for Ailinglapalap Atoll. On the morning of 21 March, Major William E. Sperling, III landed his portion of 3/22, to be followed ashore by the group commanded by Major Shisler. The defenders of the atoll manned a defensive line that crossed Ailinglapalap Island at its narrowest point. Marine infantrymen attacked behind an 81mm mortar barrage to crush the position. Two Marines were wounded on Ailinglapalap Island and 39 Japanese killed. Two of the defenders escaped the American onslaught, but both were captured elsewhere in the atoll.

Once this objective was secured, the two forces parted company as planned. Shisler's men landed at Ebon Atoll on the morning of 23 March and, on the following day, killed 17 Japanese in a vicious fight that cost the lives of two Marines. Six enemy noncombatants were taken into custody. From Ebon, Shisler's command proceeded to Namorik Atoll and Kili Island, neither of which had been garrisoned. Meanwhile, Sperling's Marines investigated Namu Atoll, where seven Japanese civilians willingly surrendered.

On 30 March, two days after Shisler returned to Kwajalein, Major Earl J. Cook led a reinforced rifle company toward the Northeast Group. Once again, the troops were provided by 3/22. The number of objectives was reduced to three—Mejit, Ailuk, and Likiep—for aerial photographs and reports by friendly natives indicated that these were the only inhabited places in

the area. No Japanese were found at either Ailuk or Likiep Atoll, but every member of the six-man weather station on Mejit died resisting the landing.

While 3/22 was carrying out its assignments, the 2d Battalion dispatched a reinforced rifle company to secure the North Group and as much of the Northeast Group as remained under enemy control. Aerial reconnaissance indicated that Ailinginae, Rongerik, and Bikar Atolls were not inhabited, so Major Robert P. Felker, the force commander, was free to concentrate upon Bikini, Rongelap, and Utirik Atolls.

Felker's Marines landed on 28 March at Bikini, but no fighting occurred, for the five Japanese on the atoll killed themselves. The 6-man detachment reported at Rongelap apparently had been withdrawn; at any rate, the Americans found no trace of it. On 5 April, the company landed at Utirik, killed 14 Japanese, and then re-embarked for Kwajalein.

During FLINTLOCK, JR. elements of the 22d Marines had made 29 separate landings in order to secure 12 atolls and 3 islands. This campaign, which lasted from 7 March to 5 April, brought an estimated 60,000 square miles of ocean under American control. Once the mission had been accomplished, the 22d Marines embarked for Guadalcanal to prepare for further operations.

FINAL OPERATIONS

The final landings of the Marshalls campaign took place shortly after the departure of the 22d Marines. On 17 April, a detachment from the 1st Marine Defense Battalion set sail for

Erikub Atoll, some 5 miles from Wotje, and Aur Atoll, located 10 miles from Maloelap. No Japanese were found at either objective and the nearby enemy garrisons did not attempt to interfere. In February, Marines from this battalion had left their camp at Majuro to occupy Arno Atoll east of Majuro and north of the Japanese stronghold of Mille. Soldiers from the 111th Infantry landed at Ujelang Atoll on 21 April to begin a 2-day reconnaissance that resulted in the killing of 18 Japanese. No further landings would be made until hostilities had ended.

By the end of April, the enemy retained control over only Wotje, Mille, Maloelap, and Jaluit Atolls in The Marshalls group. The task of keeping these bases neutralized fell to the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing, later redesignated the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing. In February, Marine fighters arrived at Roi and Engebi, but the systematic battering of the bypassed atolls did not begin until 4 March, when scout bombers from Majuro braved dense anti-aircraft fire to attack Jaluit.

By the time of this first Marine raid, Navy and Army aviators had destroyed the enemy aircraft assigned to defend the Marshalls. The only aerial opposition encountered by these Marine pilots occurred during a strike launched on 28 March against Ponape in the Carolines. Six F4U (Corsair) fighters, escorting four Army bombers, shot down eight Japanese fighters and destroyed another on the ground. Although

Ponape was visited several times during the months that followed, no Japanese planes attempted to intercept the raiders.

From 4 March 1944 until the end of hostilities in August of the following year, the Marines continued to bomb and strafe Mille, Maloelap, Wotje, and Jaluit. They unleashed 6,920 tons of bombs and rockets, approximately half the total tonnage employed against the four atolls during the entire war. These missiles, along with 2,340 tons of naval shells, killed 2,564 Japanese out of garrisons that totalled over 13,000. In carrying out their part of the Marshalls mop-up, Marine airmen learned lessons in fighter-bomber techniques applicable elsewhere in the Pacific.⁵³

The FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE operations resulted in the rapid capture of bases for further Pacific operations. During FLINTLOCK, JR. and the landings that followed, American control over the Marshalls was confirmed. Then, while the assault troops advanced into the Marianas, Marine aviators assumed the mission of maintaining the neutralization of the bypassed strongholds in the group. So well did the flyers succeed that those Japanese who survived the rain of bombs and rockets either starved to death or became so weak from hunger that they were no longer even a remote threat to American forces.

⁵³ A more complete treatment of the activities of Marine aviation in the Marshalls will be contained in the fourth volume of this series.

The Fruits of Victory

The conquest of the Marshalls was a far more significant victory than the previous success in the Gilberts. FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE represented a shattering of the line of outposts that protected the inner defenses of the enemy homeland. As far as the Japanese were concerned, the Marshalls themselves were not indispensable, but the speed with which the American forces moved robbed the enemy of the time he needed to prepare for the defense of the more vital islands that lay nearer to Japan.

THE ENEMY SITUATION¹

Among the victims of FLINTLOCK was the Japanese naval base at Truk. On 10 February, immediately after the loss of key islands in Kwajalein Atoll, the enemy decided to withdraw his major fleet units to prevent their destruction by American air power. The carrier raid that preceded CATCHPOLE made Truk a rattlesnake without fangs. Nimitz concluded that no amphibious assault would be necessary and abandoned a plan that called for the employment of five divisions and one additional regiment. Once Truk

had joined Rabaul and Kavieng in the backwash of World War II, the 1st, 3d, and 4th Marine Divisions, the 4th Marines, and the 7th and 77th Infantry Divisions were freed for service elsewhere in the Pacific. American planners could now look forward to the Marianas.

The loss of the Marshalls and the resultant neutralization of Truk caused the enemy to revise his strategy. Early in March, Admiral Mineichi Koga, commander in chief of the Japanese *Combined Fleet*, established still another zone in which interception operations could be carried out against the American fleet. Patrol planes, submarines, and picket boats were charged with detecting any attempt by Nimitz to penetrate the Central Pacific Front, an area stretching from the Kuriles past Honshu, through the Bonins, Marianas, and Carolines, and terminating in New Guinea. Should the United States fleet venture into the area, land-based planes would blast the carriers to enable surface ships to close with and sink the troop transports. The Japanese admiral urged his men to destroy as many of the invaders as possible while the expedition was at sea. The survivors, in keeping with current tactical doctrine, were to be annihilated at the beaches. This was the gist of Koga's proposed *Z Operation*.

Admiral Koga was killed in a plane crash before his plan could be executed,

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Hattori, *Complete History*, v. 3, p. 5; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*; USSBS, *Campaigns of the Pacific War*.

but his successor in command of the *Combined Fleet*, Admiral Soemu Toyoda, had ample time to modify this basic strategy before the Americans struck. This revised plan, dubbed *A-GO*, also called for strengthening the island defenses along the Central Pacific Front. Toyoda, however, established two "decisive battle areas," the Palau Islands and the western Carolines. If amphibious forces should attempt to seize outposts in either the western Carolines, the neighboring Marianas, or the Palaus, the defense forces already posted in the threatened sector were to hold fast. The bulk of the Imperial fleet, now based at Tawi Tawi off Borneo, would stream north-eastward to crush the Americans.

CATCHPOLE, following so closely after FLINTLOCK, made it inevitable that Japan would have extreme difficulty in completing the preparations necessary for *A-GO*. The decision to bypass Truk left Nimitz with enough well-trained troops, many of them combat veterans, to deliver a sudden blow at the Marianas. The enemy wanted to reinforce these islands before they were attacked, but in order to move the necessary men and their supplies, the Japanese had to place a heavy strain on an already weakened merchant marine. By the beginning of March 1944, the available enemy merchant shipping, almost 6½ million tons at the outbreak of the war, had been reduced to about 4 million. American submarines had wrought most of this destruction. Now, thanks to the Marshalls operations, these undersea raiders would be able to operate from a base 1,200 miles closer to the Marianas.

AMERICAN GAINS

This second part of the Central Pacific campaign had come to a close with the capture of bases some 800 miles within enemy territory. The Japanese had been driven back to their inner defenses. American amphibious forces demonstrated beyond question that they had absorbed the lessons offered by the assault upon Betio.

Besides securing bases from which to mount further operations, the Pacific Fleet, by seizing certain key objectives, had succeeded in neutralizing the more powerful Japanese bastions in and near the Marshalls. The "unsinkable aircraft carriers," in which the enemy had placed so much confidence, remained ready to receive planes, but none could be sent them. American carrier task forces had driven the Japanese from the skies over the Marshalls, and land-based planes from the recently captured atolls stood ready to maintain this mastery of the air. The careful selection of targets coupled with a skillful use of the available air, ground, and sea forces meant a saving in lives as well as time.

In addition to these strategic gains, the Americans amassed additional experience in atoll warfare. Although the Marshalls operations represented some improvements in tactics and techniques over previous efforts, planners as well as troop leaders were well aware of errors that thus far escaped correction. Only by coldly assessing the campaigns just completed, noting weaknesses, and making the necessary corrections could Nimitz' amphibious forces lay the groundwork for future victories.

LESSONS LEARNED²

Like the Gilberts expeditionary force, the organizations formed for FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE did not include replacement pools. Planners had decided that casualties in the brief but intense Marshalls actions would not be severe enough to impair the effectiveness of the landing forces. At Kwajalein Atoll, no serious difficulties were encountered by the assault divisions, but the Roi garrison had to call for an emergency draft of 27 men to replace casualties suffered during the 12 February Japanese air raid. At Eniwetok, however, a series of relatively brief fights gradually wore down Tactical Group 1 to such an extent that General Watson ordered rifle units formed from among elements of his garrison forces.

The staff of Tactical Group 1 had been hard pressed to keep an accurate tally of casualties. What was needed, General Watson decided, was a single center for compiling such data, a clearing house that would be located in the flagship of the attack force commander. VAC pointed out that directives then in force called for just such a system of accounting. The fault lay in the various commanders, who seldom reported accurately or on time.

American intelligence concerning Kwajalein Atoll was accurate, but Gen-

eral Smith's staff desired more extensive coverage by oblique aerial photographs and wanted the pictures delivered at least 90 days prior to D-Day. General Watson, whose Parry Island assault troops had been confused by a redesignation of the beaches, noted that the arbitrary designation of "color" beaches by higher headquarters was not always advisable. He believed that the attack force commander should have additional leeway in designating the area to be stormed. Looking back on the Eniwetok operation, Watson also called for the marking of known defenses on maps as small in scale as 1:20,000, a more careful delineation of the coastline and of all landmarks upon which the tractor waves might guide, and photographic coverage of every island within the atoll to be attacked. JICPOA had done an accurate job in placing the bulk of the *1st Amphibious Brigade* at Eniwetok Atoll, but photographs taken prior to D-Day did not indicate the type of defenses that the enemy had prepared. By the time of the main landings, General Watson was aware of the enemy's strength and probable dispositions. The extent of the Japanese underground defenses, however, was not known until the Americans actually encountered them.

Neither of the Marshalls operations represented any departure from the established command structure for amphibious operations. Although the position of the corps commander was clarified for the Kwajalein landings, the nature of the undertaking prevented General Smith from exercising close tactical supervision. Essentially, FLINTLOCK consisted of two distinct series of

²Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *TF 51 AR*; *TF 53 AR Roi-Namur*; *VAC AR FLINTLOCK* (including rpts of staff sections, Encls C-H); *VAC Rpt of LogAspects*; *VAC Cmts on TG 1 SAR*, dtd 1Apr44; *TG 51.11 OpRpt*; *4th Mar Div AR*; *TG 1 SAR*; *ComInCh, Marshall Islands*; *Sherrod, Marine Air History*.



RIFLEMEN of the 22d Marines advance toward the last Japanese-held area on Parry. (USMC 74488)



MARIANAS INVASION FORCE assembled in the lagoon at Eniwetok Atoll on 9 June 1944. (USN 80-G-248207)

landings by widely separated divisions. Admiral Turner, however, later noted that "all Central Pacific amphibious operations in which I was concerned needed at least a corps command of expeditionary troops."³ The principle, then, was already accepted. As soon as VAC attacked a suitable land mass, its commanding general would direct more closely the actions of its assigned divisions.

As far as planning was concerned, the staffs of both VAC and Tactical Group 1 voiced the same complaint—not enough time. Indeed, every agency involved in the planning of FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE was working against a rapidly approaching deadline. For this reason, final versions of certain annexes of the basic plans were late in reaching the assault units. The most conspicuous victims of this situation were the LVT and LVT(A) battalions, which had not received their orders for the Roi-Namur landings in time for rehearsals. In particular, this fact hampered their communications, since radio frequencies had to be set en route to the line of departure.⁴

If nothing else, the Marshalls fighting proved the value of sound training climaxed by realistic rehearsals. The shortcomings of Marine amphibian tractor crews at Roi-Namur and of Army infantrymen on Eniwetok Island were blamed on a lack of indoctrination and practice. VAC head-

quarters could account for the poor quality of the amphibious rehearsals staged for Tactical Group 1. Watson's command completed its training while the FLINTLOCK expedition was being mounted, so the assault units rather than the reserve had first call for the limited number of DUKWs and LVTs then available. The 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion had completed its final exercise before the plan of attack was ready for distribution. As General Smith went on to point out, there would be times when speed was so essential that rehearsals were certain to be inadequate.

In the case of the Marshalls operations, speed denied the enemy time to convert the objectives into fortresses as powerful as Betio Island had been. Firepower helped the American landing forces to succeed in spite of the minor defects in their training and employment. The prolonged naval bombardment of targets in Kwajalein Atoll was supplemented by the effective fires of artillery units emplaced on islands off the principal objectives. The quality of naval gunfire, and of air support as well, had improved since GALVANIC. General Schmidt, for example, estimated that between 50 and 75 percent of the Roi-Namur garrison was killed by either naval shelling or aerial attack. At Eniwetok Atoll, neither planes nor warships were as deadly, for the planned bombardment was based on an incomplete knowledge of the nature of the Japanese defenses. The troops fighting ashore at Eniwetok, however, benefited from the first heavy use of night illumination shells by supporting naval vessels.

The landings, screened by the fires of

³ Turner ltr I.

⁴ The radio frequencies received in the plan could not be set up within the LSTs, consequently units had to struggle to establish them once they were launched for the landings. Metzger ltr.

LVT(A)s, LCI gunboats, and warships, were hampered by poor communications. In Kwajalein Atoll, where the sea was rough, many of the radios carried in LVTs were drowned out by spray, thus insuring a confused advance toward the beaches. Once again, Marine officers renewed their appeal for communications equipment that was adequately waterproofed.

Ashore the Marine troops fought well. What mistakes they did make were those expected of men entering combat for the first time. The unauthorized sprint across Roi, for example, upset the prearranged scheme of maneuver, although it undoubtedly kept the enemy off balance. This advance was traceable to the Marines' desire to excel in their first battle. Although the 22d Marines had trained ceaselessly during its stay in Samoa, this unit, too, needed the experience of actual warfare. During CATCHPOLE, unnecessary firing decreased in volume as the troops became used to fighting at night. In addition, the men of the regiment learned to avoid leaving weapons scattered about the battlefield where Japanese infiltrators could find them. In attacking enemy emplacements, whether concrete bunkers or underground spider webs, flamethrowers, demolitions, and hand grenades proved most deadly. The division of rifle squads into fire teams, as practiced by the 22d Marines, was a successful innovation, for these elements were especially effective in dealing with enemy positions that were located in wooded or overgrown areas.

Most aspects of the logistical plans for FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE represented improvements over GAL-

VANIC. The DUKW justified the confidence that General Corlett had placed in it, and the "hot cargo" system, as practiced by the 7th Infantry Division, proved a reliable method of getting priority cargo ashore during the early hours of an amphibious operation. Generals Schmidt and Watson also had critical items of supply preloaded in amphibious vehicles, in their case LVTs, ready to be landed at the request of the units ashore. Corps observers were convinced that the amphibian truck was better suited for carrying supplies than the tractor, for the DUKW had a larger cargo compartment and was easier to repair.

During the Marshalls fighting, the LST performed several important duties. Except for those units which seized the islands adjacent to Roi-Namur, all the Marine assault forces boarded their assigned tractors before the LVTs were launched by their parent landing ships. Thus, the troops were spared the ordeal of transferring in the open sea. Besides carrying LVTs and providing enclosed transfer areas, this same type of ship participated in the logistical plan. Certain LSTs carried food, water, and ammunition, others served as hospital wards, and still others carried tools and spare parts with which to repair damaged tractors.

The amount of supplies carried to Kwajalein Atoll proved, in some instances, more than sufficient, but the troops at Eniwetok Atoll endured shortages in concussion grenades and demolitions fuzes. Fortunately, the men had enough ammunition. One item that was habitually discarded as soon as the troops landed was the gas

mask, which General Watson considered a "distinct nuisance."⁵

The limited area available prevented the proper dispersal of supply dumps, but otherwise the movement of cargo to the troops inland was well executed. Pallets permitted the rapid landing of bulk cargo, and a permanent beach party organization assumed responsibility for controlling boat traffic and the evacuation of the wounded. After observing these beach parties in operation, Admiral Turner's headquarters recommended that a permanent shore party similar to that used in the Southwest Pacific be organized. A well-trained nucleus could be reinforced as necessary by labor contingents and garrison units, so that the handling of supplies no longer would depend on men borrowed from the assault battalions.

The role of Marine aviation in the Marshalls was little changed from the previous operation, for General Smith's recommendation that Marine pilots based on carriers support future landings had not been accepted. The performance of Navy airmen, however, was improved, thanks to better planning and careful briefing. During FLINTLOCK, aircraft had attacked in conjunction with the preliminary naval bombardment. Since the experiment had proved successful, VAC recommended that similar aerial attacks be carried out in forthcoming landings. General Watson's command had not benefited from this kind of coordination. Rather than suspend naval gunfire to enable the planes to make a final strafing run, he urged that this

last-minute strike be omitted in future landings.

Immediately after the capture of bases in Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls, Marine fighter planes arrived to help defend these conquests. Between 15 and 23 February, elements of two Marine fighter squadrons (VMFs-224 and -532) began flying combat air patrols from Kwajalein. VMF(N)-532, using radar-equipped F4Us, was responsible for patrolling the night skies. Although ground crews landed on Engebi while that island was being mopped up, Marine fighter craft did not make their appearance there until 27 February. VMF-113 operated during daylight, and a detachment from VMF(N)-532 took over after dark. On 14 April, the Engebi-based night fighters made their first kills of the war, destroying two Japanese planes and probably shooting down a third.

During the critical hours after the landings, the antiaircraft units from defense battalions were employed to protect the beachheads. Scout bombers also assisted indirectly in the aerial defense of the Marshalls bases by helping neutralize the bypassed atolls. In short, Marine aviators played a slightly larger role in FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE than they had in GALVANIC, but support of the landings remained the responsibility of the Navy. In addition, naval aviators operating from carriers prevented the Japanese from launching aerial attacks against the expanding beachhead, a task which they shared with Marine and Army antiaircraft units.

In summing up the FLINTLOCK operation, General Smith noted that the lessons learned in the Gilberts had

⁵ *TG 1 SplRpt*, p. 15.

proved invaluable. "In the attack of coral atolls," read his report, "very few recommendations can be made to improve upon the basic techniques previously recommended and utilized in FLINTLOCK. However, there is still much to be desired to improve planning,

improve coordination of efforts, and prepare for the attack of more difficult objectives."⁶ As the Central Pacific drive moved westward, the enemy's island defenses seemed certain to improve.

⁶ VAC AR FLINTLOCK, p. 11.