

## 'The Singapore Guns'

The firing on Betio had barely subsided before apocryphal claims began to appear in print that the four eight-inch naval rifles used as coastal defense guns by the Japanese were the same ones captured from the British at the fall of Singapore. Many prominent historians unwittingly perpetuated this story, among them the highly respected Samuel Eliot Morison.

In 1977, however, British writer William H. Bartsch published the results of a recent visit to Tarawa in the quarterly magazine *After the Battle*. Bartsch personally examined each of the four guns and discovered markings indicating manufacture by Vickers, the British ordnance company. The Vickers company subsequently provided Bartsch records indicating the four guns were part of a consignment of 12 eight-inch, quick-firing guns which were sold in 1905 to the Japanese during their war with Russia. Further investigation by Bartsch at the Imperial War Museum produced the fact that there were no eight-inch guns captured by the Japanese at Singapore. In short, the guns at Tarawa came from a far more legitimate, and older, transaction with the British.

The eight-inch guns fired the opening rounds in the battle of Tarawa, but were not by themselves a factor in the contest. Earlier bombing raids may have damaged their fire control systems. Rapid counterbattery fire from American battleships took out the big guns in short order, although one of them maintained an intermittent, if inaccurate, fire

throughout D+1. Colonel Shoup stated emphatically that the 2d Marine Division was fully aware of the presence of eight-inch guns on Betio as early as mid-August 1943. By contrast, the division intelligence annex to Shoup's operation order, updated nine days before the landing, discounts external reports that the main guns were likely to be as large as eight-inch, insisting instead that "they are probably not more than 6-inch." Prior knowledge notwithstanding, the fact remains that many American officers were unpleasantly surprised to experience major caliber near-misses bracketing the amphibious task force early on D-Day.

*Destruction of one of the four Japanese eight-inch Vickers guns on Betio was caused by naval gunfire and air strikes.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 63618



point in the re-entrant between the two beaches played havoc among troops trying to scramble over the sides of their beached or stalled LVTs. Five of Company E's six officers were killed. Company F suffered 50 percent casualties getting ashore and swarming over the seawall to seize a precarious foothold. Company G could barely cling to a crowded stretch of beach along the seawall in the middle. Two infantry platoons and two machine gun platoons were driven away from the objective beach and forced to land on Red Beach One, most joining "Ryan's Orphans."

When Lieutenant Colonel Amey's boat rammed to a sudden halt against the reef, he hailed two passing LVTs for a transfer. Amey's LVT then became hung up on a barbed wire obstacle several hundred yards off Red Beach Two. The battalion commander drew his pistol and ex-

horted his men to follow him into the water. Closer to the beach, Amey turned to encourage his staff, "Come on! Those bastards can't beat us!" A burst of machine gun fire hit him in the throat, killing him instantly. His executive officer, Major Howard Rice, was in another LVT which was forced to land far to the west, behind Major Ryan. The senior officer present with 2/2 was Lieutenant Colonel Walter Jordan, one of several observers from the 4th Marine Division and one of only a handful of survivors from Amey's LVT. Jordan did what any Marine would do under the circumstances: he assumed command and tried to rebuild the disjointed pieces of the landing team into a cohesive fighting force. The task was enormous.

The only assault unit to get ashore without significant casualties was Major "Jim" Crowe's LT 2/8 on Red

Beach Three to the left of the pier. Many historians have attributed this good fortune to the continued direct fire support 2/8 received throughout its run to the beach from the destroyers *Ringgold* and *Dashiell* in the lagoon. The two ships indeed provided outstanding fire support to the landing force, but their logbooks indicate both ships honored Admiral Hill's 0855 ceasefire; thereafter, neither ship fired in support of LT 2/8 until at least 0925. Doubtlessly, the preliminary fire from such short range served to keep the Japanese defenders on the eastern end of the island buttoned up long after the ceasefire. As a result, Crowe's team suffered only 25 casualties in the first three LVT waves. Company E made a significant penetration, crossing the barricade and the near taxiway, but five of its six officers were shot down in the first 10 minutes ashore. Crowe's



Heywood (APA 6) lowers an LVT-1 by swinging boom in process of debarking assault troops of the 2d Battalion, 8th

Marines, on D-Day at Betio. The LVT-1 then joined up with other amphibian tractors to form up an assault wave.

LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection

LT 2/8 was up against some of the most sophisticated defensive positions on the island; three fortifications to their left (eastern) flank would effectively keep these Marines boxed in for the next 48 hours.

Major "Jim" Crowe—former enlisted man, Marine Gunner, distinguished rifleman, star football player—was a tower of strength throughout the battle. His trademark red mustache bristling, a combat shotgun cradled in his arm, he exuded confidence and professionalism,

qualities sorely needed on Betio that long day. Crowe ordered the coxswain of his LCVP "put this god-damned boat in!" The boat hit the reef at high speed, sending the Marines sprawling. Quickly recovering, Crowe ordered his men over the sides, then led them through several hundred yards of shallow water, reaching the shore intact only four minutes behind his last wave of LVTs. Accompanying Crowe during this hazardous effort was Staff Sergeant Hatch, the combat photographer.

Hatch remembers being inspired by Crowe, clenching a cigar in his teeth and standing upright, growling at his men, "Look, the sons of bitches can't hit me. Why do you think they can hit you? Get moving. Go!" Red Beach Three was in capable hands.

The situation on Betio by 0945 on D-Day was thus: Crowe, well-established on the left with modest penetration to the airfield; a distinct gap between LT 2/8 and the survivors of LT 2/2 in small clusters along Red Beach Two under the tentative command of Jordan; a dangerous gap due to the Japanese fortifications at the re-entrant between beaches Two and One, with a few members of 3/2 on the left flank and the growing collection of odds and ends under Ryan past the "bird's beak" on Green Beach; Major Schoettel still afloat, hovering beyond the reef; Colonel Shoup likewise in an LCVP, but beginning his move towards the beach; residual

LVT-1s follow wave guides from transport area towards Betio at first light on D-Day.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 63909





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 65978

*LVT-1s in the first assault wave enter the lagoon and approach the line of departure. LVT-2s of the second and third waves proceed on parallel courses in background.*

members of the boated waves of the assault teams still wading ashore under increasing enemy fire; the tanks being forced to unload from their LCMs at the reef's edge, trying to organize recon teams to lead them ashore.

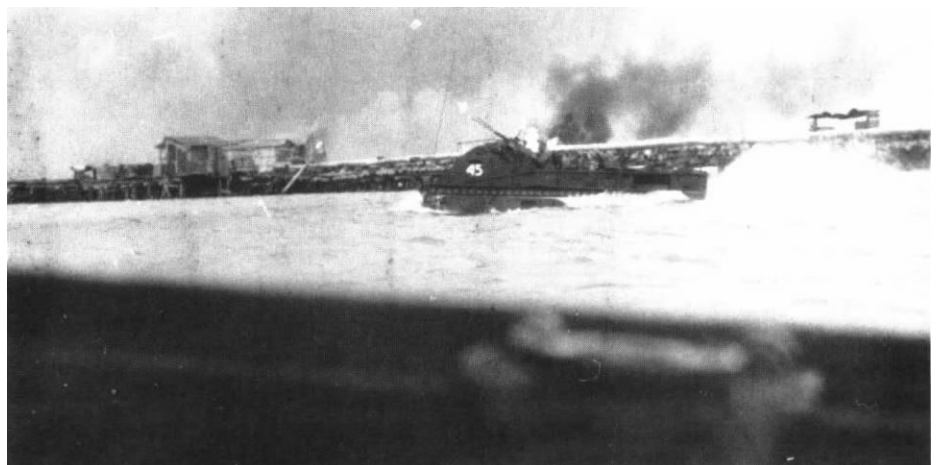
Communications were ragged. The balky TBX radios of Shoup, Crowe, and Schoettel were still operational. Otherwise, there was either dead silence or complete havoc on the command nets. No one on the flagship knew of Ryan's relative success on the western end, or of Amey's death and Jordan's assumption of command. Several echelons heard this ominous early report from an unknown source: "Have landed. Unusually heavy opposition. Casualties 70 percent. Can't hold." Shoup ordered Kyle's LT 1/2, the regimental reserve, to land on Red Beach Two and work west.

This would take time. Kyle's men were awaiting orders at the line of departure, but all were embarked in boats. Shoup and others managed to assemble enough LVTs to transport Kyle's companies A and B, but the third infantry company and the weapons company would have to wade ashore. The ensuing assault was chaotic. Many of the LVTs were destroyed enroute by antboat guns

which increasingly had the range down pat. At least five vehicles were driven away by the intense fire and landed west at Ryan's position, adding another 113 troops to Green Beach. What was left of Companies A and B stormed ashore and penetrated several hundred feet, expanding the "perimeter." Other troops sought refuge along the pier or tried to commandeer a passing LVT. Kyle got ashore in this fashion, but many of his troops did not complete the landing until the following morning. The experience of Lieutenant George D. Lillibridge of Company A, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, was typical. His LVT driver and gunners were shot down by machine gun fire. The sur-

*Three hundred yards to go! LVT-1 45 churns toward Red Beach Three just east of the long pier on D-Day. Heavy fighting is taking place on the other side of the beach.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 64050







LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection

*LVT-1 49 ("My Deloris"), the first vehicle to reach Betio's shore, lies in her final resting place amid death and destruction, including a disabled LVT-2 from a follow-on assault wave. This photo was taken after D-Day. Maintenance crews attempted to salvage "My Deloris" during the battle, moving her some-*

*what eastward from the original landing point on "the bird's beak," but she was too riddled with shell holes to operate. After the battle, "My Deloris" was sent to the United States as an exhibit for War Bond drives. The historic vehicle is now at the Tracked Vehicle Museum at Camp DelMar, California.*

Lawrence C. Hays, Jr.), the division reserve. At 1036, Smith reported to V Amphibious Corps: "Successful landing on Beaches Red Two and Three. Toe hold on Red One. Am committing one LT from Division reserve. Still encountering strong resistance throughout."

Colonel Shoup at this time was in the middle of a long odyssey trying to get ashore. He paused briefly for this memorable exchange of radio messages with Major Schoettel.

0959: (Schoettel to Shoup)  
"Receiving heavy fire all along beach. Unable to land all. Issue in doubt."

1007: (Schoettel to Shoup)  
"Boats held up on reef of right flank Red 1. Troops receiving heavy fire in water."

1012: (Shoup to Schoettel)  
"Land Beach Red 2 and work west."

1018: (Schoettel to Shoup) "We have nothing left to land."

When Shoup's LCVP was stopped by the reef, he transferred to a passing LVT. His party included Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson, already a media legend for his earlier exploits at Makin and Guadalcanal, now serving as an observer, and Lieutenant Colonel Presley M. Rixey, commanding 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, Shoup's artillery detachment. The LVT made three attempts to land; each time the enemy fire was too intense. On the third try, the vehicle was hit and disabled by plunging fire. Shoup sustained a painful shell fragment wound in his leg, but led his small party out of the stricken vehicle and into the dubious shelter of the pier. From this position, standing waist-deep in water, surrounded by thousands of dead fish and dozens of floating bodies, Shoup manned his radio, trying desperately to get organized combat units ashore to sway the balance.

For awhile, Shoup had hopes that the new Sherman tanks would serve to break the gridlock. The combat

debut of the Marine medium tanks, however, was inauspicious on D-Day. The tankers were valorous, but the 2d Marine Division had no concept of how to employ tanks against fortified positions. When four Shermans reached Red Beach Three late in the morning of D-Day, Major Crowe simply waved them forward with orders to "knock out all enemy positions encountered." The tank crews, buttoned up under fire, were virtually blind. Without accompanying infantry they were lost piecemeal, some knocked out by Japanese 75mm guns, others damaged by American dive bombers.

Six Shermans tried to land on Red Beach One, each preceded by a dismounted guide to warn of underwater shell craters. The guides were shot down every few minutes by Japanese marksmen; each time another volunteer would step forward to continue the movement. Combat engineers had blown a hole in the seawall for the tanks to pass inland, but the way was now blocked



Marine Corps Personal Papers

*Aerial photograph of the northwestern tip of Betio (the "bird's beak") taken from 1,400 feet at 1407 on D-Day from a Kingfisher observation floatplane. Note the disabled LVTs in the water at left, seaward of the re-entrant strongpoints. A number of Marines from 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, were killed while crossing the sand spit in the extreme lower left corner.*

with dead and wounded Marines. Rather than run over his fellow Marines, the commander reversed his column and proceeded around the "bird's beak" towards a second opening blasted in the seawall. Operating in the turbid waters now without guides, four tanks foundered in shell holes in the detour. Inland from the beach, one of the surviving Shermans engaged a plucky Japanese light tank. The Marine tank demolished its smaller opponent, but not before the doomed Japanese crew released one final 37mm round, a phenomenal shot, right down the barrel of the Sherman.

By day's end, only two of the 14 Shermans were still operational, "Colorado" on Red Three and "China Gal" on Red One/Green Beach. Maintenance crews worked through the night to retrieve a third tank, "Cecilia," on Green Beach for Major Ryan. Attempts to get light tanks into

the battle fared no better. Japanese gunners sank all four LCMs laden with light tanks before the boats even reached the reef. Shoup also had reports that the tank battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander B. Swenceski, had been killed while wading ashore (Swenceski, badly wounded, survived by crawling atop a pile of dead bodies to keep from drowning until he was finally discovered on D+1).

Shoup's message to the flagship at 1045 reflected his frustration: "Stiff resistance. Need halftracks. Our tanks no good." But the Regimental Weapons Company's halftracks, mounting 75mm guns, fared no better getting ashore than did any other combat unit that bloody morning. One was sunk in its LCM by long-range artillery fire before it reached the reef. A second ran the entire gauntlet but became stuck in the loose sand at the water's edge. The

situation was becoming critical.

Amid the chaos along the exposed beachhead, individual examples of courage and initiative inspired the scattered remnants. Staff Sergeant William Bordelon, a combat engineer attached to LT 2/2, provided the first and most dramatic example on D-Day morning. When a Japanese shell disabled his LVT and killed most of the occupants enroute to the beach, Bordelon rallied the survivors and led them ashore on Red Beach Two. Pausing only to prepare explosive charges, Bordelon personally knocked out two Japanese positions which had been firing on the assault waves. Attacking a third emplacement, he was hit by machine gun fire, but declined medical assistance and continued the attack. Bordelon then dashed back into the water to rescue a wounded Marine calling for help. As intense fire opened up from yet another nearby enemy stronghold,

the staff sergeant prepared one last demolition package and charged the position frontally. Bordelon's luck ran out. He was shot and killed, later to become the first of four men of the 2d Marine Division to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

In another incident, Sergeant Roy W. Johnson attacked a Japanese tank single-handedly, scrambling to the turret, dropping a grenade inside, then sitting on the hatch until the detonation. Johnson survived this incident, but he was killed in subsequent fighting on Betio, one of 217 Marine Corps sergeants to be killed or wounded in the 76-hour battle.

On Red Beach Three, a captain, shot through both arms and legs, sent a message to Major Crowe, apologizing for "letting you down." Major Ryan recalled "a wounded ser-

geant I had never seen before limping up to ask me where he was needed most." PFC Moore, wounded and disarmed from his experiences trying to drive "My Deloris" over the seawall, carried fresh ammunition up to machine gun crews the rest of the day until having to be evacuated to one of the transports. Other brave individuals retrieved a pair of 37mm antitank guns from a sunken landing craft, manhandled them several hundred yards ashore under nightmarish enemy fire, and hustled them across the beach to the seawall. The timing was critical. Two Japanese tanks were approaching the beachhead. The Marine guns were too low to fire over the wall. "Lift them over," came the cry from a hundred throats, "LIFT THEM OVER!" Willing hands hoisted the 900-pound guns atop the

wall. The gunners coolly loaded, aimed, and fired, knocking out one tank at close range, chasing off the other. There were hoarse cheers.

*Time* correspondent Robert Sherrod was no stranger to combat, but the landing on D-Day at Betio was one of the most unnerving experiences in his life. Sherrod accompanied Marines from the fourth wave of LT 2/2 attempting to wade ashore on Red Beach Two. In his words:

No sooner had we hit the water than the Japanese machine guns really opened up on us . . . . It was painfully slow, wading in such deep water. And we had seven hundred yards to walk slowly into that machine-gun fire, looming into larger targets as we rose onto higher ground. I

*"D-Day at Tarawa," a sketch by Kerr Eby. This drawing captures the desperation of troops wading ashore from the reef through barbed wire obstacles and under constant machine gun fire. The artist himself was with the invading troops.*

U.S. Navy Combat Art Collection





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 63956

Maj Henry P. "Jim" Crowe (standing, using radio handset) rallies Landing Team 2/8 behind a disabled LVT on Red Beach Three on D-Day. Carrying a shotgun, he went from foxhole to foxhole urging his troops forward against heavy enemy fire.

was scared, as I had never been scared before . . . Those who were not hit would always remember how the machine gun bullets hissed into the water, inches to the right, inches to the left.

Colonel Shoup, moving slowly towards the beach along the pier, ordered Major Ruud's LT 3/8 to land on Red Beach Three, east of the pier. By this time in the morning there were no organized LVT units left to help transport the reserve battalion ashore. Shoup ordered Ruud to approach as closely as he could by landing boats, then wade the remaining distance. Ruud received his assault orders from Shoup at 1103. For the next six hours the two officers were never more than a mile apart, yet neither could communicate with the other.

Ruud divided his landing team into seven waves, but once the boats approached the reef the distinctions blurred. Japanese antiboat guns

zeroed in on the landing craft with frightful accuracy, often hitting just as the bow ramp dropped. Survivors reported the distinctive "clang" as a shell impacted, a split second before the explosion. "It happened a dozen times," recalled Staff Sergeant Hatch, watching from the beach, "the boat blown completely out of the water and smashed and bodies all over the place." Robert Sherrod reported from a different vantage point, "I watched a Jap shell hit directly on a [landing craft] that was bringing many Marines ashore. The explosion was terrific and parts of the boat flew in all directions." Some Navy coxswains, seeing the slaughter just ahead, stopped their boats seaward of the reef and ordered the troops off. The Marines, many loaded with radios or wire or extra ammunition, sank immediately in deep water; most drowned. The reward for those troops whose boats made it intact to the reef was hardly less sanguinary: a 600-yard wade through withering crossfire, heavier by far than that en-

dured by the first assault waves at H-Hour. The slaughter among the first wave of Companies K and L was terrible. Seventy percent fell attempting to reach the beach.

Seeing this, Shoup and his party waved frantically to groups of Marines in the following waves to seek protection of the pier. A great number did this, but so many officers and noncommissioned officers had been hit that the stragglers were shattered and disorganized. The pier itself was a dubious shelter, receiving intermittent machine-gun and sniper fire from both sides. Shoup himself was struck in nine places, including a spent bullet which came close to penetrating his bull neck. His runner crouching beside him was drilled between the eyes by a Japanese sniper.

Captain Carl W. Hoffman, commanding 3/8's Weapons Company, had no better luck getting ashore than the infantry companies ahead. "My landing craft had a direct hit from a Japanese mortar. We lost six or eight people right there." Hoff-



man's Marines veered toward the pier, then worked their way ashore.

Major Ruud, frustrated at being unable to contact Shoup, radioed his regimental commander, Colonel Hall: "Third wave landed on Beach Red 3 were practically wiped out. Fourth wave landed . . . but only a few men got ashore." Hall, himself in a small boat near the line of departure, was unable to respond. Brigadier General Leo D. ("Dutch") Hermle, assistant division commander, interceded with the message, "Stay where you are or retreat out of gun range." This added to the confusion. As a result, Ruud himself did not reach the pier until mid-afternoon. It was 1730 before he could lead the remnants of his men ashore; some did not straggle in until the following day. Shoup dispatched what was left of LT 3/8 in support of Crowe's embattled 2/8;

others were used to help plug the gap between 2/8 and the combined troops of 2/2 and 1/2.

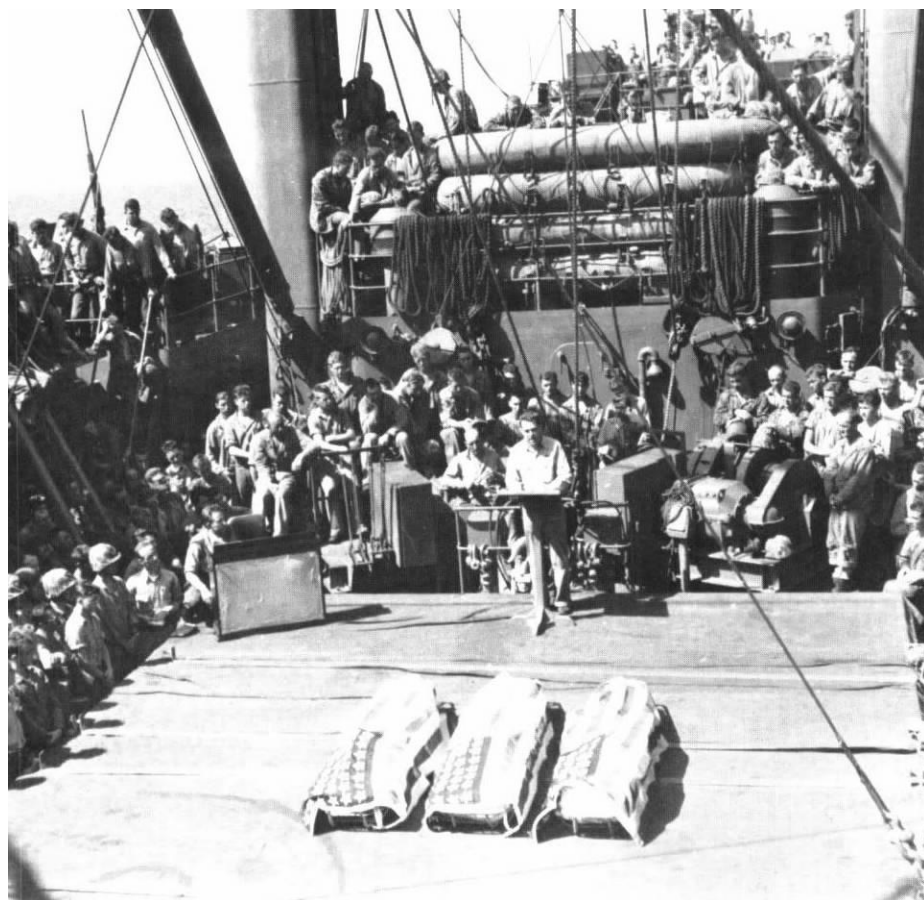
Shoup finally reached Betio at noon and established a command post 50 yards in from the pier along the blind side of a large Japanese bunker, still occupied. The colonel posted guards to keep the enemy from launching any unwelcome sorties, but the approaches to the site itself were as exposed as any other place on the flat island. At least two dozen messengers were shot while bearing dispatches to and from Shoup. Sherrod crawled up to the grim-faced colonel, who admitted, "We're in a tight spot. We've got to have more men." Sherrod looked out at the exposed waters on both sides of the pier. Already he could count 50 disabled LVTs, tanks, and boats. The prospects did not look good.

The first order of business upon

Shoup's reaching dry ground was to seek updated reports from the landing team commanders. If anything, tactical communications were worse at noon than they had been during the morning. Shoup still had no contact with any troops ashore on Red Beach One, and now he could no longer raise General Smith on *Maryland*. A dire message came from LT 2/2: "We need help. Situation bad." Later a messenger arrived from that unit with this report: "All communications out except runners. CO killed. No word from E Company." Shoup found Lieutenant Colonel Jordan, ordered him to keep command of 2/2, and sought to reinforce him with elements from 1/2 and 3/8. Shoup gave Jordan an hour to organize and rearm his assorted detachments, then ordered him to attack inland to the airstrip and expand the beachhead.

*Captain and crew of Zeilin (APA 3) pause on D-Day to commit casualties to the deep. The three dead men (two Marines and a Navy surgeon), were found in a derelict LVT drifting through the transport area, 10 miles away from the beaches.*

LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection



Shoup then directed Evans Carlson to hitch a ride out to the *Maryland* and give General Smith and Admiral Hill a personal report of the situation ashore. Shoup's strength of character was beginning to show. "You tell the general and the admiral," he ordered Carlson, "that we are going to stick and fight it out." Carlson departed immediately, but such were the hazards and confusion between the beach and the line of departure that he did not reach the flagship until 1800.

Matters of critical resupply then captured Shoup's attention. Beyond the pier he could see nearly a hundred small craft, circling aimlessly. These, he knew, carried assorted supplies from the transports and cargo ships, unloading as rapidly as they could in compliance with Admiral Nimitz's stricture to "get the hell in, then get the hell out." The indiscriminate unloading was hindering prosecution of the fight ashore. Shoup had no idea which boat held which supplies. He sent word to the Primary Control Officer to send only the most critical supplies to the pier-



# Sherman Medium Tanks at Tarawa

One company of M4-A2 Sherman medium tanks was assigned to the 2d Marine Division for Operation Galvanic from the I Marine Amphibious Corps. The 14 tanks deployed from Noumea in early November 1943, on board the new dock landing ship *Ashland* (LSD 1), joining Task Force 53 enroute to the Gilberts. Each 34-ton, diesel-powered Sherman was operated by a crew of five and featured a gyro-stabilized 75mm gun and three machine guns. Regrettably, the Marines had no opportunity to operate with their new offensive assets until the chaos of D-Day at Betio.

The Shermans joined Wave 5 of the ship-to-shore assault. The tanks negotiated the gauntlet of Japanese fire without incident, but five were lost when they plunged into unseen shell craters in the turbid water. Ashore, the Marines' lack of operating experience with medium tanks proved costly to the survivors. Local commanders simply ordered the vehicles inland to attack targets of opportunity unsupported. All but two were soon knocked out of action. Enterprising salvage crews worked throughout each night to cannibalize severely damaged vehicles in order to keep other tanks operational. Meanwhile, the Marines learned to employ the tanks within an integrated team of covering infantry and engineers. The Shermans then proved invaluable in Major Ryan's seizure of Green Beach on D+1, the attacks of Major Jones and Major Crowe on D+2, and the final assault by Lieutenant Colonel McLeod on D+3. Early in the battle, Japanese 75mm antitank guns were deadly against the Shermans, but once these weapons were destroyed, the defenders could do little more than shoot out the periscopes with sniper fire.

Colonel Shoup's opinion of the medium tanks was ambivalent. His disappointment in the squandered deployment and heavy losses among the Shermans on D-Day was tempered by subsequent admiration for their tactical role



LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection

*M-4A2 Sherman tank ("Charlie") of 3d Platoon, Company C, Medium Tanks, was disabled inland from Red Beach Three by mutually supporting Japanese antitank guns firing from well-dug in positions not too far from the beaches.*

ashore. Time and again, Japanese emplacements of reinforced concrete, steel, and sand were reduced by direct fire from the tanks' main guns, despite a "prohibitive ammunition expenditure." Shoup also reported that "the so-called crushing effect of medium tanks, as a tactical measure, was practically negligible in this operation, and I believe no one should place any faith in eliminating fortifications by running over them with a tank."

The Marines agreed that the advent of the Shermans rendered their light tanks obsolete. "Medium tanks are just as easy to get ashore, and they pack greater armor and firepower," concluded one battalion commander. By the war's end, the American ordnance industry had manufactured 48,064 Sherman tanks for employment by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps in all theaters of combat.

head: ammunition, water, blood plasma, stretchers, LVT fuel, more radios.

Shoup then conferred with Lieutenant Colonel Rixey. While naval gunfire support since the landing had been magnificent, it was time for the Marines to bring their own artillery ashore. The original plan to land the 1st Battalion/10th Marines, on Red One was no longer practical. Shoup and Rixey agreed to try a landing on the left flank of Red Two, close to the pier. Rixey's guns were 75mm pack howitzers, boated in LCVPs. The expeditionary guns could be broken down for manhandling. Rixey, hav-

ing seen from close at hand what happened when LT 3/8 had tried to wade ashore from the reef, went after the last remaining LVTs. There were enough operational vehicles for just two sections of Batteries A and B. In the confusion of transfer-line operations, three sections of Battery C followed the LVTs shoreward in their open boats. Luck was with the artillerymen. The LVTs landed their guns intact by late afternoon. When the trailing boats hung up on the reef, the intrepid Marines humped the heavy components through the bullet-swept waters to the pier and eventually ashore at twilight. There

would be close-in fire support available at daybreak.

Julian Smith knew little of these events, and he continued striving to piece together the tactical situation ashore. From observation reports from staff officers aloft in the float planes, he concluded that the situation in the early afternoon was desperate. Although elements of five infantry battalions were ashore, their toehold was at best precarious. As Smith later recalled, "the gap between Red 1 and Red 2 had not been closed and the left flank on Red 3 was by no means secure."

Smith assumed that Shoup was



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 64142

*U.S. Navy LCM-3 sinks seaward of the reef after receiving a direct hit by Japanese gunners on D-Day. This craft may have been one of four carrying M-3 Stuart light tanks, all of which were sunk by highly accurate coastal defense guns that morning.*

still alive and functioning, but he could ill afford to gamble. For the next several hours the commanding general did his best to influence the action ashore from the flagship. Smith's first step was the most critical. At 1331 he sent a radio message to General Holland Smith, reporting "situation in doubt" and requesting release of the 6th Marines to division control. In the meantime, having ordered his last remaining landing team (Hays' 1/8) to the line of departure, Smith began reconstituting an emergency division reserve comprised of bits and pieces of the artillery, engineer, and service troop units.

General Smith at 1343 ordered General Hermle to proceed to the end of the pier, assess the situation and report back. Hermle and his small

*SSgt William J. Bordelon, USMC, was awarded the Medal of Honor (posthumously) for his actions on D-Day.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 12980



staff promptly debarked from *Monrovia* (APA 31) and headed towards the smoking island, but the trip took four hours.

In the meantime, General Smith intercepted a 1458 message from Major Schoettel, still afloat seaward of the reef: "CP located on back of Red Beach 1. Situation as before. Have lost contact with assault elements." Smith answered in no uncertain terms: "Direct you land at any cost, regain control your battalion and continue the attack." Schoettel complied, reaching the beach around sunset. It would be well into the next day before he could work his way west and consolidate his scattered remnants.

At 1525, Julian Smith received Holland Smith's authorization to take control of the 6th Marines. This was

*Getting ashore on D-Day took great courage and determination. Attacking inland beyond the relative safety of the seawall on D-Day required an even greater measure.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 63457



good news. Smith now had four battalion landing teams (including 1/8) available. The question then became where to feed them into the fight without getting them chewed to pieces like Ruud's experience in trying to land 3/8.

At this point, Julian Smith's communications failed him again. At 1740, he received a faint message that Hermle had finally reached the pier and was under fire. Ten minutes later, Smith ordered Hermle to take command of all forces ashore. To his subsequent chagrin, Hermle never received this word. Nor did Smith know his message failed to get through. Hermle stayed at the pier, sending runners to Shoup (who unceremoniously told him to "get the hell out from under that pier!") and trying with partial success to unscrew the two-way movement of casualties out to sea and supplies to shore.

Throughout the long day Colonel Hall and his regimental staff had languished in their LCVs adjacent to Hays' LT 1/8 at the line of departure, "cramped, wet, hungry, tired and a large number . . . seasick." In late afternoon, Smith abruptly ordered Hall to land his remaining units on a new beach on the northeast tip of the island at 1745 and work west towards Shoup's ragged lines. This





Marine Corps Historical Center Combat Art Collection

*"Tawara, H-Hour, D-Day, Beach Red." Detail from a painting in acrylic colors by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, USMCR.*

*This aerial photograph, taken at 1406 on D-Day, shows the long pier on the north side of the island which divided Red Beach Three, left, from Red Beach Two, where "a man could lift his hand and get it shot off" in the intense fire. Barbed wire*

*entanglements are visible off both beaches. A grounded Japanese landing craft is tied to the west side of the pier. Faintly visible in the right foreground, a few Marines wade from a disabled LVT towards the pier's limited safety and shelter.*

Marine Corps Personal Papers





LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection

*Marines try to drag a wounded comrade to safety and medical treatment on D-Day.*

was a tremendous risk. Smith's overriding concern that evening was a Japanese counterattack from the eastern tail of the island against his left flank (Crowe and Ruud). Once he had been given the 6th Marines, Smith admitted he was "willing to sacrifice a battalion landing team" if it meant saving the landing force from being overrun during darkness.

Fortunately, as it turned out, Hall never received this message from Smith. Later in the afternoon, a float plane reported to Smith that a unit was crossing the line of departure and heading for the left flank of Red Beach Two. Smith and Edson assumed it was Hall and Hays going in on the wrong beach. The fog of war: the movement reported was the beginning of Rixey's artillerymen moving ashore. The 8th Marines spent the night in its boats, waiting for orders. Smith did not discover this fact until early the next morning.

On Betio, Shoup was pleased to receive at 1415 an unexpected report from Major Ryan that several hundred Marines and a pair of tanks had penetrated 500 yards beyond Red Beach One on the western end of the island. This was by far the most successful progress of the day, and the

news was doubly welcome because Shoup, fearing the worst, had assumed Schoettel's companies and the other strays who had veered in that direction had been wiped out. Shoup, however, was unable to convey the news to Smith.

Ryan's composite troops had indeed been successful on the western end. Learning quickly how best to operate with the medium tanks, the Marines carved out a substantial beachhead, overrunning many Japanese turrets and pillboxes. But aside from the tanks, Ryan's men had nothing but infantry weapons. Critically, they had no flamethrowers or demolitions. Ryan had learned from earlier experience in the Solomons that "positions reduced only with grenades could come alive again." By late afternoon, he decided to pull back his thin lines and consolidate. "I was convinced that without flamethrowers or explosives to clean them out we had to pull back . . . to a perimeter that could be defended against counterattack by Japanese troops still hidden in the bunkers."

The fundamental choice faced by most other Marines on Betio that day was whether to stay put along the beach or crawl over the seawall and

carry the fight inland. For much of the day the fire coming across the top of those coconut logs was so intense it seemed "a man could lift his hand and get it shot off." Late on D-Day, there were many too demoralized to advance. When Major Rathvon McC. Tompkins, bearing messages from General Hermle to Colonel Shoup, first arrived on Red Beach Two at the foot of the pier at dusk on D-Day, he was appalled at the sight of so many stragglers. Tompkins wondered why the Japanese "didn't use mortars on the first night. People were lying on the beach so thick you couldn't walk."

Conditions were congested on Red Beach One, as well, but there was a difference. Major Crowe was everywhere, "as cool as ice box lettuce." There were no stragglers. Crowe constantly fed small groups of Marines into the lines to reinforce his precarious hold on the left flank. Captain Hoffman of 3/8 was not displeased to find his unit suddenly integrated within Crowe's 2/8. And Crowe certainly needed help as darkness began to fall. "There we were," Hoffman recalled, "toes in the water, casualties everywhere, dead and

*Col Michael P. Ryan, USMC, wears the Navy Cross awarded to him at Tarawa. Ryan, the junior major in the Division, was instrumental in securing the western end of Betio, thereby enabling the first substantial reinforcements to land intact.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection







U.S. Navy Combat Art Collection

*"The Hard Road to Triumph," a sketch by Kerr Eby. The action shows Maj Crowe's LT 2/8 trying to expand its beachhead near the contested Burns-Philp pier.*

wounded all around us. But finally a few Marines started inching forward, a yard here, a yard there." It was enough. Hoffman was soon able to see well enough to call in naval gunfire support 50 yards ahead. His Marines dug in for the night.

West of Crowe's lines, and just inland from Shoup's command post, Captain William T. Bray's Company B, 1/2, settled in for the expected counterattacks. The company had been scattered in Kyle's bloody landing at mid-day. Bray reported to Kyle that he had men from 12 to 14 different units in his company, including several sailors who swam ashore from sinking boats. The men were well armed and no longer strangers to each other, and Kyle was reassured.

Altogether, some 5,000 Marines had stormed the beaches of Betio on D-Day. Fifteen hundred of these were dead, wounded, or missing by nightfall. The survivors held less than a quarter of a square mile of sand and coral. Shoup later described the location of his beachhead lines the night of D-Day as "a stock market graph." His Marines went to ground

in the best fighting positions they could secure, whether in shellholes inland or along the splintered seawall. Despite the crazy-quilt defensive positions and scrambled units, the Marines' fire discipline was superb. The troops seemed to share a certain grim confidence; they had faced the worst in getting ashore. They were quietly ready for any sudden *banzai* charges in the dark.

*Marines of Landing Teams 2/8 and 3/8 advance forward beyond the beach.*

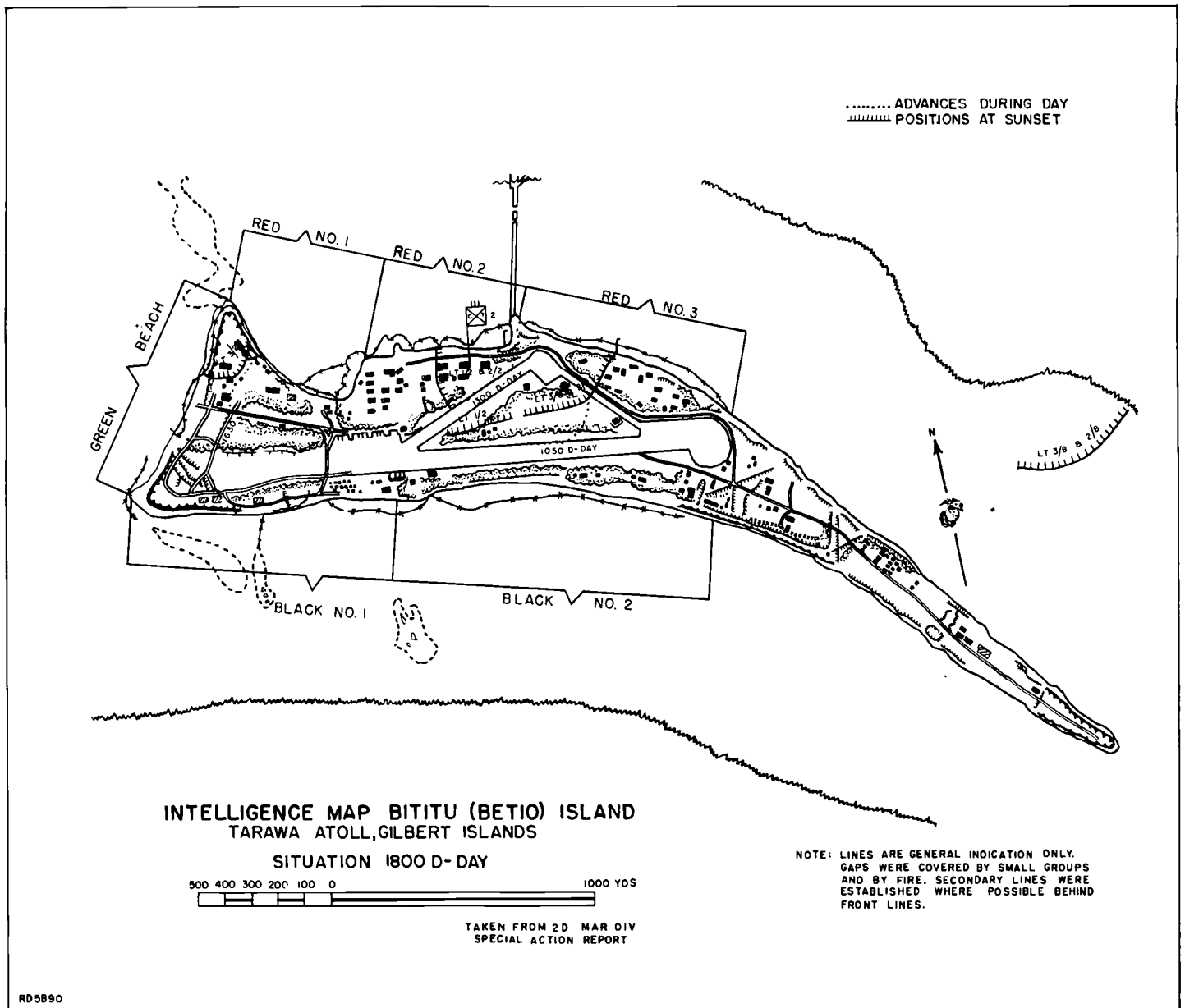
LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection

Offshore, the level of confidence diminished. General Julian Smith on *Maryland* was gravely concerned. "This was the crisis of the battle," he recalled. "Three-fourths of the Island was in the enemy's hands, and even allowing for his losses he should have had as many troops left as we had ashore." A concerted Japanese counterattack, Smith believed, would have driven most of his forces into the sea. Smith and Hill reported up the chain of command to Turner, Spruance, and Nimitz: "Issue remains in doubt." Spruance's staff began drafting plans for emergency evacuation of the landing force.

The expected Japanese counterattack did not materialize. The principal dividend of all the bombardment turned out to be the destruction of Admiral Shibasaki's wire communications. The Japanese commander could not muster his men to take the offensive. A few individuals infiltrated through the Marine lines to swim out to disabled tanks and LVTs in the lagoon, where they waited for the morning. Otherwise, all was quiet.

The main struggle throughout the night of D-Day was the attempt by Shoup and Hermle to advise Julian Smith of the best place to land the





reserves on D+1. Smith was amazed to learn at 0200 that Hall and Hays were in fact not ashore but still afloat at the line of departure, awaiting orders. Again, he ordered Combat Team Eight (-) to land on the eastern tip of the island, this time at 0900 on D+1. Hermle finally caught a boat to one of the destroyers in the lagoon to relay Shoup's request to the commanding general to land reinforcements on Red Beach Two. Smith altered Hall's orders accordingly, but he ordered Hermle back to the flagship, miffed at his assistant for not getting ashore and taking command. But Hermle had done Smith a good service in relaying the advice from Shoup. As much as the 8th Marines were going to bleed in the morning's assault, a

landing on the eastern end of the island would have been an unmitigated catastrophe. Reconnaissance after the battle discovered those beaches to be the most intensely mined on the island.

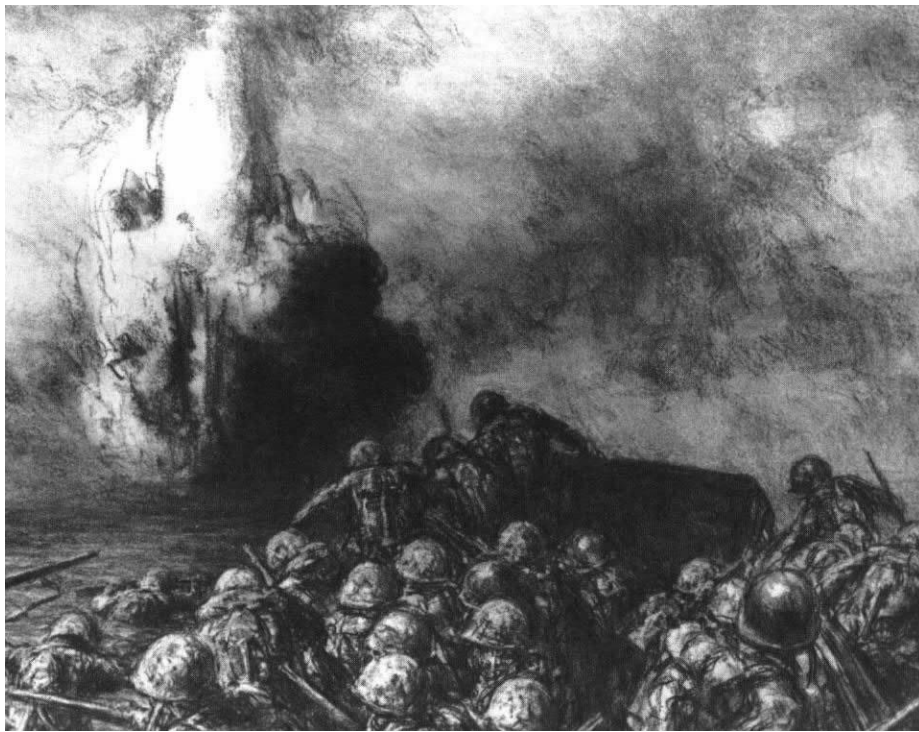
### *D+1 at Betio, 21 November 1943*

The tactical situation on Betio remained precarious for much of the 2d day. Throughout the morning, the Marines paid dearly for every attempt to land reserves or advance their ragged beachheads.

The reef and beaches of Tarawa already looked like a charnel house. Lieutenant Lillibridge surveyed what he could see of the beach at first light and was appalled: ". . . a dreadful

sight, bodies drifting slowly in the water just off the beach, junked amtracks." The stench of dead bodies covered the embattled island like a cloud. The smell drifted out to the line of departure, a bad omen for the troops of 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, getting ready to start their run to the beach.

Colonel Shoup, making the most of faulty communications and imperfect knowledge of his scattered forces, ordered each landing team commander to attack: Kyle and Jordan to seize the south coast, Crowe and Ruud to reduce Japanese strongholds to their left and front, Ryan to seize all of Green Beach. Shoup's predawn request to General Smith, relayed through Major Tompkins and Gener-



U.S. Navy Combat Art Collection

*"The Wave Breaks on the Beach," a sketch by Kerr Eby. The scene represents the unwelcome greeting received by LT 1/8 off Red Beach Two on the morning of D+1.*

al Hermle, specified the landing of Hays' LT 1/8 on Red Beach Two "close to the pier." That key component of Shoup's request did not survive the tenuous communications route to Smith. The commanding general simply ordered Colonel Hall and Major Hays to land on Red Two at 0615. Hall and Hays, oblivious of the situation ashore, assumed 1/8 would be making a covered landing.

The Marines of LT 1/8 had spent the past 18 hours embarked in LCVPs. During one of the endless circles that night, Chaplain W. Wyeth Willard passed Colonel Hall's boat and yelled, "What are they saving us for, the Junior Prom?" The troops cheered when the boats finally turned for the beach.

Things quickly went awry. The dodging tides again failed to provide sufficient water for the boats to cross the reef. Hays' men, surprised at the obstacle, began the 500-yard trek to shore, many of them dangerously far to the right flank, fully within the beaten zone of the multiple guns firing from the re-entrant strongpoint. "It was the worst possible place they

could have picked," said "Red Mike" Edson. Japanese gunners opened an unrelenting fire. Enfilade fire came from snipers who had infiltrated to the disabled LVTs offshore during the night. At least one machine gun opened up on the wading troops

*Readily disassembled and reassembled, the 75mm pack howitzers of 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, were ideal for Tarawa's restrictive hydrography. The battalion manhandled its guns ashore under heavy fire late on D-Day. Thereafter, these Marines provided outstanding fire support at exceptionally short ranges to the infantry.*

LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection



from the beached inter-island schooner *Niminoa* at the reef's edge. Hays' men began to fall at every hand.

The Marines on the beach did everything they could to stop the slaughter. Shoup called for naval gunfire support. Two of Lieutenant Colonel Rixey's 75mm pack howitzers (protected by a sand berm erected during the night by a Seabee bulldozer) began firing at the blockhouses at the Red 1/Red 2 border, 125 yards away, with delayed fuses and high explosive shells. A flight of F4F Wildcats attacked the hulk of the *Niminoa* with bombs and machine guns. These measures helped, but for the large part the Japanese caught Hays' lead waves in a withering crossfire.

Correspondent Robert Sherrod watched the bloodbath in horror. "One boat blows up, then another. The survivors start swimming for shore, but machine-gun bullets dot the water all around them . . . This is worse, far worse than it was yesterday." Within an hour, Sherrod could count "at least two hundred bodies



LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection

*Navy medical personnel evacuate the wounded from the beachhead on D-Day. This was difficult because there were few places anywhere that Marines could walk upright. The shortage of stretchers compounded the problems of the landing force.*

which do not move at all on the dry flats."

First Lieutenant Dean Ladd was shot in the stomach shortly after jumping into the water from his boat. Recalling the strict orders to the troops not to stop for the wounded, Ladd expected to die on the spot. One of his riflemen, Private First Class T. F. Sullivan, ignored the orders and saved his lieutenant's life. Ladd's rifle platoon suffered 12 killed and 12 wounded during the ship-to-shore assault.

First Lieutenant Frank Plant, the battalion air liaison officer, accompanied Major Hays in the command LCVP. As the craft slammed into the reef, Plant recalled Hays shouting "Men, debark!" as he jumped into the water. The troops that followed were greeted by a murderous fire. Plant helped pull the wounded back into the boat, noting that "the water all around was colored purple with blood." As Plant hurried to catch up with Major Hays, he was terrified at the sudden appearance of what he took to be Japanese fighters roaring right towards him. These were the

Navy Wildcats aiming for the nearby *Nimino*. The pilots were exuberant but inconsistent: one bomb hit the hulk squarely; others missed by 200 yards. An angry David Shoup came up on the radio: "Stop strafing! Bombing ship hitting own troops!"

At the end, it was the sheer courage of the survivors that got

*Marines under fire along Red Beach Three near the Burns-Philp pier hug the ground as Navy planes continually pound the enemy strongpoints in front of them.*

LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection



them ashore under such a hellish crossfire. Hays reported to Shoup at 0800 with about half his landing team. He had suffered more than 300 casualties; others were scattered all along the beach and the pier. Worse, the unit had lost all its flamethrowers, demolitions, and heavy weapons. Shoup directed Hays to attack westward, but both men knew that small arms and courage alone would not prevail against fortified positions.

Shoup tried not to let his discouragement show, but admitted in a message to General Smith "the situation does not look good ashore."

The combined forces of Majors Crowe and Ruud on Red Beach Three were full of fight and had plenty of weapons. But their left flank was flush against three large Japanese bunkers, each mutually supporting, and seemingly unassailable. The stubby Burns-Philp commercial pier, slightly to the east of the main pier, became a bloody "no-man's land" as the forces fought for its possession. Learning from the mistakes of D-Day, Crowe insured that his one surviving Sherman tank was always accompanied by infantry.

Crowe and Ruud benefitted from intensive air support and naval gun-





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 12448  
 1stLt William Deane Hawkins, USMC, was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for sustained bravery throughout the first 24 hours ashore at Betio. Hawkins commanded the 2d Marines' Scout-Sniper Platoon, which seized the long pier to begin the assault.

fire along their left flank. Crowe was unimpressed with the accuracy and effectiveness of the aviators ("our aircraft never did us much good"), but he was enthusiastic about the naval guns. "I had the *Ringgold*, the *Dashiell*, and the *Anderson* in support of me . . . . Anything I asked for I got from them. They were great!" On one occasion on D+1, Crowe authorized direct fire from a destroyer in the lagoon at a large command bunker only 50 yards ahead of the Marines. "They slammed them in there and you could see arms and legs and everything just go up like that!"

Inland from Red Beach Two, Kyle and Jordan managed to get some of their troops across the fire-swept airstrip and all the way to the south coast, a significant penetration. The toehold was precarious, however, and the Marines sustained heavy casualties. "You could not see the Japanese," recalled Lieutenant Lilibridge, "but fire seemed to come from every direction." When Jordan lost contact with his lead elements, Shoup ordered him across the island

to reestablish command. Jordan did so at great hazard. By the time Kyle arrived, Jordan realized his own presence was superfluous. Only 50 men could be accounted for of LT 2/2's rifle companies. Jordan organized and supplied these survivors to the best of his abilities, then—at Shoup's direction—merged them with Kyle's force and stepped back into his original role as an observer.

The 2d Marines' Scout Sniper Platoon had been spectacularly heroic from the very start when they led the assault on the pier just before H-Hour. Lieutenant Hawkins continuously set an example of cool disdain for danger in every tactical situation. His bravery was superhuman, but it could not last in the maelstrom. He was wounded by a Japanese mortar shell on D-Day, but shook off attempts to treat his injuries. At dawn on D+1 he led his men in attacking a series of strongpoints firing on LT 1/8 in the water. Hawkins crawled directly up to a major pillbox, fired his weapon point blank through the gun ports, then threw grenades inside to complete the job. He was shot in the chest, but continued the attack, personally taking out three more pillboxes. Then a Japanese shell nearly tore him apart. It was a mortal

*Working parties ignore sniper and artillery fire to unload 75mm ammunition delivered by LCVPs from Biddle (APA 8) at the head of the long Burns-Philp pier.*

LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 63492

*Navy hospital corpsmen attend a critically wounded Marine on Betio. The 2d Marine Division's organic medical personnel paid a high price while administering aid to fallen Marines: 30 Navy doctors and corpsmen were killed; another 59 wounded.*

"Hold up—we are calling an air strike." It took two more runners to get the air strike cancelled. Ryan then ordered Lieutenant Greene to call in naval gunfire on the southwest targets. Two destroyers in the lagoon responded quickly and accurately. At 1120, Ryan launched a coordinated tank-infantry assault. Within the hour his patchwork force had seized all of Green Beach and was ready to attack eastward toward the airfield.

Communications were still terrible. For example, Ryan twice reported the southern end of Green Beach to be heavily mined, a message that never reached any higher headquarters. But General Smith on board *Maryland* did receive direct word of Ryan's success and was overjoyed. For the first time Smith had the opportunity to land reinforcements on a covered beach with their unit integrity intact.

General Smith and "Red Mike" Edson had been conferring that morning with Colonel Maurice G. Holmes, commanding the 6th Marines, as to the best means of getting

the fresh combat team ashore. In view of the heavy casualties sustained by Hays' battalion on Red Beach Two, Smith was reconsidering a landing on the unknown eastern end of the island. The good news from Ryan quickly solved the problem. Smith ordered Holmes to land one battalion by rubber rafts on Green Beach, with a second landing team boated in LCVPs prepared to wade ashore in support.

At this time Smith received reports that Japanese troops were escaping from the eastern end of Betio by wading across to Bairiki, the next island. The Marines did not want to fight the same tenacious enemy twice. Smith then ordered Holmes to land one battalion on Bairiki to "seal the back door." Holmes assigned Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Murray to land 2/6 on Bairiki, Major "Willie K." Jones to land 1/6 by rubber boat on Green Beach, and Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth F. McLeod to be prepared to land 3/6 at any assigned spot, probably Green Beach. Smith also ordered the light tanks of Company B, 2d Tank Battalion, to

land on Green Beach in support of the 6th Marines.

These tactical plans took much longer to execute than envisioned. Jones was ready to debark from *Feland* (APA 11) when the ship was suddenly ordered underway to avoid a perceived submarine threat. Hours passed before the ship could return close enough to Betio to launch the rubber boats and their LCVP tow craft. The light tanks were among the few critical items not truly combat loaded in their transports, being carried in the very bottom of the cargo holds. Indiscriminate unloading during the first 30 hours of the landing had further scrambled supplies and equipment in intervening decks. It took hours to get the tanks clear and loaded on board lighters.

Shoup was bewildered by the long delays. At 1345 he sent Jones a message: "Bring in flamethrowers if possible . . . . Doing our best." At 1525 he queried division about the estimated landing time of LT 1/6. He wanted Jones ashore and on the attack before dark.

Meanwhile, Shoup and his small staff were beset by logistic support problems. Already there were teams organized to strip the dead of their ammunition, canteens, and first aid pouches. Lieutenant Colonel Carlson helped organize a "false beachhead" at the end of the pier. Most progress came from the combined efforts of Lieutenant Colonel Chester J. Salazar, commanding the shore party; Captain John B. McGovern, USN, acting as primary control officer on board the minesweeper *Pursuit* (AM 108); Major Ben K. Weatherwax, assistant division D-4; and Major George L. H. Cooper, operations officer of 2d Battalion, 18th Marines. Among them, these officers gradually brought some order out of chaos. They assumed strict control of supplies unloaded and used the surviving LVTs judiciously to keep the shuttle of casualties moving seaward and critical items from the pierhead to the beach. All of this was per-



LtGen Julian C. Smith Collection

*This desperate scene hardly needs a caption. The Marine is badly hurt, but he's in good hands as his buddies lead him to safety and shelter just ahead for treatment.*

formed by sleepless men under constant fire.

Casualty handling was the most pressing logistic problem on D+1. The 2d Marine Division was heroically served at Tarawa by its organic Navy doctors and hospital corpsmen. Nearly 90 of these medical specialists were themselves casualties in the fighting ashore. Lieutenant Herman R. Brukhardt, Medical Corps, USN, established an emergency room in a freshly captured Japanese bunker (some of whose former occupants "came to life" with blazing rifles more than once). In 36 hours, under brutal conditions, Brukhardt treated 126 casualties; only four died.

At first, casualties were evacuated to troopships far out in the transport area. The long journey was dangerous to the wounded troops and wasteful of the few available LVTs or LCVPs. The Marines then began delivering casualties to the destroyer *Ringgold* in the lagoon, even though her sickbay had been wrecked by a Japanese five-inch shell on D-Day. The ship, still actively firing support missions, accepted

dozens of casualties and did her best. Admiral Hill then took the risk of dispatching the troopship *Doyen* (APA 1) into the lagoon early on D+1 for service as primary receiving ship for critical cases. Lieutenant Commander James Oliver, MC, USN, led a five-man surgical team

*Some seriously wounded Marines were evacuated from the beachhead by raft.*  
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 63926



with recent combat experience in the Aleutians. In the next three days Oliver's team treated more than 550 severely wounded Marines. "We ran out of sodium pentathol and had to use ether," said Oliver, "although a bomb hit would have blown *Doyen* off the face of the planet."

Navy chaplains were also hard at work wherever Marines were fighting ashore. Theirs was particularly heartbreaking work, consoling the wounded, administering last rites to the dying, praying for the souls of the dead before the bulldozer came to cover the bodies from the unforgiving tropical sun.

The tide of battle began to shift perceptibly towards the Americans by mid-afternoon on D+1. The fighting was still intense, the Japanese fire still murderous, but the surviving Marines were on the move, no longer gridlocked in precarious toeholds on the beach. Rixey's pack howitzers were adding a new definition for close fire support. The supply of ammunition and fresh water was greatly improved. Morale was up, too. The troops knew the 6th Marines was coming in soon. "I thought up