

# Western Pacific Operations

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

VOLUME IV

*By*

GEORGE W. GARAND  
TRUMAN R. STROBRIDGE

*Historical Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps*

1971

Other Volumes in this Series

---

I

LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr.  
*Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*

II

Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Maj Douglas T. Kane  
*Isolation of Rabaul*

III

Henry I. Shaw, Jr., Bernard C. Nalty, and Edwin T. Turnbladh  
*Central Pacific Drive*

V

Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr.  
*Victory and Occupation*

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 58-60002

PCN 19000262700

## Foreword

This book is the fourth in the five-volume history of Marine Corps operations in World War II. The story of Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Marine artillery and aviation in the Philippines, as previously narrated in separate detail in preliminary monographs, has been reevaluated and rewritten to depict events in proper proportion to each other and in correct perspective to the war as a whole. New material, particularly from Japanese and other sources that has become available since the earlier monograph series was published, has been included to provide fresh insight into the Marine Corps' contribution to the final victory in the Pacific.

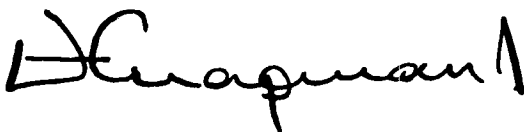
The period covered by this history, essentially from mid-September 1944 to late March 1945, covers the continuation of the United States drive from the Central Pacific to the Western Carolines and the Volcano-Bonin Islands at the very doorstep of Japan. Once again it became the task of the Marine Corps to put into practice the amphibious doctrine that had been developed during the prewar years, modified and perfected during earlier operations in the Solomons, Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas. The course of events on Peleliu and Iwo Jima demonstrated the basic soundness of Marine Corps tactics and techniques in the face of skillful and tenacious resistance offered by a highly motivated and well trained foe who was determined to defend his possessions to the last.

While the American amphibious assault team fought its way through the Japanese defenses towards the Home Islands, Marine aviation wrote a glorious chapter of its own. Frequently denied the opportunity of flying direct support in amphibious operations, Marine aviators developed and put into practice a doctrine of close air support that more than proved its worth during the recapture of the Philippines. The continuous neutralization of bypassed enemy-held islands in the Central Pacific by Marine air isolated sizable Japanese garrisons from their bases of supply and rendered them powerless to support the enemy war effort until their surrender at the end of the war.

The numbers of men and quantities of materiel employed during the operations narrated in this volume defy the imagination. In this connection it is worth recalling that the successful execution of these operations depended on joint Army-Navy-Marine cooperation, which became ever more pronounced as the war approached its final phase. Combined with improved tactics and weapons on the field of battle was the highly flexible

and efficient Marine command organization designed to meet the requirements of modern warfare.

As on other battlefields before World War II and since, the Marines who fought and died in the Philippines, on Peleliu, and on Iwo Jima wrote with their blood an indelible account of courage and sacrifice that will live on in their country's history, to serve as a guide and inspiration to future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. F. Chapman, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

L. F. CHAPMAN, JR  
GENERAL, U.S. MARINE CORPS  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

Reviewed and approved  
26 May 1970

## Preface

In a series of boldly conceived and executed operations, American forces in the Pacific Theater captured and developed a number of strategically placed islands that were to serve as springboards for the inexorable advance towards the Japanese home islands. The Guadalcanal campaign, first offensive step after a year of reverses in this theater, marked the beginning of the American counteroffensive that gathered momentum until a steamroller of unprecedented force smashed its way across the vast expanses of the Central and Western Pacific.

Hand in hand with the accelerating tempo of operations went improvements in the techniques employed in the amphibious assault and the sometimes protracted operations inland. By the time the Peleliu operation was launched in mid-September 1944, the Japanese had changed their tactics of defending the beaches and launching a final *banzai* once the inevitable end was in sight to a far more sophisticated defense that amounted to an extended delaying action conducted from well dug tunnels and cave positions which had to be taken at great cost to the attacking force. The battle for Iwo Jima, which got under way on 19 February 1945, represented a battle of attrition in the truest sense, with losses in men and materiel far out of proportion to the size of the objective. Aside from its tactical value, Iwo Jima assumed strategic importance in signalling the Japanese government and people that the United States was determined to bring the war in the Pacific to a victorious conclusion and that even the heaviest losses would not deter Americans from this purpose.

New tactics employed by the Marine Corps in the course of the war were not limited to fighting on the ground. The speedy expansion of Marine strength following the Pearl Harbor debacle was accompanied by a proportionate growth of the air arm that had existed in miniature size up to that time. Denied the use of carriers during the early years of the war, Marine aviators discovered through trial and error that they could make an important contribution to the ground troops in furnishing a type of close air support that could be rendered quickly and with devastating results to the enemy. Together with this support came the creation and perfection of the air liaison team which provided a direct and vital link between troops on the ground, whether Marine or Army, and the supporting aircraft. The bombing of bypassed islands in the Central Pacific, as carried out by Marine aviation over a prolonged period of time, under-

scored the fact that enemy bastions of considerable strength could be effectively neutralized from the air without having to be subjected to costly ground assault.

A section of this volume has been devoted to the evolution of the organization that had to be created to coordinate the training, flow of replacements and supplies, and overall employment of Marine field components. This was the Fleet Marine Force, which was conceived long before World War II. Its growth and development clearly mirror the organizational demands made on the Corps during the war years. The chapters provide the reader with a better understanding of the command organization that made possible many of the famous amphibious assaults of World War II.

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

This five-volume series was planned and outlined by Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., Chief Historian, while Mr. George W. Garand was responsible for Volume IV itself. Mr. Truman R. Strobridge, originally assigned as the author of this volume, wrote the first four chapters of the Peleliu campaign before he left the Marine Corps to become a historian with the Department of the Army. Mr. Garand wrote the rest of this book, revising and editing it for publication. In his research on the Peleliu operation, Mr. Garand frequently consulted the material assembled for the monograph *The Assault on Peleliu* by Major Frank O. Hough; material dealing with the Philippines was obtained from the monograph *Marine Aviation in the Philippines* by Major Charles W. Boggs, Jr. In preparing the narrative for Iwo Jima, the monograph *Iwo Jima: Amphibious Epic*, prepared by Lieutenant Colonel Whitman S. Bartley, served as a valuable guide. Mr. Garand also prepared all the appendices. The Director of Marine Corps History made the final critical review of portions of the manuscript.

A number of leading participants in the actions described have commented on the preliminary drafts of pertinent portions of the book. Their valuable assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Several senior officers, in particular General Oliver P. Smith, Admiral George H. Fort, Admiral

Jesse B. Oldendorf, Lieutenant General Julian C. Smith, Lieutenant General Merwin H. Silverthorn, Lieutenant General Thomas A. Wornham, Lieutenant General Louis E. Woods, Major General Ford O. Rogers, Major General Dudley S. Brown, and Brigadier General John S. Letcher made valuable contributions through their written comments, as did Lieutenant General Lewis B. Puller and Brigadier General John R. Lanigan during personal interviews.

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

Captain Charles B. Collins and his predecessors as Historical Division/Branch Administrative Officers, Chief Warrant Officer Jo E. Kennedy, Second Lieutenant Gerald S. Duncan, and First Lieutenants John J. Hainsworth and D'Arcy E. Grisier ably handled the many exacting duties involved in processing the volume from first drafts through final printed form. The bulk of the early preliminary typescripts was prepared by Miss Kay P. Sue, who, with the assistance of Sergeant Michael L. Gardner, also expertly handled the painstaking task of typing the final manuscript for the printer. Miss Sue, assisted by Miss Charlotte L. Webb, also performed the meticulous work demanded in preparing the index.

The maps were drafted by Sergeant Earl L. Wilson and his successor, Sergeant Kenneth W. White.



F. C. CALDWELL  
COLONEL, U.S. MARINE CORPS (RETIRED)  
DIRECTOR OF MARINE CORPS HISTORY





# Contents

## PART I BACKGROUND

| CHAPTER         | PAGE |
|-----------------|------|
| 1. Introduction | 3    |

## PART II FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. The Development of FMFPac . . . . .   | 13 |
| 2. Administration and Aviation . . . . . | 33 |

## PART III THE PALAUS: GATEWAY TO THE PHILIPPINES

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. Strategic Situation . . . . .                            | 51  |
| 2. Pre-Assault Preparations . . . . .                       | 77  |
| 3. D-Day on Peleliu . . . . .                               | 106 |
| 4. The Drive Inland: 16–22 September . . . . .              | 132 |
| 5. Angaur and Ulithi . . . . .                              | 162 |
| 6. Securing the North: 23–30 September . . . . .            | 185 |
| 7. The Umurbrogol Pocket: 29 September–15 October . . . . . | 219 |
| 8. To the Bitter End . . . . .                              | 254 |

## PART IV MARINES IN THE PHILIPPINES

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. Background and Planning . . . . .         | 291 |
| 2. The Leyte Landings . . . . .              | 309 |
| 3. The Luzon Campaign . . . . .              | 334 |
| 4. Southern Philippines Operations . . . . . | 358 |

## PART V MARINE AVIATION IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. Mounting The Offensive . . . . .                                      | 393 |
| 2. Marine Aviation in the Marianas, Carolines, and at Iwo Jima . . . . . | 422 |

PART VI IWO JIMA

| CHAPTER   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| 1. Background to DETACHMENT . . . . .                             | 443  |
| 2. Offensive Plans and Preparations . . . . .                     | 462  |
| 3. The Preliminaries . . . . .                                    | 482  |
| 4. D-Day on Iwo Jima . . . . .                                    | 502  |
| 5. The Struggle for Suribachi . . . . .                           | 528  |
| 6. Drive to the North . . . . .                                   | 547  |
| 7. 3d Marine Division Operations on Iwo Jima . . . . .            | 571  |
| 8. Airfield Development and Activities Behind the Lines . . . . . | 594  |
| 9. The 5th Marine Division Drive on the Left . . . . .            | 616  |
| 10. The 4th Marine Division Drive on the Right . . . . .          | 645  |
| 11. Final Operations on Iwo Jima . . . . .                        | 684  |
| 12. Summary . . . . .   | 713  |
| 13. Conclusions . . . . .   | 729  |

APPENDICES

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| A. Bibliographical Notes . . . . .                       | 739 |
| B. Guide to Abbreviations . . . . .                      | 752 |
| C. Military Map Symbols . . . . .                        | 758 |
| D. Chronology . . . . .                                  | 759 |
| E. Fleet Marine Force Status—31 August 1944 . . . . .    | 765 |
| F. Table of Organization F-100 Marine Division . . . . . | 780 |
| G. Marine Task Organization and Command List . . . . .   | 782 |
| H. Marine Casualties . . . . .                           | 797 |
| I. Unit Commendations . . . . .                          | 798 |

|                 |     |
|-----------------|-----|
| Index . . . . . | 813 |
|-----------------|-----|

ILLUSTRATIONS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Amphibious Exercises, Puerto Rico . . . . .   | 18  |
| Testing Higgins Boat . . . . .                | 18  |
| Landing Exercise, New River, N. C. . . . .    | 37  |
| Change of Command, FMFPac, 1945 . . . . .     | 37  |
| Assault Troops Off Peleliu . . . . .          | 107 |
| Peleliu Beach on D-Day . . . . .              | 107 |
| Abortive Enemy Tank Attack, Peleliu . . . . . | 125 |
| Machine Gun In Action, Peleliu . . . . .      | 125 |
| Artillery in Firing Position . . . . .        | 140 |

| ILLUSTRATIONS—Continued   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| Marine Tanks at Peleliu Airfield . . . . .                        | 140  |
| Close Fighting Near Airfield . . . . .                            | 149  |
| Casualty Evacuation . . . . .                                     | 149  |
| U. S. Army Troops Assault Angaur . . . . .                        | 167  |
| Closing in on the Enemy, Angaur . . . . .                         | 167  |
| Men and Supplies Crossing Peleliu Reef . . . . .                  | 188  |
| U. S. Army Troops Arrive at Peleliu . . . . .                     | 188  |
| Marine Aircraft Preparing for Napalm Attack . . . . .             | 194  |
| Bombing of Japanese Ridge Positions, Peleliu . . . . .            | 194  |
| Assault on Ngesebus . . . . .                                     | 213  |
| Advance Inland, Ngesebus . . . . .                                | 213  |
| Battle of the Ridges, Peleliu . . . . .                           | 243  |
| Final Operations on Peleliu . . . . .                             | 243  |
| Navy Planes at Dulag Airfield, Leyte . . . . .                    | 313  |
| Marine Night Fighters, Leyte . . . . .                            | 313  |
| Close Air Support for U. S. Army Troops, Luzon . . . . .          | 355  |
| Marine Dive Bombers on Luzon Returning from Mission . . . . .     | 355  |
| New Dive Bombers for Marine Aviation in the Philippines . . . . . | 360  |
| Filipino Guerrillas On Mindanao . . . . .                         | 360  |
| LSTs Unloading at Zamboanga . . . . .                             | 369  |
| U. S. Army Ceremony Honors Marine Aviation . . . . .              | 369  |
| Marine Dive Bombers En Route to Bypassed Islands . . . . .        | 419  |
| U. S. Personnel Touring Mille Island, Marshalls . . . . .         | 419  |
| Bombs Away at Iwo Jima . . . . .                                  | 488  |
| Amphibious Assault, Iwo Jima . . . . .                            | 488  |
| 4th Marine Division Troops on Iwo Beach . . . . .                 | 507  |
| Landing of 2/27, Iwo Jima . . . . .                               | 507  |
| Japanese Painting of Iwo Invasion . . . . .                       | 511  |
| War Dog and Handler Approach Enemy Cave . . . . .                 | 511  |
| 37mm Gun in Action . . . . .                                      | 529  |
| Debris of Battle, D plus 2 . . . . .                              | 529  |
| Flamethrowers in Action . . . . .                                 | 532  |
| Marine on Mt. Suribachi and View of Landing Beaches . . . . .     | 532  |
| First Flag Raising on Iwo Jima . . . . .                          | 541  |
| Second Flag Goes Up on Suribachi . . . . .                        | 544  |
| Marines at Mass . . . . .   | 596  |
| First "Grasshopper" Lands on Iwo . . . . .                        | 596  |
| B-29 Superfortress After Emergency Landing . . . . .              | 599  |
| 4th Marine Division Observation Post . . . . .                    | 599  |

| ILLUSTRATIONS—Continued  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| 155mm Gun in Action . . . . .  | 606  |
| Rocket Fire Support . . . . .  | 606  |
| Birdseye View of Iwo Beachhead . . . . .                                       | 609  |
| Shore Parties Hauling Supplies . . . . .                                       | 609  |
| Captured Japanese Tank . . . . .   | 619  |
| Combat Patrol in Northern Iwo . . . . .  | 619  |
| Enemy Positions near Nishi Village . . . . .                                   | 696  |
| Japanese Prisoner and Escort . . . . .   | 696  |
| Air Force Bivouac Area on Iwo After Banzai . . . . .                           | 709  |
| Motoyama Airfield No. 1 After Restoration . . . . .                            | 709  |
| <br>MAPS   |      |
| 1. Strategic Situation, Central and Western Pacific . . . . .                  | 53   |
| 2. Palau Islands . . . . .   | 56   |
| 3. Japanese Defense Plan, Peleliu . . . . .                                    | 74   |
| 4. D-Day, Peleliu . . . . .  | 111  |
| 5. Peleliu, Second Operational Phase . . . . .                                 | 133  |
| 6. Angaur Island . . . . .   | 164  |
| 7. Ulithi Atoll . . . . .  | 182  |
| 8. Commitment of the U.S. Army 321st Infantry Regiment,<br>Peleliu . . . . .   | 191  |
| 9. Isolation of Umurbrogol . . . . .   | 196  |
| 10. North Peleliu and Ngesebus . . . . .                                       | 203  |
| 11. Securing the North . . . . .   | 215  |
| 12. Umurbrogol Pocket . . . . .  | 220  |
| 13. Drive from the North . . . . .   | 239  |
| 14. Final Marine Action, Peleliu . . . . .                                     | 247  |
| 15. Final 81st Infantry Division Operations, Peleliu . . . . .                 | 255  |
| 16. Philippine Islands . . . . .   | 295  |
| 17. Sixth Army Area of Operations . . . . .                                    | 311  |
| 18. Lingayen Gulf Landing . . . . .  | 338  |
| 19. Luzon . . . . .  | 341  |
| 20. Route to Manila and XI Corps Landings . . . . .                            | 345  |
| 21. Main U. S. Drives in the Victor V Operation . . . . .                      | 364  |
| 22. Area of Responsibility, Commander Aircraft, Northern<br>Solomons . . . . . | 394  |
| 23. Marshall Islands—MAG-22 Operations, 1944 . . . . .                         | 406  |
| 24. Iwo Jima—Sulphur Island . . . . .  | 446  |
| 25. Japanese Defense Sectors . . . . .   | 460  |

| MAPS—Continued  | PAGE        |
|---|-------------|
| 26. Landing Plan, Iwo Jima . . . . .  | 470         |
| 27. Naval Gunfire Areas of Responsibility, D-3 and D-2 . . . . .                        | 494         |
| 28. VAC Front Lines D-Day, 19 February 1945 . . . . .                                   | 524         |
| I. Scene of Battle, 1944-1945 . . . . .   | Map Section |
| II. Progress of the Attack, VAC Front Lines, D-Day—<br>D Plus 5 . . . . .               | Map Section |
| III. 3d Marine Division Zone of Action, Iwo Jima,<br>25 February–1 March 1945 . . . . . | Map Section |
| IV. 3d Marine Division Zone of Action, Iwo Jima,<br>1–10 March 1945 . . . . .           | Map Section |
| V. 5th Marine Division Zone of Action, Iwo Jima,<br>24 February–2 March 1945 . . . . .  | Map Section |
| VI. 5th Marine Division Zone of Action, Iwo Jima,<br>2–10 March 1945 . . . . .          | Map Section |
| VII. 4th Marine Division Zone of Action, Iwo Jima,<br>24–28 February 1945 . . . . .     | Map Section |
| VIII. 4th Marine Division Zone of Action, Iwo Jima,<br>5–7 March 1945 . . . . .         | Map Section |
| IX. 3d Marine Division, Final Operations . . . . .                                      | Map Section |
| X. 4th Marine Division, Final Operations . . . . .                                      | Map Section |
| XI. 5th Marine Division, Final Operations . . . . .                                     | Map Section |

## CHARTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. Genealogy of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific . . . . .                 | 22  |
| 2. Japanese Command Organization—Defense of the Philippines . . . . . | 299 |
| 3. Organization of Air Command, Southwest Pacific Area . . . . .      | 302 |

**PART I**

***Background***



# Introduction

The military operations narrated in this volume cover neither the beginning of the greatest global conflict in history nor its end. They do, however, describe in detail two of the major amphibious campaigns in the Western Pacific, Peleliu and Iwo Jima, and the prolonged fighting that followed until all enemy resistance was quelled. In addition, the little-known exploits of Marine artillery and air in the Philippines and the accomplishments of Marine flying squadrons in the reduction of enemy positions in the Central and Western Pacific are covered.

In themselves, the day-by-day accounts of terrain seized, sorties flown, rounds fired, numbers of enemy killed, and casualties sustained tend to have a numbing effect. The mere recitation of the thousands of tons of artillery ammunition expended in the preliminary bombardment and small arms ammunition fired in weeks of close combat tend to overwhelm the imagination. Nor does the spectacle of 90,000 men battling for weeks at close quarters appear realistic unless it is remembered that such combat actually took place on Iwo Jima. Even though this volume tells of the exploits of Marines, both ground and air, in the Western Pacific, it should be recalled that their heroism was but a small part in the mosaic of global war, and that their sacrifice was directly linked with that of the remaining mili-

tary services of the United States and its Allies.

World War II had its roots in the political, economic, and social conditions that arose or prevailed in the years following the end of the greatest conflagration the world had experienced up to that time. In a carefully prepared address to the Senate on 22 January 1917, President Woodrow Wilson had voiced the view that any lasting peace had to be a peace without victory, since "victory would mean peace forced upon a loser, a victor's peace imposed upon the vanquished. Only a peace between equals can last."<sup>1</sup>

Almost prophetically, the President continued that "peace must be followed by some concert of powers which will make it virtually impossible that any such catastrophe should ever overwhelm us again."<sup>2</sup>

As part of the peace settlement following the end of World War I, the German island possessions in the Central Pacific, notably the Marianas, Carolines, and Marshalls, were mandated to the Japanese, who also gained control of former German concessions in China.

---

<sup>1</sup> President Woodrow Wilson's address to the U.S. Senate, 22 Jan 17, as cited in Oscar Theodore Barck, Jr., and Nelson Manfred Blake, *Since 1900—A History of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), pp. 210-211.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



While Germany was being stripped of her outlying possessions and the groundwork for future trouble was being laid in Central Europe, where strips of territory inhabited by ethnic Germans were being incorporated into adjacent countries, Japan emerged as the strongest power in the western Pacific. While the Japanese, under the terms of the mandate given to them by the League of Nations, were permitted to govern and develop the islands placed under their charge, they were forbidden to construct fortifications on them, a point further underscored by the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922.

Quite possibly, given a few decades of global peace, the major nations of the world might well have succeeded in restoring their shattered economies, rebuilding their political structures, and learning to live with their neighbors across the multitude of newly created borders. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case. The severe bloodletting that the big powers had undergone in World War I bred distrust, dissatisfaction, and an increasing trend towards national and international violence among the victors and vanquished alike.

Even before the end of World War I, two major upheavals occurred in Russia, with inherent loss of life and destruction of property unheard of since the Mongol invasion. While the Red and White factions were locked in a struggle to the death, the peasants, workers, and remnants of the erstwhile aristocracy suffered drastic privations. In the end little changed, and one oppressive regime was succeeded by another. Lack of faith in their respective leaders and/or national destinies

was to cause overwhelming changes in Italy and Germany where fascist dictatorships were established without recourse to civil war, once the people had lost faith in the parliamentary forms of government they had enjoyed since the end of the war.

In the United States, following the conclusion of the armistice, there was a considerable amount of confusion as to the shape in which the postwar world was to be rebuilt. President Wilson was an ardent advocate of a League of Nations in which every member, regardless of size, would have one vote. The five big powers, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States, were to sit on an executive council permanently, while non-permanent seats were to be allotted to four of the smaller nations. A permanent Court of International Justice was to arbitrate disputes between the member nations. Among the foremost functions of the League of Nations was the preservation of peace, as expressed in Article 10, which President Wilson regarded as the heart of its constitution. This article provided that:

The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the League. In case of any threat of danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled.<sup>3</sup>

Enforcement of a global peace was predicated on the assumption that no aggressor could withstand the combined strength of outraged humanity, and that all member nations would take con-

<sup>3</sup> Article 10 of the Constitution, League of Nations, as cited in *ibid.*, p. 251.

certed action without delay against any form of aggression. The United States had joined the Allies "in order to make the world safe for democracy," and President Wilson clearly perceived that the future of world peace could be safeguarded only if all the major powers combined their strength, manpower, and resources in stabilizing a shaky world. Many influential Americans felt now that the war had been won, in no small measure by virtue of their efforts, that the time had come to withdraw from the arena of international politics. In this they were guided by the parting words of the first President of the United States who had clearly stated:

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations to have with them as little political connections as possible . . . It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances . . . Taking care always to keep ourselves by suitable establishments on a respectable defensive posture, we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.<sup>4</sup>

Continued upheavals in Europe, economic considerations, and disillusionment with prolonged bickering at the conference table soon led the United States to revert to its hallowed tradition of isolationism, thus deserting Wilson's leadership that, had it been carried out to its fullest extent, might have assured the world a period of peace and stability. Instead, the American nation rejected not only Wilson's vision of a just peace, but along with it his political party and the League of Nations. On

the positive side, the Republican administration of President Warren G. Harding convened a disarmament conference in July 1921, initially limited to Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan. The number of participants was subsequently expanded to include several of the smaller countries. Soviet Russia, socially still unacceptable and far removed from obtaining official United States recognition, was excluded.

On 12 November 1921, three years after the World War I armistice, the conference was held in Washington. Considering the differences that existed between the attending powers, substantial agreement was quickly reached by the three major nations, the United States, Great Britain, and Japan, as well as by France and Italy, with reference to the ratio to be employed as to the ships to be retained by each country's navy and the number to be scrapped. At the same time, the participants agreed to halt the construction of warships, but not aircraft carriers, in excess of 10,000 tons or equipped with guns larger than 8 inches in caliber for a period of 10 years. The participants agreed to the terms of the agreement largely because it resulted in a sizable cut in military spending at a time when the various treasuries were badly depleted by the drain of World War I. Japan received an additional incentive as her reward for agreeing to the ratio, which was to become a major factor in shaping the policies that the major powers were to adopt in dealing with various areas of the Pacific.

By way of a compromise, the United States agreed that she would not fortify any of the islands under her control in

<sup>4</sup> Victor Platsits, ed., *Washington's Farewell Address* (New York: New York Public Library, 1935), pp. 155-56.

the Pacific, except for Hawaii. The United States specifically agreed not to fortify the Philippines, Guam, Wake, or the Aleutian Islands; Great Britain likewise agreed not to fortify Hong Kong, Borneo, the Solomons, and the Gilberts. In turn, the Japanese agreed not to fortify Formosa or any of the former German possessions in the Pacific north of the equator, including specifically the Marianas less Guam, which was under American control, and the Carolines.

A Four-Power Pact, to which England, France, Japan, and the United States were signatories called for a mutual recognition of insular rights in the Pacific. This pact, which was to be in force for a 10-year period, called for the adjustment of any difficulties that might arise by way of the conference table. In order to eliminate a further source of irritation in the Far East, a Nine-Power Treaty, subscribed to by the United States, Great Britain, Japan, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, The Netherlands, France, and China attempted to regulate the often precarious and complicated relations of China with various outside powers. At least on the surface, the Washington Conference seemed to assure a period of international cooperation that, coupled with a reduction in armaments, could lead to a lengthy span of global peace.

Under the terms of the Naval Treaty of 1922, the United States destroyed 19 capital ships of pre-World War I vintage and 13 that were still under construction. Expressed in tonnage, the United States destroyed 842,380 tons; Great Britain 447,750 tons; and Japan 354,709 tons. On the part of American

naval experts the scrapping of major ships as well as the agreement to leave the western Pacific area unfortified evoked sharp criticism, since "the strict observance of these treaties left the United States crippled."<sup>5</sup> It was to become apparent soon enough that the Washington Conference had left a major loophole in that the quota system did not apply to submarines, cruisers, and destroyers. As a result, it was not long before those nations interested in evading the provisions of the disarmament treaty concentrated their efforts on the construction of these "permitted" vessels.

By 1927, the euphoria that had followed in the wake of the Washington Conference had largely given way to a spirit of sober contemplation. In an attempt to revive the hopeful spirit of 1922, and in order to put an end to the smaller vessel naval armaments race that had been developing, President Calvin Coolidge deemed it advisable to hold a second disarmament conference, which convened in late June 1927 at Geneva. Even though once again the United States offered her good offices in reviving the feeling of trust and conviviality that had marked the Washington Conference, the climate abroad had undergone a distinct change in the five years that had passed since the earlier conference. Both Italy and France refused to participate at all; the United States, Japan, and Great Britain failed

<sup>5</sup> Maj C. Joseph Bernardo and Dr. Eugene H. Bacon, *American Military Policy—Its Development Since 1775* (Harrisburg: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1957), p. 391.

to reach any substantial agreement in limiting the construction of the smaller naval vessels and, in consequence, the Geneva Conference ended in failure.

Nearly three more years were to pass before the London Naval Treaty of April 1930 once more brought some semblance of order into the international naval armament situation, though once again France and Italy refused to comply with the terms of the agreement. A World Disarmament Conference, convened at Geneva in 1932 under the auspices of the League of Nations, failed to yield concrete results, even though the United States, this time under the leadership of President Herbert Hoover, attempted to have all offensive weapons outlawed, and, failing this, made an effort to at least obtain a sizable reduction in such weapons. Once again, the American proposals fell on deaf ears in a world increasingly beset by social, political, and economic problems. One history was to sum up the overall situation in these words:

America had entered the postwar period with hopeful visions of a new world order in which reason, logic, and disarmament would pave the way toward world peace. But the unsettled problems and bitterness of the Versailles Peace Conference provided anything but the proper milieu for the entertainment of such thoughts. The world was in ferment, but America slept, trusting in diplomacy and disarmament to protect her from a cruel and implacable fate.<sup>6</sup>

It was the fate of the United States to emerge on the international scene as a dominant power at the very time that the problems of the major nations cried

for a solution that even an older and more experienced country might have been able to mediate only with great difficulty. World War I had brought forth only bitter fruit for victors and vanquished alike and the balance of power that had existed prior to 1914 had largely vanished. It was succeeded by new forms of government and tenuous alliances more often engaged in as fleeting expediences rather than solutions of a more permanent nature. Seemingly abounding in material wealth, possessed by a sharp sense of business, and dwarfing the Old World powers with her sheer physical size and enormous resources, the appearance of the young giant on the world scene, and particularly in the sphere of diplomacy, was greeted by her elders with a mixture of amusement, admiration, envy, and scorn. Few could deny President Wilson's sincerity in putting forward his Fourteen Points aimed at restoring stability to a troubled postwar world. Even fewer could question the honesty of the attempts made by Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover in forestalling a general world armaments race that sooner or later was bound to result in a shooting war that once again might engulf one nation after another. Yet, in assessing its own political aspirations on the international scene, a nation embarked on pursuit of its national destiny, real or imagined, could not help but feel a sense of frustration and irritation at the continuous American efforts that could well be considered as direct or indirect interference in the affairs of others. No matter how well meant or inspired the American quest for world

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.

peace, the very honesty and often lack of complexity within these proposals could hardly fail to act as an irritant to those nations that by virtue of age, culture, and social fabric considered themselves somewhat superior to the sometimes clumsy diplomacy of the New World.

On the international scene, fluctuations in American foreign policy occasioned by succeeding administrations that were in themselves reflections of internal developments within the country frequently were misinterpreted by foreign observers. Central and South America were generally regarded as the preserve of the United States, and several small-scale military incursions by U.S. forces into these areas whenever American interests were threatened underscored this point. In other parts of the world, the United States attempted to make available its good offices in mediating disputes, but isolationism within the country failed to furnish the outside world with an image of firmness and resolution, backed by military power.

The isolationism that gripped the United States in the early 1930s in itself was the outgrowth of several factors, all of which combined to imbue Americans with a spirit of withdrawal from the troubles of other nations. The prolonged economic depression with its side effects of widespread discontent further contributed to a public apathy towards external developments underscored by growing public disillusionment with the state of the world in general. As one history dealing with this particular subject matter was to comment:

To many Americans, World War I had been fought in vain; the world had not

been made safe for democracy. There was a growing feeling that wars were engineered by munitions makers so that they might make money. . . . Another factor in the isolationist trend was the failure of the debtors to repay what they had borrowed during World War I. And what made it worse, Americans felt that this money was being used to build up national armaments which would lead to future wars.<sup>7</sup>

The rising number of dictatorships across the globe could also serve as a barometer warning of future trouble in international affairs. By the end of the 1920s a growing number of nations had entrusted their destinies to the hands of "strong men," notably the Soviet Union, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Poland. The trend toward authoritarian forms of government was still gaining ground and the concept of a single-party state that, at the cost of individual freedom, could operate more efficiently in a state of crisis than the parliamentary system, made great inroads. Thus, the six million unemployed in Germany resulting from the Great Depression, played an important part in the rise to power of the National Socialist Party. In Japan, the militarists were also moving into the saddle by degrees, though the Emperor continued to rule supreme. As the evil of totalitarianism spread, the differences between opposing systems became diffused:

Communism and fascism became more clearly movements international in character, each thriving in the fertile soil of popular frustration and social distress, and on fears aroused by the other. After 1933, when the National Socialists took absolute control of Germany, the accumulating crises merged into one supreme crisis: The direct challenge of unbridled

<sup>7</sup> Barck and Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 551.

organized violence to all that men had tried to achieve in 1919 and had still hoped to achieve in 1925.<sup>8</sup>

Trouble in Europe and Asia was not to be long delayed. In Central Europe, within three years after Adolf Hitler's rise to power, there occurred the German remilitarization of the Rhineland, followed by the annexation of Austria in early 1938 and occupation of the Sudetenland in September of that year under a policy of appeasement by the Western European powers. Within six months of the Munich settlement, the Germans occupied the remainder of Bohemia. In September 1939, Hitler launched his fateful attack against Poland, thus ushering in a global conflict of then unheard of dimensions. On the other side of the globe, Japan had launched an attack on Manchuria in September 1931 and by May 1933 had withdrawn from the League of Nations. Italy, under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, launched a war of aggression of its own against Ethiopia and in late 1935 thwarted League action condemning the attack. In 1936 Germany, Italy, and Japan aligned themselves, ostensibly against the threat of Communism, but each with her own separate interests. Both China and Spain represented additional trouble spots, each country engaged in civil war that was fuelled from outside sources. The League of Nations, lacking an effective police force to check the spiralling aggression of the totalitarian powers, proved unable to assert its authority; its role eventually was re-

<sup>8</sup> David Thomson, ed. *The Era of Violence, 1898-1945—The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. xii (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 558, used with permission.

duced to that of a debating society whose members, when chastized, walked out at will.

During the 1930s, some Americans were watching the increasing trend towards international violence with rising concern, though the country was still in the throes of the Great Depression. Considering the state of the United States' defenses, this concern was only too well justified. In 1933, the then Chief of Staff of the Army, General Douglas MacArthur, estimated "that the United States stood seventeenth in rank among the world's armies."<sup>9</sup> In order to counter the general apathy towards military preparedness then engulfing the country, several veterans' organizations spoke up in behalf of increased allocations for the armed forces, but theirs was a voice crying in the wilderness in a country still beset by major economic troubles. As to the outlook for bolstering America's armed forces during this period, the situation was bleak:

A new administration would take office in 1933, faced not only with the grim specter of hunger stalking the streets, but also the sound of marching boots in Europe and Asia. The Roosevelt Administration was to fall heir to a depleted military establishment, acute economic distress, and intensified international difficulties.<sup>10</sup>

Within the budget-starved military establishment of the United States there existed a force that was lean in numbers but strong in history, tradition, and reputation: the United States Marine Corps. In 1933, the entire Corps consisted of 1,192 officers and 15,343 men. As war clouds gathered over Europe in

<sup>9</sup> Bernardo and Bacon, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

the summer of 1939, this number saw only a nominal increase, though a substantial enlargement was authorized by executive order of 8 September 1939. Specializing in the amphibious assault, the U.S. Marine Corps was to occupy a unique position in World War II. One of the official histories in this series, which discusses the role of Marines prior to and following America's entry into the war in detail, makes this observation:

While his country battled a coalition of enemies, and most of his countrymen in arms were fighting halfway across the globe from him, the Marine trained to meet only one enemy—Japan. As the war moved inexorably onward, the men who flocked to join the Corps in unprecedented numbers were literally and consciously signing up to fight the Japanese. This orientation toward a single enemy and towards one theater, the Pacific, colored every Marine's life in and out of battle

and had an incalculable but undeniably beneficial effect on the combat efficiency of the Fleet Marine Force.<sup>11</sup>

The development of the Fleet Marine Force in conjunction with the evolution of amphibious doctrine will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters as a prelude to the account of two of the major amphibious operations undertaken by the U.S. Marine Corps in the Western Pacific. To this end, an understanding of the principles of the amphibious assault and knowledge of the Marine command organization that evolved in the Pacific during World War II, should prove helpful.

---

<sup>11</sup> Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Major Douglas T. Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul—History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. II (Washington: Hist Br, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1963), p. 4, hereafter Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*.

**PART II**

***Fleet Marine Force, Pacific***





# The Development of FMFPac<sup>1</sup>

## BACKGROUND<sup>2</sup>

During World War II, the primary tactic employed by the United States in

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: Administrative History of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, 10Apr44-31Aug45, dtd 15May46, hereafter *FMFPac Administrative History*; Historical Outline of the Development of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, 1941-1950 (Preliminary), HQMC, n.d., hereafter *The Development of FMFPac*; LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. I (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1958), hereafter Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*; Henry I. Shaw, Jr., Bernard C. Nalty, and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. III (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1966), hereafter Shaw, Nalty, and Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*; Maj Edwin N. McClellan, *The United States in the World War* (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1968 Reprint of 1920 Edition); General Holland M. Smith and Percy Finch, *Coral and Brass* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), hereafter Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, used with permission; Jeter A. Isely and Philip Crowl, *The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War, Its Theory, and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), hereafter Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Clyde H. Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), hereafter Metcalf, *A History of the U. S. Marine Corps*; Robert D. Heinl, Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea—The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1962), hereafter Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*.

<sup>2</sup> Additional information in this section is derived from: William H. Russell, "The Gen-

the Pacific Theater was the amphibious assault. In photographs, newsreels, and books dealing with the progress of American operations against Japan, there appears the familiar sight of United States Marines wading through the surf to assault a hostile beach or of waves of amphibian tractors approaching enemy-held shores. So closely has the U.S. Marine Corps been identified in the public mind with amphibious warfare that such terms as "The Marines have landed" have long since become a commonly-used phrase in the American vocabulary. Amphibious warfare and amphibious assault, over a period of many years, have assumed a very definite meaning: that of landing a force to wrest islands or other terrain from the enemy, as opposed to uncontested amphibious landings. Generally, the preparedness of the United States to conduct amphibious operations during the early phase of World War II has been conceded to be the result of foresight and planning on the part of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps.<sup>3</sup>

In order to obtain a balanced picture of the U.S. Marine Corps, its organization and its tactics in World War II, it

esis of FMF Doctrine: 1879-1899," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 35, nos. 4-7 (Apr-July 1951); LtGen Holland M. Smith, "The Development of Amphibious Tactics in the U. S. Navy," in *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 30, nos. 6-10 (Jun-Oct 1946).

<sup>3</sup> Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, chaps. 1-2.

becomes necessary to follow the evolution of that service since its inception. The tradition of Marines serving on board ships and landing on foreign shores dates back to the Revolutionary War. Throughout the Nineteenth Century, as occasion demanded and as dictated by the expanding interests of the United States, Marines distinguished themselves in operations on the seas or on foreign soil. Their exploits became legend at home and abroad; their existence and immediate availability in time of need became a factor in the foreign policy of the United States. To those viewing this country with unfriendly eyes, they became a force to be reckoned with.

Even though, from the very inception of the Corps, ship-based Marines had made landings on enemy soil, real interest in amphibious warfare, as the term has since become widely known, did not develop until the Spanish-American War. At that time, both in Cuba and in the Philippines, a military force was needed to accompany the fleet to seize and hold advanced bases.<sup>4</sup> Once this requirement had been established, The General Board of the Navy recommended the activation of a permanent base force. In November 1901, the Secretary of the Navy ordered the Commandant of the Marine Corps to organize a battalion for such advance base work. Instruction of Marines in this special activity began in 1902 at Newport, Rhode Island and Annapolis, Maryland. The training covered field fortifications, transportation of guns, construction of telegraph and telephone lines, and the planting of land mines. Of necessity, it

was limited in scope, since the Marine Corps was fully occupied with other commitments abroad. Amphibious landing exercises were not held until 1914. Advance base training was shifted to New London, Connecticut in 1910 and to Philadelphia a year later. There it remained until 1920, when the activity moved to Quantico, Virginia.

During World War I, the Marine Corps gained little combat experience in advance base warfare despite the existence of an Advance Base Force of more than 6,000 officers and men. The big battles of that war were fought on *terra firma* by large land armies locked for weeks or months in trench warfare that featured little movement. As in the past, Marines distinguished themselves on the battlefield, but the war they waged was that of the foot soldier. Since armies tend to refight battles of a previous war in peacetime in anticipation of the next conflict, instruction in the years following World War I emphasized the Army-type of fighting that had become the trademark of that war. As a result, emphasis in those years was on land warfare at the expense of amphibious training.

Another reason for a lack of interest in amphibious warfare in the immediate post-World War I years was the dismal experience of the British in launching their ill-fated Dardanelles-Gallipoli operation in 1915. The general conclusion among military strategists at the time was that large scale amphibious opera-

---

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed account of Marine involvement in shaping the concept of amphibious warfare, see Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, Pt. I.

tions against a defended shore were comparable to a "Charge of the Light Brigade," particularly if such an assault were attempted in the daytime. Still, there were others who did not share this pessimism. The subject of amphibious landings was discussed in the Annual Report of the Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1921. At the same time, a then unknown student at the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, Major Holland M. Smith, began to expound his views on behalf of the role he envisioned for the Marine Corps of the future in the realm of amphibious warfare.<sup>5</sup>

During the immediate postwar period, the voices raised in support of the feasibility of amphibious warfare were crying in the wilderness. By mid-1921, at a time of isolationism and retrenchment, the strength of the U.S. Marine Corps diminished to 1,087 officers and 21,903 enlisted men,<sup>6</sup> a figure that was to drop even lower during the late 1920s and early 1930s. In the wake of demobilization the entire Corps was suffering from a letdown that invariably follows the return of a military organization to peacetime conditions. Most of the men who had signed up for the emergency had returned to their civilian pursuits. Many wartime officers had left the service and wholesale demotions in rank had become necessary, while recruiting was slow. The status of the officers who re-

mained was uncertain and, as with the other Services, retrenchment and budgetary restrictions obscured the peacetime mission and status of the Corps.

Postwar economy and public apathy subjected the Marine Corps and the other Services to severe limitations in men and resources, notwithstanding the fact that Marines were deployed in the Caribbean and later in Central America on peace-keeping missions that occasionally extended to fighting brushfire wars. The lean years, which were to extend to the very eve of World War II, placed severe restrictions on the scope of Corps operations, yet the maxim that "necessity is the mother of invention" once again proved its validity during this period. Lack of manpower and equipment forced Marines to concentrate on intellectual pursuits, primarily that of defining their mission and planning ahead for the future. At times, bigness tends to stifle initiative; lacking all but the most elementary resources, Marines relied on improvisation that, despite some manifest disadvantages, was to serve them well in the years to come.<sup>7</sup>

Two factors combined to bring about a gradual reversal of the negative thinking regarding amphibious operations. One resulted from the Five-Power Washington Conference of 1921-1922, which put an end to the further fortifi-

<sup>5</sup> Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, pp. 47-54.

<sup>6</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States—Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington: Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, GPO, 1961), hereafter *U. S. Historical Statistics*.

<sup>7</sup> Recalling this period many years later, one Marine was to comment: "Prior to World War II, the Marine Corps was a great "make do" outfit despite extremely limited means. Where else could you find men who, after four years, shipped over for PFC?" Col R. M. Baker ltr to Head, Hist Br, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 21Jul69, in *FMFPac History Comment File*.

cation of naval bases in the Pacific west of the Hawaiian Islands; the other was the emergence of the Japanese presence in the Pacific, one of the consequences of the Treaty of Versailles, the bitter fruits of which were not to be confined to Europe alone. Having jumped on the Allied bandwagon just in time in World War I, Japan was free to consolidate and expand her foothold in the Central and Western Pacific.

Among the first to recognize that expansion-minded Japan might well become a major adversary in any future war was Major Earl H. Ellis, a Marine Corps officer who by 1921 foresaw the possibility that the United States some day would have to seize bases from Japan in the Marshall, Caroline, and Palau Islands.<sup>8</sup> Though high-ranking Marines, including the Commandant, Major General John A. Lejeune, shared his views, little concrete planning could be accomplished at the time. Major Ellis went on to write an ingenious plan for "Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia," which was to become a partial blueprint for American operations in the Central Pacific 20 years later during World War II. But Major Ellis was far ahead of his time and was destined to perish obscurely in the Palaus—either on a personal or semi-official reconnaissance—before his seeds could fall on fertile soil.

---

<sup>8</sup> As a captain prior to World War I, Ellis had already written on "The Security of Advanced Bases and Advanced Base Operations" (IntelSec, DivOps and Trng Files, HistDiv, HQMC).

### *CREATION OF THE FLEET MARINE FORCE*<sup>9</sup>

During the early 1920s, the Marine Corps involvement with amphibious warfare very gradually gained ground, though a number of years were to elapse before it became the Corps' primary mission. In 1921, the Advance Base Force at Quantico was superseded by the Marine Corps Expeditionary Force. Emphasis was on support of the fleet and in 1924 and 1925 this force took part in extensive maneuvers in the Caribbean and in Hawaii. By 1927, a Joint Army-Navy Board recommended that the Marine Corps, in keeping with its close association with the Navy, be given special preparation for the conduct of amphibious warfare.

Thus was laid the groundwork for what was to become the main occupation of the Corps. But the road from recommendation to concrete planning to actual implementation was a rocky and tortuous one, and in the late 1920s a clear definition of the primary Corps mission was still lacking. By this time, large Leatherneck contingents were stationed abroad, notably in Nicaragua and China. Neither funds nor personnel were available for the creation of an amphibious force as envisioned by some of the farsighted Marine commanders. Once again, internal and external developments lent a helping hand to the budding amphibious force. The year 1929

---

<sup>9</sup> Additional material in this section is derived from: MajGen John H. Russell, "The Birth of the FMF," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, v. 2, no. 515 (Jan 1946).

saw a significant reduction in the number of Marines on foreign service; by early 1933 the last contingent had left Nicaragua.

Major General John H. Russell, who commanded the Marine Corps at the time, took the initiative in approaching the Chief of Naval Operations with a plan that would supplant the Expeditionary Force Staff at Quantico with a "Fleet Base Defense Force" or "Fleet Marine Force." Under the new concept espoused by the Commandant, this force would not be subject to continuous interruption in training through detachment or diversion to other tasks. It was visualized that the new force would become an integral unit within the Fleet under operational control of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet. General Russell's recommendations were approved and thus was created on 7 December 1933 the Fleet Marine Force<sup>10</sup> with headquarters at Quantico, Virginia, an event that was to be described as perhaps "the most significant development within the Marine Corps."<sup>11</sup>

Immediately following the establishment of the 3,000-man Fleet Marine Force, the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico prepared an amphibious operations manual which set forth a philosophy of command relations, modern concepts, and techniques for a controlled ship-to-shore movement; possible means of ship-to-shore communications; doctrines for air support and naval gunfire;

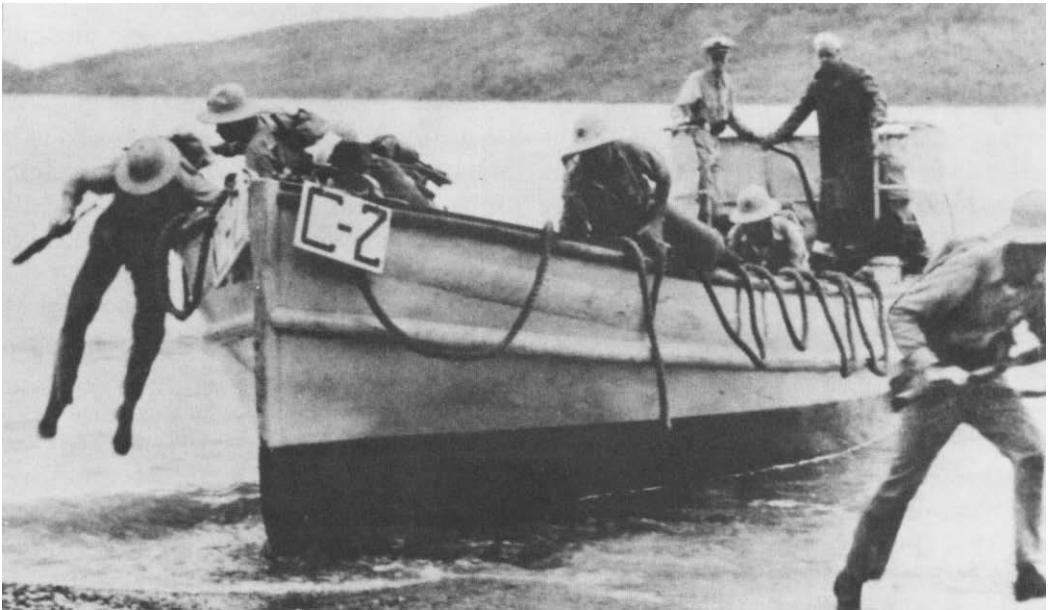
combat loading of troops and supplies; and basics of shore party organization. The finished guide was introduced as the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*. Within four years, the manual was to be adopted by the Navy as official doctrine for all landing operations. Subsequently, with additional modifications, it also emerged as an Army Field Manual.

In September 1935, Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force moved from Quantico to San Diego. At the same time, the Fleet Marine Force was organized into two brigades. The 1st Brigade was stationed at Quantico, while the 2d moved to the Marine Corps Base, San Diego. In order to have available an organization that could cope with the testing of equipment that was to be used for amphibious warfare, a Marine Corps Equipment Board was established at Quantico, which subsequently was instrumental in the development of the amphibian tractor.

Beginning in February 1934, units of the Fleet Marine Force took part in the annual maneuvers of the U. S. Fleet. In the Pacific, such maneuvers were held off the coast of California, in Hawaii, and at Midway, while similar landing exercises in the Atlantic were conducted in the Caribbean. In 1936 and again in 1938, elements of the U. S. Army participated in some of the exercises, but in 1939 the Army declined to take part, thus for all practical purposes leaving the field of amphibious warfare entirely in the hands of the Marine Corps. Along with the refinement in landing techniques during the late 1930s came the introduction of suitable vessels that

<sup>10</sup> Navy Dept GO No. 241, as cited in *The Development of FMFPac*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Metcalf, *A History of the U. S. Marine Corps*, p. 550.



AMPHIBIOUS EXERCISES *at Culebra, Puerto Rico, 1936. (USMC 529463)*



MARINES *in steel Higgins boat, 1939. (USMC 526331)*

would move an assault force from the troop transports to its objective. Following extensive experimentation and controversy, Higgins-designed landing craft were found to be best suited to this purpose, and their manufacture in large numbers was initiated.

When World War II broke out in Europe in September 1939, the Marine Corps, with a strength of less than 20,000 men, already had laid a sound basis for its subsequent expansion. This got under way when President Roosevelt proclaimed a state of limited national emergency and, in keeping with a general expansion of the armed forces, increased Marine Corps strength to 25,000. While the war in Europe ran its course and a victorious German Army overran Poland, Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries, and finally France—in the end placing Great Britain under threat of imminent invasion—the Marine Corps continued to train for a war in which the United States might eventually become involved.

In the autumn of 1940, the 1st Marine Brigade departed from Quantico for Cuba and subsequently underwent extensive amphibious training in the West Indies. On 1 February 1941, the newly organized 7th Marines joined the 1st Brigade at Culebra, where the two combined units were designated as the 1st Marine Division, commanded by Holland M. Smith, who up to this time had headed the 1st Marine Brigade.

In the course of the landing exercises conducted by the division, various types of landing craft and new tank and artillery lighters were tested. The boats employed to bring the Marines ashore were totally unsuitable in high surf, such as

existed off Culebra, as were the Navy tank lighters tested. On the other hand, the Higgins boat, which made its first appearance during 1940, had much to recommend it and, according to General Smith, "this craft, in my opinion, did more to help win the war in the Pacific than any other single piece of equipment. . . . Without it our landings on Japanese-held beaches in large numbers would have been unthinkable."<sup>12</sup>

Also on 1 February 1941, the 2d Brigade was designated the 2d Marine Division. It is interesting to note that at the very threshold of the greatest expansion the Marine Corps had even seen, the Fleet Marine Force was temporarily disbanded. This development resulted from war plans that called for the establishment of a two-divisional expeditionary force with each fleet for the specific purpose of carrying out amphibious assaults as required. These amphibious forces were to be further supplemented by an additional division per fleet obtained from the Army and to be trained by the Marines. Upon the recommendation of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General Thomas Holcomb, the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions were assigned to the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets respectively, while the defense battalions of the Fleet Marine Force, which had been created in 1939 for advance base service, were distributed to other commands.

For all practical purposes, the Fleet Marine Force was converted into a training command that would pass on its knowledge and experience to the other Services. In June of 1941, barely

---

<sup>12</sup> Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 72.



six months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, certain organizational changes occurred. Major General Holland M. Smith on 13 June relinquished command of the 1st Marine Division and became Commanding General of I Corps (Provisional), U. S. Atlantic Fleet, composed of the 1st Marine Division and the Army's 1st Infantry Division. Two weeks later, the organization was redesignated as Task Force 18, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, followed within two days, on 28 July 1941, by a redesignation to the 1st Joint Training Force, U. S. Atlantic Fleet. By mid-August 1941, the title had been changed again to Atlantic Amphibious Force, and in late October of the same year, the organization became the Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet. This designation was retained until 3 March 1942, at which time the command received yet another title, that of Amphibious Corps, Atlantic Fleet.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, regardless of this multitude of titles bestowed upon the organization, there was a continuity of command if not in name, and General Holland Smith continued to preside at each consecutive baptism.

By mid-1941, with war clouds now looming ominously over the Pacific, Marine Corps strength had doubled over that of the preceding year totalling over 54,000.<sup>14</sup> The rapid expansion continued throughout 1941 and skyrocketed after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. By 30 June 1942 the Marine Corps numbered 142,613 officers and men.<sup>15</sup> Even during the period of rapid expansion in

the summer of 1941, no one could surmise the scope of global warfare in which the United States would shortly become involved. Thus, in May of that year the Navy General Board, in dealing with the expansion of the Marine Corps, concluded that:

The composition, organization and strength of the Marine Division as submitted to the General Board by the U. S. Marine Corps appear to be satisfactory for the overseas landing operations to be required of Marine Corps ground troops. The question as to the number of Marine Divisions necessary has been fully discussed and while it appears that a major war conducted in both the Atlantic and Pacific might require three Marine Divisions, most of the probable operations incident to the seizure of any one outlying overseas base probably can be carried through successfully with one Marine Division fully supported as it would be by a Naval Attack Force.<sup>16</sup>

The global commitment of the Marine Corps was to go far beyond the strength contemplated in early 1941, but at the time a steady increase in strength over a protracted period of time was envisioned. Hand in hand with the augmentation of the Corps went the enlargement of existing bases and acquisition of new ones. One of these on the East Coast was the New River base in North Carolina, later to become Camp Lejeune; another was the Marine air station at Cherry Point, North Carolina. On the West Coast, Camp Holcomb, subsequently renamed Camp Elliott, came into being. Early in the year, the first planes of the 2d Marine Aircraft Group were sta-

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>14</sup> *U. S. Historical Statistics*, p. 736.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Report of General Board on Expansion of U. S. Marine Corps, G. B. No. 432, Serial No. 139, dtd 7 May 1941, in *Organization and Expansion of the USMC, 1940s (OAB, NHD)*.

tioned on Oahu at Ewa.<sup>17</sup> Marine defense battalions at the outbreak of the war were stationed on Midway, Palmyra, and Johnston Islands, and on Wake. Other detachments held forward outposts in the Pacific in American Samoa, at Subic Bay, Luzon, and in the Aleutians.

As the expansion of the armed forces of the United States continued and was further accelerated during 1942, a concept was adopted which charged the Army with primary responsibility in the Atlantic, while the Navy was to reign in the Pacific. As a result of this concept, amphibious training activities on the East Coast of the United States generally became the responsibility of the Army, while similar activities on the West Coast were assigned to the Marine Corps. In line with this thinking, the 2d Joint Training Force had been created on 1 November 1941 at Camp Elliott near San Diego. This force had been planned as a joint Marine-Army training organization, paralleling General Holland Smith's setup on the East Coast. There were similar gyrations in name and title to those the Marine establishment on the East Coast had experienced. On 10 February 1942, Major General Clayton B. Vogel's command became the Amphibious Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet, to be rechristened as Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, less than two months later. (See Chart 1.) Effective 3 August 1942, General Vogel, who up to this time had also acted as the senior Fleet Marine Force commander at San Diego, was placed in command

of all Fleet Marine Force units, both ground and air, in the 11th Naval District.

#### WORLD WAR II EXPANSION<sup>18</sup>

By mid-1942 it had become apparent that predominance of the Army on the East Coast had deprived the Amphibious Training Staff, Fleet Marine Force, of the lion's share of its training mission in the Atlantic or the Caribbean. At the same time, developments in the Pacific Theater left very little doubt that the offensive in the South Pacific would be based on large-scale amphibious warfare, all or most of which would be carried out by the Marine Corps. As a consequence of this shift in strategic emphasis, General Smith and his Amphibious Training Staff, Fleet Marine Force, departed from Quantico in September of 1942 and proceeded to San Diego. There, the Amphibious Training Staff was disbanded and its personnel assigned to Headquarters, Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet. At the same time, General Smith took over as Commander of the Amphibious Corps and as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, San Diego Area. General Vogel, who had been displaced by the arrival of General Smith, took charge of the I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC) at San Diego, a unit whose staff was composed largely of personnel who had previously served with General Vogel on the staff of the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet. Shortly thereafter, General Vogel left

<sup>17</sup> The growth of Marine Corps aviation and the evolution of its command organization will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

<sup>18</sup> Additional material in this section is derived from: BGen D.A.D. Ogden (AUS), "Amphibious Operations," Reprint of Lecture at the U. S. Army Engineer School, Ft. Belvoir, Va., 15Mar49.

# GENEALOGY OF FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

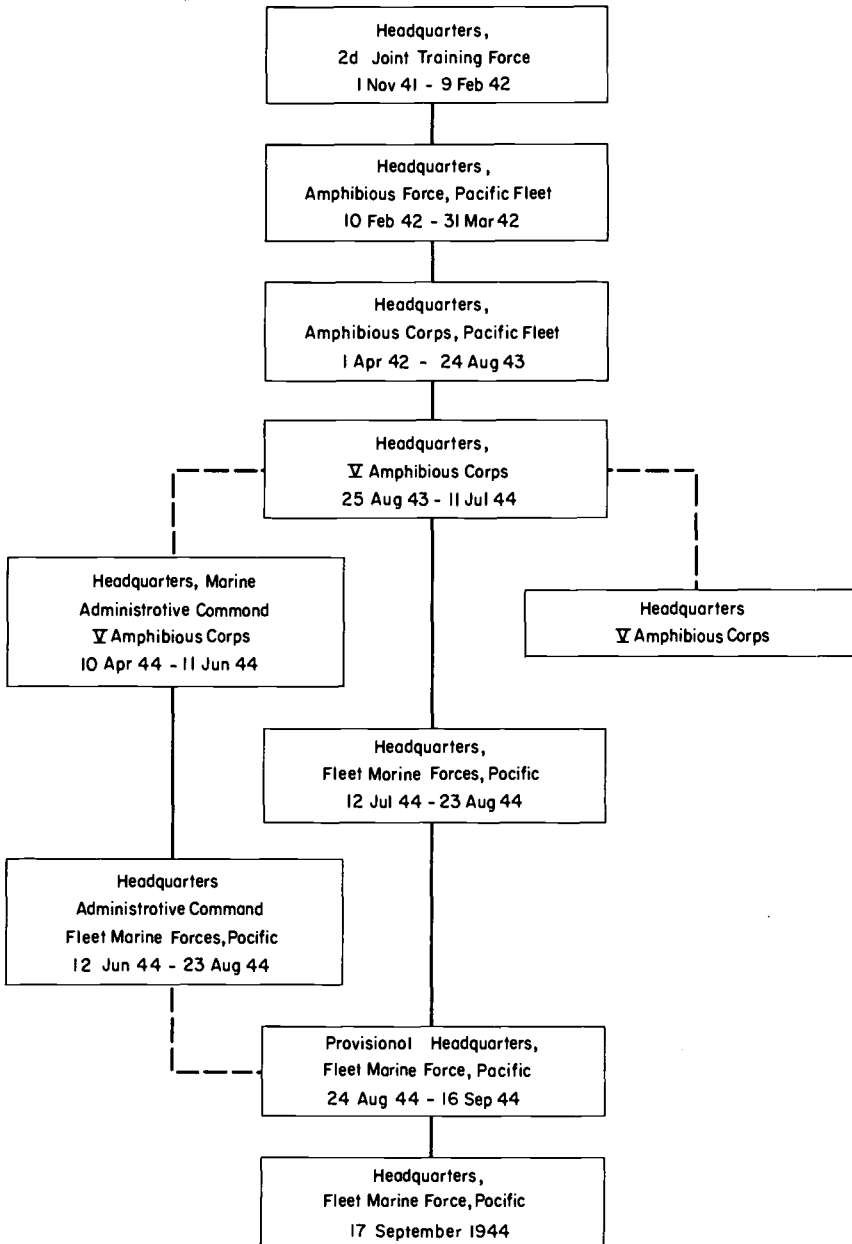


CHART 1

K.W. White

the West Coast to assume command of the IMAC in the South Pacific.

Despite the tortuous and somewhat confusing road that the Marine Corps command organization had travelled, an effective command organization was beginning to emerge by the middle of 1942, though many difficulties remained to be overcome. In his capacity as Commanding General, Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, General Smith was responsible for the organization and training of Fleet Marine Force units as they became available for employment with the Amphibious Force, Pacific Fleet. At the same time, in his dual capacity as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, San Diego Area, General Smith was charged with the administration of training activities at San Diego, Camp Pendleton, and Camp Dunlap, as well as command of Fleet Marine Force units that were not specifically assigned to the Corps. Since the Amphibious Corps was a joint command and consisted of U. S. Army as well as Marine units, its primary mission for a number of months was to train Army units, specifically for operations in the Aleutians.

Meanwhile, American troops were pouring into the Pacific Area in ever increasing numbers, making it necessary for the I Marine Amphibious Corps, originally planned only as an administrative command for Marine units, to assume tactical functions. By late 1943, augmentation of the Pacific Fleet and availability of manpower made possible the initiation of the Central Pacific offensive, whose purpose was to strike out westward across the Pacific along the most direct route to Japan. Pursuant to this mission, Vice Admiral Raymond

A. Spruance became commander of the Central Pacific Force and the Fifth Fleet. In August 1943, the Fifth Amphibious Force was organized under Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, and later that month the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, was redesignated as the V Amphibious Corps (VAC), with General Holland Smith in command.

Even though the newly-created VAC directly succeeded the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, there was a major difference in its mission, which became a dual one. First, the organization was to constitute an administrative command with control of Marine units in the Central Pacific. Secondly, it had the tactical mission of directing amphibious assaults of both Marine and U. S. Army troops. At the time of these administrative changes, the new organization turned over its responsibility for amphibious training on the West Coast of the United States to a newly established Troop Training Unit, Amphibious Training Command, Pacific Fleet. In September 1943, VAC moved to Hawaii, where preparations were then in full swing for the invasion of the Gilbert Islands.

It soon became apparent that the organizational expedient that had been sought in establishing such a multitude of organizations whose missions were bound to overlap would not be a happy one. In the words of one history dealing with this organizational maze:

Assumption of tactical functions by Amphibious Corps headquarters gave rise once again to the problem of conduct of administrative matters of Fleet Marine Force units in the Pacific. Now two parallel echelons functioned directly with Headquarters, Marine Corps while performing duplicate administrative activities

with respect to subordinate units. It became necessary to divorce tactical elements from administrative elements during operations, hence the formation of rear echelons of substantial size for each amphibious corps headquarters.<sup>19</sup>

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had decided as early as 1942 to split command in the Pacific Theater between the Southwest Pacific Area under General MacArthur and the Pacific Ocean Areas under Admiral Nimitz. Until 1944, most FMF units had served in the Southwest Pacific under MacArthur, but the new Central Pacific drive demanded trained amphibious troops and the Navy wanted Marines for the assault role. Effective 25 March 1944, the I Marine Amphibious Corps passed to the command of Admiral Nimitz, who now controlled it in addition to the V Amphibious Corps.

General Holland Smith, who had just received his promotion to lieutenant general, recognized that the time was ripe for a reorganization of the Marine command structure under the new setup in the Central Pacific. He recommended the creation of Headquarters, Amphibious Troops, Pacific, to include I Marine Amphibious Corps, II Marine Amphibious Corps, an Army Corps, along with Defense Troops, Expeditionary Troops Artillery, and the Service of Supply, Amphibious Troops Pacific. The new organization, which for all practical purposes constituted a field army, would be divided into two echelons: an administrative rear headquarters in Hawaii to take care of administrative and logistical matters, and a forward headquarters

to command and direct amphibious assaults.<sup>20</sup>

On 29 March 1944 the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, authorized the Commanding General, VAC, to exercise, as an additional duty, complete administrative control and logistical responsibility for all Fleet Marine Force units committed for operations in the Central Pacific.<sup>21</sup> General Alexander A. Vandegrift, who had been appointed as Commandant of the Marine Corps on 1 January, was on an inspection tour in Hawaii when the above authorization arrived and on this occasion proposed the establishment of an Administrative Command, VAC. The latter was to function just below VAC with responsibility for the administrative work of all Pacific Fleet Marine Force units concerning supply, evacuation, sanitation, construction, salvage, personnel management, quartering and general supervision of censorship. Further, it was to handle the command and administration of all Fleet Marine Force units in the Pacific which remained at bases during combat operations or which were assigned by the Commanding General, VAC. Finally, the Administrative Command was to supervise the routine administrative activity of units that would normally be handled by the rear echelon of the Corps headquarters.

Admiral Nimitz expressed his belief that the efficiency of both the administration of Marine units in the Pacific Ocean Areas and the logistic support of

<sup>19</sup> *FMFPac Administrative History*, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 154.  
<sup>21</sup> CominCh ltr ser 001015, dtd 29Mar44 as cited in *FMFPac Administrative History*, p. 11.

their combat operations would be greatly improved by the measures proposed by General Vandegrift, except that he desired the new organization to be designated as the V Amphibious Corps Marine Administrative Command in order to avoid any misconception that the functions assigned to the new organization would affect such Army units as were assigned or attached to VAC. The Commandant's recommendations were put into effect without further delay and on 10 April 1944, the Marine Administrative Command, VAC, was activated.<sup>22</sup>

Under the reorganization, the newly created unit consisted of Headquarters, Marine Administrative Command, VAC, and Marine Supply Service, VAC. At the same time that the organizational changes became effective, the Commanding General, I Marine Amphibious Corps, was relieved of his administrative functions, retaining only those of a tactical nature, unless otherwise directed by the Commanding General, VAC. Under the new setup, the functions of the Supply Service, IMAC and those of the Marine Supply Service, VAC, were consolidated.

While the above reorganization and consolidation no doubt were steps in the right direction, it soon became evident that additional changes were necessary as a consequence of the constantly changing tactical situation in the Pacific Theater. By April 1944 the Fleet Marine Force units in the theater consisted of four divisions, a brigade which

lacked only a regimental combat team in order to constitute a full division, corps troops and a steadily expanding Supply Service. The 5th Marine Division was still being trained and equipped in the Continental United States, but its arrival in the theater was also expected around the turn of 1944-1945.

During 1944, imminent operations in the Marianas made the establishment of an overall Marine Command in the Pacific highly desirable, if not imperative. Since operations in the Marianas were to be carried out in two major phases—an attack against Saipan and Tinian in the north, followed by the assault against Guam farther south, two task forces would be necessary. One of these was the Northern Attack Force under Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, who also led the Joint Expeditionary Force. The Southern Attack Force came under Rear Admiral Richard L. Connolly. General Holland Smith was to wear two hats during the operations, for he was to serve as Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops and at the same time as Commanding General, Northern Troops and Landing Force. Major General Roy S. Geiger, commanding the III Amphibious Corps (IIIAC), a new title for IMAC, was to command the Southern Troops and Landing Force in the assault on Guam.<sup>23</sup> In order for General Smith to exercise tactical command in both IIIAC and VAC, a higher headquarters had to be organized. Prior to the landings, VAC thus had to set up

---

<sup>22</sup> VAC GO No. 53-44, dtd 6Apr44, as cited in *FMFPac Administrative History*, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> The redesignation which became effective on 15 April 1944, reflected the fact that the corps, like VAC, was a command including troops of all Services, not just Marines.

two tactical staffs. Organization of the staff took place at Pearl Harbor on 12 April 1944, on the same date that the Marine Administrative Command was formed. For all practical purposes, a Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific was now in existence in all respects except for the name.

Events occurring during the spring of 1944 were designed to correct this deficiency. On 27 May 1944, the Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet queried the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet with respect to the desirability of creating a Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Ocean Areas, under General Holland Smith. In reply, Admiral Nimitz expressed his concurrence and recommended that the change become effective upon completion of the assault phase of the campaign in the Marianas. As far as the organizational structure was concerned, Admiral Nimitz recommended that the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Ocean Areas, consist of a headquarters with the IIIAC, the VAC, and the Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Ocean Areas, as subordinate units.

Following the above discussions, on 5 June 1944 Admiral King designated the Commanding General, VAC, as the type commander for all Fleet Marine Force ground units in the Pacific Ocean Areas effective that date. He further specified that, as ordered by the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, a Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, be established under the command of General Holland Smith. The Marine Administrative Command, VAC, was to be re-

designated as Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.<sup>24</sup>

Since at the time General Holland Smith was participating in the Saipan-Tinian campaign as Commanding General, VAC, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas directed that in his absence the Commanding General, Marine Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, assume additional duty as Deputy Commander, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Upon his return from the Marianas, General Smith assumed command of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. On 24 August 1944 Headquarters, Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, was redesignated Provisional Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.<sup>25</sup> Subordinate units of the Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific were redesignated units of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Headquarters and Service Battalion, Administrative Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, also underwent a change in that it became Provisional Headquarters and Service Battalion, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

Presumably, the term "provisional" was inserted in the titles of Force Headquarters and Force Headquarters and Service Battalion because it had previously been stipulated that the Administrative Command would continue to function as a separate entity under Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Instead, the Provisional Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific

<sup>24</sup> *FMFPac Administrative History*, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> FMFPac SpecO No. 2-44, dtd 23Aug44.

now assumed those functions previously assigned to the Administrative Command.

Within a week, there was to be a further change in the round of redesignations and reorganizations. On 31 August 1944, the Commandant ordered the abolition of the Administrative Command and organization of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. At the same time an organizational chart was drawn up listing as components of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, the FMFPac Headquarters Troops, III Amphibious Corps, V Amphibious Corps, FMF Air Pacific, Force Artillery, Force Antiaircraft Artillery, Force Amphibian Tractor Group, Force Reserve, FMF Supply Service, Force Service Troops, FMF Transient Center, and Marine units under island commands for administration only.<sup>26</sup> In line with this authority from CMC, Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and Headquarters and Service Battalion, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific were formally activated effective 17 September 1944.<sup>27</sup>

As of this date, the following major elements comprised Fleet Marine Force, Pacific:

Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force,  
Pacific  
Headquarters, III Amphibious  
Corps, and Corps Troops  
Headquarters, V Amphibious  
Corps, and Corps Troops  
1st Marine Division

2d Marine Division  
3d Marine Division  
4th Marine Division  
5th Marine Division  
6th Marine Division  
Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force,  
Pacific, with  
1st Marine Aircraft Wing  
2d Marine Aircraft Wing  
3d Marine Aircraft Wing  
4th Marine Aircraft Wing  
Marine Fleet Aircraft, West  
Coast

1st 155mm Howitzer Battalion  
2d 155mm Howitzer Battalion  
3d 155mm Howitzer Battalion  
4th 155mm Howitzer Battalion  
5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion  
7th 155mm Gun Battalion  
8th 155mm Gun Battalion  
9th 155mm Gun Battalion  
10th 155mm Gun Battalion  
11th 155mm Gun Battalion  
12th 155mm Gun Battalion  
1st Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion  
2d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion  
3d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion  
4th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion  
5th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion  
7th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion  
8th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion  
9th Antiaircraft Artillery  
Battalion, Reinforced  
10th Antiaircraft Artillery  
Battalion  
11th Antiaircraft Artillery  
Battalion  
12th Antiaircraft Artillery  
Battalion  
14th Antiaircraft Artillery  
Battalion, Reinforced

<sup>26</sup> CMC ltr to CG, FMFPac, Serial 003E23944, dtd 31Aug44.

<sup>27</sup> FMFPac GO No. 12-44, dtd 18Sep44.



15th Antiaircraft Artillery  
 Battalion  
 16th Antiaircraft Artillery  
 Battalion  
 17th Antiaircraft Artillery  
 Battalion  
 18th Antiaircraft Artillery  
 Battalion  
 52d Defense Battalion, with two  
 detachments  
  
 1st Seacoast Artillery Battalion  
 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion  
 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion  
 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion  
 4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion  
 5th Amphibian Tractor Battalion  
 6th Amphibian Tractor Battalion  
 8th Amphibian Tractor Battalion  
 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion  
 11th Amphibian Tractor Battalion  
 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion  
 2d Armored Amphibian Battalion  
 3d Armored Amphibian Battalion  
 (Provisional)  
 1st Base Headquarters Battalion  
 3d Base Headquarters Battalion  
 1st Separate Engineer Battalion  
 2d Separate Engineer Battalion  
  
 Supply Service, Fleet Marine Force,  
 Pacific, with  
 1st Field Depot  
 3d Field Depot  
 4th Base Depot  
 5th Field Depot  
 6th Base Depot  
 7th Field Depot  
 8th Field Depot  
 16th Field Depot  
 1st Service and Supply Battalion  
 2d Service and Supply Battalion

3d Service and Supply Battalion  
 4th Service and Supply Battalion<sup>28</sup>

The far-reaching changes in the organizational structure of the Marine Corps found their echo in the status of the Fleet Marine Force aviation units in the Pacific, which also was subject to modification. On 7 September 1944, General Vandegrift acted on instructions received from Admiral King and ordered deletion of FMF Air Pacific from the initial organizational chart of 31 August, leaving the command status of aviation units to be clarified at a later date. On 16 September, Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, was redesignated as Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

A final decision on the status of the aviation units of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, was reached on 11 October 1944 in Pacific Fleet Letter 53L-44, which also regulated the status of FMFPac. Accordingly, the Commanding General, FMFPac, was a type commander for all units comprising his command and in this capacity came under the direct command of the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet. He had responsibility for the overall administration and supply of all subordinate units, except for aviation supplies. He was charged with coordinating the activities of the Fleet Marine Force; establishing policies relating to its organization, maintenance, and support; issuing directives for its training, operations, administration, and supply, except for the operation of aircraft. Further, he was to keep the Commander

<sup>28</sup> *FMFPac Administrative History*, pp.113-114.

in Chief, Pacific Fleet, informed of matters affecting the readiness or operating capabilities of subordinate units; allocate and distribute personnel; and exercise operational control of all FMF units (except aviation) unless they were otherwise assigned. In addition to the above, the Commanding General, FMFPac was to act as advisor to the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas on matters pertaining to the Marine Corps in general and on amphibious operations. He was to study and keep abreast of the strategic situation and make recommendations for the employment of the Fleet Marine Force. Finally, he was to command a task force in combat operations when directed to do so.<sup>29</sup>

With reference to the aviation units, the same letter spelled out the status of Aircraft, FMFPac. The latter organization was defined as a major unit of FMFPac. Its Commanding General was charged with performing type-command functions under the Commanding General, FMFPac within the latter's field of responsibility. In aviation matters, the Commanding General, Aircraft, FMFPac, was to perform type-command functions under the Commander, Air Force, Pacific Fleet. Operational control of Aircraft, FMFPac tactical units was to remain with the Commander, Air Force, Pacific Fleet, unless such units were otherwise assigned.

Even though the letter more clearly spelled out the mission and responsibilities of FMFPac, and as such signified a large step forward for the Marine Corps command structure, it still fell short of

one objective. There now existed an amphibious organization in the Pacific which had come a very long way from the basic structure that had existed at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. Nevertheless, the new establishment still had not attained the status of a tactical field army type of headquarters that General Smith had envisioned and proposed in March 1944 and which the Commandant had previously endorsed. A gap in the doorway had been opened through the provision that the Commanding General, FMFPac, could at times act as a task force commander in combat operations, but at this stage the door was still far from ajar.

In November 1944, General Smith submitted proposed tables of organization for his headquarters staff. These proposals rested on the premise that FMFPac would represent a tactical headquarters for a Marine field army of two corps, as well as an administrative headquarters in the rear. In the course of January 1945 these proposals formed the subject of discussion between representatives of General Vandegrift, Admiral Nimitz, and General Smith. When it became apparent that no operations were scheduled calling for the commitment of a Marine field army, and in the light of personnel shortages, it was decided that the staff of Headquarters, FMFPac would be large enough only to take care of the administrative duties, with sufficient additional personnel for inspection parties, observers, and small task force staffs.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *FMFPac Administrative History*, pp. 19-22, 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> Pacific Fleet Letter 53L-44, dtd 110ct44.

Assurances were provided that General Holland Smith in his capacity as Commanding General, FMFPac, would retain responsibility for conducting combat operations as a task force commander when directed to do so. In practice, he was able to exercise such command only during the Iwo Jima operation in February–March 1945. Prior to the end of World War II, the status and organizational structure of Headquarters, FMFPac remained essentially unchanged. The only other major change was the redesignation of the Supply Service, FMFPac, as Service Command, FMFPac, which became effective on 1 June 1945.

At the time of the Japanese surrender, FMFPac consisted of the Service Command, FMFPac, the III and V Amphibious Corps, composed of six Marine divisions, and Aircraft, FMFPac consisting of four Marine Aircraft Wings and Marine Fleet Air, West Coast.

The American drive across the Pacific to the doorstep of Japan rendered acute the question of the forward displacement of Headquarters, FMFPac. It was proposed initially to move elements of Headquarters, FMFPac, from Hawaii to Guam in the Marianas. A study of the question brought out the fact that there was a continuing necessity for certain sections of General Smith's headquarters to maintain liaison with Headquarters, Commander in Chief, Pacific. There was an additional requirement for other headquarters sections to advise the Commanding General, FMFPac, in the forward area. Basically, the latter would comprise the personnel who would act as the operating

staff of the Fleet Marine Force in the field.

As of December 1944, it was envisioned that major portions of the G-2 and G-4 Sections, Headquarters, FMFPac, would remain in Hawaii, since the Joint Intelligence Center, POA, and most of the logistical operating sections would also remain there. The Deputy Commander, FMFPac, was to remain at Pearl Harbor, and all staff sections were to be represented on his staff, so that normal administrative functions as an area command could be retained. Since a Field Service Command was already present on Guam, no further displacement of Headquarters, Supply Service, FMFPac, was anticipated.

After a considerable delay resulting from General Holland Smith's participation in the Iwo Jima operation, he recommended to Admiral Nimitz that Headquarters, FMFPac, and Headquarters, Supply Service, FMFPac, displace forward either to Guam or Okinawa once VAC embarked upon its next amphibious operation. General Smith felt that since FMFPac constituted a major element within the Pacific Fleet, the eventual location of his headquarters should depend on that of the Pacific Fleet. In any case, he felt that all of the Fleet Marine Force should in time be located either in the Marianas or further west, in any case at least as far west as Guam.<sup>31</sup>

On 26 April 1945, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas authorized the forward displacement of Administrative Headquarters, FMFPac, to Guam

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

subsequent to 1 July. However, inasmuch as the primary function of the Commanding General, FMFPac, was that of an administrative commander, General Smith felt that it would not be feasible for the main body of the administrative staff to remain in Hawaii while he himself relocated to Guam. Since he was divorced from operational duties, the bulk of the daily decisions dealt with questions of personnel and logistics whose solution required immediate access to all of the records retained in Headquarters, FMFPac. The physical separation of the major portion of his staff from these records would, for all practical purposes, strip him of his primary function as administrative commander of FMFPac while delegating the command of that headquarters to the Deputy Commander, FMFPac.

An additional factor mitigating against the forward displacement of FMFPac was the lack of headquarters facilities on Guam. There was a critical shortage of engineers and it was felt while some construction could be completed for subordinate elements of FMFPac with limited space requirements, adequate housing for the Headquarters would not be available on Guam for an indefinite period. In view of this problem, the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific reversed his thinking as to the forward displacement of his headquarters and requested that his earlier recommendation to this effect be held in abeyance, pending a major change in the overall situation.

In July 1945, following the assumption of the command of FMFPac by Lieutenant General Roy S. Geiger on 3

July, action on the forward move of the headquarters was again initiated. It was tentatively planned that the forward headquarters would consist of the commanding general and a small operating staff and that initially the bulk of the administrative work would be handled in Hawaii under the Deputy Commander, FMFPac. As before, Guam was to serve as the forward location. Initial housekeeping support at the forward headquarters was to be provided by small advance echelons of the Headquarters and Service Battalion, the Signal Battalion, the Marine Detachment (Provisional), Marianas Area, and the Transient Center, Marianas Area. Subsequent echelons were to displace forward over an extended period of time. In order to provide for an uninterrupted handling of the workload, it was anticipated that certain Headquarters files and records would have to be duplicated and that certain special staff sections would have to be combined with appropriate general staff sections at either location.

In response to General Geiger's request, the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas on 19 July 1945 authorized FMFPac to establish an advance headquarters on Guam, to consist of approximately 72 officers and 350 enlisted men. However, it was specified that the Island Commander, Guam, was not in a position to furnish engineering assistance for the construction of the necessary facilities. Despite difficulties that could be expected with reference to office space and quarters, final preparations for the forward displacement were all but completed by early August 1945. The initial

echelon which was to include General Geiger, the Chief of Staff, G-3 Section, and appropriate general and special staff representatives, was slated to be established on Guam on or about 3 September 1945.<sup>32</sup> The main body of Headquarters, FMFPac was to remain in Hawaii under the Deputy Commander, FMFPac, as stipulated in the earlier plan.

During the absence of General Geiger, the Deputy Commander was to exercise the former's administrative functions, in addition to controlling and supervising units and the staff groups remaining in Hawaii. The division of staff functions between the forward and rear echelon was to be handled in such a way that operational planning, allocation of troop units, training directives, organization, and troop movements would all be taken care of on Guam while personnel administration, allocation of replacement drafts, intelligence functions, procurement of maps and aerial photographs, supply and evacuation, transportation, and other administrative matters both special and routine would be the responsibility of the Deputy Commander.

The end of the war forestalled the forward displacement of FMFPac, and the headquarters remained at Pearl Harbor.<sup>33</sup> The immediate problems in-

herent in the invasion of Japan, for which planning was well under way by the time of the Japanese surrender, could now be shelved as the uncontested occupation of the Home Islands became a reality. In nearly four years of global warfare, the Marine Corps had succeeded in putting an untried concept of amphibious warfare to the acid test. The evolution of the administrative structure of the FMFPac represented a small but vital link in the chain of events that led from prewar experimentation with the ways and means of amphibious assault on the peaceful shores of islands in the Caribbean to such places as Tarawa, Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. To make these assaults feasible required not only vast quantities of materiel and men trained in their use, but also an efficient organization that could assure that both were available when and where needed.

The twists and turns taken during the evolution of the Fleet Marine Force are but a reflection of the ever-changing war situation that called for a highly flexible command organization. Thus, the development of the Fleet Marine Force saw its beginnings before war came to the United States; it was destined to continue long after the last shot had been fired. The lessons of that war, many of them learned by trial and error, were to become an invaluable asset in the overall offensive and defensive capability of the United States, to be available as needed for the use of future generations.

<sup>32</sup> FMFPac GO No. 75-45, dtd 30Aug45.

<sup>33</sup> The Japanese surrender voided the imminent move of Headquarters, FMFPac to Guam. Detailed notes pertaining to this move for the period 12-27Aug45 are contained in LtGen Merwin H. Silverthorn ltr to HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 20Jun69, in *FMFPac History Comment File*.

# Administration and Aviation<sup>1</sup>

## ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS AND CONTACTS

When the guns fell silent in 1945, the time had arrived to take stock and determine where the organizational structure of the Marine Corps had gone during the war years and what direction it would take in the future. The expanded Fleet Marine Force in the summer of 1945 bore little resemblance to the embryo organization that had existed during the early days of World War II, when a few defense units had been scattered among widely separated islands in the Pacific. Within the overall structure of the Marine Corps and the remaining armed forces of the United States, the Fleet Marine Force was not an isolated entity. All of its titles and functions resulted from tactical considerations; in fact, the numerous changes in both were inherently the result of a flexible response to widely varying de-

mands made on the Corps in the course of the evolution of amphibious warfare.

One name that recurs unfailingly during all of World War II in connection with this evolution is that of General Holland M. Smith. This officer, among others, made it his life purpose to perfect amphibious doctrine and organization to a point where both won general acceptance, despite numerous skeptics and critics who still remembered the unsuccessful Allied expedition to the Dardanelles in World War I. The experience of the U.S. Marine Corps in all aspects of amphibious landings during World War II removed that type of warfare once and for all from the sphere of experimentation that had occupied much thought and time of planners during the 1920s and 1930s. It was fortunate that "this tough, egocentric, cantankerous, exacting little Marine general, who became one of the most controversial figures in World War II, provided the main power drive to all amphibious training on the east coast in the crucial year of 1941."<sup>2</sup> Nor did this drive diminish during the war years, for throughout the war General Smith kept in mind the fundamental reason for the existence of the Fleet Marine Force: the Navy's need for an efficient, highly mobile striking force

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *FMFPac Administrative History; The Development of FMFPac*; Shaw, Nalty, and Turnblad, *Central Pacific Drive*; Reports of Organization and Expansion of the U. S. Marine Corps during the 1940s (OAB, NHD); Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Heintz, *Soldiers of the Sea*; Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), hereafter, Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*; U. S. Historical Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 62.

that was the master of amphibious assault. In assessing the role played by Holland Smith in the evolution of his command and in enumerating some of his personal qualities, one historical account concluded:

Whatever may be the judgment of his contemporaries or of history concerning his role in the Pacific War, there can be little doubt that he played the leading part in forging a fighting amphibious team that made possible the eventual successful landings in both the Atlantic and the Pacific.

General Smith's primary qualifications for the particular job at hand were that he was a driver and a perfectionist. Never did he allow himself the comfortable satisfaction of believing that the training exercises under his direction came off as well as might have been expected under the circumstances and therefore could pass muster. Never did he allow his subordinates in the Navy and Marine Corps or his equals and superiors in the Navy to relax in the drive for perfect planning and execution of all phases of landing operations.<sup>3</sup>

The very nature of the successively redesignated commands he headed dictated that General Smith should work in close coordination with elements of the other Services. Thus, during the early phase of World War II, he not only supervised the amphibious training of the 1st Marine Division but at the same time initiated the U.S. Army's 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions into the intricacies of amphibious warfare. While this activity was in progress on the East Coast of the United States, the 2d Marine Division and the Army's 3d Infantry Division were similarly trained in California. Once his activities had shifted to the West Coast, General Smith

took over the amphibious training of the 2d Marine Division and the Army's 7th Infantry Division. Almost from the very outset, both the embarkation and debarkation of troops from the vessels then available posed serious problems as did accommodations on the transports themselves. At the time, the Higgins craft with bow ramp remained to be perfected. Once a landing force made it ashore, endless confusion ensued until an effective shore party organization could be established.

Within the scope of any amphibious landing, overall coordination and the quantity and quality of naval gunfire support loomed as ominous factors. The controversy regarding the effectiveness of such support was to flare up here and there across the Pacific throughout the war. In 1941 there were no concrete answers to this question since during the landing exercises held at the time all naval gunfire support was simulated. One problem arising in the course of these exercises was the difficulty of coordinating the efforts of the three Services; the naval shore observation parties were without adequate communications equipment and lacked experience, while Army officers were generally unfamiliar with standard naval signal procedure.<sup>4</sup>

Similar exercises conducted in 1942 resulted in answers to some of these problems only to have new ones crop up, notably in connection with the shore party. In the end, the elements of amphibious training were decentralized so that various centers could devote their full resources to a specified activity. In consequence, special schools to conduct

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

the training of shore fire control parties were set up at Quantico and Parris Island. Transport-loading training was given at Quantico and Norfolk, while both Quantico and Fort Bragg, N. C., provided much needed theoretical and practical instruction in radio code, the operation of message centers, and the fundamentals of joint Army-Navy communications procedure. The effects of this training were to be felt across the globe as the Marine and Army divisions who had absorbed it headed for different theaters of operations.

Along with improvements in training came significant technological developments in the machinery of war that would move amphibious assault troops to their objectives. First came the Higgins boats, which had already been tested and improved during the late 1930s, followed in 1941 by the adoption of the Higgins tank lighters which were to become the standard medium landing craft (LCM) used in amphibious landings throughout World War II. The development of the tracked landing vehicle, subsequently to become known as the LVT, followed a tortuous path similar to that of the Higgins boat. Initially invented for rescue work in the Everglades of Florida, the amphibian tractor first came to the attention of the Marine Corps in the 1930s. In late 1940 the first of the Roebling "Alligators" was demonstrated at Quantico, after which time funds were set aside by the Navy for the large-scale production of this vehicle.

While these developments were in progress, the Marine Corps Equipment Board was working on plans for an armored amphibian vehicle based on

the design of the "Alligator." As this project got under way:

Plans called for a vehicle of over twenty feet in length, twelve feet wide, and six and one half feet high. The hull was to be composed of structural steel, turrets were to be of  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch steel castings and would be operable by hand. Each such vehicle was to be armed with a 37-millimeter gun and one .30 caliber machine gun in the center turret, one .50-caliber machine gun in each side turret, and two fixed .50 caliber machine guns fired by the driver by means of buttons at the top of the two steering levers. Propulsion would be obtained from 4-inch T-shaped curved cleats bolted to roller chains. Roebling accepted the idea with modifications. By November 1940, Marine Corps Headquarters had given approval, and production of the first model armored amphibian (LVTA) was begun.<sup>5</sup>

Also during the early phase of the war, rapid improvements were made in naval gunnery that would assure an assault force effective fire support as it approached and seized an enemy shore. Once again, General Smith, on this occasion with the active support of Admiral Ernest J. King, initiated a general reorganization of the shore fire control party. One of the basic changes adopted was the substitution of a Marine or U. S. Army officer for naval personnel who had previously acted as naval gunfire spotters. Henceforth, specially trained naval officers were to act as liaison officers of the shore fire control party. Signal personnel of the assault units, either Marine or Army, were to be made available to the gunfire spotter. In order to familiarize naval personnel with the problems that an amphibious assault force could expect to

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.



face during actual landings, a number of naval gunfire liaison officers were sent to Quantico and Parris Island where they received joint training with Marine artillery officers between September 1941 and March 1942. Artillery officers of the 1st Marine Division received similar training with those of the Army's 9th Infantry Division at Fort Bragg, N. C. around the same period. Eventually the graduates of these courses, though their number remained small, found their way into the various theaters of operations, where their special training benefited those headquarters to which they were assigned.

In a parallel development, naval observation pilots received special instruction in spotting shore targets during early 1942, both at Quantico and at Fort Bragg. In order to train these officers in practical gunnery without having to resort to extensive travel in the Caribbean, an island was purchased off the eastern shore of Maryland in Chesapeake Bay to serve as a firing range for naval bombardment. It was the first amphibious gunnery range ever established for this specific purpose, and a new chapter in the history of naval gunfire training got under way.

As combat operations expanded and the size, mission, and capabilities of the Marine Corps increased, the administrative contacts between the various components of the Corps became more complex. The directive establishing the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, had defined the role of the commander of that organization as that of a type commander for all units comprising FMFPac. As such General Smith came under the di-

rect command of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, however, the Commander, FMFPac also was a direct administrative subordinate of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. In line with this organizational structure, overall tactical control of the Fleet Marine Force was vested in the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, while CMC handled routine administrative matters. Since no distinct line existed between matters of tactical and administrative concern, there evolved a no-man's-land in which the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, exercised a certain influence. Any change in the organization of the Fleet Marine Force, for example, could have a direct and profound effect on the tactical employment of Marine units despite the administrative nature of such changes.

During the Central Pacific Campaign successive islands were seized, which made it incumbent upon General Smith's headquarters to establish and maintain contact with the commanders of the more recently seized islands, notably those on Tinian, Guam, and Peleliu. In their capacity as island commanders these Marines were indirectly subordinate to the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, the channel of command leading to them from the latter by way of the area commander.

There was no chain of command between Headquarters, FMFPac and the Commander, Marianas Area, or the Commander, Marshall-Gilberts Area. Each of the latter was directly under the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean

---

<sup>6</sup> Pac Flt ltr 53L-44 dtd 110ct44.



MARINE INFANTRY AND ARTILLERY *landing exercise, New River, N.C. 1942.*  
(USMC 5125)



LIEUTENANT GENERAL ROY S. GEIGER *takes command of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, from Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith at Oahu, Hawaii, 7 March 1945.*  
(USMC 127386)

Areas. The area commanders exercised operational control over certain units of the Fleet Marine Force, either through the island or the atoll commanders. In relation to the business of these commands, the normal flow of communications passed through the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, though shortcuts were frequently taken to simplify procedures and conserve time.

The Commander, Amphibious Forces, U. S. Pacific Fleet and the Commander, Air Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet were type commanders under the direct control of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet. Their status thus paralleled that of the Commanding General, FMFPac. In the case of these commands, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas acted as the hub of the wheel, though liaison officers were often directly employed between the commands.

Even though no administrative command relationship existed between units of the U. S. Army and the Fleet Marine Force in the Pacific Ocean Areas, it was inevitable that interservice cooperation and coordination would be required on an ever increasing scale as joint operations became more commonplace. During the early phase of the war in 1942, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had already authorized the creation of the amphibious corps, under a Marine officer whose staff included such Army and Navy personnel as were required. Of necessity, such officers provided the necessary liaison with their respective Services. In line with this concept, most of the U. S. Army personnel attached to Headquarters, VAC, were transferred to Head-

quarters, FMFPac when that organization was activated.<sup>7</sup> There, they remained in their respective capacities and continued to serve on the general and special staffs until the cessation of hostilities.

By early 1945, it had become common practice to exchange staff representatives monthly between Headquarters, Marine Corps and FMFPac. Such an exchange provided a better liaison between the two headquarters in addition to routine communication that already existed. At the same time, a liaison officer of the Fleet Marine Force attached to the staff of Admiral Nimitz looked after the interests of his organization. The principal contacts between Headquarters, FMFPac, and Headquarters, Department of the Pacific pertained to the exchange of administrative information on personnel matters and business mutual to Marine garrison units of the Navy's shore establishment and the Fleet Marine Force. A similar exchange of information took place with the Commanding General, Marine Garrison Forces, Fourteenth Naval District, since no chain of command existed between that command and Headquarters, FMFPac.

During the early part of 1945, the trend towards representation of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, on Army staffs continued in the Pacific Theater. Towards this end, based on purely tactical considerations, the Marine Detachment, Tenth Army was activated on the first day of the year and assigned to Headquarters, U. S. Tenth Army, where it carried out a vital liaison func-

---

<sup>7</sup> FMFPac SO No. 3-44, dtd 26Aug44.

tion during the planning and execution of the Okinawa campaign. The Marine Detachment, U. S. Sixth Army, was slated for a similar role during the impending assault on Kyushu in the Home Islands, in which VAC was to participate.

Pursuant to an agreement reached between the Commander in Chief, Army Forces, Pacific, and the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas on 16 May 1945, provision was made for Headquarters, FMFPac to be represented on the staff of the Commanding General, United States Army Forces, Western Pacific. The liaison officers thus assigned were to provide the Army headquarters with information on the capabilities of FMFPac, obtain logistic support for Fleet Marine Force units under U. S. Army operational control, and make certain that directives of Army commanders corresponded to the capabilities of FMFPac. It was intended that representatives of the Fleet Marine Force would become an integral part of the Army staffs to which they were assigned; their primary duty would be to assist in planning for future operations. In their capacity as representatives of FMFPac, they could contact that headquarters directly in all matters pertaining to Fleet Marine Force policy. Activation of the Marine Detachment (Provisional), U. S. Army Forces, Western Pacific, took place on 19 June 1945. This detachment remained attached to the Army headquarters until the end of the war.

The expansion of Marine Corps staffs and headquarters in the course of World War II can be understood only when viewed in an overall relationship

with the expanded responsibilities and size of the Corps. From a total strength of 54,359 officers and men in the summer of 1941, the Marine Corps expanded eight-fold within the span of four years; on 30 June 1945, within six weeks of the war's end, the Corps numbered 37,067 officers and 437,613 men, a total of 474,680.<sup>8</sup>

By the time the war entered its final phase, the Marine Corps in the Continental United States had become a huge replacement training organization. The last Fleet Marine Force unit to be organized was the 29th Marines. When that unit left Camp Lejeune in 1944, training shifted for the most part to individual replacements who, upon completion of boot camp, either went on to technical schools or moved in a steady flow towards the combat areas of the Pacific Theater, according to the dictum that "there are only two kinds of Marines: those who have been overseas and those who are going."<sup>9</sup> Thus, in a few short years, the Fleet Marine Force truly had come a long way, eventually comprising some 185,000 trained men in ground organizations, organized into six divisions and other supporting units.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond training members of the U. S. Marine Corps, an additional temporary function emerged for the Fleet Marine Force in 1943, when Dutch Marines were trained at Quantico and Camp Lejeune in line with the reorganization of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps,

<sup>8</sup> *U. S. Historical Statistics*, p. 736.

<sup>9</sup> Statement attributed to General Vandegrift in Heintz, *Soldiers of the Sea*, p. 508.

<sup>10</sup> Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, p. 595.

which was then being reconstituted in exile. Before the end of World War II, several thousands of these Netherlands Marines were to absorb some of the doctrine and experiences of their American counterparts.

### *THE DEVELOPMENT OF AIRCRAFT, FMFPAC*<sup>11</sup>

The development of the aviation arm of FMFPac during World War II paralleled that of the ground units. It portrayed the gradual ascendancy of an instrument of war which, long neglected in peacetime appropriations like most of the military establishment, was to be forged into a potent striking force. The history of Marine aviation passed through several stages of growth. Following the establishment of the Fleet Marine Force in the 1930s, the fledgling force grasped for a clearcut mission. The years prior to World War II saw the training of pilots and ground crews and the acquisition of newer type aircraft. After the Pearl Harbor attack, Marine aviation initially maintained a defensive posture during the early months of the war in the face of overwhelming enemy superiority. Eventually, there followed the establishment and consolidation of bases along the outer perimeter of the Japanese ad-

vance; and finally, a gradual movement got under way to the northwest, across the Pacific, towards the Japanese Home Islands, slow at first, but steadily accelerating as the offensive across the Pacific gained momentum.

The mission of Marine aviation, as set forth by the Navy General Board in 1939, was primarily to support the Fleet Marine Force in landing operations and in the field. As a secondary mission, Marine air was to furnish replacement squadrons for carrier-based naval aircraft. To carry out their mission, Marine pilots had to utilize airfields within a relatively short range of the objective; the only alternative to nearby airfields was to station Marine squadrons on carriers. During the early 1930s, Marine aviators gained considerable experience in that type of operation when stationed on board the *Saratoga* and *Lexington*. A lack of carriers, on the other hand, precluded such combat employment of Marine squadrons until the final phase of World War II.

Attempts to obtain carriers for the exclusive use of Marine aviation invariably resulted in a rebuff similar to that administered by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral H. R. Stark, who on 15 March 1941 made this comment:

In fleet landing exercises recently completed, naval squadrons were landed from and marine squadrons embarked in both carriers available, and so doing is considered to be in accordance with correct principles. Assignment of a few particular carriers to the Fleet Marine Force would inevitably fail to meet possible requirements in carrier operation of marine squadrons. At the same time it would permanently reduce the number available for purely naval operations. Thus there would be imposed definite disadvantages

<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Division of Aviation, Marine Corps Aviation Status Sheet (Pers& Loc, May42-Dec46); Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Administrative History, 7Aug42-16Sep44, hereafter *AirFMFPac Administrative History*; Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, War Diary, Aug1942-Sep1944, hereafter MAWPac WarD; Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, War Diary, Sep1945-Dec1946, hereafter AirFMFPac WarD; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*.

without adequate compensating advantages.

The assignment of a carrier to operate marine squadrons only could not be permitted to involve any replacement of the ship's own personnel by marines. It could not, without definite reduction of efficiency and definite violation of principles of unquestionable standing, be permitted to involve command of important units, such as carriers and their necessary supporting ships, by marine officers.<sup>12</sup>

The U. S. Navy's attitude with respect to the exclusive assignment of carriers to Marine aviation is understandable enough when it is recalled that during the 1930s the *Saratoga* and the *Lexington* were the only carriers the Navy had. As more of these types of ships became available, they had to be assigned to other uses. As a result, for most of World War II, Marine air support of amphibious operations was limited to landings carried out within range of land-based airfields.

Organizationally, Marine Corps aviation had humble beginnings. There were 129 Marine pilots in 1931, a figure that had increased by 9 four years later. By mid-1940, there were 245 Marine pilots; expansion of the Corps then under way resulted in an increase to 425 by the end of that year.<sup>13</sup> In 1935, Marine aviation was transferred from the Division of Operations and Training at Headquarters, Marine Corps and established as an independent section under the Commandant. Less than a year later, on 1 April 1936, the Officer in Charge,

Colonel Ross E. Rowell, was appointed Director of Marine Corps Aviation. In this capacity, he continued the functions his predecessors had carried out since the days of Major Alfred A. Cunningham in 1919, by advising the Commandant on all matters pertaining to Marine aviation and acting as liaison between the Marine Corps and the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics.

When Congress established a 10,000-plane program for the U. S. Navy in June 1940, Marine Corps aviation was allotted slightly more than 10 percent of this number, a total of 1,167 planes. In line with this expansion, the 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings were activated at Quantico, Virginia and San Diego, California, respectively. On paper, a wing was authorized 4 air groups with 16 squadrons, though at the time there were not even enough aircraft on hand to equip a single group. When the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor, the total Marine aviation organization consisted of 13 squadrons with a total of 204 aircraft of all types, as follows:<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> In this table, adapted from Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 33, V equals aircraft (heavier-than-air); M stands for Marine; F equals fighter; SB stands for scout bomber; J designates utility; R equals transport; O stands for observation. (\*) On maneuvers at New Bern, N. C. Returned to Quantico 9 December. (\*\*) No record has been found which indicates how many planes were at San Diego in wing headquarters, if any. The same is true of group headquarters at Ewa. (\*\*\*) Commissioned 1 December at Naval Air Station, San Diego. No record of any planes received by 6 December. (\*\*\*\*) Available records show only 204 planes in the Marine organization as of 6 December 1941, as compared to a figure of 251 compiled in Historical Division, HQMC in 1944.

<sup>12</sup> CNO ltr to Chairman, General Board, Op-12A-4-drc (SC) A21-2/CV, Ser 020512, dtd 15 Mar41, in Organization and Expansion of the U. S. Marine Corps, 1940s (OAB, NHD).

<sup>13</sup> Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 30.

## MARINE CORPS AVIATION, 6 DECEMBER 1941

*Director:* COL RALPH J. MITCHELL1st Marine Aircraft Wing, BGen Roy S. Geiger, Quantico  
Wing Hq, 1 JRB-2, 1 SBC-4

MAG-11, LtCol Harold D. Campbell, Group Hq, 2 SBD-1

|          |           |          |                           |
|----------|-----------|----------|---------------------------|
| VMF-111* | 15 F4F-3A | 2 SNJ-3  | Maj Thomas J. Walker, Jr. |
| VMF-121* | 20 F4F-3  | 2 SNJ-3  | Maj Samuel S. Jack        |
| VMO-151* | 12 SBC-4  |          | Maj Thomas C. Green       |
| VMSB-131 | 18 SB2U-3 | 5 spares | Capt Paul Moret           |
| VMSB-132 | 19 SBD    |          | Maj Albert D. Cooley      |
| VMJ-152  | 1 JO-2    | 3 J2F-4  | Maj Thomas J. McQuade     |
|          | 2 R3D     | 1 J2F-1  |                           |

2d Marine Aircraft Wing, BGen Ross E. Rowell, San Diego  
Wing Hq\*\*

MAG-21, LtCol Claude A. Larkin, Ewa, T.H.

|            |           |                     |                         |
|------------|-----------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| VMF-211    | 12 F4F-3  | at Wake             | Maj Paul A. Putnam      |
|            | 10 F4F-3  | 1 SNJ at Ewa        |                         |
| VMF-221    | 12 F2A-3  | in <i>Saratoga</i>  | Maj Verne J. McCaul     |
| VMO-251*** |           |                     | Capt Elliott E. Bard    |
| VMSB-231   | 18 SB2U-3 | in <i>Lexington</i> | Maj C. J. Chappell, Jr. |
|            | 7 SB2U-3  | at Ewa              |                         |
| VMSB-232   | 19 SBD-1  | 3 SBD-2             | Maj Ira L. Kimes        |
| VMJ-252    | 2 R3D-2   | 1 JO-2              | Maj Perry K. Smith      |
|            | 2 J2F-4   | 1 SB2U-3            |                         |
|            | 1 JRS-1   | 1 SBD-1             |                         |

Virgin Islands, Base Air Detachment 3

VMS-3            7 J2F-4            1 JRF            Maj Roger T. Carleson

Total planes, 204\*\*\*\*

Just one week prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Stark, once more commented on the size of the Marine Corps contemplated under the then existing state of limited emergency. In

outlining the overall mission of the Corps in the immediate future, the Admiral foresaw three types of operations calling for the employment of Marines. These were broken down into:

a. small expeditions for the seizure of

small islands, such as a small atoll; or a compact group of islands, well separated from other islands or land masses, such as the Azores;

b. large expeditions requiring the simultaneous or successive capture of several islands spread over a considerable area, with a view to developing a secure advanced base area for future operations of the fleet, and

c. large expeditions to overseas continental areas for the seizure of bases to be used subsequently as bridgeheads for extensive land campaigns.<sup>35</sup>

In cautioning against too large an expansion of the Marine Corps, Admiral Stark stated:

It seems apparent that were the Navy to insist on building up amphibious assault troops in numbers sufficient for all three of the categories of operations mentioned in paragraph 3, the effect would be that the Navy would be attempting to create a separate army of its own, entirely independent of the United States Army, and of a size greater than has heretofore been contemplated. Unfavorable reactions would ensue, which might even result in the absorption by the Army of all Marine Corps units at shore stations. Were this to occur, the Navy would be deprived of troops especially trained to work with the fleet, and to take the lead in amphibious operations. Assembling all the equipment for a third Marine division would be of little use, because it takes a long time to enlist and train the personnel of a division, and during the training period the two existing divisions would be more or less broken up to provide for the new division a nucleus of trained men. The net result would be that, for a considerable period, the Navy

would be without the services of even one trained division.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time the Chief of Naval Operations also outlined his objections to provisions that the General Board had made in the summer of 1941 with respect to the 15,000-plane program then recommended. This plan called for two air wings, each to be attached to a Marine division, and the establishment of four base defense air groups for the defense of advance bases in cooperation with Marine defense battalions. According to the program that the General Board had approved, medium bombers were to be eliminated from the aircraft wing and dive bombers substituted in their place. In view of the mission of the Marine Corps which was to capture positions and defend them once they had been seized, Admiral Stark felt that medium range bombers would be far more valuable than dive bombers. In outlining his objections to the proposed course of action, the Chief of Naval Operations added:

Once the wing is established ashore after capture of the position, medium range bombers are needed for reaching into back areas for attack on enemy reinforcements which may be coming up, or, if established on an island, to reach out at considerable distances to attack enemy bases or naval vessels. Providing only dive bombers for Marine aircraft organizations is considered unsound, since dive bombers are not effective against well armed ships or shore bases except at considerable sacrifice. War experience has demonstrated the need not only for dive bombers, but also for long range bombers and torpedo planes.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> CNO ltr to SecNac, dtd 1Dec41 Op.12-VDS (SC) P-16-1KK Serial 0120712, in Organization and Expansion of the U. S. Marine Corps, 1940s (OAB, NHD).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



This high-altitude bomber versus dive bomber controversy remained unsolved, for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, immense enemy victories during the initial phase of the war in the Pacific, and requirements in men and material that now became global in nature put an end to the gradual increase of Marine Corps strength. In the words of one historical account:

The amphibious character of the war in the Pacific imposed on the Marine Corps greater tasks than any it had ever been called on to perform. Expanding the Corps and equipping it with the weapons and support facilities demanded by modern amphibious undertakings was an administrative achievement of the first magnitude but was overshadowed by the readiness of the Fleet Marine Force to undertake the Guadalcanal Operation at a critical time early in the war when other ground forces were still undergoing training.<sup>18</sup>

The development of the command organization of Marine aviation was to follow a course that was somewhat similar to that of the ground units. In August 1942, at a time when Marine aviation was undergoing a rapid expansion in line with the demands of the war in the Pacific, the need for a command echelon above that of the Marine air wing became apparent. In order to meet this requirement the Commandant, General Holcomb, on 10 August 1942 ordered the establishment of a new command to be known as Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, under Major General Ross E. Rowell, who up to this time had commanded the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing.

The new command was to consist of the Headquarters, a Service Group, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, and the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing.<sup>19</sup> While Headquarters was to be located at Pearl Harbor, the Service Group was to be situated at a place where it could best carry out its function of dealing with personnel and supplies. The 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings were to retain all units assigned to them at this time, except for squadrons and groups stationed at outlying bases for defense purposes. These latter units were to be incorporated into the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing.

Operating under Admiral Nimitz, the new headquarters was responsible for the organization, administration, and distribution of personnel and supplies within the command. Its area of responsibility extended to all Marine aviation units in the Pacific except for those assigned to a specific task organization. General Rowell was to make recommendations to Admiral Nimitz as to the employment of Marine aviation units in the Pacific Theater.

Headquarters Squadron, Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, was activated at the Naval Air Station, San Diego on 15 August 1942. Initially, the organization consisted of 10 officers and 24 enlisted men.<sup>20</sup> Five days later, the Service Group was activated, in accordance with the original authority which had stated that the group was to be established "for the distribution of personnel and material with operating

<sup>18</sup> Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, p. 595.

<sup>19</sup> CMC ltr to MajGen Ross E. Rowell, dtd 10Aug52, App 1 to MAWPac WarD, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> MAWPac Hist, p. 2.

agencies at such localities as may be appropriate."<sup>21</sup> The first officer to command the Service Group was Colonel Lewie G. Merritt.

One of the first measures initiated by General Rowell was to field the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, commanded by Brigadier General Roy Geiger. Orders to this effect were issued on 21 August, directing Headquarters and Service Squadron, 1st MAW and MAG-12 to head for the South Pacific. There, the battle for Guadalcanal was just getting under way, and General Geiger's pilots would soon make a name for themselves in the defense of Henderson Field. By 24 August, the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing was organized under Colonel Claude A. Larkin. Initially, this wing was to consist of units of the 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings which were assigned to the defense of outlying bases.

Once the 4th Wing had been organized, the time had come for Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, to leave the Continental United States. Accordingly, Admiral Nimitz on 5 September requested General Rowell to move his headquarters to Hawaii, where it was to be based at Ewa, which had been commissioned as a Marine Air Station only five days earlier. The move to Hawaii was designed to bring about closer liaison between Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, its subordinate units in the Pacific Theater, and the headquarters of Admiral Nimitz. Pursuant to these orders<sup>22</sup> General Rowell left San

Diego for Hawaii on 16 September, followed less than two weeks later by Headquarters Squadron, Marine Air Wings, Pacific, which made the voyage by ship and reached Pearl Harbor on 4 October. On 19 November, MAG-23 returned from Guadalcanal en route to the Continental United States, where personnel of this group were broken up and split into cadres that were to become Marine Aircraft Groups 41, 42, 43, and 44. Some of these cadres became the nuclei for new Marine air stations to be established at El Centro, Santa Barbara, and Mojave.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, the expanding needs of Marine aviation in the Pacific Theater placed a heavy workload on the Service Group, both with respect to personnel replacement and the procurement of materiel. In order to furnish additional support for the Service Group, which had remained in the Continental United States, General Rowell on 3 December 1942 ordered it to be expanded into a larger unit designated as Marine Fleet Air, West Coast. This organization was activated on 22 January 1943 under the command of Colonel Merritt, who had previously been in charge of the now defunct Service Group.

One of the immediate problems facing General Rowell's recently constituted headquarters was that of channeling replacements into the combat area. The 1st Wing estimated at the time that 5 percent enlisted ground personnel, 25 percent pilots, and 20 percent radioman-gunner replacements would be required for each month of combat in the South Pacific.<sup>24</sup> In re-

<sup>21</sup> CMC ltr to MajGen Rowell, dtd 10Aug42, *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> CinCPac Dispatch #050113, as cited in *MAWPac Hist*, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *MAWPac Hist*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

sponse to this problem, the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, commanded by Colonel Francis P. Mulcahy, was ordered into the South Pacific area to relieve General Geiger's wing in late February 1943.

Major General Ralph J. Mitchell, who had served as Director of Aviation until late March 1943 assumed command of Marine Aircraft, South Pacific on 21 April, thus heading the principal subordinate echelon of Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific. Both the 1st and the 2d Marine Aircraft Wings came under his headquarters. In a reflection of the stepped up operations in the South Pacific during the summer of 1943, several changes were made in the organization of Marine aviation. In August, Admiral Nimitz ordered Headquarters of the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing to be established in Samoa, where it was to function under the operational control of the Commanding General, Samoan Force. On the 21st of the month, Brigadier General Harold D. Campbell assumed command of the Aircraft Defense Force, Samoan Area. Embarkation of the first echelon of the 4th Wing for Samoa got under way on 28 August.

The continued expansion of Marine aviation in the field necessitated additional changes in the areas farther to the rear. Accordingly, on 1 September 1943, Marine Aircraft, Hawaiian Area was activated. In another development highlighting the increasingly important part played by Marine aviation in the South Pacific, General Mitchell, in November 1943, became Commander of Aircraft in the Solomons Area (ComAir

Sols) in addition to his other duties, relieving Army Air Forces Major General Nathan Twining.

As of the beginning of 1944, Marine Air Wings, Pacific, still commanded by General Rowell, functioned under Air Force, Pacific Fleet, alternately designated as Task Force 59.11. The units subordinated to General Rowell's headquarters at this time were Marine Aircraft, South Pacific; the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing; Marine Aircraft, Hawaiian Area, and Marine Fleet Air, West Coast. By this time the staff at Headquarters, Marine Air Wings, Pacific, numbered 27 officers and 118 enlisted men.<sup>25</sup>

On 8 May 1944 the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, which had previously been a training command on the East Coast, and was on this date commanded by Brigadier General Walter G. Farrell, who had just taken over from Brigadier General Larkin, reached Ewa. There, it assumed the functions which had previously been assigned to Marine Aircraft, Hawaiian Area. The latter headquarters was deactivated.<sup>26</sup> All elements of the former command were incorporated into the new wing.

The establishment of Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, in the summer of 1944 brought with it the question as to who was to control the Fleet Marine Force aviation units. In August of that year, the Commandant had directed

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> *MAWPac Chronology* in *MAWPac WarD*, p. 4.

that Marine aviation in the Pacific was to be under the newly organized Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. This order had been revoked at the direction of Admiral Nimitz, and for a month the status of these aviation units remained unclarified. This uncertainty ended on 11 October 1944, when Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific was redesignated as Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.<sup>27</sup> The implementation order issued by General Mulcahy, who had assumed command of Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific on 16 September, spelled out in detail:

Aircraft Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, is a major unit of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. The Commanding General, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force performs type command functions under the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force with respect to matters for which the latter is responsible. He also performs type command functions under Commander Air Force, Pacific Fleet, with respect to aviation matters. The operational control of the tactical units of Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, rests with Commander Air Force, Pacific Fleet, unless they are otherwise assigned.<sup>28</sup>

Two additional subordinate commands were established on 21 October 1944. One was the Provisional Air Support Command at Ewa under Colonel Vernon E. Megee. The overall purpose of this command was to act as a liaison group in amphibious operations be-

tween ground forces and supporting aircraft. The other was Marine Carrier Groups, Aircraft, FMFPac, which was organized at Santa Barbara, California, under the command of Colonel Albert D. Cooley. Creation of the latter organization marked the end of years of Marine efforts to have men and aircraft assigned to carriers. Colonel Cooley's command consisted of MB DAG-48 at Santa Barbara and MAG-51 at Mojave, shortly thereafter redesignated as Marine Air Support Groups. Each Air Support Group was to consist of four carrier air groups, each with an 18-plane fighter squadron and a 12-plane torpedo-bomber squadron.

At the beginning of 1945, the units subordinate to Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, were the 1st, 2d, 3d, and 4th Marine Air Wings; Marine Fleet Air, West Coast, and the newly established Provisional Air Support Command. This organization remained in effect during the early months of 1945, though changes in command were frequent. Thus, on 23 February, Major General James T. Moore, who had led the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing during the campaign in the Palaus, traded commands with Major General Mulcahy. General Moore became Commanding General, Aircraft, FMFPac, while General Mulcahy assumed command of the 2d Wing, which subsequently was to take part in the invasion of Okinawa.

One final change was to mark the Marine aviation organization in the Pacific Theater prior to the end of the war. On 21 April 1945, the Provisional Air Support Command was disbanded and

<sup>27</sup> Pacific Flt Ltr 53L-44, dtd 11Oct44, in Organization and Expansion of the U. S. Marine Corps, 1940s (OAB, NHD).

<sup>28</sup> FMFPac GO No. 3-44, dtd 24Oct 44, App 2 to MAWPac WarD.

the personnel and equipment of that unit were taken over by the newly established Marine Air Support Control Units, Amphibious Forces, Pacific. This command, under Colonel Megee, consisted of a headquarters and four teams designed to furnish close air support control for ground forces in amphibious operations. The command, functioning under the Commander, Amphibious Forces, Pacific, continued to carry out its administrative function at Ewa until the end of the war.

The evolution of Marine Corps aviation administrative headquarters must be viewed from the organizational requirements levied on that arm. Thus, by the end of World War II, Marine aviation had expanded to a total of 103 tactical squadrons, numbering 10,049 pilots and a total of 116,628 personnel.<sup>29</sup> Not included in these figures are those nontactical squadrons used for transport and observation. In a span of four years, Marine aviation had mushroomed from 2 aircraft groups with 9 aircraft squadrons to 5 aircraft wings, 32

aircraft groups, and 131 aircraft squadrons.<sup>30</sup>

In retrospect, the organization of Marine Aviation met the demands made upon it, oftentimes by trial and error, within the limitations imposed by time and recurrent shortages in manpower and materiel. The flexibility of the administrative support available to the tactical squadrons in the field contributed much in helping these units to carry out their tactical missions. Thus, when compared to the development of the Fleet Marine Force organization as outlined in the previous chapter, it becomes readily apparent that the growth of Marine aviation was directly proportionate to overall Marine strength. The effect of this administrative expansion on the units in the field will be demonstrated in subsequent parts of this volume which describe in detail the performance of Marine aviators and their equipment in a tactical environment.

---

<sup>29</sup> Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, p. 422.

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434. An additional monthly breakdown of Marine aviation units, location, and personnel is contained in Division of Aviation Monthly Status Sheets, Mar43-Dec46, Division of Aviation, HQMC.

**PART III**

***The Palau: Gateway To The Philippines***



# Strategic Situation <sup>1</sup>

Most American planners agreed by early 1944 that the next important goal in the increasingly successful war against Japan was to secure a base in the strategic triangle formed by the Philippines, Formosa, and the coast of

China. Such a move would sever the lines of communication between Japan's home islands and her rich conquered lands in the Netherlands Indies and Southeast Asia. Moreover, the plan envisaged sites for long range bomber airfields, as well as a valuable base from which future invasions, including the ultimate assault of Japan itself, could be mounted. After much debate over the proper avenues of advance, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to a compromise which would set in motion a two-pronged attack along the two most practicable routes of approach: one through the Central Pacific, and the other along the New Guinea-Mindanao axis originating from the Southwest Pacific.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Maj Frank O. Hough, *The Assault on Peleliu* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1950), hereafter Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War; The War Reports of General of the Army George C. Marshall—General of the Army H. H. Arnold—Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1947), hereafter *War Reports* with appropriate originator; Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach to the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), hereafter Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; USSBS (Pac), NavAnalysis Div, *The Campaigns of the Pacific War* (Washington, 1946), hereafter USSBS (Pac), *Pacific Campaigns*; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Leyte June 1944—January 1945—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, v. XII (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), hereafter Morison, *Leyte*; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki—The Army Air Forces in World War II*, v. V (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), hereafter Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*. Where location citations for documentary sources for this part are missing, the material is in the following files of the Archives, Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps: Palau Area Operations; Peleliu Monograph and Comment File; Unit Historical Report.

Both of these offensives were well advanced by the summer months of 1944. By a series of amphibious landings, General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area forces had reached the western extremity of New Guinea. As a result, the island was neutralized as a base for enemy operations, and the way was cleared for a move against Mindanao (See Map 1). In the Central Pacific, meanwhile, troops controlled by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPOA) had seized Saipan and consolidated their hold on the Marianas. When these two avenues of attack converged in a pincer movement on the Philippines, the



planned encirclement of bypassed Japanese bases would be complete, and the Central Pacific for all practical purposes would be turned into an American lake. First, however, thought had to be given to the safeguarding of MacArthur's invasion route north from New Guinea.

Some 530 miles directly east of Mindanao lay Japan's main bastion in the Western Carolines, the Palau Islands. General MacArthur believed that he could not mount an amphibious campaign against the Philippines unless this potential threat to his lines of communications was eliminated. It appeared that land-based aircraft could not neutralize this danger, for the enemy stronghold was too far distant from newly-acquired bases for sustained and effective air attacks. Permanent neutralization of the Palaus, Pacific planners decided, could be gained only by amphibious assault.

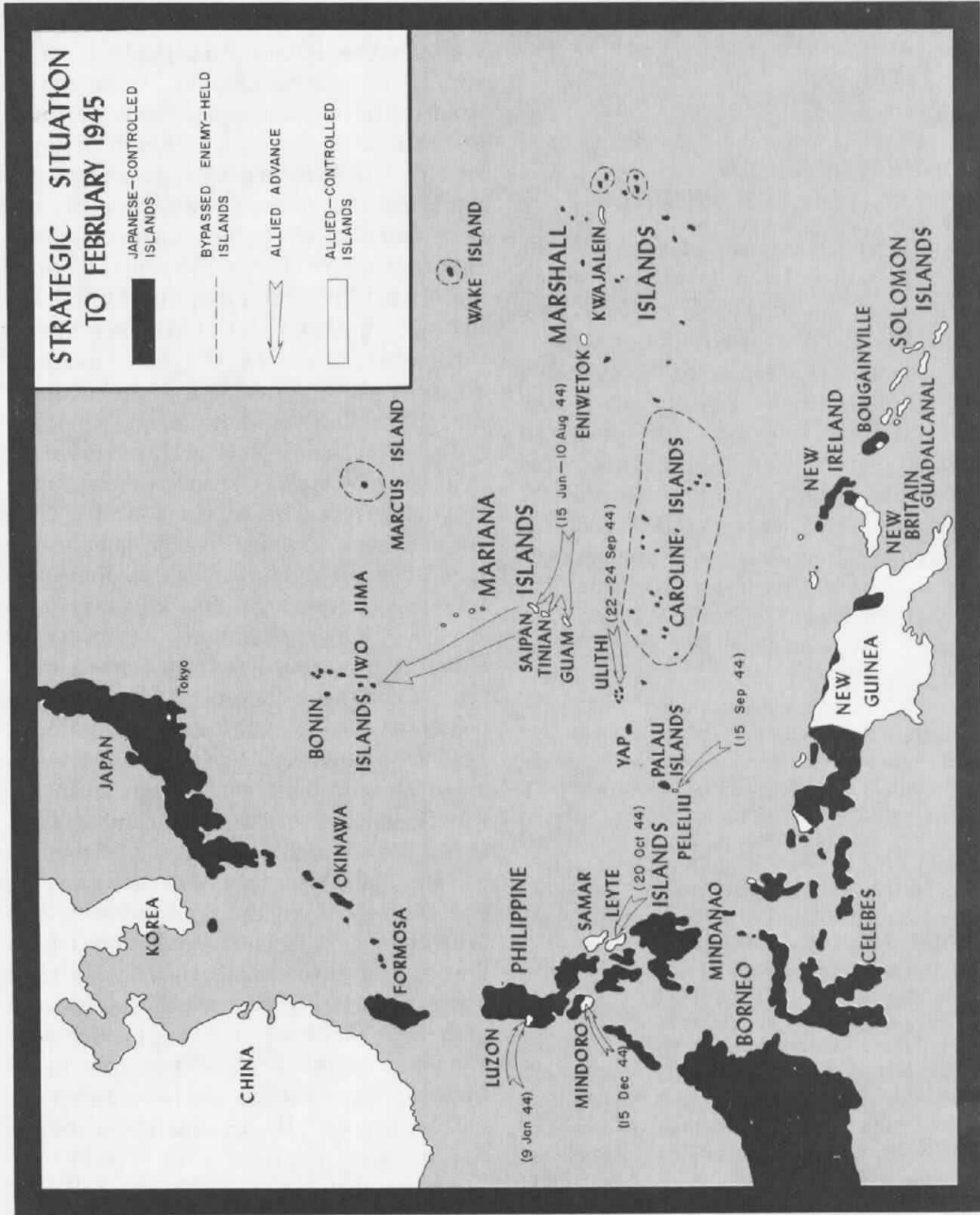
Although three excellent targets stood out in the Western Carolines—the Palaus' airfields and anchorages, Yap's air base, and Ulithi's exceptionally spacious and deep anchorage—the high level planners envisioned, at first, only the seizure of the Palaus. This undertaking was given the rather prophetic code name of Operation STALEMATE, for revisions, postponements, and drastic changes characterized it right up to the moment of actual consummation. Before the campaign initiated by STALEMATE was ended, all three of the targets were to be included in its operation plans, although only the islands of Peleliu and Angaur in the southern Palaus and the Ulithi Atoll actually would be invaded.

As Admiral Nimitz later explained, the reasons for STALEMATE were twofold: "first, to remove from MacArthur's right flank, in his progress to the Southern Philippines, a definite threat of attack; second, to secure for our forces a base from which to support MacArthur's operations into the Southern Philippines."<sup>2</sup> On the same day proposed for the landing on Peleliu, infantry units of the Southwest Pacific command would assault the island of Morotai in the Moluccas, thus securing MacArthur's left flank and providing him with a suitable airfield site for land-based aircraft to support his invasion armada mounting from New Guinea.

Whether or not the Palau Operation was a necessary prerequisite for MacArthur's return to the Philippines remains a matter of unproductive speculation. Except for those who participated in it, Peleliu largely remains a forgotten battle, its location unknown, its name calling forth no patriotic remembrance of self-sacrifice or gallant deeds as do the battles of Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Iwo Jima. For the Marines who stormed ashore on Peleliu, however, the strategic value of the island may not have been clear, but duty was. They had been given a job to do, and they went ahead and did it. As Major Frank O. Hough, a veteran of the fighting on "Bloody" Peleliu, commented:

Whatever might have been, the Marines hit the Peleliu beaches on 15 September 1944, and history records that nine days after the assault phase was declared at an

<sup>2</sup> FAdm Chester W. Nimitz ltr to Philip A. Crowl, dtd 5Oct49, cited in Isely and Crowl, *U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 392.



Map 1

end, MacArthur invaded Leyte. For better or for worse, his flank had been secured, and with the action which followed the Pacific War entered a new and decisive phase.<sup>3</sup>

### GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND<sup>4</sup>

As the westernmost extremity of the vast Carolines Islands chain, which spans some 33 degrees of longitude across the Pacific Ocean just north of the equator, the Palaus lie roughly 500 miles from both the Philippines to the west and New Guinea to the south, and 240 miles from Yap to the east. This remoteness, especially from the rest of Micronesia, long retarded the islands' development and delayed knowledge of their existence to the outside world.

Although Ruy Lopez de Villalobos is generally credited with the discovery of

the Palaus in 1543, the first recorded visit to the island was made in 1712 by Spanish missionaries. Afterwards, Spain was to maintain a shadowy claim of ownership over the Palaus and the rest of the Western Carolines; yet she made no real attempts at the economic development or social improvement of them. Except for visits by English ships in 1738 and 1791, the Palaus remained unknown to the Western World until the middle of the 18th Century when trading ships plying the Chinese market rediscovered them.

By 1885, Spain's long failure to develop the Western Carolines encouraged Imperial Germany, anxious at this time for overseas colonies to supplement her rapidly growing industrial factories, to land naval forces at Yap and take possession. This challenge to Spanish sovereignty proved fruitless, for a neutral arbitrator soon disallowed the Germans' claim to the disputed islands. In 1899, however, Spain suddenly decided to withdraw completely from the Pacific area; she wanted no more territorial losses such as she had suffered in the Spanish-American War. As a result, she sold the Carolines, Marshalls, and Marianas to the Germans, who immediately began to exploit the islands with vigor. By 1914, this exploitation had provided the Palaus with a telegraph station and modernized transportation facilities. In addition, the mining of phosphates and the production of copra had been initiated.

At this point, the outbreak of World War I gave Japan a golden opportunity for expanding into the Central Pacific. Quickly joining the Allies, she organized naval expeditions and set about

<sup>3</sup> Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Joint Intelligence Study Publishing Board, Joint Army-Navy Intelligence Study of Palau Islands (JANIS No. 103), 2 vols, dtd Apr44, hereafter *JANIS No. 103*; CinCPac-CinCPOA Bulletin No. 124-44, Southern Palau, dtd 15Aug44; JICPOA, Information Bulletin: Palau, dtd 15Feb44, hereafter *JICPOA Bulletin No. 17-44*; JICPOA, Information Bulletin: Palau Islands, dtd 1Jun44, hereafter *JICPOA Bulletin No. 87-44*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Herbert W. Krieger, *Island Peoples of the Western Pacific Micronesia and Melanesia: Smithsonian Institution War Background Studies Number 16* (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution, 1943); R. W. Robson, *The Pacific Islands Handbook 1944: North American Edition* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945); LCdr Dorothy E. Richard, *United States Naval Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*, 3 vols (Washington: CNO, 1957).

seizing Germany's Pacific possessions. This energetic land-grab was more or less legitimized after the war, when the new League of Nations granted Japan a mandate over the former German colonies north of the equator. After their abrupt withdrawal from the League in 1935, the Japanese continued exercising a *de facto* sovereignty over the Palau Islands, as well as the rest of the mandated islands.

Geographically, the Palaus consist of several large islands and well over a hundred smaller ones, extending generally in a northeast-southwest direction for nearly 100 miles (See Map 2). Except for Angaur in the south and two small atolls in the north, the whole group lies within a great encircling coral reef which is largely a barrier reef on the west and a fringing reef on the east. The maximum width between the outer reefs is about 20 miles, and the whole island group covers approximately 175 square miles. All of the islands are irregularly shaped and most are hilly, but they vary greatly in physical character, ranging from flat atolls in the north to volcanic central islands and, finally, to coral-limestone islands in the south.

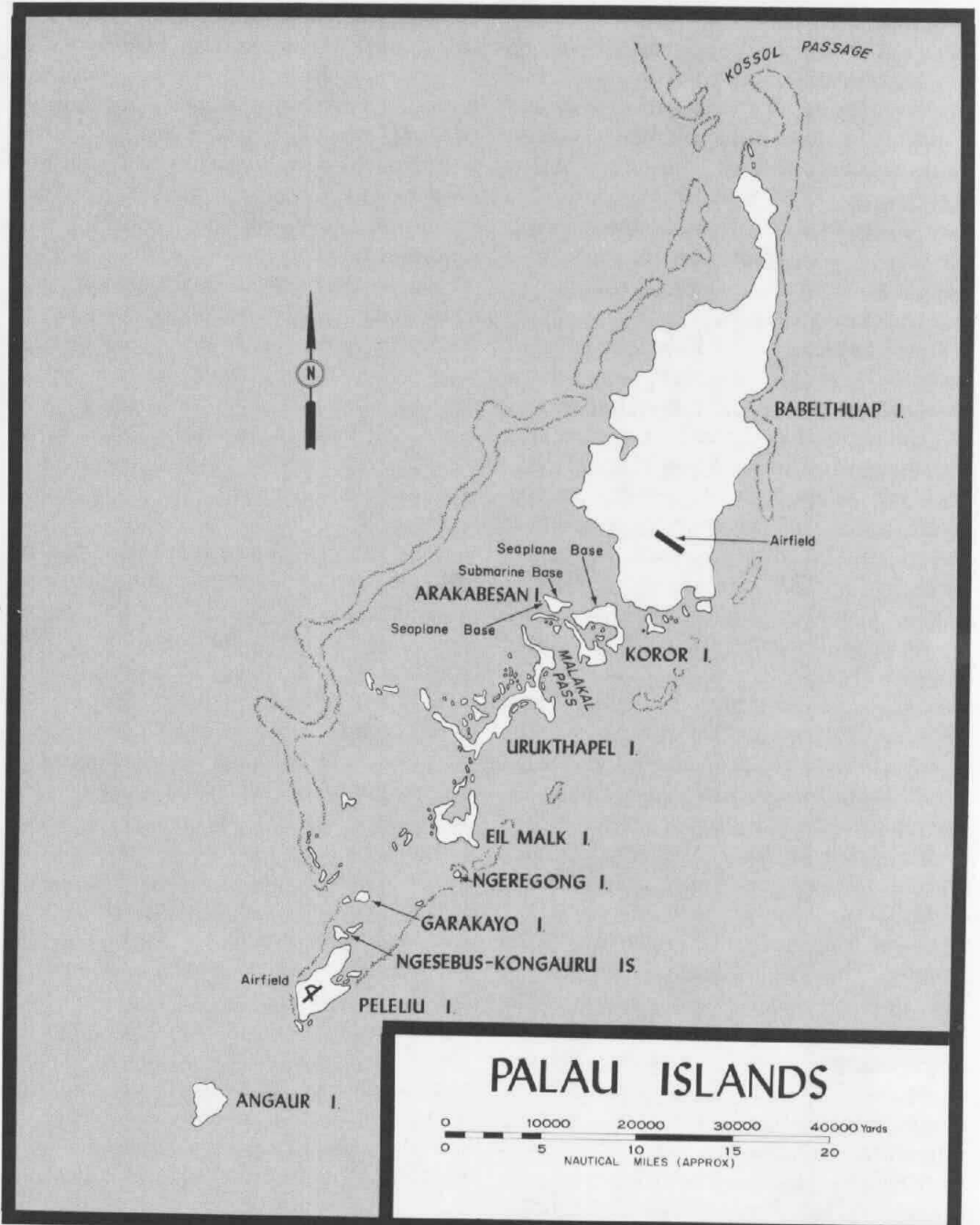
Lying only a few degrees above the equator, the Palaus have a humid and hot climate typically equatorial, and the seasons are monotonously uniform and unchanging. In any month, the rainfall is rarely less than 4 inches, and the mean monthly temperature is seldom less than 80 or more than 82 degrees Fahrenheit. While temperatures are not excessively hot, the relative humidity (82%) remains high at all times and is most discomforting and debili-

tating. Also typical of equatorial conditions are the threats to health caused by dengue and dysentery; strangely enough, however, malarial mosquitoes are not present in the Palaus.

During the fall season (September-November), westerly winds predominate, and there are usually three heavy thunderstorms a month, while typhoons are an ever-present threat. In addition, these fall months normally have 18 to 20 rainy days, the average rainfall for any one month being just over 10 inches. Visibility is usually good, however, with mean monthly amounts of cloud cover varying from four-tenths to six-tenths. Fogs are rare and mists infrequent.

The natives inhabiting these equatorial islands are basically Micronesians, a racial blend of the lighter Polynesian and the darker Melanesian stocks. Physically, however, Palauans most nearly resemble the Malay people of the Netherlands Indies, probably because of interracial mixing that occurred as the result of an eastward seaborne immigration of the Malays. The Palau language shows obvious Malayan influences also. In fact, Americans found great language and cultural differences between the people of the Western Carolines and those whom they encountered in Micronesia.

Like other native ethnic groups in the Pacific islands, the Palauans suffered a population decline following the coming of the white man, usually as a result of his diseases. From an estimated 40,000 in 1800, the number of Palauans had shrunk to a pre-World War II total of 6,500. An estimated 20,000 Japanese civilians, who had emigrated from the



Map 2

E. L. Wilson

Home Islands prior to the war, lived in the Palaus. As a result, a certain intermingling of Japanese and Palauan blood lines occurred.

While the natives enjoyed an adequate food supply due to the islands' staple taro crop, large quantities of rice had to be imported from the Home Islands each year to feed the numerous Japanese living there. Fish from the surrounding waters, of course, provided an important dietary supplement. The only agricultural export produced by the natives was copra, but the extensive phosphate deposits on Angaur and Peleliu supplied the Palaus' most valuable export. Trade between the various islands and the outside world was restricted by the Japanese almost solely to the Home Islands.

The principal islands in the Palau chain from north to south are Babelthuap, Koror, Arakabesan, Malakal, Urukthapel, Eil Malk, Peleliu, and Angaur. Larger than all others combined, Babelthuap has a rugged interior with heights up to 800 feet, and is covered with a typical rainforest growth. Just north of the large island lies Kossol Passage, a valuable naval anchorage because of its spacious reef-enclosed area with a coral and sand bottom. Centrally located and near the best anchorages and harbors, the town of Koror on the island of the same name is just to the south of Babelthuap. Under Japanese rule, it functioned as the commercial, administrative, and communication hub for the island group, as well as governmental headquarters for the entire mandated territory. It was, however, the southernmost islands, Peleliu and Angaur, upon which the

attention of the American planners came to focus.

Located just inside the southwest tip of the huge Palau reef, Peleliu is an oddly shaped island with two elongated arms of land. Often described as resembling the claw of a lobster, this coral-limestone island is approximately six miles long, is aligned in a north-south direction, and has a maximum width of slightly more than two miles. The relatively flat and wide southern section contrasts sharply with the northern elongated arm which is dominated by an irregular series of broken coral ridges, narrow valleys, and rugged peaks. The key terrain from a military viewpoint, this ridge system derived its name from the 550-foot Umurbrogol Mountain. Literally honeycombed with natural caves, a nightmare of crags, pinnacles, and coral rubble, this type of terrain lends itself well to defensive tactics (See Map 3).

To the east, Peleliu's other peninsula soon tapers off into a series of smaller islets, separated from each other and the longer northern arm by a complex of swamps and shoal coral. This eastern arm of land extending out from the southern portion of Peleliu is virtually separated from it by a tidal coral flat choked with mangroves. The southernmost part of the island, on the other hand, terminates into two promontories with a cove between. The southwestern promontory, sometimes called Ngar-moked Island, is larger and more rugged than the southeastern one, which is connected to the mainland only by a narrow spit of sand.

The island is heavily wooded with a thick scrub jungle growth, and on the

thin topsoil of the Umurbrogol ridges grew a sparse, scraggly vegetation that cloaked the contours beneath and defied all attempts of pre-invasion aerial reconnaissance. A dense tropical growth thrives along most of the island's shores, with mangrove swamps bordering the northeastern beaches. The island has no rivers or lakes, and except for a few swamps, its soils drain within a few hours after a heavy rainfall. For their water supply, Peleliu's inhabitants depended chiefly upon rain water stored in cisterns.

Amphibious planners found no dearth of suitable beaches on Peleliu, for landings were feasible at almost any point, providing the reef was passable. Along the east coast is a narrow reef which borders the shoreline, except to the south where small bays occur, and to the north where the reef lies 1,200 to 5,000 yards offshore. On the western side of Peleliu, there is a broad, shallow reef shelf, varying in width from over a mile in the north to 400 yards in the south. The outer part, somewhat higher than the inner portion, was strewn with boulders. At a few points, there are breaks in the reef, where restricted channels permit passage of small boats at high tide. The northern part of the reef is from 1,400 to 1,600 yards offshore, while in the south it averages 500 yards. During the fall months, the west shores of Peleliu receive only a light to moderate surf, and the mean range of its tides is from 3.3 to 3.9 feet.

The beaches on the western side, the best in terms of amphibious assaults, are extensive. Composed of coarse textured coral sands, they are trafficable at all times, particularly when wet.

Their surface is generally rough and rubbly, with much coral debris lying about. The slope of the beaches is usually moderate to steep, and passage inland encounters, in general, only moderately rising wooded areas.

The main military value of Peleliu, and of the Palaus, lay in its southern lowlands, where the Japanese had already built two unusually good runways in an X pattern. Surfaced with hard-packed coral, this airfield was suitable for bombers and fighters, and was served by ample taxiways, dispersal areas, and turning circles. A scrub jungle, interspersed with wild coconut trees and an occasional grassy clearing, flanked the field on both the west and south, while a dense mangrove swamp bordered it on the east. To the north was an extensive area of buildings, and right behind them began the sharp ridges of the Umurbrogol system, which were to prove such an ideal position for the defenders. Also of military interest was the auxiliary fighter strip in the process of being constructed on Ngesebus Island, which lay off the northern tip of Peleliu, connected by a wooden causeway across a shallow reef to the mainland.

The Japanese airfield, near the village of Asias, was the central focus of Peleliu's road system. From the airfield, the West and East Roads ran up the northern peninsula, flanking the Umurbrogol highlands. In the north where the ridges flatten out briefly, these two roads converged into one that continued to the northernmost tip of Peleliu and the village of Akalokul, site of a phosphate crushing plant and a hand-operated, narrow-gauge railroad.

About half way up the West Road, near the village of Garekoru, a trail angled across the ridges to link up with the East Road. From Asias, a road ran northeast across the narrow causeway and up the eastern peninsula to Ngardololok, where the Japanese had set up a radio-direction finder, a power plant, and a few other military installations. A southern extension of the East Road served the promontories to the south.

The other island attracting the attention of American planners was smaller and more compact than Peleliu. Angaur is the southernmost of the Palau Islands and lies outside of the complex of reefs surrounding them. The island is composed of raised coral and is shaped somewhat like a half-moon, with its concave side facing to the west. Approximately 5,000 yards north to south and nearly 4,000 yards at its maximum width, Angaur has an estimated area of 2,000 acres. Its highest elevation, about 200 feet, is in the more rugged northwest corner, and there are steep 20- to 40-foot cliffs along much of the shoreline. The remainder of the densely wooded island, however, is almost flat, and its capability of being readily transformed into a heavy bomber site made it a military objective worthy of seizure. Barriers to overland movement were the dense jungle growth, swampy areas inland, steep cliffs, two small lakes formed by water collecting in abandoned phosphate diggings, and the broken ridges of the northwest corner.

Several excellent beaches for landing operations occur on Angaur, with movement immediately inland hampered only by the rainforest and thick under-

growth. Where reefs fringe the coast, they are generally narrow and drop off sharply into deep water. A sheltered water area exists on the west side near the village of Saipan. The port and trade center of the island, this village was connected with the other coasts by roads, trails, and narrow-gauge railway lines.

Two other potential targets, besides the Palaus, also played an important role in the evolution of STALEMATE: Yap Island and Ulithi Atoll. Yap, actually a cluster of islands grouped together on a triangular reef, possessed a well-developed and strongly garrisoned Japanese airbase. None of Ulithi's some 30 islands, on the other hand, was considered suitable by Japanese engineers for the construction of an airstrip, and the atoll was only lightly held. Ulithi, however, possessed an excellent sheltered anchorage, and occupied a central position in respect to other Pacific islands the Americans had seized or intended to seize. After its capture, it was destined to become the vital hub of naval operations in the Western Pacific during the last days of the war.

### OPERATION STALEMATE II<sup>5</sup>

Initial Allied planning for the capture of the Palaus started during the First

---

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: ComThirdFlt, Rpt on Seizure of Southern Palau Islands and Ulithi, Concurrent Ops in Support of the Seizure of Morotai, dtd 14Nov44, hereafter *ThirdFlt AR*; ComWesPacTFs OPlan No. 14-44, dtd 1Aug44; III PhibFor, Rpt on STALEMATE II Op, dtd 11Nov44, hereafter *III PhibFor STALEMATE II Rpt*; TF 31 OPlan A302-44, dtd 4Aug44;



Quebec Conference (QUADRANT) in August 1943. During this top level meeting, a tentative date of 31 December 1944 was fixed for the assault on the Palaus; the campaign would follow the seizure of the Marshalls and Truk, but precede the attack on the Marianas. Subsequent strategic revisions, however, provided for the bypassing of Truk and the capture of the Palaus in September following the occupation of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. This new schedule was formulated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff directive of 12 March 1944.

Preliminary steps, meanwhile, had already been initiated by top Pacific commands. A Marine general, passing through Pearl Harbor on his way to the front in January 1944, found the Planning Section of CinCPOA Staff, headed by Colonel Ralph R. Robinson, USMC, far advanced in its preparation for a future assault of Babelthup. In fact, the general noted that the planners were utilizing the same landing area as used by a Marine Corps Schools problem in the thirties.<sup>6</sup> A month later, Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas distributed a bulletin setting forth what was then known about the Palaus. This was little enough, for such convenient intelligence sources as coast-

watchers and trading ships' captains, often available in earlier campaigns, were totally lacking. Until the Americans actually landed in the Palaus, any terrain studies of the islands would have to be made solely from aerial or submarine reconnaissance.

Operation STALEMATE was formally launched on 10 May, when Admiral Nimitz issued the Joint Staff Study for the Palau Operation. This study contained the general organization of the forces to be employed, the allocation of ground, air, and naval units, the scheme of maneuver, and the logistic support plan. The date for the landing was tentatively set for 15 September 1944. As copies came into the hands of the assault and support echelons concerned, detailed planning began immediately. The planning for the Marianas campaign was minutely scrutinized, with a view of profiting from previous errors and of eliminating all unnecessary detail from the plans of each subordinate command.

This flurry of activity among the staffs of the various Pacific commanders accelerated appreciably on 29 May, when CinCPOA promulgated a warning order envisioning the capture of the entire Palau Group with a target date of 8 September. This ambitious undertaking, larger in scale than any previous Pacific operation, would employ four assault divisions, organized into two corps.

---

ExTrps, ThirdFlt, SAR, Palau Op, dated 12Oct44, hereafter *ExTrps SAR*; IIIAC, Op-Rpt-PalausOps, dtd 24Oct44, hereafter *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; *Peleliu Comment File*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Morison, *Leyte*; RAdm Worrall Reed Carter, *Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil: The Story of Fleet Logistics Afloat in the Pacific during World War II* (Washington: GPO, 1952), hereafter, Carter, *Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil*; Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*.

---

<sup>6</sup> MajGen Oliver P. Smith, "Personal Narrative," p. 62, being a typed copy of Smith's personal journal with the inclusive dates, 28Jan44-1Nov44, hereafter cited as Smith, *Narrative*.

Earlier, on 7 April, while in Pearl Harbor in connection with the planning for the Marianas Operation (FORAGER), Major General Roy S. Geiger, Commanding General, III Amphibious Corps (IIIAC), had been forewarned by Nimitz that his corps would participate in the coming Palau campaign. Immediately upon his return to Guadalcanal and in spite of the scarcity of available information, General Geiger had his staff institute a study of the Palaus, concurrent with its planning for the close-at-hand Guam assault.

Just prior to embarking for the Marianas, Geiger detached a provisional planning staff from IIIAC and sent it to Pearl Harbor, where it became operative on 12 June. Initially headed by Colonel Dudley S. Brown and charged with the planning for the seizure of the Palaus, this group was later redesignated X-Ray Provisional Amphibious Corps, and Major General Julian C. Smith, who possessed sufficient rank and seniority to sustain Marine Corps views in subsequent planning conferences, was placed in command. At this time, General Smith was stationed in Pearl Harbor as Deputy Commander, V Amphibious Corps, and he was to fill both positions for some time.

Because so many echelons had staffs located in the Pearl Harbor area, planning for the Palau campaign benefited from a closer coordination between the various assault and support commands than was customary in similar operations. Right from the start, however, complications arose to plague the planners and high echelon commanders. Unbeknown to them, STALEMATE plans

were to wend an involved and tortuous path and undergo numerous revisions before actual consummation.

The troop basis for the Palau Operation had been predicated upon the use of units already slated for the Marianas, a campaign that proved more difficult and time-consuming than originally estimated. As a result, units earmarked for STALEMATE had become deeply involved in the Marianas fighting. Unless the landing was delayed, it would be impossible to re-equip and ready these forces in sufficient time to meet the deadline of 8 September. Accordingly, CinCPOA directed, on 29 June, that such substitutions or improvisations be made as necessary for the execution of the Palau campaign.

Such last minute shifts of troop assignments, however, did not resolve the problem of insufficient forces. By early July, planners were becoming disturbed by reports that alarming increases in the enemy forces garrisoning Babelthuap and the other islands were occurring. Doubts were voiced about the adequacy of a two-division landing force for the large island. After all, it had taken three divisions 25 days to secure the smaller and less rugged Saipan.

Questions were raised also about the suitability of Babelthuap's terrain for airfield construction, hitherto a contributory reason for its being a target. Peleliu, on the other hand, already had a fine airfield and an auxiliary fighter strip under construction on offshore Ngesebus. Their seizure and rapid development as a base for American planes would permit neutralization of the remaining Japanese-held Palau Is-

lands without the need of actually invading them. In addition, the small island of Yap, Palaus' nearest neighbor, already possessed a good airbase and was a much easier target than Babelthuap.

Although its anchorage facilities was another reason for Babelthuap's capture, the excellent and spacious fleet anchorage at Ulithi Atoll was available at little cost, as the Japanese had only a handful of soldiers outposting it. The substitution of Yap and Ulithi for Babelthuap, with its unfinished airfields and fair anchorage, would provide instead a good operative airbase and a superb fleet anchorage.

Other factors added complications to the STALEMATE planners. Shipping allocated to the Palau Operation was heavily committed to the slow-moving Marianas campaign, as were the available fire support ships. Then in mid-June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff queried the top Pacific commanders as to the possibility of bypassing the Western Carolines completely in exchange for a speedup of the Pacific timetable and an earlier strike at Formosa, or even Japan itself. Only one answer was in the affirmative, that of Admiral William F. Halsey, but the changed strategic picture in the Central Pacific at this time did bring about a radical revision of the proposed Palau Operation.

After a re-examination of the situation, Nimitz cancelled the original Palau concept in favor of a much less ambitious venture. The southern islands of Peleliu and Angaur would still be seized, but the atolls of Ulithi and Yap, known to be easier targets, would be substituted for Babelthuap.

On 7 July, a new warning order was forwarded to all subordinate commands, replacing the earlier one of 29 May. The overall operation, under the new designation of STALEMATE II, was to be a two-phase assault carried out by two separate landing forces. Phase I would consist of the capture of the Southern Palaus and the neutralization of the Babelthuap and Koror areas, while Phase II would involve the seizure of Yap and the Ulithi Atoll. The target date for Phase I was postponed to 15 September 1944, thus coinciding with the assault on Morotai, and the date for the initiation of Phase II was established tentatively as 5 October.

Overall command for the operation resided in Admiral Halsey as Commander, Western Pacific Task Forces. The combat ships of his Third Fleet were to cover the approach of the Joint Expeditionary Forces to their objectives. In addition, he was expected to furnish naval support for the Southwest Pacific Forces simultaneously assaulting Morotai while, in return, General MacArthur's air would aid in the pre-invasion softening up of the Palaus and other air support missions.

Incidentally, out of this planning by Central and Southwest Pacific air liaison officers for STALEMATE II came a most closely coordinated, integrated, and far-reaching series of strategic air support missions. The major objective of the combined operation—gaining control over the eastern approaches of the Luzon - Formosa - China coast area—caused the air planners to widen the scope of the proposed air activities to a degree not encountered in any previous Pacific amphibious undertakings.

The magnitude of Halsey's task is still difficult to imagine. Upon his Third Fleet fell the duty of transporting and protecting the landing forces en route to the target, furnishing the necessary naval gunfire and air support, plus such related support missions as supplying the troops ashore after a beachhead was secured. Before STALEMATE II was over, every major command in the Pacific participated in it, and it eventually involved 800 vessels, 1,600 aircraft, and an estimated 250,000 Navy, Army, and Marine personnel. As the largest naval amphibious venture thus far in the Pacific, the attacking force alone included 14 battleships, 16 carriers, 20 escort carriers, 22 cruisers, 136 destroyers, and 31 destroyer escorts, not counting the numerous types of landing craft or service ships, nor the support ships for the Morotai landing. Supplying such a vast and complicated assortment of men and ships taxed the logistic support of all available Allied commands.

In order to handle adequately the job of shepherding the troop transports and attached vessels to their destination, plus fulfilling related support missions, Admiral Halsey was forced to divide his powerful Third Fleet into two parts. He retained direct control of the Covering Forces and Special Groups (TF 30), and Vice Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson commanded the Third Amphibious Force (TF 31). For direct support of the landings, TF 31 was further divided into the Eastern Attack Force (TF 33), scheduled for the Yap-Ulithi assaults, and the Western Attack Force (TF 32), which would cover the Peleliu and Angaur operations. Admiral

Wilkinson retained direct control of TF 33, but delegated control of TF 32 to Rear Admiral George H. Fort. This latter force was again divided into the Peleliu Attack Group (TG 32.1, under Fort's tactical control), the Angaur Attack Group (TG 32.2, Rear Admiral William H. P. Blandy), and the Kossol Passage Detachment (TG 32.9, Commander Wayne R. Loud), which had the mission of sweeping the area free of mines and organizing it as a temporary fleet anchorage and seaplane base.

Although the U. S. Navy had the task of transporting, protecting, and landing the assault troops, the man designated to control all ground action for Operation STALEMATE was Major General Julian C. Smith in his role as Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops. Immediate control would be exercised by his subordinate Western and Eastern Landing Forces. The Western Landing Force and Troops, Major General Geiger's IIIAC, would seize Peleliu using the 1st Marine Division (Major General William H. Rupertus) and complete Phase I by capturing Angaur with the 81st Infantry Division (Major General Paul J. Mueller, USA). Phase II, the seizure of Yap and Ulithi, was assigned to the Eastern Landing Force and Troops, commanded by Major General John R. Hodge, USA. He had the XXIV Corps, consisting of two infantry divisions and, upon release by the Western Landing Force and Troops, units of the 81st.

For backup, General Smith had as floating reserve the 77th Infantry Division, which would be embarked at Guam. He also could call upon the newly-

formed 5th Marine Division in area reserve, should the need arise.

With the successful securing of the objectives, General Smith's duties as overall ground commander for STALEMATE II would cease. At this time, the defense and subsequent development of the newly-acquired bases as major airfields and fleet anchorages would become the sole responsibility of Admiral John H. Hoover, Commander, Forward Area, Central Pacific Command.

Except for a few minor redesignations in units and commanders, Phase I plans remained unchanged until D-Day. Upon his return from Guam on 15 August, General Geiger assumed command of X-Ray Provisional Amphibious Corps which was then redesignated IIIAC, and took over command of Western Landing Forces and Troops from General Smith, who then reverted to his higher role as Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, Third Fleet. Phase II, on the other hand, was destined to undergo still another radical revision due to startling developments arising out of the far-sweeping support actions of the U. S. Navy.

One portion of the Third Fleet's mission was to "Seek out and destroy hostile air and naval forces which threaten interference with the STALEMATE II operations, in order to inflict maximum damage on the enemy and to protect our own forces."<sup>7</sup> This provision for blunting the enemy's potential to counteract a landing was by this time standard operating procedure in any amphibious undertaking. This time, however, Hal-

sey had ordered his naval officers to seek out every opportunity for engaging the Japanese major naval forces in a decisive sea battle.

In his eagerness to close with the enemy's surface fleet, Halsey made this mission the primary one, overriding the customary one of protecting the landing force. His operation order clearly directed this radical departure from accepted amphibious doctrine by stating, "In case opportunity for the destruction of a major portion of the enemy fleet offers itself or can be created, such destruction will become the primary task."<sup>8</sup> Subordinate naval echelons, of course, reflected this viewpoint. Admiral Wilkinson directed his heavier warships in the Fire Support Group to "Concentrate and engage enemy task forces encountered. Support the Covering Force or provide striking groups if so directed."<sup>9</sup> As in the recent Marianas campaign, the covering naval forces for STALEMATE II were on the lookout for a decisive sea battle with the Imperial Fleet rather than being primarily concerned with the protection of the amphibious landing forces.

In hopes of being in on just such a decisive naval engagement, Admiral Halsey personally led the strongest combat component of the Covering Forces and Special Groups, Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 38), out of Eniwetok Atoll on 28 August 1944 for strikes against the Bonins, Palaus, Yap, and Mindanao. Chichi Jima and Iwo Jima were struck by carrier-launched aircraft on 31 Au-

<sup>7</sup> ComWesPac TFs OPlan No. 14-44, dtd 1Aug44, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> TF 31 OPlan A302-44, dtd 4Aug44, p. 3.

gust-2 September, the Palau on 6-8 September, and Mindanao on 9-10 September. Everywhere the enemy's air resistance proved surprisingly weak, and the great success of the last strike persuaded Halsey to shift his intended follow-up attack on Mindanao instead to the Central Philippines.

Exploiting the enemy's weakness by pressing in close to the coast, the carriers of TF 38 actually stationed themselves within sight of the Samar Mountains from 12-14 September, during which time 2,400 sorties were launched against the Visayas bases of the Japanese. The phenomenal success of this air attack, which had achieved tactical surprise, proved dazzling. American pilots claimed the destruction of some 200 enemy planes, the sinking or damaging of many ships, and the infliction of tremendous damage upon Japanese installations. American losses in comparison were minute: 8 planes in combat, 1 operationally, and 10 men.

Halsey could report to his superior that the "Enemy's non-aggressive attitude [was] unbelievable and fantastic."<sup>10</sup> Later he would recall that "We had found the central Philippines a hollow shell with weak defenses and skimpy facilities. In my opinion, this was the vulnerable belly of the Imperial dragon."<sup>11</sup>

This astonishing victory, coupled with the lack of serious Japanese reaction,

prompted Halsey to send a dispatch to Nimitz stating his belief that "the Palau and Yap-Ulithi operations were unnecessary to support the seizure of the Philippines"<sup>12</sup> and that an invasion of the Leyte-Samar area be undertaken at the earliest possible date using the troops slated for STALEMATE II. Admiral Nimitz passed on the recommendation concerning Phase II to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but due to commitments already made, he decided Phase I would have to go through as planned.

From then on, events on the strategic stage moved rapidly. In answer to a Joint Chiefs of Staff inquiry about General MacArthur's willingness to advance Leyte's target date if given the troops of XXIV Corps, his staff officers, took it upon themselves—MacArthur was maintaining radio silence on board a cruiser off Morotai—to radio an affirmative reply on 15 September.<sup>13</sup>

Word to this effect was immediately relayed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then in Quebec with President Roosevelt for the OCTAGON conference. So impressed were they by this dramatic agreement between the top Pacific Theater commanders that 90 minutes after the dispatch was received they were able to flash their approval. Thus the XXIV Corps departed the Central Pacific to play its important part in the dramatic 'Liberation' campaign.<sup>14</sup>

To further compound the difficulties, Halsey on the following day, the second

<sup>10</sup> CinCPac WarD, dtd 14Sep44, p. 1, hereafter *CinCPac WarD*, with appropriate date.

<sup>11</sup> FAdm William F. Halsey and LCdr Julian Bryan, III, *Admiral Halsey's Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1947), p. 199, hereafter Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*.

<sup>12</sup> *ThirdFlt AR*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> George C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports: A Personal History of the Pacific War* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949), p. 432, hereafter Kenney, *Reports*, used with permission.

<sup>14</sup> Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 191.

day of the Peleliu fighting, directed the seizure of Ulithi "as early as practical . . . with resources at hand."<sup>15</sup> The only uncommitted force was the corps reserve, a single regimental combat team (RCT), and its removal from the immediate area would leave the Marines still battling desperately ashore to secure Peleliu without any reinforcements should they be needed.<sup>16</sup> What resulted, however, when this happened, will be narrated later in its proper sequence.

### THE JAPANESE BOLSTER DEFENSES<sup>17</sup>

The thick veil of secrecy with which the Japanese cloaked their prewar ac-

tivities in the mandated Palaus revealed an early awareness of the military potentialities of the islands. Under the League of Nations' terms, none could be fortified, but Japan's extreme sensitivity concerning them aroused suspicions. As one American visitor stated, "Officials and officers swarm here in such numbers that the visitor does not draw a breath without an appropriate note being made in the archives."<sup>18</sup> Here, it was, also, that a Marine colonel died under very mysterious circumstances in 1923, while traveling in the disguise of a commercial trader.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, there was no concrete evidence of any extensive fortification of the Palaus prior to World War II. Harbors had been dredged, some naval facilities erected, and an airfield built, but the Peleliu airfield, while pos-

<sup>15</sup> *III PhibFor, STALEMATE II Rpt*, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> "In explanation of Halsey's decision, 3dPhibFor's serial 00314 of 11 Nov 1944 (p. 8) notes that Halsey acted after receiving a report of the local situation. Further, the RCT was not expected to depart until 21 September and Halsey provided for the use of the RCT in Peleliu prior to that date if the situation required." RAdm E. M. Eller ltr to Hd, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, dtd 18Jul66, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Eller ltr*.

<sup>17</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ExTrps SAR; IIIAC Palaus Rpt; 1stMarDiv, SAR, PalauOp*, dtd 16Nov44, hereafter *1st MarDiv SAR; Peleliu Comment File; CinCPac-CinCPOA Bulletin No. 173-45, Japanese Military Caves on Peleliu: 'Know Your Enemy!'*, dtd 23Jul45; *JICPOA Bulletin No. 17-44; JICPOA Bulletin No. 87T-44, Target Analysis: Palau Islands*, dtd 20Jun44, hereafter *JICPOA Bulletin No. 87T-44; USSBS (Pac), Interrogations, II, VAdm Shigeru Fukudome, Cdr Chikataka Nakajima; HistSec, G-2, GHQ, FEC, Japanese Studies in World War II, Japanese Monograph No. 48, Operations in the Central Pacific*, hereafter *Japanese Ops in the CenPac; Japanese Research Div, MilHistSec, GHQ, FEC, Japanese Monograph No. 49, Central Pacific Opera-*

*tions Record*, Volume II, April-November 1944, hereafter *Japanese CenPac Ops; Gen MacArthur's Staff, Historical Report of Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area*, 2 vols. (Tokyo, 1951), hereafter *MacArthur's History*, with appropriate volume; Saburo Hayashi, in collaboration with Alvin D. Coox, *Kōgun: The Japanese Army in the Pacific War* (Quantico, Va.: The Marine Corps Association, 1959) hereafter Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun; Hough, Assault on Peleliu; Smith, Approach to the Philippines; Morison, Leyte*.

<sup>18</sup> Willard Price, "Hidden Key to the Pacific," *The National Geographic Magazine*, v. LXXXI, No. 6 (Jun42), p. 784.

<sup>19</sup> For those interested in the mysterious disappearance of Lieutenant Colonel Earl H. Ellis, see: LtCol Philip N. Pierce, USMC, "The Unsolved Mystery of Pete Ellis," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 46, No. 2 (Feb62), pp. 34-40, which incorporated the findings of LtCol Waite W. Worden, USMC, who visited Koror in 1950 and interviewed its residents concerning Ellis' death. Copies of Worden's findings are also in the possession of RefBr, HistDiv, HQMC.

sessing great military value, was equally useful for peaceful civilian pursuits.

Immediately following Pearl Harbor, however, the islands served as a jumping-off point for Japan's attack against the Philippines. Out of its naval base had sortied the small carrier task force which launched the first air raids against American forces in the Philippines, while troops staged at the Palaus for the later Philippines land campaign. Afterwards, the islands came to be used primarily as an intermediate staging base and supply point for offensives along the outer perimeter of the Japanese advance. During the struggle for the Solomons, thousands of Imperial soldiers staged through the Palaus, utilizing them as training and practice areas, on their way to the front.

The Japanese high command, during the early stages of the Pacific War, paid slight attention to the ability of the Palaus to defend themselves. The full vigor of Japan's war effort was then concentrated upon the outer fringes of newly conquered territories, where mounting Allied counterattacks absorbed available Japanese troops and war material in ever increasing amounts. Any development of a strategic inner defense line was deferred until dramatic reversals in New Guinea, the Solomons, and other points forced the Imperial war planners to reassess the hopeless battle on the outer perimeter.

Finding herself unable to match the superior Allied air and naval strength, Japan began concentrating her energies upon the creation of a powerful defensive bastion which would halt the Allied advance and hurl it back. Accordingly,

in September 1943, the *Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ)* at Tokyo created a second line of defense which embraced the areas west of the Marianas-Carolines-Western New Guinea line. It was then decreed that this was the zone of absolute defense where each Japanese soldier would fight to the death.

Initial steps in girding this decisive battle area for the eventual assault called for bolstering the garrisons with first-string combat troops. For the first time in the Pacific War, *IGHQ* planners were forced to draw upon the battle-ready divisions of the *Kwantung Army* in Manchuria. Maintained at peak combat readiness, this unit served the purpose of immobilizing the large number of Russian troops in nearby Siberia, thereby preventing their redeployment to the European front for use against Japan's ally, Germany. The needs of the crucial Pacific sector, however, sent the *35th Division*, among others of the *Kwantung* units, hurrying southward. The *35th* arrived during March 1944 in the Palaus, until then garrisoned only by rear-echelon troops, but it was almost immediately dispatched farther westward to a more critical front, leaving only one understrength regiment to defend the island group.

Earlier in 1944, the American seizure of the Admiralties and Marshalls had brought all of the Carolines within effective striking range of Allied land-based bombers. In the face of this new threat, the *Combined Fleet* transferred its headquarters from the now highly vulnerable Truk to the Palaus, which would be used as a temporary forward naval base until a permanent one could be constructed in the Philippines. No



sooner had the Japanese settled down in their new location, than a successful carrier raid by the U. S. Fifth Fleet in late March denied them the use of the Palaus even temporarily.

This large scale air strike also spurred the defensive efforts of the Japanese Army and caused some drastic reshuffling of troop assignments. Since an American attack was believed imminent, the *14th Division*, already en route from Manchuria, was dispatched with all possible speed to the Palaus. Landing there on 24 April, the *14th* took over the responsibility for the islands' defenses, releasing the regiment of the *35th* to rejoin its parent organization already committed to the fighting farther westward.

To handle the overall task of defending the Central Pacific area, *IGHQ* had established the *Thirty-first Army* with headquarters in the Marianas. Its zone of responsibility stretched along the Bonins-Marianas-Carolines line of the strategic area of absolute defense. The commanding general was to have control over all army units in the theater and be directly responsible to the *Central Pacific Fleet*, but his displeasure in being subordinated to a naval officer precipitated a furious interservice squabble which was smoothed over only when the Navy and Army commanders orally pledged each other not to assume complete responsibility.

With the arrival of the hardened veterans of the *14th Division* on Babelthuap, after a delay while their transports evaded would-be American attackers, an effective defense of the islands approached reality. The *14th* was one of the oldest and best military

units in the Japanese Army, and its infantry regiments, the *2d*, *15th*, and *59th*, all had excellent reputations. Its commanding officer, Lieutenant General Sadae Inoue, was made Commander, *Palau Sector Group*, the organization responsible to the *Thirty-first Army* for the defense of all the Palaus, Yap, and nearby islands. Military units already based in the Palaus, such as the Sea Transport Units (landing craft and crews) of the *1st Amphibious Brigade*, and the service and support troops for the Japanese forces in New Guinea, passed to the control of General Inoue as group commander, who later reorganized them into the *53d Independent Mixed Brigade (IMB)*. Inoue's orders from the superior headquarters were concise:

The Palau Sector Group Commander will secure the Palau Islands (including Angaur) and the Yap Island area. . . . The islands must be held to the very last as the final position barring the enemy from penetrating into the Pacific. Peleliu and Angaur must be fortified as an important air base.<sup>20</sup>

Within a matter of weeks after his arrival, General Inoue successfully deployed his units in scattered defensive positions. Headquarters of both the division and group, naturally, were located on Koror, the administrative center of the islands, and the major part of the troops were deployed on nearby Babelthuap where Inoue planned to make his final fight.

As the main infantry force on Peleliu, Inoue allocated the *2d Infantry*. Its commander, Colonel Kunio Nakagawa, was designated Commander, *Peleliu*

<sup>20</sup> *Japanese Ops in the CenPac*, p. 24.

*Sector Unit*, which also had artillery, mortar, signal, and light tank units attached to it. The *346th Independent Infantry Battalion* of the *53d IMB* and the *3d Battalion, 15th Infantry*, were also assigned to Nakagawa's command to bolster his combat strength. In addition, the Navy had the *144th* and *126th Anti-aircraft* units, and the *45th Guard Force Detachment*, plus construction units and the airbase personnel. In all, Nakagawa had approximately 6,500 combat troops available for the defense of Peleliu, and the service troops and non-combatants brought his garrison total up to about 10,500.

The *Peleliu Sector Unit* commander confidently expected his troops to man their assigned positions until death, for the Imperial Japanese infantryman, schooled in the strict *Bushido* code of the warrior, prided himself on his tenacious fighting ability without regard for personal safety. The *esprit de corps* of the *15th Infantry*, whose *2d* and *3d Battalions* were destined to be wiped out during the fighting on Peleliu, was typical of the Japanese fighting units. First organized in 1884, the regiment was presented its colors the following year and covered them with great honor in several hard-fought battles. More recently, it had received a citation for a battle in North China. As the regimental commander reported:

All the officers and men carried in mind the meaning of our sacred war, and the leaders, burning with the will to be 'Breakwater of the Pacific,' and feeling the obligation of this important duty, and being a picked Manchukuoan regiment that does not expect to return alive and will follow to the death an imperial order, devoted themselves to the endeavor of being the

type of soldier who can fight hundreds of men. . . .

Using all wisdom especially while acquiring our antilanding training we will overcome the hardships of warfare and under the battle flag which displays our battle glory we vow with our unbreakable solidarity we will complete our glorious duty and establish the 'Breakwater of the Pacific.'<sup>21</sup>

Such was the caliber of the men slated to fight to the last in a hopeless struggle on Peleliu. About the only Japanese lacking this fanatical viewpoint were those portions of the naval garrison consisting of the labor troops and the Korean labor force. Most of these noncombatants, however, were forced by the combat troops to resist aggressively the American attacks; only a few ever succeeded in surrendering.

On Angaur, Inoue stationed the *59th Infantry*, less one battalion. Late in July, however, most of these infantrymen were withdrawn to strengthen Babelthuap where the main attack was expected, leaving only the *1st Battalion* as garrison. Its commander, Major Ushio Goto, was then assigned as Commander, *Angaur Sector Unit*. His remaining garrison forces totaled some 1,400 men, including supporting artillery, anti-aircraft, mortar, engineer, and service units.

Within easy reinforcing distance of both Peleliu and Angaur were some 25,000 troops on the other Palau Islands, many specially trained in amphibious operations. Among the other places under General Inoue's command, only Yap was heavily garrisoned. As

<sup>21</sup> CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 9764, "Report on the 15th Infantry Regiment," dtd 16May44.

late as 27 August 1944, American intelligence officers reported its defending forces as 8,000 to 10,000 men.<sup>22</sup>

Immediately upon assuming responsibility for the defense of the *Palau Sector Group*, General Inoue became bogged down in that long-standing rivalry between the Japanese Army and Navy. The naval officers had regarded the Palaus as their own private domain for so long that the sudden arrival of a lieutenant general, senior to their own commander, aroused their excessive sensitivity and displeasure.

The Army commander, right from the start, was made to feel the Navy's resentment over the new state of affairs. Inoue found it practically impossible to obtain civilian help in erecting fortifications, for the Navy had already monopolized all available labor and organized the workers into pools to be used for naval projects only. Nor would the naval officers allow any Army personnel to utilize their caves or installations. As a result, Inoue had to drive his men night and day in a frantic effort to prepare adequate defensive positions quickly. The situation became unusually severe on Peleliu, where the Navy garrison was commanded by a flag officer—who was, of course, senior to Colonel Nakagawa. Finally, in desperation, Inoue assigned his next senior officer, Major General Kenjiro Murai, in nominal command of the Peleliu garrison in order to make any progress at all in fortifying the island.

There was also another reason for General Murai's presence on Peleliu.

Since the group commander considered the island's airfields of prime importance, he had selected his most able officer, Colonel Nakagawa, to direct its defense. As Inoue explained in a postwar interview, he had assigned Murai to Peleliu while leaving Nakagawa in actual command for two reasons. First, Inoue wanted to remove the pressure of naval animosity from Nakagawa's shoulders and second, as a form of insurance, "to see that Colonel Nakagawa didn't make any mistakes."<sup>23</sup> This unusual arrangement proved unnecessary, as later events indicated that all orders right up to the bitter end of the fighting were issued in Nakagawa's name.

Actually, the Palaus' defenses actively entered into the strategic defense plans of *IGHQ* only for the relatively brief period from April to July 1944. During this time, men and supplies were rushed to the islands to hasten their preparations for an expected imminent assault. With the successful American attack upon the Marianas, however, the greater strategic value of the Philippines necessitated the writing off of the Palaus and their garrisons and the concentration of all available strength in the Philippines area.

The overshadowing importance of the Philippines also caused a lack of Japanese air support for the Palaus, a serious flaw in their defense preparations. Most, if not all, of the planes already in the Palaus were destroyed in the Fifth Fleet's carrier raid of late March, when jubilant American fliers claimed a total of 168 aircraft destroyed. At any

---

<sup>22</sup> 96th InfDiv, STALEMATE II FO No. 14, dtd 27Aug44, Anx B, p. 1.

---

<sup>23</sup> LtCol Waite W. Worden ltr to CMC, dtd 4Apr50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Worden ltr*,

rate, none of the Peleliu-based Japanese airplanes survived the pre-invasion bombardment; only a few float planes at Koror escaped intact. Nor could replacements be spared. By this time, Japan's aircraft reserves were becoming limited. Besides, all available planes were being hoarded for the planned decisive battle to be forced with the Americans in the Philippines.

Even though written off by *IGHQ* strategists, the doomed Palau garrisons were expected to conduct a tenacious defense in the event of American attack, thereby delaying utilization of the coveted airfields by the invaders. Besides, combat losses to the assaulting units would delay their reemployment in future campaigns. Time, a most precious commodity in war, would be gained by the Japanese for perfecting defenses in more strategic areas.

By July 1944, also, the point had finally been driven home to the Japanese high command that a blind adherence to the usual doctrine of attempting to annihilate the invaders on the beach was futile. Recent battles involving American amphibious assaults against well-fortified beaches revealed that the Americans' ability to unleash a devastating preparatory bombardment made total reliance upon beach defense useless.

Only one limited success stood out. Instead of uselessly expending his forces in suicidal *Banzai* counterattacks, the Japanese commander at Biak had prolonged the fighting substantially by having his men dig in, thus forcing the Americans to rout out each defender in a long, bloody, mopping-up campaign. This successful innovation, the pro-

tracted resistance on Saipan, and the long list of failures of Japanese commanders in attempting to hold the beachline, undoubtedly spurred the *IGHQ* planners to undertake a detailed study of the problem.

As a result, *IGHQ* decided in July 1944 on a new approach, and orders to employ new tactics in protracted ground battles were circulated to all Japanese commands in the Pacific. Briefly, these tactics involved the preparation of a main line of resistance far enough inland from the beach to minimize the effects of the pre-invasion bombardment, the organization of a defense in depth designed to wear down the attacking forces, and the hoarding of sufficient reserves to mount successful counterattacks at the appropriate times.

On 11 July 1944, General Inoue issued "Palau Sector Group Training for Victory," a document incorporating the new defensive concepts of *IGHQ*. His instructions revealed a departure from Japanese tactics employed earlier in the Pacific war and a unique attempt by the Japanese to profit from past errors. Inoue's instructions emphasized that victory would depend upon "our thorough application of recent battle lessons, especially those of Saipan,"<sup>24</sup> and that the "ultimate goal of this training is to minimize our losses in the severe enemy pre-landing naval and aerial bombardment." Among other things, Inoue urged the holding back of sufficient reserves in prepared defensive positions inland to permit a massive

<sup>24</sup> All quotes from this document were taken from CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 11,190, "Palau Sector Group Headquarters: Palau Sector Group Training for Victory," dtd 11Jul44.

counterattack and the destruction of the invaders in one fell swoop before their beachhead became secure. In deploying these reserve troops for the attack, careful attention was to be given so that there "will be no rapid exhaustion of battle strength," and the soldiers were to advance "at a crawl, utilizing terrain, natural objects and shell holes." As a last resort, he instructed the "construction of strong points from which we can cover our airfields up to the last moment, regardless of the situation," and it was Inoue's contention that "if we repay the Americans (who rely solely upon material power) with material power it will shock them beyond imagination."

As it turned out, Peleliu was where the battle was joined and the wisdom of Inoue's defensive tactics tested. Basically, the Japanese planned their troop and weapon dispositions on the island for a defense in depth. The resulting defense system was well organized and carefully integrated, and it possessed great inherent strength and flexibility. The enemy utilized the rugged terrain to construct mutually supporting defensive positions, and Peleliu was divided into four sectors, each manned by a reinforced battalion, with another one in reserve.

Regardless of which beaches the Americans chose to land on, they would be resisted by the major portion of Colonel Nakagawa's available forces. Swift redeployment of his troops would be possible, since the Japanese commander had the advantage of interior lines to operate over. Nor would naval or air attempts at interdiction prevent this concentration, for the earlier American

air raids had been utilized by the Japanese to provide actual troop training in advancing under fire. Detailed plans dealing with proposed counterattacks were prepared and rehearsed. A few infantry companies were even reorganized into special counterattack units, rather than in the conventional platoons. Most companies also had several teams of two to three men prepared to infiltrate and to knock out attacking tanks.

To forestall an invasion of Peleliu, all potential landing beaches were heavily mined with mine belts often extending 100 yards or so inland. Offshore obstacles were erected, anti-tank barriers constructed, and barbed wire strung. Everywhere, the dominating terrain was utilized for the placement of artillery, previously zeroed-in on the beaches, to wreak havoc among the assaulting troops. All defensive positions took full advantage of man-made and natural cover and concealment, while yet dominating all invasion approaches (See Map 3).

Peleliu's southwestern beaches, where the American assault actually came, were typical of the Japanese beach defense preparations. The natural offshore obstacles there were augmented by the effective positioning of tetrahedron-shaped tank obstacles, strung barbed wire, and over 300 single and double-horned anti-invasion mines. The beaches themselves and all routes leading inland were strewn with tangled barbed wire and land mines, as well as with huge aerial bombs adapted to serve as mines. To prevent advancing infantrymen from working their way through the obstacles on the beaches under the covering fire of their tanks, long antitank

trenches running roughly parallel to the beaches were dug.

These antitank ditches, as well as the beaches, were covered by fields of fire from pillboxes and gun casemates, located in dominating positions and all linked together in a system of mutual cover and support. The casemates mounted 37mm or 47mm antiboat and antitank guns, and were made of reinforced concrete with coral packed against the sides and over the top.

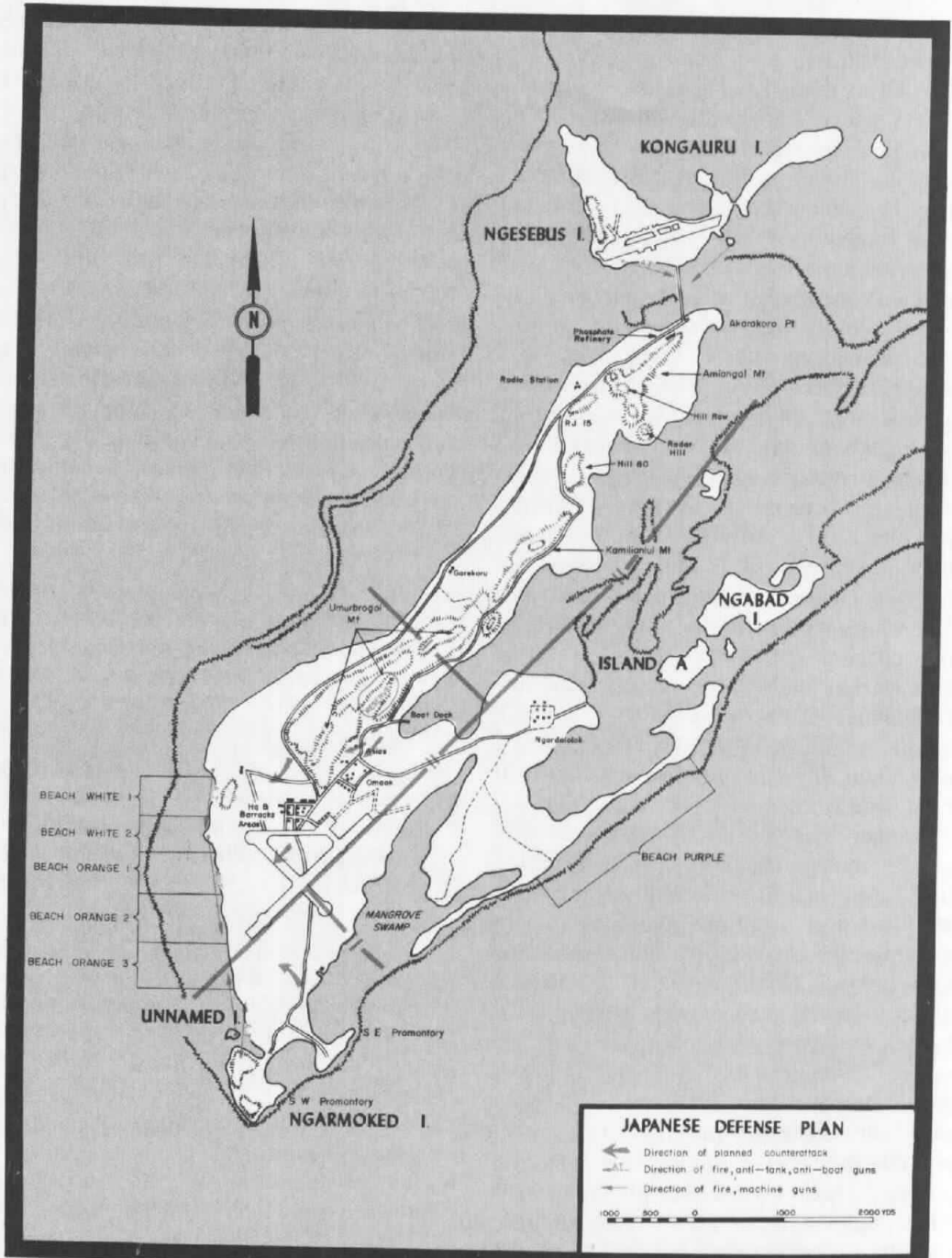
Just to the north of the beaches, a natural fortress formed by a prominent coral hill was riddled with covered rifle pits and pillboxes, each large enough for two or three infantrymen armed with rifles or automatic weapons. Near the base of the cliff was a reinforced concrete casemate housing a 47mm gun which could provide enfilade fire on approaching amphibious waves or interdictory fire on the beaches. Peleliu's southwestern promontory and a small island, a few hundred yards offshore, were used for the location of anti-boat guns and machine guns to furnish enfilade fire.

On the flat terrain farther inland from the beaches, the defense consisted of direct fire against advancing troops from well-camouflaged pillboxes and other defensive positions, while observed artillery and mortar fire could be laid down from the dominating ridges to the north of the airfield. Dug into these ridges were pillboxes and a casemate for a 75mm mountain gun, which commanded the entire southern portion of the island. At least one steel-reinforced concrete blockhouse had as many as 16 mutually supporting automatic weapons.

If the invaders survived the landing and were able to consolidate the beachhead, the Japanese planned to fall back to previously prepared defensive positions that commanded the ground between them and the attacking forces. If all else failed and the secondary line of defense was overrun and the commanding ground seized, last ditch resistance would center around the extensive cave fortifications that literally honeycombed the rugged terrain of northern Peleliu. Below is a description of the area by a former Marine, who was wounded in the fighting:

It was this high ground which made Peleliu so perfectly adaptable to defense-in-depth, for it was neither ridge nor mountain but an undersea coral reef thrown above the surface by a subterranean volcano. Sparse vegetation growing in the thin topsoil atop the bedrock had concealed the Umurbrogol's crazy contours from the aerial camera's eye. It was a place that might have been designed by a maniacal artist given to painting mathematical abstractions—all slants, jaggeds, straights, steeps, and sheers with no curve to soften or relieve. Its highest elevation was 300 feet in the extreme north overlooking the airfield-islet of Ngesebus 1,000 yards offcoast there. But no height rose more than 50 feet before splitting apart in a maze of peaks and defiles cluttered with boulders and machicolated with caves. For the Umurbrogol was also a monster Swiss cheese of hard coral limestone pocked beyond imagining with caves and crevices. They were to be found at every level, in every size—crevices small enough for a lonely sniper, eerie caverns big enough to station a battalion among its stalactites and stalagmites."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Robert Leckie, *Strong Men Armed: The United States Marines Against Japan* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 391, used with permission.



Map 3

E. L. Wilson

The Umurbrogol ridges were, of course, the key to a successful defense of Peleliu, and the Japanese made the utmost use of its rugged terrain. They developed the natural caves that existed practically everywhere or blasted others into the almost perpendicular cliffs in order to deploy their troops and locate their weapons for a last-ditch stand. If driven from prepared positions, enemy soldiers could take refuge in the abundant natural cavities in the ridges, and by sniping from and defending every cave, crack, or crevice large enough for a man to squeeze into, could tenaciously prolong the resistance.

Due to bitter inter-service rivalry, both the Army and the Navy independently developed their own caves. The Navy, with the help of the *214th Naval Construction Battalion* and a tunnel construction unit, was able to build some rather elaborate underground installations. These were located mainly in the north of Peleliu and consisted for the most part of tunnels, ranging from single ones up to networks of 10 or more. The hollowed-out chambers usually measured 10 feet across and 6 feet high, often with separate rooms for food and ammunition storage, living quarters, and medical facilities. Some even had the benefits of electric lights, ventilation systems, and wooden floors. Designed primarily as shelters against air and naval bombardment, these underground positions had no prepared defenses against the onslaughts of attacking infantry/tank teams.

The Army's caves, on the other hand, while not so large, elaborate, nor ingeniously constructed as those of the Navy, were built and prepared for pro-

longed land combat. Whenever practicable, two or more staggered levels were constructed, and the multiple entrances led to tortuous passageways within a single huge tunnel system, where any number of safe refuges would protect the occupants from the concussive effect of bombing and shelling and provide cover from direct fire. Every effort, of course, was taken to camouflage skillfully all cave openings, while still preserving protection and clear fields of fire. Siege defense preparations consisted of jamming every nook and crevice with food and ammunition and building troughs to collect the water dripping from overhead stalactites.

Tactical reasons alone determined the location of the Army's caves. Fortifications were built, weapons sited, and soldiers deployed in order to provide a mutually interlocking system of concrete pillboxes, entrenchments, gun emplacements, and riflemen's positions dominating the strategic areas. Near every important artillery or mortar emplacement were other underground dwellings housing automatic weapons to provide protective fire. Communication trenches or tunnels connected these mutually supporting locations, while observation posts often were placed on top of the ridge in a natural limestone cavity or crevice. The approaches to vital installations, such as command posts, were covered from all angles by fire from cleverly located caves half way up the surrounding ridges. At most strategic points and in the final defensive area were numerous smaller underground positions designed to provide interlocking support fire from small arms. These were intended to be held



to the death, and no escape routes had been provided for their occupants.

With their final defensive positions prepared, the Japanese garrison on Peliu could view the future only gloomily. After July, when the Palaus were written off by the Imperial high command, whose attention was centered on the approaching decisive battle in the Philippines, even the receipt of the more essential supplies dwindled to a mere trickle due to shipping losses by attacks from American submarines and aircraft. The future prospects seemed dim indeed.

The Americans had the choice of either assaulting the islands or bypassing them, thereby allowing the Japanese garrison to degenerate into a state of combat ineffectiveness through lack of supplies and food. If the invasion came, then the enemy soldier faced the dilemma of either surrendering or waging a bitter fight to the death. No hope of relief or reinforcements could be expected.

After communications with the *Thirty-first Army's* headquarters on Saipan ceased in August, the *Palau Sector Group* was reassigned by IGHQ, for administrative purposes, to the *Southern Army* which controlled operations in the Philippines, and operationally to *Headquarters, Combined Fleet*. When advance intelligence indicated an imminent American assault, it was the *Southern Army* that notified General

Inoue on 3 September as to the probable time and place of the landing. A few days later, Japanese intelligence officers estimated the size of the attacking force to be probably a division. Just before the actual invasion, the Japanese learned that the assault force commander was Major General Julian C. Smith.

General Inoue immediately notified all of the forces under his command that the long awaited opportunity to annihilate the Americans was near at hand. But as late as 8 September, *Palau Sector Group Headquarters* thought the carrier strikes might be just feinting actions, with the main assault coming elsewhere. When the heavy calibered shells of the American battleships began falling on 12 September, however, Inoue knew, without doubt, that the decisive moment had arrived. With great eloquence, he informed his command of the approaching battle:

This battle may have a part in the decisive turn of tide in breaking the deadlock of the 'Great Asiatic War.' The entire Army and people of Japan are expecting us to win this battle. There will never be another chance as these few existing days for the people living in the empire to repay the emperor's benevolence again. Rouse yourselves for the sake of your country! Officers and men, you will devote your life to the winning of this battle, and attaining your long cherished desire of annihilating the enemy.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Japanese Ops in the CenPac*, p. 75.

# Pre-Assault Preparations<sup>1</sup>

## THE BEACH AND THE PLAN<sup>2</sup>

Detailed planning by the assault unit scheduled for the Peleliu landing began

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the information for this chapter has been derived from: ComWes-Pac TF OPlan No. 14-44, dtd 1Aug44; *Third-Flt AR; III PhibFor STALEMATE II Rpt*; TF 31 OPlan A302-44, dtd 4Aug44; *ExTrps SAR*; ExTrps OPlan No. 1-44, dtd 9Jul44; TF 32 Rpt of Amph Op to Capture Peleliu and Angaur, dtd 16Oct44, hereafter *TF 32 Peleliu and Angaur Rpt*; TF 32 OPlan A501-44, dtd 15Aug44; *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; *1st MarDiv SAR*; 1st MarDiv WarDs, Jun-Sep44, hereafter *1st MarDiv WarD*, with appropriate date; 1st MarDiv OPlan 1-44, dtd 15Aug44; *Peleliu Comment File*; Smith, *Narrative*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; George McMillan, *The Old Breed: A History of the First Marine Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1949), hereafter McMillan, *The Old Breed*; Sherrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*; Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Craven and Cate, *The Pacific*; The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, *The 81st Infantry Wildcat Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), hereafter Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*.

<sup>2</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: WesLandFor, STALEMATE II, OPlan No. 1-44, dtd 23Jul44; 7th Mar OPlan No. 1-44, dtd 1Aug44; Theodore Roscoe, *United States Submarine Operations in World War II* (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute, 1949), hereafter Roscoe, *Submarine*; Cdr Francis Douglas Fane, USNR, and Don Moore, *The Naked Warriors* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), hereafter Fane and Moore, *The Naked Warriors*.

on 2 June 1944, when CinCPOA's warning order of 29 May was received by the 1st Marine Division. It was now resting and reorganizing on Pavuvu in the Russells, a small island group about 65 miles northwest of Guadalcanal, having arrived there in April following the strenuous New Britain campaign.

Although Major General Rupertus was absent in Washington arranging for replacements, Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, the Assistant Division Commander, immediately initiated a staff study of the proposed assault. As soon as the G-2 officer assembled all available maps and aerial photographs of Peleliu and adjacent islands, the staff members began a careful examination of the beaches. In spite of the fact that higher echelons provided very little guidance during this early phase of the planning or that little intelligence of the island was available, the division managed to have a workable plan by the time of the commanding general's return.

Knowledge of Peleliu's beaches and terrain came almost solely from photographs, for it was nearly impossible to land a reconnaissance patrol and expect it to scout successfully the interior of the small, strongly-held island. The Fifth Fleet's carrier strike in March had made the first systematic aerial surveillance of the Palaus, and subsequent flights by carrier planes and the

land-based aircraft of the Fifth Air Force obtained up-to-date vertical and oblique shots of the island chain. In addition, photographic profiles of all potential beaches were taken by the submarine, USS *Seawolf*, during the period 23-28 June.

A month later, another submarine surfaced off Peleliu with the intention of landing small underwater demolition teams (UDTs) by rubber boats. Bright moonlit nights, coupled with active Japanese radar and constant air and sea patrols, however, kept the USS *Burrfish* submerged for two weeks, during which time it could only take periscope photographs of the island's shore lines. Finally, on a dark night, a five-man landing party succeeded in paddling ashore on a beach later used in the assault. Much valuable data was obtained, but vital beach information, such as depth of water, nature of shoals, and type of bottom, had to wait upon the explorations of the UDTs working under the protective cover of naval gunfire just prior to the landing.

The intelligence officers of X-Ray Provisional Amphibious Corps regularly passed on to the 1st Marine Division and other assault units the latest maps and photographs as well as the current estimate of the enemy's strength. The standard map of Peleliu for the operation was compiled by CinCPOA cartographers and drawn on a scale of 1:20,000. Although the map contained some errors, it was workable and accurate for most of the island. Front line units received blown-up sections on the larger scale of 1:10,000 and 1:5,000. Following the fortuitous capture on Saipan of certain 31st Army Headquarters

files, Americans knew almost to a man the size of the Japanese garrisons in the Palaus. Although modified by later findings, this estimate served as the basis for tactical planning by the assault forces.

Right from the start, the Marine planners noted that the Peleliu landing would be different from any of the 1st Marine Division's earlier operations. To cross the 600-700-yard reef all along the prospective beachhead—similar to the situation encountered at Tarawa—would necessitate transporting the troops, equipment, and supplies across the coral obstacles solely by amphibian tractors. In addition, while the southern part of the island was flat and low, like an atoll, the parallel ridges just to the north of the airfield possessed some of the most rugged and easily defended terrain yet encountered by American forces in the Pacific. Peleliu, therefore, would repeat many of the difficulties encountered at Tarawa, as well as some which were met on Saipan.<sup>3</sup>

Although Peleliu abounded with beaches suitable in size for a division landing, the Marine staff quickly selected the western ones as being most preferable. The eastern beaches, backed by sprawling swamps that would hinder movement inland, had been discarded early, as were the extreme northern ones which were too far from the

---

<sup>3</sup> "The 1st Marine Division, while experienced in other amphibious operations, had not previously landed over a coral reef. They were short of amtracs and very deficient in mine detection and disposal." Vice Admiral George H. Fort, USN (Ret) ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC dtd 18May66 in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Fort ltr*.

prime objective of the assault, the airfield.

The division planners finally narrowed the choice down to three courses of action: (1) to land on the beaches overlapping the airfield; (2) to land on the beaches overlapping the airfield, while at the same time landing on the two promontories at the southern end of the island; or (3) to land on the beaches north of the airfield.

At first, the Marine officers had leaned toward the idea of making a two-pronged assault, with one regiment landing on the southern promontories while another one attacked across the beaches overlapping the airfield. Later, however, a more complete photographic coverage revealed that the promontories were strongly fortified and that the reef between them was covered with concrete tetrahedrons and was heavily sown with mines. An expert in UDT techniques warned, also, that the pill-boxes ringing the coves could prohibit demolition work on the reef. The third possibility, landing in the north, was discarded because the ground rose abruptly into jungle-covered cliffs which would deprive the division of maneuver space.

By the time General Rupertus returned on 21 June, his staff members felt that an attack over the western beaches overlapping the airfield best favored success; after making his own estimate, the division commander agreed. The code name of White and Orange were given to the selected beaches.

Although the 1st Marine Division's staff inaugurated the detailed planning for the Peleliu landing, the amphibious

corps slated for the assault (X-Ray— redesignated IIIAC on 15 August 1944) passed on the proposed plan before giving it a stamp of approval. For instance, when Rupertus wanted to assault the objective with two regiments, holding the other afloat as reserve, General Julian C. Smith recommended a simultaneous landing by three infantry regiments, with a RCT of the 81st Infantry Division as division reserve. After returning from Guam and assuming charge of X-Ray, General Geiger ruled that the Marine division would land with three regiments abreast, less one battalion landing team as the division's sole reserve.

The reserve's small size was not considered risky, for the embarked troops of the 81st Infantry Division were not to be committed to the Angaur landing until the situation on Peleliu had passed the critical assault phase. In addition, one RCT of the 81st was to be held afloat as corps reserve. Disturbing for the future, however, was Rupertus' apparent unwillingness to make use of available Army troops. This early reluctance foreshadowed the division commander's marked refusal, later, to employ Army units as reinforcements during the critical first week ashore on Peleliu.

General Smith, as the Marine Corps spokesman during the inter-service planning, took exception to the Navy's proposal for Angaur's seizure before the Peleliu landing. This course of action, the general explained, would permit the Japanese to rush reinforcements from Babelthuap down the island chain onto Angaur, thus prolonging the fighting there. To seize Peleliu first, he ar-

gued, would make it impossible for additional enemy troops to reach Angaur. Eventually, the naval planning staff was brought around to Smith's way of thinking "but, desiring Angaur for construction of a second airfield, continued throughout to press for the earliest possible landing on that island."<sup>4</sup>

As finally approved, the scheme of maneuver for the Peleliu assault called for the landing of three RCTs abreast on a 2,200-yard-wide beachhead, followed by a drive straight across the island to seize the airfield and to divide the enemy forces. On order, a reinforced battalion would make a shore-to-shore assault against Ngesebus Island and capture its fighter strip.

On the left (north) flank of the beachhead, over the White Beaches, the 1st Marines would land two of its battalions abreast, with the remaining one in regimental reserve. After driving inland and helping to secure the airfield, the regiment was to pivot left and attack toward the high ground north of the airfield.

Landing in the center over Beaches Orange 1 and 2, the 5th Marines would use two battalions in assault and one in support. While the left battalion tied in with elements of the 1st Marines, the other assaulting battalion would push straight across the island to the eastern

shore. The support battalion, to be landed at H plus 1, would attack across the airfield and then participate in a wheeling movement northward. Once the airfield was captured, the mission of the 5th Marines would be to seize the northeastern peninsula and its nearby islets.

Only one beach, Orange 3, was assigned to the 7th Marines, for it was to land in a column of battalions, with its 2d Battalion remaining afloat as division reserve. The first battalion ashore was to attack eastward in conjunction with the 5th Marines, while the following battalion was to swing right and attack southward. After the opposite shore had been reached, all of the might of the 7th would be thrown into a push to the southern promontories, wiping out any Japanese holdouts in that area.

The 11th Marines, reinforced by the 8th 155mm Gun Battalion and the 3d 155mm Howitzer Battalion, both from corps artillery, was to land on order after H plus 1 over the Orange Beaches. Once ashore, the regiment would set up so that its 1st and 2d Battalions would be in direct support of the 1st and 5th Marines, respectively, while its 3d and 4th Battalions, together with the corps artillery, would be in support of the division. Four hours after the 11th Marines was ashore, all battalions were to be prepared to mass their fires on the ridges north of the airfield. In addition, the 8th 155mm Gun Battalion had the assignment of locating its artillery pieces so as to provide supporting fire for the Army division's later assault on Angaur.

<sup>4</sup> LtGen Julian C. Smith intvw by Maj Frank O. Hough, dtd 23Nov49, as cited in Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 11. In rebuttal of the above, the Naval Histories Division has commented: "We are unable to locate documentation in our records supporting General Smith's statement that the Navy proposed to seize Angaur prior to Peleliu." *Eller ltr.*

The scheme of maneuver selected by the division commander contained the best features of the two discarded courses of action. The approach to the White and Orange beaches avoided the enemy-emplaced hazards on the reef off the southern beach. Once ashore, the massed division could attack inland swiftly over the low flat ground that was well-suited for the employment of tanks. Such a rapid advance would quickly gain the island's airfield, uncover maneuver room for the division, and strike the main enemy beach defenses on the east coast from the rear. With the early seizure of the opposite shore, the division could operate multiple unloading points in order to speed up the disgorging of the thousands of tons of cargo needed to sustain the offensive.

The scheme did have one real danger, however. The Marines would be forced to attack across the low flat ground while the dominating ridges remained in enemy hands. The Japanese were sure to have guns of large caliber emplaced on those commanding heights. Nevertheless, the division officers willingly accepted this risk, because of the scheme's other obvious advantages. They also figured that the 7th Marines would easily mop up the southern portion of Peleliu on the first day, after which it could help the 1st Marines take the key ridges north of the airfield. Until such time as the combined striking power of the two RCTs could be massed against the defenders on the ridges, the 1st Marines would be supported by the concentrated

fire of planes, gunfire ships, artillery, and tanks.

Even with the benefit of hindsight, it still is difficult to challenge the Marine officers' reasoning. After the war, however, some criticism was raised as to whether there would have been fewer Marine dead, if the landing had taken place on the north beaches at the foot of the commanding ridges.<sup>5</sup> Granted that a successful assault at this point could have given the division control of the key terrain early in the campaign, anything less than 100 percent execution would have been fatal. If the momentum of the initial assault failed to seize the ridgeline, then the Marines would have been stranded on a narrow low beachhead, without room to maneuver or emplace supporting artillery, while the enemy would be literally looking down their throats.

The unanimity of opinion among Marines who participated in the operation and later had a chance to examine the island's terrain and Japanese defenses in great detail is that the correct course of action was taken. Typical of their attitude is the following comment:

None of the remaining beaches which might permit a landing in force would allow the rapid development of an adequate beachhead which is so essential in a landing operation. The Division Command was confronted with the problem of select-

---

<sup>5</sup> See McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 262, and Fletcher Pratt, *The Marines' War: An Account of the Struggle for the Pacific from Both American and Japanese Sources* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1948), p. 345, hereafter Pratt, *The Marines' War*.

ing the least undesirable of several beaches. In the light of those factors as well as the later developments, the correctness of the decision to land on the White and Orange beaches is hardly open to question.<sup>9</sup>

### LOGISTIC CONSIDERATIONS<sup>7</sup>

While the assault Marines received more newspaper coverage than did the logistic commands, the latter are, of course, just as essential to victory on the battlefield. The service units, performing the unquoted tasks of tending the wounded, furnishing tactical and logistical transport, providing all combat equipment and supplies, and repairing troop weapons, vehicles and other equipment, were a decisive factor behind every successful amphibious landing in the Pacific War. STALEMATE II was no exception.

To supply the vast and complex assortment of ships, equipment, and troops required for the Palau Operation, all the major Pacific commands had to be called upon for support. Only the closest liaison among these various echelons made it possible for logistic preparations to proceed smoothly. "Overall

requirements for supplies, materials, and service personnel needed for the Palau operations were ascertained by joint study. Policies affecting the Army, Navy, and Marines were implemented by interservice and intra-staff planning."<sup>8</sup> Available shipping, always a limiting factor in amphibious undertakings, had to be tightly scheduled, while the estimated arrival dates of the cargo vessels bringing the heavier base development equipment directly from the United States had to be carefully calculated.

The basic guidelines for STALEMATE II's logistic planning were set forth on 1 August 1944 by Admiral Halsey's Operation Plan 14-44, which also instructed all combatant and auxiliary ships to make a special effort to ensure they sailed from the mounting points for the target with the maximum authorized loads of ammunition, fuel, and fresh provisions. Now began an intense period of activity as all the major bases of the Pacific commands pitched in to provide the necessary logistic support, and a 24-hour workday with 12-hour shifts became the norm.

While the various warships and cargo ships took on dry provisions, the fleet tankers loaded to half capacity with Diesel oil and aviation gasoline and topped to maximum draft with fuel oil. Fresh and frozen foods, however, were available only in limited quantities, and battleships, cruisers, and carriers were provisioned to serve at least one completely dry ration every sixth day. By the last part of August, the stocks had been exhausted, and a Marine unit re-

<sup>9</sup> BGen Walter A. Wachtler ltr to CMC, dtd 1Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Wachtler ltr*.

<sup>7</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: ExTrps AdminO No. 1-44, dtd 22Jul44; 1st MarDiv AdminO No. 1-44, dtd 7Aug44; USAFor-MidPac and Predecessor Commands during World War II, 7Dec41-2Sep45, *History of G-4 Section*, n.d., hereafter *USAFor MidPac G-4 Hist*; Carter, *Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil*; Kenneth W. Condit, Gerald Diamond, and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *Marine Corps Ground Training in World War II* (Washington: Hist-Br, G-3, HQMC, 1956), hereafter *Condit, Diamond, and Turnbladh, Marine Corps Ground Training*.

<sup>8</sup> *USAFor MidPac G-4 Hist*, p. 408.

requesting fresh meat and vegetables for its troops was forced to sail for Peleliu with only a supply of emergency rations instead.

All types of vessels, from the 90,000-ton floating dry-dock to the hospital ships, steamed toward the designated staging areas. In the Tulagi-Purvis Bay region of the Solomons alone, there were gathered at one time 255 vessels, with ship movements averaging 122 daily during the last week of August. From the far reaches of the Pacific, the various vessels began to rendezvous at the mounting areas of Manus, in the Admiralty Islands, about 1,000 miles in a southwesterly direction from the objective, and Eniwetok Atoll, some 1,500 miles northeast of Peleliu.

The IIIAC assault elements and accompanying garrison forces were directed by Headquarters, Expeditionary Troops, to carry with them sufficient rations for 32 days, water enough for 5 days when pro-rated at 2 gallons per man per day, medical supplies to last 30 days, and a 20-day supply of clothing, fuel, lubricants, and miscellaneous equipment. For the assault phase, all weapons would be allowed five units of fire—a unit of fire being that amount of ammunition which CinCPOA had determined from previous campaigns would last for one day of heavy fighting.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the 105mm howitzers

would be issued another two units, and the 57mm antitank guns supplied with five more. The 1st Marine Division, moreover, arranged to carry an additional 10 units of flamethrower fillers and explosives, since it expected to encounter numerous fortified positions on Peleliu.

Detailed planning for Marine and naval cooperation during the Peleliu assault began 8 August, when a joint conference at Pavuvu was attended by the staffs of General Rupertus and Admiral Fort, commander of the Western Attack Force. At this time, the division's proposed scheme of maneuver was presented, thus permitting Admiral Fort to determine what support would be required of his force. Naval gunfire and air support plans were worked on jointly by the respective staff members concerned with these matters, and the use of UDTs for clearing away underwater obstacles and the selection of potential landing beaches for the various amphibious craft were discussed in detail.

Two days later, the Commander of Transport Group 3, the division's assigned lift, arrived with members of his staff. This time, the regimental commanders and their staffs joined the conferences planning the combat loading of the assault forces for the Peleliu operation.<sup>10</sup> During this phase of joint planning, the details of boat allocation,

---

<sup>9</sup> *1st MarDiv SAR*, Part III to Anx C, lists the number of rounds in the CinCPOA unit of fire for the various weapons in the Marine division. The unit of fire for the M-1 rifle, for example was 100 rounds; .30 caliber carbine, 45; .45 caliber pistol, 14; .30 caliber machine gun, 1,500; .50 caliber machine gun, 600; 60mm and 81 mm mortars, 100; 105mm howitzers,

---

200; 155mm howitzers, 145; and 155mm gun, 100.

<sup>10</sup> By combat loading is meant the method of embarking troops and loading their equipment and supplies in such a manner that they can be rapidly unloaded at the objective in the desired priority for sustaining the attack.



landing plans, and control of the landing waves were ironed out. Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Ballance, commanding the 1st Pioneer Battalion, was involved frequently in these conferences, for he was to be the division shore party commander.

By the time of STALEMATE II, the Marine Corps' amphibious techniques for an assault landing over a fringing reef had been battle-tested, modified where necessary, and molded into a smooth working ship-to-shore operation. Since previous Pacific campaigns had revealed that the LVT (Landing Vehicle, Tracked) was indispensable to the uninterrupted flow of assault troops past the coral barriers guarding the enemy's shores, every man in the assault forces at Peleliu was transported to the beach in an amphibian tractor.

These vehicles and their infantry passengers, as well as the LVT(A)s (armored amphibian tractors), were carried to the target by LSTs (Landing Ships, Tank). At a distance safe from enemy shore batteries, the LSTs opened their massive doors and disgorged the amphibians loaded with the assault Marines. The LVTs then proceeded to within roughly 4,000 yards of the beach. Here, along the line of departure, the vehicles were reformed into waves and headed in succession toward the beaches. Patrol craft and submarine chasers were stationed at this and other control lines to regulate movement. These vessels served also to facilitate communications between the various elements of this complex amphibious operation.

Upon reaching the reef, the amphibian tractors would crawl over and con-

tinue landward. At a point several hundred yards offshore, the LVT(A)s, which made up the initial assault wave, would begin firing their cannon for the last minute support of the assault troops in the following waves of LVTs. Once ashore, the Marines could get prompt artillery support from 75mm pack howitzers landed, ready for action, from the rear ramps on the most recent version of the LVT. Additional support was to be furnished by 105mm howitzers, brought onto the beach by DUKWs (2½-ton amphibious cargo trucks) which had been specially equipped with an A-frame unloading device to land the completely-assembled 105.

The division's tanks would be pre-loaded in LCTs (Landing Craft, Tank) which, in turn, were loaded unto the well decks of LSDs (Landing Ships, Dock). Once in the unloading zone, the decks of these floating drydocks were flooded with water. After the huge stern gates of the LSDs had swung open, the LCTs emerged for a run to the reef, where the tanks, specially waterproofed beforehand, debarked and continued ashore under their own power.

An innovation first tested at Peleliu was the use of LVTs to guide these tanks onto the beaches. Evolved to prevent delays and casualties such as those experienced during the Marianas campaign, this successful technique was described by a Marine tank officer in the following account:

An LVT was placed on each LCT to lead the tanks ashore. These LVTs were used to test the depth of the water, and as long as they propelled themselves along the bottom the tanks would follow, but if the

LVTs became waterborne the tanks would stop until the LVTs could reconnoiter a safe passage. . . . Fuel, ammunition and maintenance supplies were loaded on these LVTs which enabled the tank units to have a mobile supply dump available to them upon reaching the beach.<sup>11</sup>

For the rest of the troops, equipment, and supplies, the passage to the target area was made in assault cargo and personnel transports. The Marines were moved from their transports to the line of departure by LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel), where they were formed into waves and dispatched to a transfer line just seaward of the coral. For the remainder of the trip to the beachhead, the troops and their equipment were transferred into empty LVTs and DUKWs which had returned from the beach to shuttle the rest of the Marines and their gear to shore.

Since the LVTs had a waterborne speed of about 4.5 miles per hour, the trip from the line of departure to the beach was estimated as 30 minutes and from the transfer line, 15 minutes. Preceding the first wave of troops and scheduled to hit the beaches at H-Hour were the armored amphibians. A minute later, the initial assault troops would land, with the following waves scheduled to land at five-minute intervals. Within the first 20 minutes, five assault battalions, comprising some 4,500 men, were to be on their assigned beaches, and tanks would begin landing over the edge of the reef. Four minutes later, the regimental weapons companies were to begin landing and, by H plus 85 minutes, with the coming ashore of

three more infantry battalions, there would be 8,000 combat Marines on the beachhead.

To follow, of course, would be the remaining 17,000 men of the reinforced division, their equipment, and the some 34,500 tons of initial supply support. The division logisticians planned to leave practically all the bulk cargo either in the cargo nets or on the pallets loaded on board the ships at the embarkation points in order to expedite unloading at the target.<sup>12</sup> When these pre-packaged loads made the trip from ship to the supply dump on land, they would be moved intact at each necessary transfer point by crane instead of being unloaded and reloaded, piece by piece, by manpower. If necessary, the pallets could be dumped on the edge of the reef and hauled to the beach by bulldozer. In all, the division utilized some 2,200 pallets, attempting to palletize a representative portion of the bulk cargo. As it turned out, however, the items found most suitable for palletizing were ammunition, barbed wire, and pickets.

In charge of all unloading activities to the seaward of the beaches was the transport group beachmaster. Under him were three transport division beachmasters, each responsible for the unloading in front of a regimental beach. Each of these beaches was assigned a reef beach party and a shore

---

<sup>11</sup> Capt George E. Jerue ltr to CMC, dtd 2Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

---

<sup>12</sup> The pallet, an Army innovation first used in the Marshalls, was simply a sled, four by six feet, with wooden runners, which could be loaded to a height of about three feet and with a weight of approximately 3,000 pounds, the load being fastened securely on the pallet by means of flat metal strappings.

beach party. The reef beach party was responsible for the amphibian vehicles and boats when afloat and had the task of marking approaches over the reef and points on it where craft unable to negotiate the coral barrier could be beached. The shore beach party became the naval platoon of the regimental shore party and, as such, performed its normal functions in connection with marking of the beaches, salvage, and evacuation.

As the division shore party commander at Peleliu, Lieutenant Colonel Ballance supervised the handling of supplies on and in the rear of the beaches, as well as the casualties arriving from the battalion aid stations. He had the further responsibility of providing for the close-in defenses of the beach areas.

Initially, the division shore party was to be decentralized with a detachment of the subordinate regimental shore party going in with each assault battalion. Each regiment had been furnished a company of pioneers from Lieutenant Colonel Ballance's 1st Pioneer Battalion as the framework for its shore party.

As soon as possible, the regimental shore party commander was to take over and consolidate the unloading operations on his beach. In turn, Lieutenant Colonel Ballance, upon landing, was to assume control of all shore party activities and to select the best beaches over which supplies would continue to be unloaded. To insure that the vital stream of supplies continued to flow into the supply dumps on the beaches, the colonel planned to maintain the closest of coordination with the various beach parties.

Later, when all assault shipping was ashore, the beach dumps were to be taken over by the 16th Field Depot, a Marine supply agency designated as part of the Island Command but attached to the 1st Marine Division for the assault phase. This innovation worked extremely well from the Marines' standpoint, for it made the field depot subject to the direct orders of the division's commanding general. According to the commanding officer of the 1st Service Battalion, this arrangement made all "the difference between ordering and asking."<sup>13</sup>

Another technique, first improvised during the Marianas campaign, was included in the original plans for the Peleliu assault. Two provisional companies of infantry replacements were attached to the shore party, until such time as they would be needed to fill depleted ranks in the rifle regiments. The shore party could make good use of these extra men during the critical unloading phase, and they would be readily available for deployment as riflemen on the front lines when needed. The heavy losses of the 1st Marines during the first week of the Peleliu campaign accentuated the wisdom of planning for combat replacements and, in the later Iwo Jima operation, each Marine division had two replacement drafts attached to its shore party.

Logistic support on D-Day was expected to be hectic and difficult. The assault battalions would be able to take in with them only limited quantities of

---

<sup>13</sup> Col John Kaluf ltr to CMC, dtd 7Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Kaluf ltr*,

rations, water, and ammunition, and the anticipated heavy fighting would make it particularly important to assure an adequate resupply of ammunition and water. To safeguard this vital flow of supplies reaching the embattled Marines ashore, certain improvisations were made and precautions taken by the logistic planners.

Until such time as a pontoon causeway could be constructed over the reef to the Peleliu beaches, the creation of an artificial, waterborne supply beach seaward of the reef was imperative. For this purpose, 24 pontoon barges were lashed to the sides of LSTs for the journey from the Solomons to the target. These barges had been formed by fastening pontoon cells, seven cells long and three wide, into a single unit. When an outboard motor was attached, they became self-propelled. Once in the unloading area, only the lines holding the barges to the sides of the LSTs had to be loosened and the barges would be launched into the water, ready to proceed under their own power.

Nine of these barges, which had been modified to allow the mounting of cranes on them, would be dropped into the sea early on D-Day. After having swing cranes lowered onto them and secured, the barges would proceed to a point approximately 1,000 yards seaward of the reef. Their job was to facilitate the transfer of bulk supplies from the boats bringing them from the cargo ships to the amphibians for transportation across the reef and onto the beach. If shore-based enemy fire proved too dangerous, the barges could move under their own power to a safer spot farther out.

Three other barges were to provide fuel and lubricating oil for the LVTs. After being launched from the LSTs, these self-propelled barges were to be loaded with 80-octane gasoline and lubricating oil and dispatched to a point just off the reef. One was assigned to each regimental beach, and they all were ordered to erect a large banner, marked "Gas," so that the LVTs could easily recognize them.

The remaining 12 barges would be used to establish floating dumps. Since the transports and cargo ships were expected to retire to safer waters out to sea at nightfall, provision had to be made for an accessible supply of critical items which would be needed by the assault battalions during the hours of darkness. Upon being launched, these barges would proceed to designated cargo ships, where they would take on predetermined loads of infantry and tank ammunition, flamethrower fuel, motor fuel, lubricants, emergency rations, and water in drums, before continuing on to report to their assigned transport division beachmasters for mooring off the reef. Large painted numbers on the sides of the barges would aid the drivers of the LVTs and DUKWs in identifying the type of load contained in each. The amphibians could come alongside the barge and load by hand, or the barge might be placed next to a crane for speedier loading.

The problem of how to insure an immediately accessible supply of high expenditure rate items, such as mortar and machine gun ammunition and flamethrower fuel, for the assaulting troops during the afternoon of D-Day was also resolved. At Peleliu, the amphibian

cargo trailer would be utilized in quantity for the first time. This Marine-designed vehicle had an axle and two pneumatic tires on the bottom while its top could be bolted into place, making it waterproof. Pre-loaded in the Russells, the trailers could be lowered into the sea by cranes at the transport area and towed by LCVPs to the reef, where amphibians would hook onto them, drag them across the jagged coral barrier, and finish towing them the rest of the way to the beach. Each rifle regiment was allotted 13 of these trailers and the artillery regiment 20.

Another method of handling priority cargo was by means of specially loaded LCVPs. Certain of the assault ships would set aside eight LCVPs, preloaded with infantry ammunition, flame-thrower fuel, and water. On D-Day, these LCVPs would be dispatched to the reef off their assigned regimental beaches. The respective regimental shore parties would be briefed on the contents of the different type loads and could send out LVTs or DUKWs to locate the correct LCVP and take on a load. In a similar manner, LCMs (Landing Craft, Mechanized) were to be loaded with artillery ammunition in order to meet urgent requests for resupply of the Marine batteries ashore.

Since Peleliu lacked surface water and its enervating climate would accelerate consumption, preparations were made to insure an adequate supply for the attacking infantrymen. Every available 5-gallon can was pre-filled to the brim and scheduled for an early trip to shore, while scoured-out 55-gallon oil drums would hold a reserve supply. After the engineers managed to

set up distillation apparatus and drill new wells, the water problem was expected to vanish.

Throughout the logistic planning for STALEMATE II, the short supply of shipping in the Pacific was always a limiting factor. An unfortunate example of this situation was the fact that only four LSDs were available and these were equally divided by IIIAC planners between the Peleliu and Angaur assault units. The division found itself able to lift only 30 tanks and had to leave 16 behind. This decision aroused criticism, for Peleliu was more heavily defended and more suitable for tank operations than Angaur, where, as it turned out, only one company of tanks was ever employed at one time. As the commanding officer of the 1st Tank Battalion later stated:

. . . it is my belief that a serious error, indefensible from the tank viewpoint, was made in splitting the available tank shipping . . . as events proved it was extremely unsound in view of the desperate need for additional tanks throughout the first five (5) days of the operation . . . our Corps staff at that time did not include a tank section, greatly handicapping tank planning at Corps level.<sup>14</sup>

The lack of shipping space, coupled with the planners' belief that Peleliu's limited land area would not cause a serious transportation problem, resulted in the breaking up of the 1st Motor Transport Battalion as an integral unit. Only Company A was allowed to lift its organic equipment, including repair facilities, and, even

<sup>14</sup> LtCol Arthur J. Stuart ltr to CMC, dtd 25Apr50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Stuart ltr*.

then, its platoons were distributed among the infantry regiments to expedite the movement of supplies from the beach to the forward areas during the initial advance inland. Company C was detached during the operation and its men utilized as amphibian tractor drivers, and Headquarters and Service Company was assigned the responsibility for the division's maintenance and fuel supply, while Marines of Company B were to serve as stretcher bearers, relief drivers, and reserve troops throughout the campaign. Since each individual unit of the division down to company level was allowed to lift up to five vehicles, depending upon its mission, the total number of trucks carried to the target approximated the number that would have been organic to the 1st Motor Transport Battalion, but the lack of centralized control proved far from satisfactory. In the battalion commander's view:

This proved to be a serious handicap in the direct supply of troops. With few exceptions, there were no trucks available for the movement of troops even though the tactical situation of then [during the Peleliu campaign] called for the expeditious movement of troops by vehicular transportation.<sup>15</sup>

### PAVUVU, TROOP TRAINING, AND SHORTAGES<sup>16</sup>

Following the Cape Gloucester campaign in the debilitating rain forests

<sup>15</sup> Maj Robert B. McBroom ltr to CMC, dtd 13Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

<sup>16</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: History of the 1st Marine Regiment, 26Aug-10Oct44, n.d., hereafter *1st Mar Hist*; LtCol Kimber H. Boyer, USMC, "Formation and Employment of an Armored Amphibian

of New Britain, the Marines of the 1st Division were badly in need of rest and rehabilitation. A suitable camp was already available on Guadalcanal but, instead, General Geiger chose the small island of Pavuvu, in hopes of sparing his exhausted men the distasteful task of furnishing large working parties each day to the Island Command as was customary on the larger island. He had made the selection following a reconnaissance of Pavuvu by air and with the expectation that a battalion of Seabees would be there preparing facilities.

Upon the Marines' arrival in April 1944, they discovered to their dismay that the 10-mile long piece of coral was virtually a jungle, with the abandoned plantation long overgrown and rats and rotting coconuts practically everywhere. The 15th Naval Construction Battalion, having completed a 1,300 bed hospital on nearby Banika Island on 26 March, had little time to work on the camp on Pavuvu before the Marines arrived. Typical of the Marines' bitterness was that of the officer who barged into General Smith's tent and shouted, "Great God! Who picked this dump? More like a hog lot than a rest camp."<sup>17</sup>

Instead of getting a chance to relax, the battle-weary Marines found them-

---

Battalion, Palau Operation, 15 September 1944-20 October 1944: A Study of the Use of Special Equipment," (Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps Schools, Amphibious Warfare School, Senior Course 1946-1947), hereafter Boyer, *Armd AmphibianBn*; Condit, Diamond, and Turnbladh, *Marine Corps Ground Training*.

<sup>17</sup> Burke Davis, *Marine! The Life of LtGen Lewis B. (Chesty) Puller, USMC (Ret)*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 202, hereafter Davis, *Marine!*, used with permission.

selves turned to constructing a livable camp area. Disposing of the rotting coconuts alone took over a month; wells for drinking water had to be dug;<sup>18</sup> and for weeks, the men were forced to live, work, and sleep in mud until they had laboriously bucket-hauled enough coral to surface the access roads and living area.

Not surprisingly, the morale of the division hit an all-time low. The majority of the veterans had been in the Pacific for over two years, and their exertions in two strenuous jungle campaigns had sapped their reserves of energy. Alternately racked by malarial chills or burning up with its fever—which the tropical climate of Pavuvu did nothing to alleviate—weakened by poor rations, and rotten with a variety of fungus growths in various parts of their bodies, these Marines were both physically and mentally exhausted.

The number answering sick call increased alarmingly, averaging “200 to 250 cases daily. . . . Hospitalization would not have been required in many of these cases had water, clean surroundings and clean clothing and of course good food been available to all units on the Island.”<sup>19</sup> Because of the

---

<sup>18</sup> “. . . and when that water was reached, it was the most god-awful stuff you can imagine. Its unique flavor was not enhanced by the rotting coconuts which had seeped through the coral-streaked mud to the water supply and one was forced to spike it with the lemonade component of K-rations which, in itself, was more like battery acid and more suitable for burnishing canteen cups and mess gear than for drinking.” Mr. Benis M. Frank comments on draft MS, dtd 29Mar63.

<sup>19</sup> Cdr Emil E. Napp ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

Marines' weakened condition, their let-down following the recent tensions and stresses of combat, and the countless frustrations encountered on Pavuvu, they tended to behave in a manner that people back home might consider eccentric and to give credulity to wild rumors that ordinarily would have been laughed down.<sup>20</sup>

Adding to their woes, the food on Pavuvu, while adequate, was monotonous, unappetizing, and limited—for example, fresh meat appeared on the mess tables only once a week—the movies were usually second-run features or worse, and beer was limited to only a few cans a week.<sup>21</sup> Contributing to the men's dissatisfaction with their lot was the widespread belief that service troops on Banika and Guadalcanal were eating and drinking much better than the combat-returned Marines.

Welding these dispirited, malady-ridden, and exhausted men once again into a keenly-edged fighting team was the first task faced by the division's officers, who set about immediately preparing the Marines physically and

---

<sup>20</sup> “Less eccentric by Pavuvu standards was the man who ran out of his tent at dusk and began to pound his fists against a coconut tree, sobbing angrily: ‘I hate you, goddammit, I hate you!’ ‘Hit it once for me,’ came a cry from a nearby tent, the only comment that was made then or later by the man's buddies.” McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 231.

<sup>21</sup> “The only USO show to reach this miserable hole was not scheduled to come at all; it arrived only by dint of the personal efforts of Bob Hope and at considerable inconvenience to his troupe, who managed to sandwich in a morning performance between rear echelon engagements shortly before the division shoved off for Peleliu.” Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 27.

psychologically for their role in the forthcoming assault. Training, however, had to be conducted under the severe limitations of space, equipment shortages, and the detailing of men and equipment for the construction of camp facilities. In addition, the division experienced an influx of some 260 officers and 4,600 enlisted men replacing those Marines being rotated home. All of the newcomers had to be broken in on their new jobs for the imminent battle.

The amount of terrain on Pavuvu suitable for training purposes proved to be small even for a platoon to maneuver about, let alone a whole division. As a result, Marines on field problems found themselves slipping between the tents and messhalls of their bivouac area.<sup>22</sup> With large-scale maneuvers out of the question, the only recourse was to place a much greater emphasis upon small unit exercises, practicing with rifles, automatic weapons, grenades, bazookas, and portable flamethrowers. Meticulous attention was paid to the details of each unit's proposed scheme of maneuver ashore at the target. Over and over again, the movements of the scheme were rehearsed until each rifleman, specialist, and leader knew exactly where he was to be and what he was to do throughout the different phases of the assault.

---

<sup>22</sup> One story, perhaps apocryphal, has it that "one Saturday morning a battalion of the Fifth Marines was holding inspection while a battalion of the First Marines was conducting a field problem. The result was that during the inspection, fire groups of the latter were infiltrating through the statue-like ranks of the former." Maj Robert W. Burnette ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar49, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

Stressed also was instruction in close-in fighting with the bayonet, knife, club, hip-level snap shooting, and judo. The use of hikes, excellent in hardening men for the rigors of combat, was handicapped by the lack of space; the marching units kept bumping into each other.

Unfortunately, practical experience in tank/infantry coordination, destined to be of inestimable value in the coming battle, was limited to one day for each rifle regiment. Each squad, however, did actually coach the movements and firing of a tank by visual signals and the external telephone in the rear of the tank.

Wherever suitable terrain could be found, firing ranges and combat areas were set up, and their use was rigidly controlled by a tight scheduling. In the combat areas, platoon-sized groups employed flamethrowers, bazookas, demolitions, antitank guns, machine guns, and rifles while practicing simulated assaults against log bunkers. On the infiltration course, Marines negotiated barbed wire and other obstacles, while live ammunition forced them to keep down. Other subjects covered were the techniques of night defense, chemical warfare, patrolling with war dogs, and coordination of fire teams using all organic weapons. The ground phase of the training closed in the middle of August with combat firing by all units.

Even more difficult and nightmarish than the infantry's efforts were the attempts of the division's supporting arms to train with their bulkier equipment on Pavuvu. The 11th Marines rehearsed massing fires with time, impact, and ricochet bursts, but due to lack of space,



the artillery "was reduced to the pitiful expedient of firing into the water with the observers out in a boat or DUKW."<sup>23</sup> Without room to maneuver, tank training had to stress gunnery, flamethrower operations, fording, night security, all-around defense, and textbook study of tactics. On the whole, organic support units spent the majority of their training period breaking in replacements, repairing battered equipment, and shaking down new vehicles.

During the division's training period, two newly developed weapons were received. The Navy Mark I flamethrower was capable of throwing a flame of blazing napalm<sup>24</sup> to a distance of 150 yards and sustaining it for 80 seconds. Three of the flamethrowers were mounted on LVTs, while another LVT was equipped to serve as a supply carrier for the napalm mixture. Although slated for employment primarily against beach pillboxes during the assault landings, the new weapon was to prove its great value in reducing dug-in fortifications farther inland.

The other new weapon was the 60mm shoulder mortar, adapted to fire from a light machine gun mount and designed for flat trajectory fire against pillbox and cave openings. Some of its parts, however, proved too weak to stand the rough wear and tear of combat, and Marines who had to lug the weapon around complained of its heaviness. Even more serious was the recoil, which

was so severe that the gunner had to be relieved after firing only two to four rounds. Since this new weapon's function duplicated that of the bazooka, which gave a good performance on coral-surfaced Peleliu, Marines were inclined to hold the shoulder mortar in less regard than the older and more familiar weapon.

Hindering the whole training schedule of the division, but especially the amphibious phases, were critical shortages of equipment. These embraced such a wide array of items that about the only things in adequate supply were the basic arms of the individual infantrymen. Shortages in armored amphibians, amphibian tractors, flamethrowers, demolitions, automatic weapons, bazookas, engineering equipment, and waterproofing material existed right up to the last stages of training, while final allotments in some categories arrived barely in time to be combat-loaded with the troops. In addition, some of the supplies furnished with the division were not of A-1 quality:

Belts of machine gun ammunition had rotted . . . powder rings on mortar ammunition were disintegrating and bourrelets rusted, shotgun shells swollen or, if brass, corroded. All ammunition had to be unstowed, inspected and in large part replaced and restowed at the last minute.<sup>25</sup>

To complicate matters further, the division had been ordered early in July to form two provisional amphibian tractor battalions, "utilizing personnel of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, augmented by personnel from units of the

---

<sup>23</sup> LtCol Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

<sup>24</sup> The gelled fuel resulting from combining napalm powder with gasoline for use in incendiary bombs and flamethrowers.

---

<sup>25</sup> LtCol Spencer S. Berger ltr to CMC, dtd 19Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Berger ltr*.

division."<sup>26</sup> These Marine elements preparing for imminent combat, however, objected strenuously to parting with any of their skilled men, and often did not without a fight. In addition, those Marines reassigned to the amphibian tractor battalions had to be retrained in the operation of the unfamiliar equipment. Often, due to lack of time to practice, these inexperienced drivers would be performing on-the-job training with tractors filled with Marines practicing assault landings.

Further complications arose for the newly formed 3d Armored Amphibian Battalion (Provisional), because it was scheduled to receive the recently developed LVT(A), or armored amphibian tractor, which would form the initial assault wave at Peleliu and furnish fire support for the following troop waves. Lacking any of the new vehicles for demonstration purposes, the battalion's Marines, completely unfamiliar with the LVT(A) or its armament, were forced to rely solely upon blueprints for acquaintance with the tractor they would be handling in combat. Although the first delivery of the armored amphibians arrived early in August, difficulties still persisted. After feverishly practicing with the new vehicles, the crews were dumbfounded to find that the next shipments were of a later model, mounting 75mm howitzers instead of the 37mm's with which the crews had previously familiarized themselves. Approximately two-thirds of the battalion had to be retrained as a result.

"That the battalion should turn in an outstanding performance after such un-

propitious beginnings might well rank as one of the minor miracles of the campaign."<sup>27</sup> The man responsible for the battalion's good showing on the Peleliu beaches was Lieutenant Colonel Kimber H. Boyer. He "did one of the greatest training jobs I ever saw or heard of,"<sup>28</sup> said a fellow officer. Although beset by overwhelming problems and forced to obtain his men in dribbles from whatever source he could find, Lieutenant Colonel Boyer managed to train and shape his crews into a finely tuned combat team by the time of the assault. The commanding officer of the newly formed 6th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, Captain John I. Fitzgerald, Jr., "faced with almost the same problems and circumstances [as Boyer], performed as admirably."<sup>29</sup>

The amphibious training, not only of the amphibian battalions but also of the entire division, was retarded seriously by the insufficiency of amphibious vehicles and the lack of repair parts for them. Upon its arrival at Pavuvu, the division had only 48 of the 248 LVTs authorized for the Peleliu campaign. Of these 48, more than half were inoperative, awaiting vital parts. When the first shipment did arrive, there remained less than a month in which to prepare the vehicles, train the crews, and familiarize the several thousand assault troops in LVT ship-to-shore techniques.

As a result, the division was forced to substitute the DUKWs as personnel carriers and to use them in the amphib-

---

<sup>27</sup> Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> LtCol Joseph E. Buckley ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

<sup>29</sup> Maj Robert F. Reutlinger ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Reutlinger ltr*.

---

<sup>26</sup> *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase I, p. 5.

ious exercises with the infantry regiments. It was during such a landing drill that General Rupertus fell from an amphibian tractor and severely fractured his ankle, an injury that might have caused a less determined man to miss the Peleliu campaign. The amphibious trucks used by the infantry, however, had to be taken away from the artillery units, which had been practicing their own assault techniques of loading and unloading howitzers and radio jeeps in the LVTs and DUKWs. Consequently, the training time available to the 11th Marines was drastically reduced.

Training for the 1st Marine Division culminated in large-scale landing rehearsals at the Cape Esperance area on Guadalcanal. By this time, 27 and 29 August, the assault units were already embarked on board the vessels which would carry them to the target, and the warships scheduled to provide naval gunfire support for the operation were also on hand.

The first rehearsal was designed solely to test communications. After the new radio equipment, which had been rushed by air from Pearl Harbor to supply the division's minimum requirements, was accurately calibrated, the rehearsal went off smoothly. On the 29th, the naval guns and planes blasted at the beaches prior to the landing and continued deep supporting fires after the Marines debarked and moved inland. Spreading out, the assault units went through the motions of their assigned missions, and everything went off smoothly.

At a critique held the next day, and attended by all of the ranking commanders of both naval and ground

forces, not a single serious criticism was raised; in fact, nothing in the way of constructive revisions was even discussed. The two practice landings, however, had served their purpose of familiarizing the troops with their debarkation and transfer stations, snapping in the new crews of the amphibian vehicles, coordinating the preliminary gunfire and bombardment plans, and ironing out any possible kinks in the complicated ship-to-shore maneuver, which depended upon split-second timing and scheduling for success.

On 3 September, a shore party exercise was held at Tetere Beach on Guadalcanal, but no supplies were unloaded. The next landing performed by Marines of the division would be over Peleliu's coral reef and onto the enemy-held beaches.

Despite its frustrations with Pavuvu's shortcomings, the equipment shortages, and the training difficulties, the 1st Marine Division had done an admirable job of fusing the new replacements with the older veterans of Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester into a recharged, combat-ready fighting unit. When the 1st Division's Marines stormed ashore at Peleliu, they were once again a top-notch assault outfit.

### *MOUNTING THE ATTACK*<sup>30</sup>

The logistical problem confronting the 1st Marine Division in mounting out from Pavuvu for the Peleliu campaign and the many heartbreaking diffi-

<sup>30</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: TF 32 MovO No. A503-44, dtd 20Aug44; ComLSTFlot 13 Trng MovO No. 3-44, dtd 24Aug44; 1st MarDiv AdminO No. 1-44, dtd 7Aug44.

culties encountered in solving it cannot be overemphasized. What the situation would have been if the division had not been lifted by an experienced transport group is hard to imagine, because the loading of the naval vessels had to be closely coordinated with the final plans for the beach assault.

Fortunately, the transport group commander, his staff, and the vessels' crews were veterans in complicated ship-to-shore movements and experts in working with Marines to solve related problems. The group staff, according to one Marine officer:

. . . worked in the closest liaison, not only with the Division's Operations and Planning Officers, but with the commanders and staff officers of subordinate units, together with the Navy Control Officers designated for each beach. The consolidated scheme was a product of close and effective joint planning.<sup>31</sup>

The embarkation warning order reached the Marine division on 5 August, only 10 days before the actual assault loading was to begin. Planning by staff officers started immediately but, without any idea of the number, type, or characteristics of the allotted ships, only the most general plans could be made. Although the transport group commander and his staff arrived at Pavuvu on 10 August, the necessary, detailed information was not obtained until two days later. Even after the ships finally appeared, it was discovered that several had reserved holds for ship's stores or carried extra equipment which was not shown on the ship's char-

acteristics. As a result, confusion and misunderstanding marked the loading arrangements of the division, causing numerous changes, compromises, and improvisations right up until the last.

To complicate the Marines' logistic problem even further, loading operations would have to be conducted at the widely separated staging areas of Pavuvu, Banika, Guadalcanal, and Tulagi, as well as in the New Hebrides, where the transports would pick up the ground echelons and equipment of the Marine air units slated to be based on the Peleliu airfield as soon as it was seized and operative. If the principle of combat loading was to be adhered to, a prodigious amount of load planning and close coordination of ships' routes would be necessary to prevent wasted effort or back-tracking. Compounding the difficulties were the limits to dockage and lighterage at certain of these staging areas, which necessitated a tight scheduling of the ships' movements to forestall any needless delays.

The first units of the LST flotilla assembled from scattered Pacific bases, arrived off Pavuvu on 11 August, and the Marine division began loading the next day. Since the flotilla commander, Captain Armand Robertson, had been too busy readying his ships for sea to come to Pavuvu during the planning phase, the Marines had requested him to delegate a liaison officer with the authority to make decisions in his name, but none was ever furnished. Admiral Fort, who was Captain Robertson's superior, held daily conferences with the Marines on Pavuvu after 8 August, thus to some extent offsetting the gap created by the absence of a liaison officer,

<sup>31</sup> Col Harold O. Deakin ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

Nevertheless, shortly after his arrival, Captain Robertson ordered the loading plans for eight LSTs to be changed. The Marines knew from past experience that understowing<sup>23</sup> was indispensable in keeping within allotted load limits and yet lifting all the required tonnage. It was only with the greatest reluctance, however, that the flotilla commander permitted his LSTs to be so loaded.

Even after the Marines were finally embarked, they discovered to their amazement that certain vessels transporting two regiments would be in launching areas different from those planned by the division. If not rectified, this drastic change would force the amphibians and craft, carrying the 5th and 7th Marines ashore, to crisscross in order to get these regiments to the proper beaches. Such a maneuver, difficult to execute and contrary to the accepted doctrine for ship-to-shore procedures, could not be tolerated and, as a result, troops already embarked on board nine vessels had to be shifted.

Actually, the last of the LST flotilla did not put in an appearance at Pavuvu until 25 August, at which time the troops were already embarked on board the transports in preparation for their final training rehearsals. In spite of all these last-minute complications, however, the 30 LSTs, 17 transports, and 2 LSDs allotted to the division for the Peleliu operation were fully combat-loaded by 31 August.

---

<sup>23</sup> Understowing consisted simply of the loading of the tank deck of an LST with flat or well-packaged cargo, such as rations, barbed wire, or ammunition, next covering the whole with a layer of dunnage, and then storing LVTs on top of the dunnage.

After their final landing exercises at Guadalcanal, the Marines had a chance to go ashore before departing for the Peleliu assault. These last few days were spent in conditioning hikes, small-unit maneuvers, and recreation. The other assault unit of the IIIAC, the 81st Infantry Division, meanwhile, had mounted out in Hawaii and rendezvoused off Guadalcanal for its final rehearsals and movement to the target.

Unlike the Marine division with its two major campaigns under its belt, the newly activated Army division was still untested in battle. Neither during their training nor mounting out had the soldiers endured any of the difficulties experienced by the Marines on Pavuvu. According to the 81st's history, "the loading worked out well," and after "its long stateside training, its intensive refresher courses, the rehearsal, and the relaxation in the [Hawaiian] Islands, the Division was a bronzed, tough crew, ready for action."<sup>33</sup>

On 4 September, LSTs carrying the initial assault elements of both the 1st Division and the 81st lifted anchor and departed with their naval escort ships for the Palaus. Four days later, the faster-moving transports and LSDs followed with their screening forces. The two convoys were expected to rendezvous in the target area early on D-Day. Prior to the departure of the transport echelon, the Peleliu Fire Support Unit and Escort Carrier Group had left in order to arrive at the target on 12 September to begin the bombardment and bombing of the objective, as well as to

---

<sup>33</sup> Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, pp. 45, 59.

start the underwater demolition of artificial obstacles.

The approach route lay northwestward through the Solomons and then along a course generally parallel to the northern coast of New Guinea. For the embarked troops, the 2,100-mile trip over smooth seas was uneventful, the monotony being broken only by the periodic anti-aircraft exercises which used the naval planes flying from the escort carriers as tracking targets. On 14 September, D minus 1, the transports made contact with the slower-moving LSTs, and they proceeded together to their respective stations off the Palaus.

On the same day, the Marine troop commanders and the civilian news correspondents opened General Rupertus' sealed letter, which had been given to each of them just prior to the departure from Guadalcanal with instructions not to open it until D minus 1. Apparently, the division's commanding general had not consulted with anyone, "with the possible exception of"<sup>34</sup> his chief of staff, before issuing the letter. In it, Rupertus expressed his opinion that the fighting on Peleliu would be extremely tough but short, lasting not more than four days. This viewpoint, according to the official Marine Corps monograph on the campaign was:

... perhaps the most striking manifestation of that preoccupation with speedy conquest at the highest division level which was to color tactical thinking ashore for a month to follow.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> LtCol William E. Benedict ltr to CMC, dtd 27Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

<sup>35</sup> Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 35. "Most officers believed this unusual document [was] intended in the nature of a pep talk. This was

### MARINE AIR PREPARES<sup>36</sup>

Since the Western Carolines lay too far distant from any Allied base for land-based aircraft to provide cover during STALEMATE II, naval planes operating off carriers would furnish the needed air support until such time as the airfield on Peleliu had been captured and readied for use by American aviation units. Destined to be the major component of this garrison air force was the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing (2d MAW) which, in mid-1944, was located in the Solomons and functioned primar-

not its effect on news correspondents, however: many of the 36 accredited to the division did not come ashore at all, and only six (one of whom was killed) chose to stay through the critical early phases. Hence, news coverage of the operation was sketchy, often misleading, and, when quick conquest failed to materialize, tinged with biting criticism." *Ibid*.

<sup>36</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: Garrison AF Western Carolines WarDs, 30May-Sep44, n.d., hereafter *Garrison AF WarD*, with appropriate date; Island Comd, Peleliu WarDs, Jul-Sep44, hereafter *Peleliu Island Comd WarD*, with appropriate date; 2d MAW WarDs, June-Sep44, hereafter *2d MAW WarD*, with appropriate date; 2d MAW UHist, 7Dec41-20Feb46, dtd 12Mar46, hereafter *2d MAW UHist*; HqSq-2, 2d MAW WarD, Jul-Sep44, hereafter *HqSq-2, 2d MAW WarD*, with appropriate date; MAG-11 WarD, Jun-Sep44, hereafter *MAG-11 WarD*, with appropriate date; MAG-11 UHist, 1Aug41-1Jul44, dtd 19Jun45, hereafter *MAG-11 UHist*; MAG-11 Rpt on Palau Ops with 4th MAW comments, dtd 22Dec44, hereafter *MAG-11 Palau Rpt*; VMF-114 WarD, Jun-Sep44, hereafter *VMF-114 WarD*, with appropriate date; VMF-114 UHist, 1Jul43-1Jan45, dtd 10May45, hereafter *VMF-114 UHist*; VMF(N)-541 WarD, Jun-Sep44, hereafter *VMF(N)-541 WarD*, with appropriate date; VMF(N)-541 UHist, 15Feb44-30Apr46, dtd 30Apr46, hereafter *VMF(N)-541 UHist*.

ily as a training command for squadrons flying combat missions in more active zones. Assignment to the wing, whose headquarters was on Efate Island in the New Hebrides, meant that a squadron's pilots could receive additional training as well as enjoy a welcome break from the rigors of daily flights over enemy-held territory, before returning to combat.

The 2d Wing first suspected it was slated for a more active war role when it received a dispatch on 14 June ordering it to become an "independent and self sustaining unit"<sup>37</sup> as rapidly as possible. Eleven days later, the wing was directed to move to Espiritu Santo Island, a staging area farther north in the same island chain, for possible deployment to an active combat zone.

A forward echelon moved to the new base to pave the way for the rest of the command, and the 2d MAW officially began operating from there on 3 July. During the remainder of the month, the wing busied itself with completing the move, bringing itself up to authorized strength, gathering and readying its own lower echelons, and streamlining its staff organization for efficient functioning under any possible combat contingency.

This tailoring of the air unit to fit the requirement of its assigned mission resulted in the 2d MAW reverting back to a one-group wing. Only the month previously, it had been brought up to a two-group wing in anticipation of an active combat role. Since Marine Aircraft Group 11 (MAG-11) was expected to furnish sufficient tactical air support

for STALEMATE II once it was based on the captured and repaired Peleliu airfield, the unneeded MAG-25 was detached from the 2d MAW on 25 July.<sup>38</sup>

In preparation for basing on Peleliu, MAG-11 was authorized a new provisional table of organization on 26 July. All elements, except group and squadron headquarters, and operations and intelligence sections, were to be transferred to the service squadron, which would then be placed under the operational control of the Air Base Commander, a subordinate of the Island Commander. Although these changes made the service squadron large and unwieldy, besides complicating the command structure, this arrangement was to remain in effect throughout the Palau campaign.

Earlier, on 6 July, the 2d MAW had lost its commander, when CinCPOA summoned Brigadier General Harold D. Campbell to Pearl Harbor to organize a headquarters for his forthcoming role as Island Commander, Peleliu. This joint Army-Navy-Marine Corps command, known as the Third Island Base Headquarters until 16 November 1944, was to have the mission of defending the captured base from all possible enemy attacks and improving the island's facilities in accordance with the base development plan.

No sooner had the new wing commander, Major General James T. Moore, assumed command, than a dispatch from Admiral Nimitz on 9 July desig-

---

<sup>37</sup> *2d MAW WarD*, Jun44, p. 1.

---

<sup>38</sup> The 2d MAW became a two-group wing again on 8 October 1944, the date that Marine Base Defense Air Group 45 (redesignated MAG-45 on 15 November) arrived at Ulithi Atoll.

nated the Marine officer as Commander Garrison Air Force, Western Carolines. As was common in the intricate amphibious air-sea-land operations of the Pacific War, General Moore was to head a staff composed of Army, Navy, and Marine Corps officers whose mission was to "defend the Western Carolines area by employing in mutual support against hostile air threats all air defense units based in that area."<sup>39</sup> Once his squadrons began operating from the captured Peleliu airfield, the Marine general would have three major tasks: defending all ground troops and convoys in the Western Carolines from enemy air attacks, providing close air support for the infantry units still fighting on Peleliu, and neutralizing the remaining enemy bases in the Western Carolines.

Although still the 2d Wing's commander, General Moore found it necessary to locate at Pearl Harbor near the headquarters of Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific, because the planning and organizing of his new command necessitated frequent conferences with the staffs of higher and subordinate echelons. Finally, on 22 August, the Marine general flew to Espiritu Santo and assumed personal command of the wing during final preparations for the Peleliu campaign.

Scheduled to land with the assault units at Peleliu were the ground echelons of Marine Fighter Squadron 114 (VMF-114), VMF-121, VMF-122, and Marine Night Fighter Squadron 541 (VMF(N)-541) of MAG-11. Their flight echelons were to remain at Es-

piritu until such time as they could be flown by stages to the repaired and operative airfield. As soon as possible, other units of MAG-11 would be flown in, to be followed later by wing headquarters.

With combat imminent, the group's squadrons underwent intensified training.<sup>40</sup> The typical day's flight schedule was designed to improve the skills and abilities of the pilots, as well as to determine the condition of the aircraft and equipment. The final weeks prior to mounting out found the fighter squadrons stressing dive and glide bombing exercises, for which their assigned aircraft, the F4U (Corsair), was admirably suited. In addition to this increased emphasis upon tactics which could be used in close support of ground troops, the basics of squadron air work were practiced in instruments, intercepts, and division tactics.

The Marine air units, not unlike the ground troops, were experiencing their own difficulties with shortages, as MAG-11 reported:

The first major difficulty encountered was in obtaining the proper quantities and types of aviation ordnance. Allowances were specifically laid down by ComAirPac [Commander Air Forces, Pacific Fleet] who then made ComSoPac [Commander, South Pacific] responsible for their delivery. ComSoPac passed this task to the 16th Field Depot, a Marine unit, at Guadalcanal. Due to shortages, lack of knowledge of aviation ordnance and lack of belting equipment, the specified allowances were never obtained. The Group went on the operation short of certain bombs, fuses,

<sup>39</sup> *Garrison AF WarD*, 30May-30Sep44, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> During July and August, training accidents resulted in 2 pilots killed, 1 missing, 1 wounded, and 4 aircraft lost.



etc., and had to take all unbelted ammunition. Belting and handling a million and a quarter rounds of .50 caliber ammunition was done after landing and proved to be a major problem.<sup>41</sup>

Since the Peleliu landing would be the first time that ground echelons of Marine squadrons would accompany the assault troops ashore, the aviators preparing for their role in STALEMATE II found themselves confronted by some unique problems. The question of the composition of the parties to accompany the general assault units and the amount and type of gear the parties should take with them was a difficult one to resolve, according to MAG-11, which noted:

At present, there is no table of allowances which prescribes the kind and amount of aviation materiel, Marine Corps equipment, transportation and personnel that should be taken in with the assault echelons. As a result of this, every Group and Squadron Commander had to make his own decision in the matter, with the result that the amount and kind of material and number of personnel taken in during the early stages of an operation varies greatly.<sup>42</sup>

Adding to the Marine aviators' woes was the fact that, because shipping space was at a premium, equipment had to be reduced to the barest necessities. Liaison officers had been sent to Pavuvu for coordination of loading plans with the 1st Marine Division, but the limitation of pace on the ships transporting the assault elements and the staging of STALEMATE II at five widely separated points complicated the situation. The S. S. *Mormacport*, for example, af-

ter loading the ground echelons and equipment of MAG-11 and Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron 134 (VMTB-134) in the New Hebrides, would stop at the Russells and embark another task force unit "on top of the Group and squadron gear."<sup>43</sup> As a result, VMTB-134 would be flying antisubmarine patrols long before its equipment or spare parts were ashore at Peleliu.

The newly organized VMF(N)-541, which arrived at the Espiritu Santo staging area from the United States just in time for its ground echelons to be loaded on board the assault ships, had its own unique problem. Commissioned 15 February 1944 at Cherry Point, North Carolina, this night fighter squadron had been equipped and trained for its mission of providing protection against enemy air attacks during the hours of darkness. Its assigned aircraft, a modified version of the Navy's standard fighter, the F6F (Hellcat) contained very complicated precision radar to aid in the night interception of enemy bombers. Although excellent in operating aspects and accurate at times for distances up to 60 miles, this radar required a great deal of maintenance to keep it in acceptable working condition.

The misfortunes of VMF(N)-541 began when it travelled some 10,000 miles from its staging area at Cherry Point and continued until its planes touched down on the repaired Peleliu airfield. At no time in this two-month period was there ever any testing or maintenance of the delicate radar equipment installed in the Hellcats, even though the flight echelon had flown over 5,000 miles. The

<sup>41</sup> *MAG-11 Palau Rpt*, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *MAG-11 Palau Rpt*, 1st End, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *MAG-11 Palau Rpt*, p. 2.

not unexpected result was that "every one required almost a major overhaul at a time when top performance was required."<sup>44</sup>

Loading out at Espiritu Santo began 25 August, when the ground echelons of VMF-114, VMF-121, VMF-122, and VMF(N)-541 went on board the USS *Tryon* and *Centaurus*. These vessels sailed on the 25th and 27th, respectively, to rendezvous with the main naval task force at Guadalcanal. On 30 August, the ground echelons of VMTB-134 and the Headquarters and Service Squadrons of MAG-11 embarked in the S. S. *Mormacport* for their journey to Peleliu. Remaining behind at Espiritu Santo were the flight echelons and the rear echelon which would service the aircraft prior to departure for the Palaus and supervise the loading of the remaining gear.

### *SOFTENING THE ENEMY'S DEFENSES*<sup>45</sup>

Owing to the detailed planning by SWPA and CinCPOA air liaison officers, STALEMATE II's plans called for a wide-sweeping series of closely-meshed air support missions by both

---

<sup>44</sup> VMF (N)-541 Rpt (Night Fighter Squadron, plane, personnel, and material requirements), dtd 25Nov44, hereafter *VMF(N)-541 Rpt.*

<sup>45</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: TG 38.3 OpO No. 1-44, dtd 25Aug44; TF 32 MovO No. A503-44, dtd 20Aug44; TG 32.1 AtkO No. A502-44, dtd 20Aug 44; TG 32.15 AtkO No. 8-44, dtd 30Aug44; TU 32.7.1 OpO No. 1-44, dtd 5Sep44; VMF-314 Rpt of Observers aboard Aircraft Carriers during STALEMATE, dtd 17Nov44, hereafter *VMF-314 Rpt of Observers*; Fane and Moore, *The Naked Warriors*; Roscoe, *Submarine*.

carrier- and land-based aircraft embracing the period prior to, during, and after the amphibious landing. As early as March 1944, the Palaus had been struck by fast carrier forces of the Fifth Fleet, and further carrier-based attacks were again launched during July and August. SWPA's long-range planes, meanwhile, had flown reconnaissance and bombing runs over the target area and, in August, the Fifth Air Force's B-24s (Liberators) began a concentrated effort to knock out enemy defenses throughout the island chain.

A series of night flights from 8 August through 14 September dumped 91.2 tons of fragmentation, demolition, and incendiary bombs over the Palaus and, beginning 25 August, the heavy bombers braved Japanese fighters and heavy antiaircraft fire to make daylight bombing runs over the objective. In a total of 394 sorties, the Liberators dropped 793.6 tons of high explosives on the enemy defenses. In Koror Town alone, some 507 buildings were completely demolished, and major Japanese installations throughout the island chain were destroyed. By 5 September, photo reconnaissance revealed only 12 Japanese fighters, 12 floatplanes, and 3 observation aircraft still based in the Palaus. The enemy's airstrips, moreover, were badly cratered, and only the most extensive repairs would ever make them fully operative again.

Although the Palaus were beyond the range of CinCPOA's shore-based planes, other Japanese-held islands in the Carolines were not. Yap, Woleai, and Truk, for example, were hit repeatedly by naval bombers operating from recently captured Allied bases, while the Libera-

tors of SWPA flew coordinated, reinforcing strikes against the same objectives. In addition, the B-24s struck at enemy airdromes on Celebes and in the southern Philippines in preparation for the later-scheduled carrier strikes by the Third Fleet.

To prevent confusion and to coordinate strategic air support missions, the heavy bombers of SWPA were to shift to night bombing runs as soon as American carriers began operations in the vicinity of the Palaus. In late August, one group of Admiral Mitscher's fast carriers made a diversionary raid against the enemy-held Volcano-Bonin Islands, while the other three proceeded to the Palaus and initiated a three-day aerial bombardment with a fighter sweep on the afternoon of 6 September. During the next two days, as the warplanes ranged over the islands, bombing and strafing, the cruisers and destroyers of the covering screen blasted away at the Japanese defenses ashore. These fast carrier groups then continued on to their additional mission of interdiction strikes against the enemy airbases in the southern Philippines.

After completing its diversionary raid in the Volcano-Bonins, the remaining fast carrier group struck at Yap and, on 10 September, its planes hit the Palaus. Notwithstanding the target's previous bombardment by both aircraft and warships, the naval pilots could lament that so many Japanese anti-aircraft batteries were still active that "Much time and many bombs were expended before return fire was sufficiently reduced to let us get down low for close observation and detection of small but important enemy positions, bivouac areas,

etc."<sup>46</sup> This carrier group remained near the Palaus, for it was scheduled to augment the striking power of the escort carriers during the prelanding bombardment and to provide additional firepower on D-Day, if needed.

Land-based planes of both the Southwest and Central Pacific commands, meanwhile, flew search and reconnaissance missions screening the approach to the target by transports and support ships of the Western Attack Force. The pilots, flying daylight patrols some 50 to 100 miles in advance of the main naval forces, had orders to attack and destroy any enemy planes encountered.

A unique addition to the screening forces was the Submarine Offensive Reconnaissance Group, which was utilized by Halsey during the Palau operation only. Composed of three wolf packs of three submarines each, the group was strung out in attack formation over a 300-mile front. The submarines, upon sighting any enemy forces, were to radio a warning of danger to the Western Attack Force and then attack to inflict the maximum damage. In addition, they were to provide rescue service for downed aviators and furnish on-the-spot weather information.

Before dawn on 12 September, the first echelon of the Escort Carrier Group and the warships of the Fire Support Group were off Peleliu ready to begin preliminary bombardment operations. The four escort carriers, soon to be

<sup>46</sup> Air IntelGru, CNO, "Comments on 'softening up' strikes in preparation for landing operations, taken from the report of R. L. Kibbe, Cdr, USN, Commander of Air Group Thirteen for the period 6-16 September 1944," dtd 25Nov44.

joined by another six, had the task of safeguarding the approach of the Western Attack Force to the target, assisting in the softening up of the island's defenses prior to the landing, and providing close air support once the Marines were ashore on Peleliu. In addition, four seaplane tenders were to arrive in Kossol Passage one day before the landing and, after their squadrons had joined them, were to provide air-sea rescue and lifeguard, weather, and reconnaissance missions.

The activity of all planes in the target area was closely coordinated with the naval gunfire and minesweeping operations by Admiral Wilkinson's Commander Support Aircraft. Control of the close fire support furnished to the infantry would be handled by the Joint Assault Signal Company (JASCO) teams. Each Marine battalion was assigned such a team, consisting of a naval gunfire officer, an aviation liaison officer, and a shore party officer, with the required communications personnel and equipment. Once ashore, the battalion commander had only to turn to an officer at his side and heavy guns firing shells up to 16-inch or planes capable of bombing, strafing, or launching rockets were at his disposal. The Commander, Support Aircraft, could, at his discretion, relinquish control of all planes in the area to the ground commander once the expeditionary troops were firmly established on the beachhead.

First to venture in close to the target were the vessels of the Kossol Passage Detachment, which began minesweeping operations along the approaches to the designated transport and fire sup-

port areas. Later, these minesweepers would clear the Kossol Passage, which would be utilized as a roadstead where ships might await call to Peleliu for unloading and in which replenishment of fuel, stores, and ammunition could be accomplished.

At 0530 on the 12th, the large caliber guns of Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf's Fire Support Group, consisting of 5 old battleships, 4 heavy cruisers, 4 light cruisers, and 14 destroyers, began blasting away at Peleliu's defenses. For two hours, the warships steamed in a zigzag pattern off the island and fired at preselected targets. When this naval barrage ceased temporarily, carrier planes appeared over Peleliu's interior and began flying strikes against the defenses there. Following this two-hour aerial bombardment, the heavy naval guns resumed their deliberate fire. This alternating of naval gunfire and aerial bombardment was the procedure followed during the three days prior to the assault. During this time, the warships expended some 519 rounds of 16-inch shells, 1,845 rounds of 14-inch, 1,427 rounds of 8-inch, 1,020 rounds of 6-inch, and 12,937 rounds of 5-inch, for a total of 2,255 tons of ammunition.

Special UDTs, meanwhile, had been landed on the reef, where they began their important tasks of removing underwater obstacles, blasting ramps for LSTs and pathways for DUKWs in the coral, clearing boulders from roadways, and placing buoys and markers. Clad only in swimming trunks, these underwater experts were constantly fired at by Japanese with rifles and machine guns during the dangerous process of destroying the underwater obstructions,

which an American admiral described as "the most formidable which we encountered in the entire Pacific."<sup>47</sup>

Originally, the gunfire support plan called for only two days of preparatory bombardment prior to D-Day, but the strong protests of General Geiger had persuaded Admiral Wilkinson to add another day. This extra time, however, did not mean that a larger number of shells were fired; instead, the extra day merely allowed the same amount of ammunition to be expended with greater deliberation over a longer period of time. Since the Japanese had skillfully camouflaged their artillery positions and refused to be goaded into returning fire, Admiral Oldendorf was of the opinion that the "best that can be done is to blast away at suspected positions and hope for the best."<sup>48</sup> As a result, he ended the bombardment early, explaining that all targets on Peleliu worthy of naval gunfire had been destroyed.

Although the awesome weight, explosive power, and armor-piercing quality of the shells expended had transformed Peleliu's exterior "into a barren wasteland,"<sup>49</sup> neither the enemy nor his prepared defenses had been obliterated. Artillery had been hidden carefully in underground caves, some of which had steel doors to protect their interiors, while the troops had been placed in sheltered areas, from which they could emerge, unscathed and combat-ready,

after the American barrage lifted. Frustrating as it was for one Japanese soldier in a machine cannon company to remain huddled in his shelter while the warships shelled Peleliu with impunity—the sight so infuriated him that he "could feel the blood pounding in my veins throughout my body"<sup>50</sup>—the fact remains that only one man in his outfit was injured by the prelanding bombardment, and then only slightly. As Oldendorf later admitted, "My surprise and chagrin when concealed batteries opened up on the LVTs can be imagined."<sup>51</sup> In addition, one huge Japanese blockhouse, which the assaulting Marines confidently believed would be demolished since it was pinpointed on their maps, was later found to have escaped damage completely from any of the naval shells.<sup>52</sup>

Oldendorf's decision to break off fire has been described as being "entirely correct," by Admiral Fort, who was present at the bombardment of Peleliu. The "idea which some people seem to have of just firing at an island is," said the admiral, "an inexcusable waste of ammunition."<sup>53</sup> Colonel William H. Har-

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Oldendorf ltr.*

<sup>52</sup> Admiral Oldendorf commented that this blockhouse was not shown on the maps furnished him and that during "the preliminary bombardment and until several days after the landing, my entire staff was on the sick list, only my flag lieutenant remaining on his feet. This threw a heavy load on me, as I not only had to supervise the details of the daytime operations but also operate tactically at night during withdrawals." *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> RAdm George H. Fort ltr to DirMCHist, dtd 20Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Fort ltr.*

<sup>47</sup> Adm Jesse B. Oldendorf ltr to DirMCHist, dtd 25Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Oldendorf ltr.*

<sup>48</sup> *Oldendorf ltr.*

<sup>49</sup> CinCPac-CinCPOA Translations Item No. 12,190, "Extracts taken from the diary of an unidentified man," 15May-15Sep44.

rison, commanding the 11th Marines at Peleliu, held somewhat similar views, for he doubted "whether 10 times the gunfire would have helped."<sup>54</sup>

Among the Marines actually storming the shelled and bombed beaches at Peleliu and assaulting the still intact Japanese defenses and fortifications, however, there grew a belief, verging later on a feeling of bitterness, that the preparatory naval gunfire left some-

thing to be desired. After the war, this belief was shared by two historians of amphibious warfare, Isely and Crowl, who wrote that:

. . . the conclusion cannot be avoided that preliminary naval gunfire on Peleliu was inadequate, and that the lessons learned at Guam were overlooked. . . . Peleliu, like Tarawa and to a lesser extent Saipan, demonstrated that the only substitute for such prolonged bombardment was costly expenditure of the lives of the assault troops.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Comments on the Palau (Peleliu) Monograph by Col William H. Harrison, n.d., hereafter *Harrison cmts.*

---

<sup>55</sup> Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 403.

# D-Day on Peleliu<sup>1</sup>

## FIRST WAVES ASHORE<sup>2</sup>

Dawn on 15 September 1944 broke calm and clear at 0552. Sharply silhouetted against the first rays of sunlight were the American warships which filled the waters off White and Orange Beaches at Peleliu as far as the eye

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *III PhibFor STALEMATE II Rpt*; *ExTrps SAR*; *IIIAC Palau Rpt*; *1st MarDiv SAR*; *1st MarDiv WarD*, 15Sep44; *1st MarDiv D-2 Jnl*, dtd 15Sep44, hereafter *1st MarDiv D-2 Jnl*, with appropriate date; *1st MarDiv D-3 Jnl*, dtd 15Sep44, hereafter *1st MarDiv D-3 Jnl*, with appropriate date; *1st MarDiv D-3 Periodic Rpt*, dtd 15Sep44, hereafter *1st MarDiv D-3 Periodic Rpt*, with appropriate date; *4th War Dog Platoon, IIIAC, Peleliu OpRpt*, 15-30 Sep44, dtd 20Nov44, hereafter *4th War Dog Plat Peleliu OpRpt*; *Peleliu Comment File*; *Japanese CenPac Ops*; *Smith, Narrative*; *Hough, Assault on Peleliu*; *Morison, Leyte*; *Smith, Approach to the Philippines*; *Isely and Crowl, U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*; *McMillan, The Old Breed*; *Historical Committee, 81st Infantry Division*.

<sup>2</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: *TF 32 Peleliu and Angaur Rpt*; *TF 32 OPlan A501-44*, dtd 15Aug44; "*1st Mar Hist*"; *5th Mar OpRpt*, 17Aug-16Oct44, n.d., hereafter *5th Mar OpRpt*, with appropriate date; *3/1 Rec of Events*, 26Aug-10Oct44, n.d., hereafter *3/1 Rec of Events*, with appropriate date; *3/7 WarD*, 24Aug-30Oct44, dtd 18Nov44, hereafter *3/7 WarD*, with appropriate date; *Boyer, ArmdAmphibianBn*; *Cdr. C. M. Blackford, USCG, "They were all Giants at Peleliu," USNI Proceedings*, v. 76, no. 10 (Oct50), pp. 1114-1117, hereafter *Blackford, "Giants at Peleliu."*

could see. Fortunately for the Marine division scheduled to assault the strongly held enemy island, the weather was ideal for amphibious operations. Only a slight surf was running, and visibility was unlimited in practically every direction.<sup>3</sup>

With his fire support ships already in position, Admiral Oldendorf in the U. S. heavy cruiser *Louisville* gave the command and, about 0530, shells began slamming into the target areas. By this time, the green-clad Marines slated to comprise the assault waves already were loaded in their assigned LVTs and were being dispatched toward the line of departure. As the amphibian tractors formed into waves behind the LVT(A)s and began their approach to the beaches, the steady stream of naval shells overhead increased in fury.

On board their amphibious command ships, *USS Mount Olympus* and *Mount McKinley*, the ranking Navy and Marine commanders observed the complicated landing operation, while the staff of the 1st Marine Division functioned from the

<sup>3</sup> Flying conditions, in fact, were so phenomenally good, not only on D-Day but throughout the period of carrier air support, that on "no occasion was it necessary to deny a mission request from an air liaison party because of adverse weather, and on only a few occasions was it necessary to postpone temporarily the granting of a mission because of local weather conditions." *TF 32 Peleliu and Angaur Rpt*, Encl F, p. 4.



*MARINES boarding landing craft off Peleliu. (USMC A94889)*



*ASSAULT FORCE under enemy fire at Orange Beach 3. Note burning amtracs in background. (USMC 94937)*



U. S. assault transport *DuPage*. Although this vessel had been equipped as a command ship, the Marines still had to furnish much of their own equipment for communication purposes while afloat.

Beginning at 0750, 50 carrier planes bombed enemy gun positions and installations on the beaches. Not once during this 15-minute aerial strike did the roar of the ships' guns cease, since the plan called for the pilots to remain above the flat trajectory of the naval shells. While the Commander, Support Aircraft, was busy coordinating air operations with naval gunfire, the Advance Commander, Support Aircraft, who had handled this task during the preliminary bombardment, prepared to go ashore, where he would be able to assume control in the event the *Mount Olympus* became disabled. Destroyers, meanwhile, had placed white phosphorus shells on the ridges of the Umurbrogol to blanket observation by the Japanese artillerymen there, while the heavier warships had shifted to close fire support and begun firing high explosives on the beaches to pulverize their defenses.

The initial assault wave of LVT(A)s crossed the line of departure at 0800 and churned toward White and Orange Beaches, closely followed by the LVTs filled with infantry. Preceding were the 18 LCIs (Landing Craft, Infantry), which had been equipped with 4.5-inch rocket launchers. After approaching within 1,000 yards of the shore, these vessels took up positions and began unleashing salvos of 22 rockets each. When the third assault wave passed the LCIs, they moved to the flanks of the landing

beaches, ready to deliver "on call" fire. Four other LCIs, mounting 4.2-inch mortars, were stationed on the left (north) flank just off the reef to keep up a continuous fire on the rugged terrain in back of White Beach 1.

No sooner had the sound of the rocket salvos ceased, than 48 fighter-bombers flown by naval fliers appeared in the skies overhead. Peeling off, these planes struck at the landing beaches in a finely coordinated maneuver which kept at least eight of them in attack at any one time. Employing bombs, rockets, and machine guns, they poured down an effective neutralizing fire after the support ships had shifted their targets inland and to the flanks of the beaches and during the amphibian tractors' final run to the shore. As the foremost wave approached the water's edge, the fire of the planes gradually moved inland, at no time coming closer to the LVT(A)s than 200 yards.

At 0832, the armored amphibians clambered out of the water onto land, their 37mm and 75mm cannon placing fire upon the beach defenses. A minute later, the first troop wave touched the shoreline, whereupon the assault Marines hurriedly departed their LVTs and fanned out over the coral sands. Succeeding waves continued to land at one-minute intervals. The sight greeting these early arrivals on the beachhead has been aptly described by one of the participants:

Our amtrac [LVT] was among the first assault waves, yet the beach was already a litter of burning, blackened amphibian tractors, of dead and wounded, a mortal garden of exploding mortar shells. Holes

had been scooped in the white sand or had been blasted out by the shells, the beach was pocked with holes—all filled with green-clad helmeted Marines.<sup>4</sup>

Only the few scattered Japanese that somehow had survived the bombardment opposed the landing, but as the LVT(A)s led the attack inland off the beach, a steadily increasing volume of enemy artillery, mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire hampered the advance. Strewn over the beaches and reaching about 100 yards inland were numerous land mines, many of them naval types whose “horns (lead covered bottles of acid) had not been maintained properly and practically all of these mines failed to detonate. Had these mines been effective the results would have been disastrous.”<sup>5</sup> For reasons unknown, many of the mines had been set on “safe,” a possible indication that the Japanese may have expected the landing on the eastern shore, where the mines were fully armed and fused.<sup>6</sup>

The Marines advanced inland beyond the beaches, maintaining their initial momentum despite increasing resistance and heavy losses. As a chaplain with

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert Leckie, *Helmet for My Pillow* (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 286, hereafter Leckie, *Helmet*, used with permission.

<sup>5</sup> LtCol William E. Benedict ltr to CMC, dtd 27Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Benedict ltr*. “The two types most frequently encountered were 50 kg. aerial bombs buried with the tail assembly down and a pressure detonating fuse extending some three inches above the ground, and the two-horn naval anti-invasion mine. Regarding the latter, it is of interest to note that a great majority were not armed.” *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part I to Anx C, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Fort ltr*.

the assault waves marvelled later, “how we got through the murderous mortar fire which the Japs were laying down on the reef we’ll never know. The bursts were everywhere and our men were being hit, left and right.”<sup>7</sup> Carefully sited Japanese high velocity weapons also wreaked havoc on the advancing tractors. A 47mm cannon hidden in a coral point jutting into the sea just north of White Beach 1 and antiboat guns located on the southwestern promontory and on a nearby small island kept up a devastating enflading fire upon the approaches to the beaches, as well as upon the beach flanks themselves.

As more and more LVTs were destroyed, and their burning hulls cluttered up the beaches, a shortage of these all-important vehicles was soon felt. The division’s action report gave the official number of LVTs destroyed that day as 26, but “unofficial estimates by assault unit commanders bring the total knocked out at least temporarily in excess of 60.”<sup>8</sup> This discrepancy in figures probably arose because of the observers’ inability to differentiate between the blazing LVTs and DUKWs, as well as the Marines’ great skill and ingenuity in repairing crippled LVTs and thus restoring them to usefulness.

Despite the heavy losses in amphibian tractors, subsequent waves continued to

---

<sup>7</sup> Chaplain Edgar E. Siskin ltr, reproduced in *Hebrew Union College Bulletin* (Apr45), pp. 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 37. Oddly enough, this was the same number that the Japanese claimed to have destroyed on D-Day. *Japanese CenPac Ops*, p. 84.

move shoreward. Landing simultaneously with the fourth wave were the division's tanks (M-4 Shermans). Because of their excellent waterproofing for the operation, they successfully negotiated the reef, where the worst of the underwater obstacles had been removed by UDTs, and continued toward land in six parallel columns led by their respective LVT guides. The enemy fire, however, proved so intense that over half of 30 tanks organic to the division suffered from one to four hits during the 10 minutes necessary to cross the reef. In the 1st Marines' zone, for example, only one of the assigned tanks escaped being hit during the trip ashore. Only three, however, were completely knocked out of action. "Thus within a half hour after the initial landing the infantry had full tank support—a record unsurpassed in any previous Marine landing in the Central Pacific, except for the Marshalls."<sup>9</sup>

#### TROUBLE ON THE LEFT<sup>10</sup>

Colonel Lewis B. Puller's 1st Marines came in over the White Beaches on schedule. Its 3d Battalion (3/1)<sup>11</sup> landed

<sup>9</sup> Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 404.

<sup>10</sup> Additional sources consulted for this section are: *1stMarHist*; 1/1 UHist, dtd 23Nov44, hereafter *1/1 UHist*; *3/1 Rec of Events*, 15Sep44; George P. Hunt, *Coral Comes High* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), hereafter Hunt, *Coral Comes High*.

<sup>11</sup> For ease of reference, this numerical abbreviation will be used throughout the volume. For example, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines will be referred to sometimes simply as 2/5. This designation should be understood to include the reinforcing troops that make a battalion a BLT.

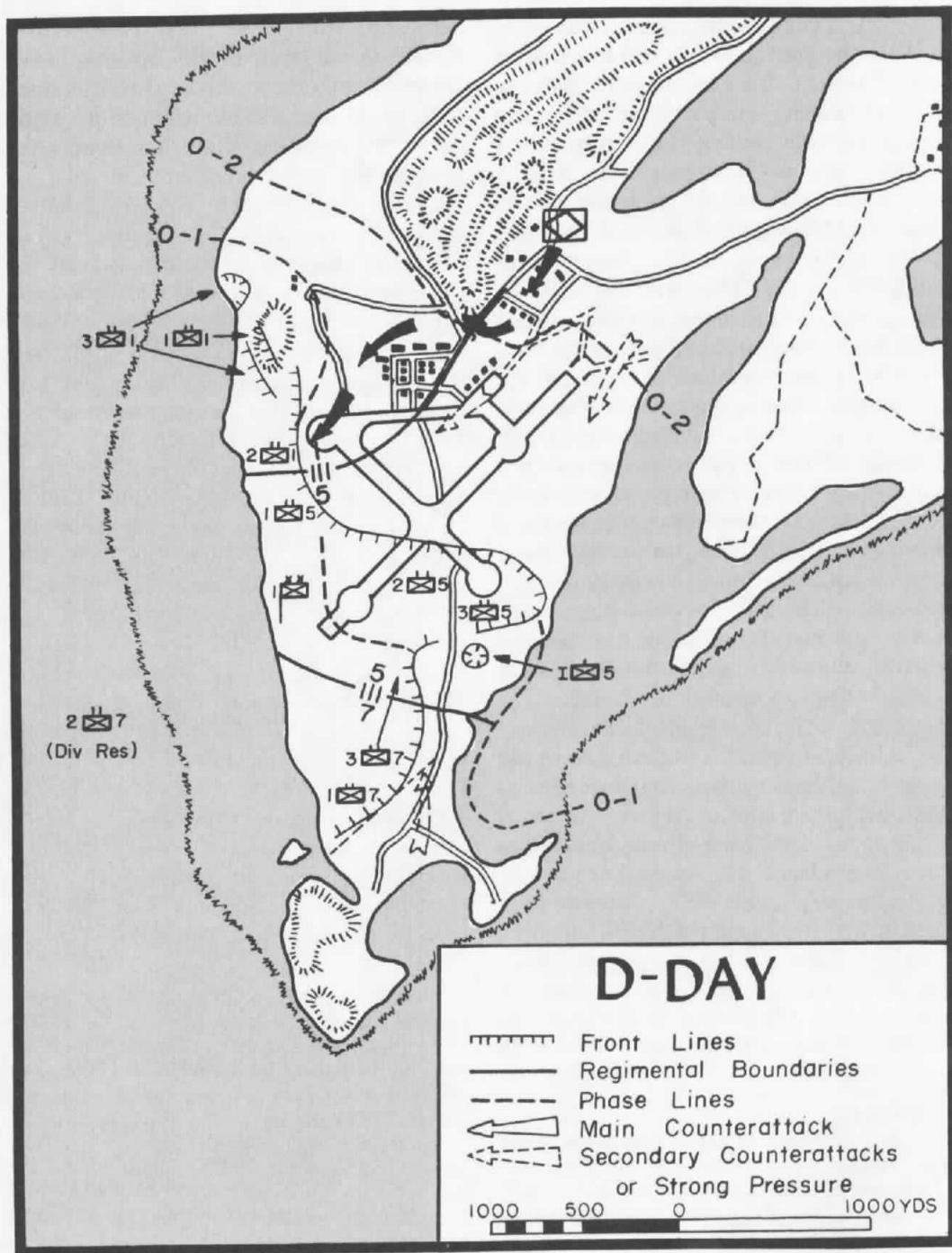
on White Beach 1, the 2d on White Beach 2, with the 1st landing over White Beach 1 at 0945 as regimental reserve. Colonel Puller rode in with the first troop wave and, as his LVT grounded:

... went up and over that side as fast as I could scramble and ran like hell at least twenty-five yards before I hit the beach, flat down... Every platoon leader was trying to form a line of his own, just as I was... That big promontory on my left hadn't been touched by the ship's guns and planes, and we got a whirlwind of machine gun and anti-tank fire.<sup>12</sup>

Landing with Companies K and I in assault, 3/1 (Lieutenant Colonel Stephen V. Sabol) ran into the most determined resistance, which, coupled with the severe enemy shelling and unexpected obstacles, hindered its progress toward phase line 0-1 (See Map 4). As the left assault unit, Company K was to act as the pivot when the regiment turned north. Its immediate objective was the Point—a jagged coral outcropping jutting into the sea and rising some 30 feet above the water's edge—from which Japanese gunners were placing a dangerous enfilading fire upon the division's flank. Company K, led by Captain George P. Hunt, was destined to execute a classic example of a small-unit attack on a fortified position.

The assault rifle platoons climbed out of their LVTs onto the white coral sand only to find themselves about 100 yards to the right of their assigned area. Company K immediately attacked inland, nevertheless, and initiated its turning movement northward with two platoons in assault. The 3d Platoon on the left

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Davis, *Marine!*, pp. 217-218.



E. L. Wilson

close to the shore fought its way to within 50 yards of The Point before its attack stalled. The 2d Platoon pushed straight ahead some 75 yards before stumbling into a tank trap and becoming pinned down by heavy fire coming from the northern end of a long coral ridge that loomed up some 30-40 feet to the right front of the startled Marines. The precipitous face of this obstacle, shown on none of the photographs or maps supplied to the 1st Marines, was honeycombed with caves and dug-in positions swarming with Japanese soldiers. By this time, the heavy fighting against stiff enemy resistance had reduced the effective strength of each of the assault platoons to approximately a squad, and contact between the two units had been severed.

Ignoring the gap between his assault units, Captain Hunt sent his reserve platoon forward to press the attack against the assigned objective, The Point.<sup>13</sup> Before this formidable stronghold could be seized, Company K would have to overcome five reinforced-concrete pillboxes, one of which housed a 47mm cannon, and the others, heavy machine guns. Each pillbox had from 6 to 12 occupants, while other Japanese infantrymen, some with light machine guns, had been placed in nearby dug-in positions and coral depressions to provide protective fire. All of these carefully prepared defenses were still intact at the time of the Marine as-

<sup>13</sup> "If any portion of my plan was to break down, the seizure of the Point must not. Should we fail to capture and hold the Point the entire regimental beach would be exposed to heavy fire from the flank." Hunt, *Coral Comes High*, p. 17.

sault, despite Colonel Puller's having insisted upon, and received, assurances from naval officers that this strategic area enfilading his flank would be properly blanketed with fire during the preliminary bombardment.<sup>14</sup>

Since The Point's fires were oriented primarily towards the landing beach area, the Marines decided to assault the bastion from the rear (east). Gathering up the remnants of the 3d Platoon, Second Lieutenant William A. Willis and his 1st Platoon began slugging their way toward the top of the objective in the face of concentrated enemy fire. After killing off its protecting infantrymen, the Marines approached each pillbox from its blind spot to blast the occupants with grenades. Finally, the attackers broke through the maze of infantry positions and pillboxes to storm the crest of The Point, but beneath them at the water's edge could be heard the roar of the 47mm cannon that had wreaked havoc among the Marines all morning.

Stealthily easing down toward the reinforced-concrete casemate from above, Lieutenant Willis managed to lob a smoke grenade right in front of the embrasure, temporarily blinding the gunners inside. Mere seconds later, another Marine fired a rifle grenade through the

<sup>14</sup> Davis, *Marine!*, p. 214. "At a conference on the flagship sometime prior to D-Day Col Puller requested that naval gunfire be put down on this point even though no enemy gun emplacements could be detected from photographs." Col Richard P. Ross, Jr., memo to DirMCHist, dtd 7Nov49. *3/1 Rec of Events*, 15Sep44, states that "The entire point and its defenses were untouched by naval gunfire; in fact, the entire length of Beach White One was only moderately damaged by our preparatory firings and bombings."

gun port. This bursting grenade probably ignited some stacked ammunition, for the whole interior almost immediately became seared with white-hot flames. When the fleeing Japanese, their clothes aflame and their cartridge belts exploding from the intense heat, dashed out, pre-positioned Marine riflemen cut them down.

By 1015, Company K had fulfilled its mission, killing a counted 110 enemy soldiers in the process. As a result, the enfilading fire from the left flank had been silenced, but the cost to the Marines had been high. Out of the two-platoon assault force, Captain Hunt could find only 32 survivors with whom to set up a hasty perimeter defense, for his other platoon was still pinned down in the antitank trap near the coral ridge. Hurriedly a captured Japanese machine gun was rushed into use, for this handful of men soon found themselves isolated on the extreme left flank of the division and the object of determined counterattacks by small enemy groups.

By this time, the 3d Battalion's 81mm mortar platoon, which had suffered 11 casualties and lost a base plate soon after landing, was working its way southward on the crowded beach, seeking room to set up firing positions. The early confusion of the landing was severely intensified by heavy enemy fire, for mortars and artillery continued to shell the shallow beachhead, while Japanese on the coral ridge some 70 yards inland swept the area with light and heavy machine gun and rifle fire. From time to time, the ammunition in a shattered, blazing tractor would explode, scattering burning debris over the beach and its scurrying occupants. To avoid

certain destruction, succeeding waves of amphibian vehicles merely dumped their contents in the midst of support platoons engaged in clearing out small pockets of enemy resistance and hurried back to the reef for another load.

Efforts of 3/1 to expand the beachhead area proved disappointing. Not only had a gap been opened between elements of Company K, but its contact with Company I, attacking on the right through swampy terrain near the 2d Battalion, had been severed. Within 15 minutes of The Point's seizure, Lieutenant Colonel Sabol ordered two platoons from his reserve (the recently landed Company L) to fill the gap between the two assault companies. Before these riflemen could complete the mission, they too were stopped by heavy fires from the southern portion of the same ridge that had kept the right assault platoon of Company K pinned down. Despite repeated attempts at both flanking and frontal assaults, the reserve group failed to dislodge the entrenched foe. Thus there was no resumption of the advance to establish contact. The battalion commander, meanwhile, had thrown in his last reserve platoon to plug the undesirable gap in Company K's lines between The Point and the long coral ridge.

While 3/1 attempted to remedy its frontline problems, the Japanese had become aware of this opening between Company K's assault platoon and had thrust massed troops into the area. When the reserve platoon arrived on the scene, these enemy soldiers aggressively resisted all attempts by the small Marine force to expel them. Since he had exhausted all the battalion's reserves,

Lieutenant Colonel Sabol requested regimental assistance to deal with this dangerous enemy-held salient in the Marine line.

The Marines of 1/1's Company A hurled themselves into the breach between The Point and the ridge, but superior and concentrated Japanese fire from the coral ridge to their right front caused the attack to bog down by inflicting severe casualties. For several hours, the Marines pressed determined attacks, including tank/infantry assaults, against both the enemy salient and the dug-in foe on the ridge. Finally, elements of Company A succeeded in storming the southern slopes of the ridge where some Marines secured a foothold and made contact with Company I on their right. Late in the afternoon, Company B of 1/1 passed through the depleted ranks of Company A to press the attack, but enemy fire from the ridge halted the advance for the day.

After commitment, the regiment's reserve battalion established contact between the assaulting rifle companies and narrowed the gap between The Point and the ridge, but the opening still was there and the danger to the division's left flank remained. Had the Japanese launched a major counterattack down the corridor between the ridge and the sea, they might have succeeded in penetrating to the beaches, which were cluttered with the men, gear, and supplies brought in by later waves. The effect upon the beachhead could have been disastrous; in fact, the possibility existed that the Marines might have been driven into the sea.

To counter this threat, Colonel Puller used the remainder of the regimental

reserve, as well as headquarters personnel and 100 men of the 1st Engineer Battalion, to form a secondary line of defense blocking the route down the corridor. The feared counterattack in force did not come, either because the Japanese failed to capitalize upon this tactical opportunity or because the Marines' fire support overwhelmed enemy attempts at massing the troops necessary to exploit the gap.

In contrast to the opposition encountered by 3/1, the 2d Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Russell E. Honsowetz) found relatively less resistance. Upon hitting White Beach 2, the assault companies of 2/1 spread out and drove inland, as a corporal later recorded in his diary:

I rushed forward with the others—dashing, dodging and jumping over logs and bushes. We must have moved in a hundred yards or so when we came to a swamp. . . . I fell flat on my face and pushed my nose deep into the moist jungle floor, waiting for more fire from the Japs; maybe I could spot them . . . started to wade into the swamp, the Nips again opened fire—burst after burst, and some did find the mark. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Advancing inland against resistance described as moderate, the Marines, making use of all their organic weapons and paced by surviving LVT(A)s, pushed on through the heavy woods and swamps, bypassing well-organized enemy strongholds or eliminating them with flamethrowers and demolitions, until they reached the 0-1 phase line—about 350 yards inland—by 0945. Here, in the wooded area facing the airfield, the battalion made a firm contact with

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 283.

elements of the 5th Marines, thus securing the right flank of the regiment, and held up, awaiting orders to proceed to the next phase line. The 2d Battalion remained here, however, until the following morning because of the precarious situation on the left.

### CENTRAL DRIVE TO THE AIRFIELD<sup>16</sup>

The 5th Marines, commanded by Colonel Harold D. Harris, landed in the center with two battalions abreast, the other as reserve following closely. As the left flank unit, the 1st Battalion came in over Orange Beach 1 with two rifle companies in assault, while the 3d Battalion landed in the same formation over Orange 2. The enemy had made extensive use of double-horned mines on both beaches. Altogether, there were three rows of them, laid in a checkerboard pattern and emplaced at about one-meter intervals. Rough weather prior to D-Day had deposited almost a foot of sand on these mines and substantially decreased their effectiveness. A number of LVTs and DUKWs were disabled by them, however, and became easy targets for the enemy artillery.

<sup>16</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: *5th Mar OpRpt*, 15Sep44; B-3 Jnl, 15Sep-16Oct44, hereafter *1/5 B-3 Jnl*, with appropriate date; *2/5 OpRpt*, 17Aug44-1Jan-45, n.d., hereafter *2/5 OpRpt*, with appropriate date; *3/5 Rpt of Opns*, 26Aug-7Nov44, n.d., hereafter *3/5 Rpt of Ops*, with appropriate date; *3/7 WarD*, 15Sep44; *2/11 SAR*, 24Aug-29Sep44, n.d., hereafter *2/11 SAR*; LtCol Robert W. Boyd, "1st Battalion, Fifth Marines, 1st Marine Division in the Palau Operation: A Summary of Offensive Action," (Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps Schools, Amphibious Warfare School, Senior Course 1948-1949), hereafter Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*.

Another period of rough weather soon after D-Day washed the sand from atop these mines and made their location and removal easier.<sup>17</sup>

The assault troops of 1/5 (Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Boyd) disembarked from their LVTs about 25 yards inland and began a rapid advance eastward through the coconut palms. Encountering only scattered Japanese riflemen and an occasional machine gun, the infantrymen pushed on until they reached the open area on the west edge of the airfield at 0900. Shortly after reaching the phase line 0-1, they tied in with Marine elements on both flanks.

Across the airfield lay phase line 0-2, but when orders did not come for the advance to continue, the battalion readied its riflemen and automatic weapons along a defensive line. Other Marines with grenade launchers and bazookas took up positions to provide cover both along the front and in depth; four 37mm antitank guns were placed in defilade in shell craters across the front; and machine guns were set up to serve as breakthrough guns in the event the Japanese counterattacked. When three tanks of Company B, 1st Tank Battalion, arrived, they were spaced out and placed in hull defilade among the bomb craters.

The caution exercised by the battalion during this phase of the operation derived from the preparatory phase. Shortly before the division left the Russell Islands, a careful study of aerial photographs had unearthed something

<sup>17</sup> BGen Harold D. Harris ltr to HistBr, dtd 12Jun66, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Harris ltr*.



that bore a very marked resemblance to tank tracks. A tank-supported counterattack debouching from the area north of the airfield seemed highly probable, since this area offered both cover and concealment. Based on this conclusion, the bulk of the anti-tank weapons and the limited number of tanks available to the 5th Marines were assigned to back up 1/5.<sup>18</sup>

By early afternoon, a battery of 2/11's 75mm pack howitzers was ashore and digging firing positions just to the right rear of 1/5. All of the artillery batteries' guns, ammunition, and equipment had to be manhandled to this position from the beach, since antitank obstacles prevented the use of LVTs. The mission of 2/11 was to support the attack of the 5th Marines, as well as to supply reinforcing fires in the zone of the 1st Marines. By 1510, the battalion's Fire Direction Center (FDC) was functioning and, 55 minutes later, the first artillery mission was fired at a Japanese gun emplacement. As these howitzers went into action, they replaced the LVT(A)s in providing supporting fire for infantry units.

Although 1/5 was to remain poised on phase line 0-1 because of the 1st Marines' failure to advance, the 5th Marines' 3d Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Austin C. Shofner) was to surge deep into the interior of Peleliu. It came in over Beach Orange 2 with Company I on the left, K on the right, and L in reserve. After the assault troops oriented themselves, they immediately cleared the beach and attacked directly east. Company I soon tied in with ele-

ments of 1/5 and gained the first objective, phase line 0-1, within an hour of landing.

Company K, meanwhile, had run into trouble. In fact, for at least 15 minutes after H-Hour, it was the right flank unit of the entire division landing. The LVTs carrying 3/7, scheduled to land on Beach Orange 3, encountered some serious underwater obstacles, which, coupled with the heavy enfilading fire from the right, caused the drivers to veer to the left. Accordingly, about half of 3/7's assault units actually landed on Beach Orange 2, where they became intermingled with 3/5's elements.<sup>19</sup>

No sooner had 3/5's Company K extricated itself from the predicament on the beach and begun its advance, than a heavy enemy mortar barrage on the southern part of Beach Orange 2 and just inland halted its forward progress. When the barrage lifted a half hour later, and after elements of 3/7 took up their positions on the right flank of Company K, the delayed movement toward phase line 0-1 began. Upon reaching the edge of the airfield, the attacking company ran into several mutually-supporting concrete and log pillboxes, which had to be reduced before the first objective could be reached. About 1000, however, the company tied in with Company I on the first phase line.

When the push to the east was resumed some 30 minutes later, Company K retained contact with the advancing

<sup>18</sup> *Harris ltr.*

<sup>19</sup> "It was noted in this connection that having the third battalions of two regiments as adjacent units added to the difficulty of reorganization on the beach since there were two 'I' Companies, two 'K' Companies, and two 'L' Companies involved." *3/7 WarD*, 15Sep44.

elements of 3/7 on the right flank, but quickly lost touch with Company I on the left, for this unit had the responsibility of remaining tied in with 1/5. As Company K continued to push through the scrub forest, the commanding officer had trouble maintaining contact between his platoons. Not only did the thick undergrowth limit visibility to a few feet, but enemy snipers kept up a heavy harassing fire. Company L, which had been sent up to plug the gap between Companies I and K, found the going much easier through the light underbrush in its zone. Shortly after noon, the two assaulting companies were stalled by a series of mutually supporting pillboxes and trenches manned by Japanese with automatic weapons. Only after a platoon of tanks could be brought up was this obstruction reduced, but by this time, contact between Company K and elements of 3/7 on the right had been severed.

The 2d Battalion (regimental reserve), meanwhile, had finished landing over Beach Orange 2 by 1015. Quickly clearing the beach, 2/5 pushed on to the front, where it relieved Company I. This unit then passed around the rear of Company L and assumed a position between the other assaulting companies of 3/5, thereby reducing Company K's frontage. Following its relief of Company I, the 2d Battalion launched a vigorous drive eastward. Later that afternoon, 2/5 shifted the direction of its attack northward. Upon the completion of this turning movement, during which time the battalion's left flank was kept anchored to 1/5's static defensive positions, the assault elements of the 2d Battalion were deployed around the en-

tire southern edge of the airfield. On the battalion's right and still retaining contact was Company L of 3/5, which was attacking straight across the island in coordination with the other rifle companies of 3/5.

After the reduction of the nest of pillboxes that had pinned 3/5 down, the battalion's advance resumed. Control of that afternoon's attack, however, proved extremely difficult and, even today, what actually happened is not completely known. In advancing through the thick scrub jungle that was devoid of any easily recognizable landmark, the riflemen were guided by maps that only sketchily portrayed the terrain. Difficulties in maintaining direction, control, and contact were compounded by steady enemy resistance. Flank elements had to take but a few extra steps to the side and contact became lost with neighboring units. The battalion's control problem was further complicated because of the earlier loss of the LVT carrying practically all of the wire and equipment of 3/5's communication platoon. Although most of these Marines managed to wade ashore and join the battalion early in the afternoon, they had been able to salvage for future use little of the vital equipment.

During the delay caused by the Japanese pillboxes, 3/5 had lost contact on its right flank with elements of 3/7. Shortly after resuming the advance, Lieutenant Colonel Shofner received a radio message from 3/7's command post (CP) stating that its left flank unit was on a north-south trail about 200 yards ahead of 3/5's right flank element. Shofner ordered Companies I and K to push rapidly forward. The left

flank unit of 3/7, meanwhile, was to hold up waiting for Company K to come abreast. The two 5th Marines companies pressed on across the island, almost reaching the eastern beaches, but never did contact any of 3/7's elements. About 1500, another radio message from 3/7's CP informed Shofner that the position of 3/7's left flank unit had been given incorrectly. Actually, at the time Company K began its push inland, 3/7's left flank was some 200 yards in the rear of that 5th Marines company. The attack of Company K, while 3/7's left flank elements held up, served to widen the existing gap.

When the true location of 3/7's left flank became known, Shofner ordered Company K to bend its right flank back in an effort to tie in with the adjoining regiment. Because its rifle platoons were already committed, the company had to press headquarters personnel into service in order to extend the line far enough, but even then the flanking 3/7's elements were not sighted by dark. During this late afternoon attack, moreover, Shofner's unit was experiencing trouble in retaining contact between its rifle companies. Only 3/5's left flank unit, Company L, managed to press its advance eastward, all the while remaining tied in with elements of 2/5 on the left. Company L was to have the distinction of being the only Marine unit to cut completely across the island and reach the opposite beach on D-Day.

All cohesion as a battalion ceased about 1700 when 3/5's CP was struck by a well-placed enemy mortar barrage which wounded the battalion commander. Following Shofner's evacuation, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis W. Walt,

executive officer of the 5th Marines, assumed command, only to be faced with the problem of regaining control over the scattered units. Setting out on a personal reconnaissance, Walt first located Company L, one platoon of which was still tied in with 2/5 on the airfield while the other two were preparing a perimeter defense for the night some 100 yards farther south in the jungle. After ordering the two isolated platoons back to the airfield to set up a linear defense in conjunction with 2/5, the battalion commander next discovered the long-lost left flank of 3/7, which was already digging in for the night on the edge of the airfield some 400 yards in from the beach.

Not until 2100, however, did Walt and his runner find Company I, and then only after a difficult passage through the jungle in the dark. The Marines, isolated from all other friendly troops and in a perimeter defense, were some 200 yards south of the airfield and about 300 yards short of the eastern shore. Walt dispatched the company toward the airfield with orders to tie in on the right flank of Company L. Some 100 yards farther southwest from Company I, the battalion commander located the last of his units, Company K. It was sent back to the airfield to tie in between Company I and the left flank company of 3/7, thereby finishing the forming of a defensive line along the edge of the airfield.

The new line was never fully completed, however, for Company I failed to locate its assigned position on the edge of the airfield due to the darkness. The unit finally deployed in the woods in front of the gap in the 5th Marines'

lines, thereby minimizing the danger. That night, as the commanding officer admitted. "No Japanese counterattack as such hit our lines, which was, of course, fortunate."<sup>20</sup>

### *PROGRESS TO THE SOUTH*<sup>21</sup>

The 7th Marines, commanded by Colonel Herman H. Hanneken, landed over Beach Orange 3 in column of battalions. The 3d Battalion (Major E. Hunter Hurst) landed at H-Hour, with the 1st following immediately, while the 2d was to remain afloat as division reserve. To carry out their mission more efficiently, the two assaulting battalions made use of an unusual command structure:

During the landing and initial operations ashore, Company A was attached to 3/7; to revert to control of CO 1/7 upon his landing. Company A had the mission of advancing south in the left half of 1/7 zone of action. This maneuver was to provide initial flank protection for 3/7 as it was advancing eastward. The support company of 3/7 was attached to CO 1/7 for the landing and reverted to CO 3/7 upon landing.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Maj John A. Crown ltr to CMC, dtd 13 Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Crown ltr*.

<sup>21</sup> Additional sources consulted for this section are: 7th Mar R-2 Jnl, 15Sep-17Oct44, n.d., hereafter *7th Mar R-2 Jnl*, with appropriate date; 1/7 Combined Bn 2-3 Jnls, 15 Sep-17Oct44, n.d., hereafter *1/7 Bn 2-3 Jnls*, with appropriate date; 1/7 HistRpt, 15Sep-30Oct44, n.d., hereafter *1/7 HistRpt*, with appropriate date; 2/7 WarD, 25Aug-26Oct44, n.d., hereafter *2/7 WarD*, with appropriate date; 3/7 WarD, 24Aug-30Oct44, dtd 18Nov 44, hereafter *3/7 WarD*, with appropriate date; *3/5 Rpt of Ops*, 15Sep44.

<sup>22</sup> LtCol John J. Gormley ltr to CMC, dtd 3Nov49, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Gormley ltr I*. "It is believed that the decision

Exposed as it was on the extreme right flank, the 7th Marines was subjected to heavy antiboat, mortar, and machine gun fire from Japanese weapons sited on the southwest promontory and the small unnamed islet nearby,<sup>23</sup> as well as to the artillery and mortar fire that was falling along the entire landing front. Both "natural and man-made obstacles on the reef necessitated [an] approach to the beach in column rather than normal wave formation"<sup>24</sup> and, as explained earlier, approximately half of the lead battalion landed to the left of its assigned beach in 3/5's landing area.

Despite the resultant confusion and dispersion, 3/7 quickly reunited and attacked inland with Company I on the left and K on the right. Fortunately, the battalion had encountered fewer than 30 live Japanese still on the beach, and these were so dazed from the preparatory fires that they were disposed of quickly by the assault troops as they pushed inland. Although mines, barbed

---

made during the planning phase to have LT [Landing Team] 1/7 and LT 3/7 swap a company was a wise one and that much time was saved during the early part of the attack since LT 1/7, landing in column behind LT 3/7, did not have to pass through the beachhead line of another unit." *3/7 WarD*, 15Sep44.

<sup>23</sup> "While the Naval Gunfire Support plan was under discussion, I strongly urged heavy caliber fire on the unnamed island just south of Orange 3, both in the prelanding and assault phases. This island was a 'natural' for enflading the reef and Orange Beaches. During the ship-to-shore move I did not see a single indication of friendly fire on this target." *Harris ltr*.

<sup>24</sup> LtCol John J. Gormley ltr to CMC, dtd 27Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter cited as *Gormley ltr II*.

wire entanglements, and spotty resistance from enemy soldiers in mutually supporting pillboxes and trenches hindered the advance, the Marines obtained unexpected help from one enemy obstacle, a large antitank trench just inland of Beach Orange 3. Spotted early that morning by an air observer, its existence was radioed to the staff of 3/7 just prior to landing. According to Major Hurst, the trench simplified the reorganization problem:

Once officers were able to orient themselves, it (the antitank ditch) proved an excellent artery for moving troops into the proper position for deployment and advance inland since it crossed the entire width of our zone of action approximately parallel to the beach. With respect to the battalion CP, I am convinced that it enabled us to join the two principal echelons of CP personnel and commence functioning as a complete unit at least an hour earlier than would otherwise have been possible.<sup>25</sup>

By 0925, 3/7 had seized its beachhead at a cost of 40 Marine casualties and, with two companies in assault, the battalion was moving rapidly inland against resistance described as moderate. In little over an hour, the front had advanced some 500 yards farther east into the island's interior, and Company K reported the capture of an enemy radio direction tower. Early in the afternoon, however, Company I came up against a well organized defense "built around a large blockhouse, the concrete ruins of a barracks area, several pillboxes, concrete gun emplacements and mutually supporting gun positions."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> LtCol E. Hunter Hurst ltr to DirMCHist, dtd 23Nov49, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Hurst ltr. I*.

<sup>26</sup> 3/7 *WarD*, 15Sep44.

To prevent needless casualties, the Marines were halted pending the arrival of the landing team's tanks which had been briefed for this particular mission.

As the Shermans moved up, making a wide sweep around the antitank trench, they chanced upon some Marines working their way along the southern fringe of the airfield. When the troops identified themselves as being of Company I, the tank commander attached his Shermans to this group of Marines and operated with them for some time before discovering that they were from 3/5's Company I instead of 3/7's Company I. All this time, of course, Hurst's battalion had been held up, awaiting the arrival of the tanks. Accordingly, 3/7's "time schedule, which had worked perfectly up to that point," explained the commanding officer, "was thrown completely off by the delay entailed, and I believe that to be principally responsible for our not reaching the east beach on the first day."<sup>27</sup>

While waiting for the Shermans to arrive and reduce the obstructions to its advance, Company I of 3/7 lost all contact with 3/5's Company K on the left flank. Accordingly, Major Hurst placed Company L, which had landed with 1/7, in a reserve position behind Company I and echeloned it toward the left rear to safeguard that flank and to allow the attack to continue. Patrols from Company L were dispatched to

<sup>27</sup> *Hurst ltr I*. "Incidentally, this incident is one of many which reflect on the lack of training prior to Peleliu. With adequate tank-infantry training behind us, the tank personnel would have known to which I Co they had attached themselves." *Ibid*.

the north in search of the adjoining regiment's right flank unit, but the foremost patrol emerged upon the airfields hundreds of yards in the rear of the unit it was attempting to locate.

The 1st Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel John J. Gormley), meanwhile, had landed but suffered from the same anti-boat fire and underwater obstacles that had scattered the lead battalion. As a result, some of 1/7's men ended up on Orange 2. Once ashore, the 1st quickly regrouped and began clearing the beach. Its zone of action was on the extreme right of the division landing, that portion of the beach which Company A of 1/7 had seized earlier when landing attached to 3/7. This company, after rejoining its parent unit, attacked directly east on the left, while Company C advanced southward on the right, and Company B remained in reserve. Until about noon, the resistance to the battalion's advance was described as light, although heavy mortar fire was received.

Immediately after moving off the beach, the Marines ran into a thick mangrove swamp which extended across a large portion of 1/7's front. When Marines of Company C tried to make their way along the only path skirting the western (right) edge of the watery obstacle, they received heavy machine gun and rifle fire from Japanese entrenched in pillboxes constructed out of large pieces of coral. As a result, their progress was seriously hindered. Company A, on the other hand, had worked its way around the eastern fringe of the swamp only to find itself some 250 yards within 3/7's zone of action. Lieutenant Colonel Gormley or-

dered the reserve company up to tie in between the assaulting companies, as the heavy fighting which had begun about noon continued.

Since the 7th Marines had failed to keep on schedule, all of its elements pushed on as rapidly as possible in the gathering dusk. Not until 1715 did the frontline units receive orders to dig in for the night. No sooner did the Marines attempt to tie in their lines, than the enemy began executing a forward movement by means of light machine gun teams operating in mutual support. Lateral movement along the front became difficult and the Marines were forced to organize only hasty defensive positions.

Although several localized counterattacks were launched against the 7th Marines' lines during the hours of darkness, only one posed any real danger. Company C was hit at approximately 0200, when a strong Japanese force swarmed out of the swamp and attacked the Marines' night defenses. Some enemy troops even succeeded in penetrating the forward positions, whereupon a number of beach party personnel were pressed into service as a mobile reserve. During the four hours of fighting, the Marines inflicted some 50 casualties upon the attackers before the Japanese broke off the action.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> *Gormley ltr I*. "It is my recollection that the Reconnaissance Co. was deployed just behind 1/7 on the night of D Day. . . . During the night a runner supposedly from 1/7 CP contacted men with orders to move forward and plug up the lines which were being breached by the enemy. . . . The Second Platoon then moved forward under fire and took its place in a gap about 40 yards . . . [and]

### JAPANESE COUNTERATTACKS<sup>29</sup>

It was not until late afternoon of D-Day that the Japanese, whose failure to seize tactical advantage from the fluid situation was puzzling, made their major bid to drive the invaders into the sea, but by then it was too late. The Marines had already established a beachhead and had made preparations to frustrate any bold attempt by the enemy to smash through to the vital supply dumps and unloading areas.

First warning of the Japanese intentions came about 1625, when particularly heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire began falling on Marine positions. Then, at 1650, Japanese infantry in estimated company-strength appeared on the northern edge of the airfield and began advancing across it. To Marines hoping for a massive *banzai* charge to facilitate their task of wiping out enemy resistance, the cool professional way in which these enemy soldiers negotiated the open area, taking maximum advantage of every dip and shell hole in the terrain over which they passed, was disappointing.

A large number of Japanese tanks, meanwhile, was forming up behind the protective shield of the ridges to the north of the airfield. They debouched in two columns upon the open terrain about 600 yards to the left front of 1/5 in full view of the Marines. After

skirting the northern fringe where the jungle growth gave some scant cover, the enemy tanks swung out "in what can best be described as two echelon formation [and] headed for the center of the 1st Battalion. About half of the enemy tanks had from eight to a dozen Japanese soldiers riding (tied) on the outside of the tanks."<sup>30</sup>

These light tanks, really tankettes by American standards,<sup>31</sup> soon came abreast the infantry advancing in dispersed formation across the open airfield and quickly left them far behind. The Japanese tank commander employed his only sound tactic, which was racing straight ahead at full throttle for the Marine lines. If the tank officers had attempted to coordinate their attack with the slower moving infantry, not one of the enemy tanks would have gained the Marine lines, for many of the organic weapons of a rifle battalion could have knocked them out.

Fortunately for the Marines, the place where this tank/infantry attack was aimed, the junction between the 1st and 5th Marines in the woods southwest of the airfield, was held by the units best organized to withstand a determined thrust of this type. Colonel Harris, knowing that the forward elements of his 5th Marines would end up facing the level terrain where conditions were ideal for tank maneuvers, had ordered

---

accounted for at least 30 of the enemy killed during the night." 1stLt Robert L. Powell, Jr., ltr to CMC, n.d., in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Powell ltr*.

<sup>29</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: *5th Mar OpRpt*, 15Sep44; *1/5 B-3 Jnl*, 15Sep44; *2/5 OpRpt*; *3/5 Rpt of Ops*, 15Sep 44; *2/11 SAR*; Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*.

<sup>30</sup> Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> The Marine tank commander on Peleliu described the Japanese light tanks as merely "light reconnaissance vehicles" possessing "only ¼" to ⅜" armor," and stated that these "tankettes were not worthy of the name tank and were doomed to certain destruction in any heavy action." *Stuart ltr*.

that heavy machine guns and 37mm antitank guns be unloaded with the assault troops and set up on phase line 0-1 as soon as this initial objective was seized. It was for this reason that Lieutenant Colonel Boyd had placed the three Shermans attached to his 1st Battalion in hull defilade when further advance did not seem likely. Although the Americans had exact intelligence as to the number of enemy tanks and expected some form of violent reaction from the Japanese during the day, the sudden appearance of the tanks on the airfield and the speed of their charge towards the Marine lines caused some surprise.

The course of the enemy tank attack ran diagonally across the front of 2/1, whose men opened up with every weapon they had. Two of the tanks suddenly veered right and crashed into the battalion's lines. Some 50 yards inside, the tanks hurled over an embankment and landed in a bog. When the Japanese attempted to escape their mired vehicles, nearby infantrymen quickly dispatched them.

Although all except one of 2/1's attached Shermans had returned to the beach to rearm, they only had to move some 50 yards to gain a clear field of fire and to engage the enemy tanks.<sup>32</sup> Once the Marines opened fire, the dust became so dense that sighting by the Shermans was possible only between the dust clouds, which slowed down their rate of fire. The first few rounds had been armor-piercing, but these shells,

to the Marines' dismay, passed completely through the thin hulls of the Japanese light tanks to detonate harmlessly on the ground. After the gunners switched to high explosive ammunition, however, the effect of the Shermans' fire was devastating.

Other Marine tanks working through the woods on the southern side of the airfield with advance elements of 2/5, meanwhile, spotted the enemy armor early and "moved out on the airstrip and were shooting as soon as the first Jap tank touched the other side of the airport."<sup>33</sup> The part that these Shermans played in the following action was witnessed by Lieutenant Colonel Walt from an advantageous position just right of the 1/5 lines:

. . . four Sherman tanks came onto the field in the 2/5 zone of action on the south end of the airfield and opened fire immediately on the enemy tanks. These four tanks played an important role in stopping the enemy tanks and also stopping the supporting infantry, the majority of which started beating a hasty retreat when these Shermans came charging down from the south. They fought a running battle and ended up in the midst of the enemy tanks.<sup>34</sup>

Men of 1/5, meanwhile, opened up with their 37mm's and heavy machine guns, while their immobile Shermans added cannon fire. Just inside the battalion's front lines were set up the only artillery pieces ready to function at this time. Battery E of 2/11 began firing

<sup>32</sup> Capt Robert E. Brant ltr to CMC, dtd 9Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Brant ltr*. ". . . the tank commanders were adjusting fires from their turrets just as if they were on a gunnery range." *Ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> Maj Jack R. Munday ltr to CMC, dtd 13Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Munday ltr*.

<sup>34</sup> LtCol Lewis W. Walt ltr to CMC, dtd 25Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Walt ltr*.



at maximum rate as soon as the Japanese tanks appeared on the airfield. Once the enemy vehicles came within range, Marines employing bazookas and grenade launchers took them under fire. Overhead, a Navy dive bomber swooped down to plant a 500-pound bomb right in the midst of the onrushing enemy tanks, adding air power's destructive capability to the holocaust already engulfing the counterattack from every available Marine weapon in range.

Under the weight of this combined fire, the tank-infantry charge quickly began melting away. Some of the tanks exploded, spreading flaming fragments far and wide, while the hitchhiking soldiers just seemed to disintegrate. Not all of the Japanese tanks were knocked out, however, and these survivors smashed into the front lines of 1/5. Penetrating far to the rear past startled Marines, these tanks created confusion and dismay among the beachhead defenders.

As the commanding officer of 1/5 described the scene, these tanks "were running around wildly, apparently without coordination, within our lines firing their 37mm guns with the riders on those tanks carrying external passengers yelling and firing rifles."<sup>35</sup> One Japanese vehicle headed straight for the firing howitzers in an attempt to overrun them. A Battery E gunner hit the tank with the first round of direct fire, stopping it in its tracks, and a bazooka team finished the job. Another tank nearly reached the beach before firepower from rear area troops knocked it out. Marines in frontline positions,

however, did not panic. Once the enemy vehicles passed them, they remained in place, ready to engage the following Japanese infantrymen.

When the smoke of battle cleared, no enemy riflemen were in sight. They had either been destroyed by the overwhelming firepower brought to bear upon them or preferred to retreat in the face of it. Two Marines were found crushed to death by enemy tanks and a few other men had been wounded by flying fragments of exploding tanks. One Sherman had even suffered three hits by bazookas, indicative of the confusion caused by the counterattack. The commanding officer of the 1st Tank Battalion, however, thought that the swift collapse of the tank-infantry counterattack was "no grounds for smugness in regard to our antitank prowess. Had the Japanese possessed modern tanks instead of tankettes and had they attacked in greater numbers the situation would have been critical."<sup>36</sup>

What actually happened during those few brief minutes of furious combat has remained cloudy and unclarified down to the present. For example, if all the claims of individual Marines were accepted, the total of Japanese tanks destroyed that day would be several times higher than what the enemy garrison had on Peleliu. Even the number of tanks engaged in the charge is in doubt, and those destroyed were so fragmentized and riddled by marks of various Marine weapons that no accurate count could be made or credit definitely granted to the weapon responsible for

---

<sup>35</sup> Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*, p. 16.

---

<sup>36</sup> *Stuart ltr.*



*AFTERMATH of enemy tank attack on Peleliu airfield. (USMC 95921)*



*.30 CALIBER MACHINE GUN in action on Peleliu. (USMC 95248)*

the vehicle's demise. Apparently, two of the Japanese light tanks escaped, leaving 11 as the number destroyed.<sup>37</sup>

Although foiled in their major attempt to annihilate the invaders, the Japanese did not lose heart. During the rest of the day and night, they pressed against the Marine lines, attempted to infiltrate these positions, and launched numerous localized counterattacks. The next major threat came about 1750, when two Japanese light tanks, this time coordinating their movement with supporting infantry, started across the northern runway, aimed as before at the junction between the 1st and 5th Marines. The heavier weapons of the Marine division quickly dispatched the two tanks, while the approaching soldiers were cut down or scattered well forward of the front lines by the hurricane of automatic fire unleashed by nearby units. About a half hour later, the enemy engaged the Marines at the junction of 1/5 and 2/5 in a fire fight which soon faded out. The next morning in a pre-dawn attack, two more Japanese light tanks accompanied by a group of soldiers attempted an attack upon 1/5's lines, but without any success.

Throughout the hours of darkness, the use of star shells and 60mm mortar illuminating ammunition precluded any surprise movements by the Japanese, while those artillery pieces already ashore kept up harassing fires to prevent regrouping of the enemy's forces. Probably because of this, no major counterattack developed on the extreme left flank of the division to exploit the

precarious situation there. The small band of Marines isolated on the Point, however, was reduced through attrition by numerous small, but determined, enemy thrusts until only 18 men, relying on a single captured machine gun, remained to resist a counterattack.

Farther south, Marine units were subjected to infiltration tactics and minor counterattacks by a determined foe throughout the night, but 2/1 and 1/5 were tied in on phase line 0-1. Except for the difficulties of 3/5 and the two assault battalions of the 7th Marines in locating each other and establishing contact, the situation appeared to be in good shape. Before halting for the night, 2/5 had surged half way across the open airfield to make the biggest gain of any Marine battalion for the day. The advance in the southern portion of the island, although nowhere near the optimistic goals set by the division commander, had opened up much-needed space for the emplacing of artillery and the locating of inland supply dumps to relieve some of the beach congestion.

### SUPPORT OPERATIONS<sup>38</sup>

While assault Marines aggressively expanded the shallow beachhead, other

<sup>37</sup> *5th Mar OpRpt*, 15Sep44; *1/5 B-3 Jnl*, 15Sep44; *Walt ltr*.

<sup>38</sup> Additional sources consulted for this section are: *2d MAW UHist*; *MAG-11 UHist*; *MAG-11 Palau Rpt*; 11th Mar OpRpt, dtd 10Nov44, hereafter *11th Mar OpRpt*; *5th Mar OpRpt*; 5th Mar Rpt on Sup and Evac, n.d., hereafter *5th Mar Sup-Evac-Rpt*; QM, 5th Mar Rpt on Sup, PeleliuOp, dtd 4/Oct44, hereafter *5th Mar SupRpt*; *3/5 Rpt of Ops*; 8th Amphibian TractorBn, IIIAC, OpRpt, dtd 30Oct 44, hereafter *8th Amphibian TractorBn OpRpt*; LtCol W. A. Bean, Canadian Army, Observer's Report—Palau, dtd 31Oct44, hereafter Bean, *Observer's Rpt—Palau*.

members of the task force labored strenuously to organize the beach area and to maintain a steady stream of vital supplies moving shoreward and inland. On the whole, this essential job was performed well, despite the enemy's heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire upon the beaches. Although the shore party suffered twice the number of casualties on Peleliu than had been the case in any previous 1st Marine Division operation, such losses "did not affect the constant unloading of supplies."<sup>39</sup>

The decision to create a waterborne supply dump by means of floating barges proved to be "an excellent solution to an extremely important problem . . . and enabled the force ashore to get along on a minimum margin of supply and also avoided congesting the beach with large quantities of supplies before it was prepared for their reception."<sup>40</sup> Another example of good foresight was the use of large numbers of amphibian trailers, which succeeded in staving "off a threatened shortage of artillery and machine gun ammunition until unloading could be resumed at dawn on Dog plus One."<sup>41</sup>

The unloading of mechanized equipment proceeded on schedule so that by late afternoon, most of the cranes and bulldozers were in operation. Some of the shore party's labor forces, however, did not arrive at their assigned locations until the morning after D-Day owing to the lack of LVTs and DUKWs to

transport them. The intense enemy fire took its toll of the advancing amphibian waves and "resulted in a continuous shortage of amphibious vehicles into which to transfer boat waves, and these waves hit the beach further and further behind schedule."<sup>42</sup>

This unfortunate situation was intensified by the fact that damaged LVTs were being dispatched to a repair ship which was already loaded to capacity with other amphibians in need of repair, thereby forcing these LVTs to mill about until they could be taken aboard. "Unnecessary wear and tear on damaged tractors resulted. In addition, as many as four (4) LVTs were towing other LVTs, thereby taking out of service from the beach badly needed tractors."<sup>43</sup> When it was discovered that it was possible to bring LCVPs over the reef to the beach at high tide, the situation was alleviated somewhat.

Participating actively in the logistic effort were the forward ground echelons of MAG-11's squadrons. Previously organized working parties operated small boat platoons for the unloading of equipment and evacuating of the wounded, while other Marines served as stretcher bearers, ammunition carriers, and even riflemen and grenade throwers on the front lines. Moreover, some 50 men from VMF(N)-541 landed in a group and manned a second line of defense against Japanese infiltration of the 7th Marines' mortar positions.

<sup>39</sup> *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part I to Anx C, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Bean, *Observer's Rpt—Palau*, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part I to Anx C, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Bean, *Observer's Rpt—Palau*, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> *8th Amphibian TractorBn, OpRpt*. "In one case, an LVT with a damaged hull came alongside the repair ship, and not being able to get aboard, sank alongside." *Ibid*.

Ashore, the assault forces were encountering and solving their own logistic headaches. The trials of the 5th Marines, in particular, revealed that complications arise even in the best laid plans. By afternoon, the heavy fighting experienced by 3/5 during its advance across the island had resulted in a critical supply shortage, for almost all the assault companies' rifle and machine gun ammunition had been expended. Replacement of these essential items to the assaulting battalion, however, was hampered seriously by the LVT shortage and the heavy enemy shelling. Japanese observers kept the entire regimental beach under strict surveillance and continually called down artillery and mortar fire whenever amphibian vehicles reached the shore. Even the 5th Marines' assigned amphibian trailers, which were being employed at Peleliu specifically to provide timely replacement of high expenditure-rate ammunition, did not help to alleviate the shortage. These trailers were not received by the regiment until after the initial supply problem had been solved, and even then, all except two were delivered in damaged condition.

Complicating the whole supply situation for the 5th Marines was the early loss of its assigned beach party commander. This naval officer had been wounded almost immediately upon arrival ashore, and his successor fell to a sniper bullet soon after. As a result, the regimental quartermaster was forced to step in and assume this additional responsibility, an unwanted command of which he was not relieved until late in the afternoon. Just one of the many

problems connected with this new task was the mounting number of casualties. Because of the shortage of amphibian vehicles, a speedy evacuation of the wounded was impossible, and the first aid stations on the beaches soon reached the overflowing stage. Too late, the Marine commander learned that the beach party had not marked the regimental beach properly, and when the evacuation LVTs finally arrived, they encountered difficulties in locating their assigned landing points.

The need on the front lines for water, rations, and ammunition, meanwhile, was so great that every available vehicle of the 5th Marines was kept busy hauling these critical items up to the embattled infantrymen. Accordingly, the work of clearing the rest of the regiment's equipment off the beach was hindered, and the unloading areas steadily became further congested. Despite these handicaps, however, the Marines of the 5th managed to surmount these logistic stumbling blocks by one means or another, and the regiment's drive across the enemy-infested island pressed on.

Like the other assault units of the division, the 5th Marines quickly discovered that the water supply contained in the 55-gallon drums, while drinkable, was extremely unpalatable. The oil drums had been improperly steam-scoured and, as a result, the water in them became fouled. Marines also found that those drums which had not been filled flush with the top had rusted in the tropical heat, polluting the water.

At any rate, the lack of a readily available water supply on the coral

island was "one of the most critical items in this operation."<sup>44</sup> One tank officer jotted down in his notebook that the infantrymen in the front lines on D-Day were begging for water "like dying men."<sup>45</sup> The enervating heat of Peleliu, when coupled with the island's lack of surface water, caused numerous cases of heat prostration among the attacking troops. Although these men bounced back to full combat effectiveness after a few days aboard ship where water was plentiful, their much-needed presence during the critical assault phase was lost.<sup>46</sup>

By nightfall, most of the 11th Marines' artillery was ashore and its batteries had completed registration firing,<sup>47</sup> but not before encountering various complications. Some artillery units, finding their assigned firing positions still in enemy hands, had to search for new sites on the crowded beachhead; others, discovering their designated landing beaches too congested and the enemy fire too intense, had to divert

<sup>44</sup> *Worden ltr.* "Lack of water during the first three days ashore caused scores of men in my battalion (1/7) to become real casualties—unfit to fight, unable to continue . . . as many casualties as enemy fire." *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Munday ltr.*

<sup>46</sup> Fortunately, this water situation was alleviated somewhat when potable water was discovered by digging shallow holes in the sand near the shore, and the problem vanished completely once the engineers got their distillation units operating on the island.

<sup>47</sup> "By 1800 the artillery had one and a half Bns [Battalions] of 75mm pack howitzers and one and a third Bns of 105mm howitzers in position, registered and ready to furnish supporting fires." *1st MarDiv D-3 Periodic Rpt*, 15Sep44.

their Marines and equipment to areas more appropriate for getting ashore and setting up to engage the Japanese. Two 105mm howitzer batteries of 3/11 were actually ashore, but still aboard their DUKWs, when ordered back to the LSTs for the night. During the return trip to the ships across the jagged coral reef, the already damaged hulls of three of the DUKWs were further holed, causing them to sink with the loss of all howitzers and equipment aboard. The surviving 105mm's were landed again early the following morning, as was the corps artillery, which had been prevented from landing on D-Day because of the shallow width of the beachhead.

#### *TWENTY-FOUR HOUR TOE HOLD*<sup>48</sup>

Although General Rupertus remained on board ship during D-Day, his assistant, Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, went ashore with a skeleton staff as soon as confirmation came that the assault battalions of the 5th Marines held a firm foothold on the beach. Smith arrived on Peleliu about 1130 and set up an advance command post in an antitank ditch a short distance inland from Beach Orange 2. Almost immediately, he made contact with the CPs of the 5th and 7th Marines, as well as with the command ship, but even attempts by radio failed to bring a response from Puller's regiment.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: *1stMarHist*; *11th Mar OpRpt*; *7th Mar R-2 Jnl*, 15Sep44; *2/7 WarD*, 15Sep44.

<sup>49</sup> To facilitate communications ashore, the division had been allotted an experimental LVT(A) that had been extensively modified as a mobile radio station. "This vehicle, while not

Earlier, the 1st Marines had suffered the loss of many skilled radio operators and much communications equipment when enemy fire had scored direct hits upon the five LVTs carrying the regimental headquarters ashore. To make matters worse, the CP was no sooner set up ashore when it was hit by a mortar shell that caused further damage and disorganization. Accordingly, neither Puller nor the division had a clear picture of the tactical situation confronting the 1st's assault platoons or of the units' casualties. It was not until late afternoon that Smith was able to talk to Puller by radio, and even then no inkling of the true precariousness of the situation on the division's left flank was gained.

When reports began trickling out to the command ship about the heavy fighting developing ashore, Rupertus' natural concern was over the loss of the initial momentum of the assault. His attention was drawn early to the plight of the 7th Marines, for just after midmorning the division commander learned of the loss by that regiment of 18 LVTs, and shortly before noon he received the 7th Marines' report of "Heavy casualties. Need ammo, reinforcements."<sup>50</sup> It was, therefore, the failure of the 7th to achieve the speedy conquest of the south rather than the bitter dug-in enemy resistance to the north, which worried the division com-

---

completely successful, performed a highly useful service for General Smith's Advance CP on D-Day." LtCol Frederick A. Ramsey, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 28Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Ramsey ltr*.

<sup>50</sup> 7th Mar R-2 Jnl, 15Sep44.

mander. He knew, moreover, that the 7th Marines had suffered heavy losses.

By noon, Rupertus had ordered that the Division Reconnaissance Company, part of the floating reserve, go ashore for commitment with the 7th Marines.<sup>51</sup> That afternoon, when the situation in the south still had not remedied itself, and after requesting General Smith's and Colonel Hanneken's opinions, Rupertus committed 2/7, the remaining division reserve. Before the BLT could be landed, however, the approach of darkness and the shortage of amphibian vehicles resulted in its being ordered back to the ships. Some of the returning boats failed to locate the Marines' ship in the darkness and spent the entire night searching, while the troops in them remained in cramped quarters. The Marines in two other boats, because of the "confusion caused by conflicting orders,"<sup>52</sup> were landed by LVTs later in the night. Since neither Smith nor Hanneken really desired the additional combat troops because their arrival would only further congest the already overcrowded beaches, 2/7's inability to land had no decisive effect upon the first day's fighting.

As the day wore on the situation ashore worsened—"it was a pretty grim

---

<sup>51</sup> "When he committed the Reconnaissance Company it was not, in the CG's [Commanding General] mind, (in my opinion) that it was a unit but that it was a group of individual infantry replacements." *Fields ltr*. "This was an improper use of the Reconnaissance Company, as there later developed several opportunities for employment of this company in the manner for which it had been trained." Smith, *Narrative*, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> 2/7 WarD, 15Sep44.

outlook at that time,"<sup>53</sup> recalled Rupertus' chief of staff, Colonel John T. Selden—the Marine commander began to express anxiety to be on the scene himself, a desire which was intensified when he learned that General Geiger, corps commander, was already ashore. Colonel Selden and other staff members, fearful that a single enemy round might wipe out the entire top echelon during the perilous journey to the beach, finally prevailed upon Rupertus to remain afloat. Selden insisted, however, that the bulk of the command echelon go ashore.

Upon reaching the transfer line, the command group discovered 2/7's Marines still waiting for amphibian vehicles to transport them across the reef. Because he "decided that superimposing a second staff on General Smith was useless and ridiculous,"<sup>54</sup> and that what was needed ashore was more combat troops and artillery, Colonel Selden arranged for his party to lie off the transfer line until elements of 2/7 cleared it. When LVTs or DUKWs still had not arrived by darkness, Selden sent off a message to Rupertus stating his intention of returning to the command ship, and then brought his party back.<sup>55</sup>

On D-Day, Rupertus had expected that his assault troops would seize Objective 0-1, which included a 300-yard

penetration behind the northern beaches and all of Peleliu south of the airfield. Then he had hoped to attack across the open runways to capture Objective O-2, which embraced all of the island south of the ridges behind the airfield. Actually, at day's end the Marines had penetrated approximately 300 yards behind the northern beaches, but held only a narrow wedge of terrain across the island behind Beach Orange 3. This shallow beachhead "had cost the division 210 dead (killed in action, died of wounds, missing presumed dead), and 901 wounded in action; total casualties of 1,111, not including combat fatigue and heat prostration cases."<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to the Marine commander's concern over the progress of his assault troops ashore on Peleliu, the Japanese commander's report on the day's fighting glowed with optimism:

. . . by 1000 hours, our forces successfully put the enemy to rout. . . . At 1420 hours, the enemy again attempted to make the perilous landing on the southwestern part of our coastline. The unit in that sector repulsed the daring counter-attack, and put the enemy to rout once more. However in another sector of the coastline near AYAME [Beach Orange 3] the enemy with the aid of several tanks were successful in landing, although they were encountering heavy losses inflicted by our forces. . . . Our tank unit attacked the enemy with such a cat-like spring at dusk, that they were able to inflict heavy damages on the enemy. . . .<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> BGen John T. Selden ltr to HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 26Oct49, in *Peleliu Comment File*, hereafter *Selden ltr*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> "During this period, we had to shift position on more than one occasion due to high velocity guns that were beginning to register too close for comfort." *Selden ltr*.

<sup>56</sup> Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*, p. 75. "These were very heavy losses and could not have been sustained for very many days in succession without destroying the combat efficiency of the division." Smith, *Narrative*, p. 34.

<sup>57</sup> *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 85.



# The Drive Inland: 16-22 September<sup>1</sup>

## THE MORNING AFTER<sup>2</sup>

The “whiskery, red-eyed, dirty Marines,” observed a civilian combat artist on the morning of 16 September, “had spent the night fighting in foxholes filled with stinking swamp water; they were slimy, wet and mean now.”<sup>3</sup> The intervening hours of darkness had been filled with the roar of artillery and the rattle of automatic weapons as the infantrymen beat back localized counterattacks. From time to time, star shells and flares from the U.S. cruiser *Honolulu*, the six destroyers, and four LCI gunboats remaining in support cast a greenish pallor over the embattled island. Small groups of Japanese, some wearing helmets of dead Marines, infiltrated behind the frontline positions, and furious hand-to-hand struggles oc-

curred in the rear. Three enemy soldiers even made a brief appearance near the division CP before a burst of fire from an alert sentry cut them down.

Under the cover of darkness, shore party and support troops made use of available LVTs and DUKWs to rush ammunition and water up to the front and to evacuate the wounded. In some cases, vital supplies had to be laboriously hand-carried forward so that the morning attack could start on schedule. No new orders were needed. All regiments were to resume the assault and bend every effort to seize the objectives previously assigned (See Map 5).

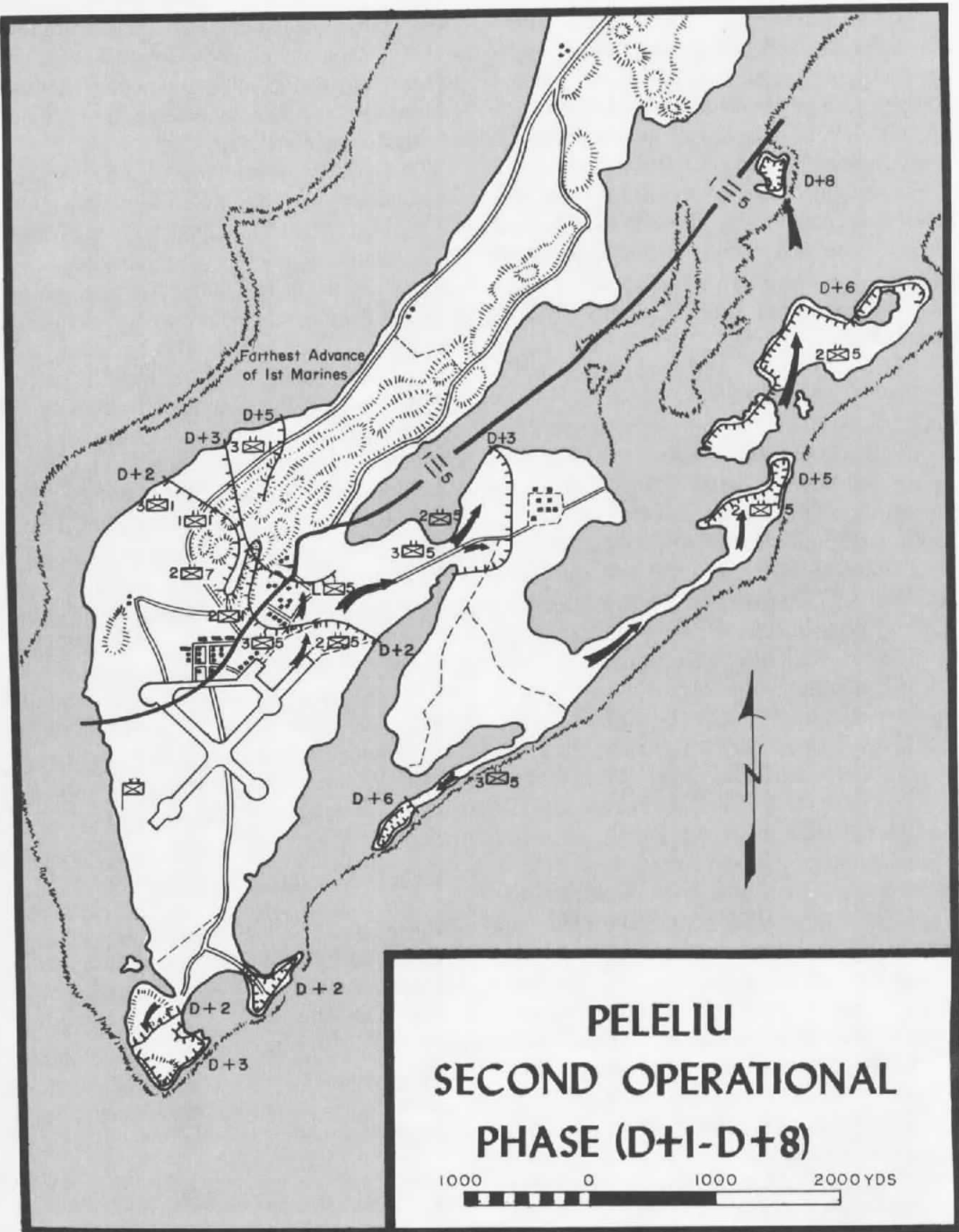
Following a half-hour air and naval gunfire bombardment, the division jumped off along the entire line at 0800. Two hours later, General Rupertus came ashore to assume direct control of the advance. The day turned extremely hot—105 degrees in the shade—and the men, already enervated by their previous day’s exertions and their night-long vigil, suffered greatly as they fought exposed to the merciless sun. Canteens quickly emptied, and a rapid resupply proved impossible. As panting men slumped to the ground, often with “tongues so swollen as to make it impossible for them to talk or to swallow,”<sup>4</sup> the strength of the attacking units deteriorated rapidly.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*; *1st MarDiv SAR*; *1st MarDiv WarD*, 15–23 Sep44; *1st MarDiv D-2 Jnl*, 15–23Sep44; *1st MarDiv D-3 Periodic Rpt*, 15–23Sep44; *Peleliu Comment File*; *Japanese CenPac Ops*; Smith, *Narrative*; Boyer, *Armd Amphibian Bn*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Isely and Crowl, *U.S. Marines and Amphibious War*; McMillan, *The Old Breed*.

<sup>2</sup> Additional sources consulted for this section are: *1st MarDiv POW Interrogation Rpts Peleliu*, 16Sep–16Oct44, hereafter *1st MarDiv POW Interrogation Rpts Peleliu*; Richard, *U.S. Naval Administration*.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Lea, *Peleliu Landing* (El Paso: Carl Hertzog, 1945), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Worden ltr.*



**PELELIU  
SECOND OPERATIONAL  
PHASE (D+1-D+8)**

1000 0 1000 2000 YDS

Map 5

E. L. Wilson

The majority of the riflemen, however, continued to advance in swift rushes through a steady rain of enemy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire to reach the Japanese entrenched in blockhouses, pillboxes, and other fortified positions. Paced by Shermans, the Marines employed flamethrower and demolition charges to eliminate these enemy strongholds or called down supporting arms fire upon particularly difficult fortifications.

On the coral ridges to the north, Puller's 1st Marines ran into bitter dug-in resistance that held down the day's gains. In the center, the 5th Marines cooperated with 2/1 to seize the airfield and to expand east and northeast, while the 7th Marines drove east and south to overrun all of the southern portion of Peleliu except the promontories. Within a few days, both the 5th and 7th Marines accomplished their initial missions and turned their attention northward to aid the hard-pressed 1st, which was finding the going slow over the central ridges.

The second day of the assault, in addition, witnessed two events of some significance: the capture of the first prisoner of war and the official establishment of military government on Peleliu. Members of the naval unit responsible for handling the native population posted the first of ten scheduled proclamations in the name of CinCPOA. To their chagrin, however, not a single Palauan made an appearance, for the Japanese had evacuated them all from the island prior to the landing. Accordingly, the ten men of the military government unit were utilized in various capacities by the Marine division until

their transfer to the Island Command on 7 October. Eventually, 15 natives turned up, but they were promptly dispatched to Angaur where a refugee camp already existed.

The prisoner of war taken on 16 September responded freely to questions. A former fisherman from Koror, this second class private had been inducted in July 1944 and trained along with 500 other men as part of a special counterlanding force; 200 of these soldiers were assigned to Peleliu after completion of the course. Their mission was to swim out and destroy the American landing vehicles and tanks with grenades and mines. The men of this specially-trained force remained holed up in their caves, however—to escape the bombs and shells of naval planes and warships—until the arrival of riflemen of the 1st Marines. Although the prisoner's information proved to be vague and of little military value, he did make one extremely accurate prediction. When asked about the morale of the Peleliu garrison, the Japanese replied, "Though they die, they will defend."<sup>5</sup>

### *SWEEP TO THE SOUTH*<sup>6</sup>

As soon as the scheduled D plus one preparatory fires to its front were lifted, the 7th Marines attacked vigorously. On the left, the 3d Battalion pushed rapidly across the island, while

<sup>5</sup> Preliminary Interrogation Rpt No. 1, dtd 16Sep44, G-2 Sec, 1st MarDiv, in *1st MarDiv POW Interrogation Rpts Peleliu*.

<sup>6</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: *7th Mar R-2 Jnl*, 16-18Sep44; *1/7 Bn 2-3 Jnls*, 16-18Sep44; *1/4 HistRpt*, 16-18Sep44; *3/7 WarD*, 16-18Sep44.

the 1st drove south toward the promontories. Bitterly resisting this two-pronged assault was the *3d Battalion, 15th Infantry*, whose veteran troops tenaciously defended their fortified positions till death in true *Bushido* spirit.

Companies K and I advanced directly east, with L following in reserve. First task of the left flank unit, Company K, was to reduce the fortifications that had held up the unit on the previous day. Aided by point-blank fire from the tanks that paced their advance, the infantrymen quickly seized the barracks area and the three gun positions, but the blockhouse proved to be a more difficult problem. Its five-foot thick reinforced concrete walls withstood direct hits from naval gunfire, 75mm tank cannon, and bazookas; even flamethrowers failed, for one-inch armor plates shielded the blockhouse's gun ports and its two underground entrances. Only after demolition teams worked their way forward under the cover of smoke to lay their charges directly against its massive walls and breached this fortification was forward movement resumed.

The 3d Battalion gained the eastern shore by 0925; then, while Company I organized beach positions to defend against any possible enemy reaction and to support the advance by fire, the battalion shifted its assault south toward the promontories. Company K led the way, followed closely by L in reserve. Free use of flamethrowers and bazookas was made, for numerous pillboxes and concrete gun emplacements were encountered. By noon, however, the foremost elements had eliminated the last two pillboxes barring the way to the sandpit leading out to the southeast

promontory. The rifle company, unfortunately, was "unable to continue its advance until a resupply of water could be effected."<sup>7</sup> The battalion waited in vain until 1500 before the necessary water arrived. By this time, only a few hours of daylight remained, so the battalion was ordered to dig in, postponing the final assault until the following morning.

What daylight remained was used to bring up tanks that destroyed with pointblank fire one blockhouse, two pillboxes, and several machine gun positions guarding the approach to the promontory. Under the cover of this protective fire, a detail of combat engineers ventured forth onto the sandspit to remove or disarm the numerous enemy mines there, paving the way for the scheduled attack the next morning. The Marines manned positions facing their objective during the hours of darkness, but the only enemy opposition consisted of sniper fire in the rear areas.

The 1st Battalion, meanwhile, had been supported in its southward drive by artillery, naval gunfire, and air strikes, as well as by rocket concentrations from the LCIs that paced the Marines' advance along the western shore. The riflemen succeeded in overrunning numerous enemy-held pillboxes and bunkers, in addition to four 5-inch guns and three lighter dual-purpose antiaircraft guns. By noon, the Marines had reached the shore opposite Ngar-moked Island, but their strenuous ex-

---

<sup>7</sup> 3/7 WarD, 16Sep44. Colonel Hanneken received the following message at 1324: "3/7 out of water. Troops having dry heaves." 7th Mar R-2 Jnl, 16Sep44.

ertions in the blazing sun had so dehydrated them that a halt was called until water could be brought up to restore the troops' strength. Sufficient water did not arrive until late afternoon, however, and the order was given to dig in for the night.

During the lull, the battalion regrouped and prepared to resume the attack. Additional engineers were rushed up to clear away Japanese mines on the beaches to the Marines' front, and a 75mm self-propelled half-track and four 37mm antitank guns had been brought up to the battalion by 1530. Later, under the cover of darkness, demolition experts searched the narrow strip of land linking Ngarmoked Island to Peleliu and dug up the enemy mines that could bar the employment of tanks in the morning attack.<sup>8</sup>

At 0730 on 17 September, the 3d Battalion's objective, the southeast promontory, was hit by an air strike, but a scheduled mortar preparation was called off when combat engineers, ranging far in advance of the infantrymen, discovered another extensive minefield in their path. For an hour and a half, Shermans and riflemen provided covering fire while the engineers performed their dangerous task of disarming or removing the deadly Japanese

mines. Then, at 1000, a platoon from Company L, the reserve of the previous day, began working its way across the sandspit in coordination with two tanks. Twenty-six minutes later, a foothold had been seized on the objective, whereupon the remainder of the company was transported over the open stretch of ground in LVTs that provided protection from small arms fire.

After regrouping, Company L immediately attacked. Opposing the advance were Japanese soldiers manning automatic weapon and rifle positions among the coral crevices or entrenched in pillboxes with mutually supporting lanes of fire. The Marines, slowly battling their way forward, recognized that blazing napalm was the most effective method of rooting out the diehard defenders, and a hurried call went throughout the battalion for additional flamethrowers. Once they reached the front and began burning the enemy out, the advance quickened. By 1215, the rifle company had seized enough ground for the siting of weapons to provide supporting fires for 1/7's assault of Ngarmoked Island; an hour later, the 3d Battalion reported the capture of the entire southeastern promontory.

The two-day struggle southward cost the Marine battalion 7 dead and 20 wounded. In contrast, the last-ditch stand by the isolated Japanese resulted in 441 enemy killed. The startling discrepancy between these two casualty figures clearly demonstrated the outstanding success and superb skill with which the highly-trained Marines employed small unit assault tactics against stubbornly-defended fortified positions.

---

<sup>8</sup>"During the night of D plus 1 many Japs were annihilated while attempting to cross from the southwestern promontory to the unnamed island during low tide. Mortar illuminating shells provided excellent observation of this movement by our troops and the Japs were easy targets for our machine gun and rifle fire." *Gormley ltr I*.

Success, however, did not come so quickly for the 1st Battalion in its final assault on Ngarmoked Island, the southwestern promontory. Early on the 17th, a platoon from Company B, the battalion reserve of the previous day that now held assault positions opposite the objective, moved out in the wake of naval gunfire and mortar fire to gain the far end of the causeway. Here, the onrushing riflemen and their supporting tanks ran head-on into heavily-fortified positions, and the attack ground to an abrupt halt. After an hour of stubborn fighting failed to expand the bridgehead, Colonel Hanneken approved a withdrawal to give the supporting arms a chance to pulverize the enemy fortifications holding up the advance.

While naval gunfire, artillery, and mortars hammered the objective, preparations to resume the attack were made. All available tanks, LVT(A)s, half-tracks, and 37mm guns were dispatched forward. By early afternoon, the successful completion of 3/7's mission permitted Major E. Hunter Hurst to release his tank and weapons support for use by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Gormley's 1st Battalion. Company B, which had been badly mauled by enemy fire that raked the causeway, was replaced in the frontlines by Company A, which jumped off at 1430 following a 10-minute air strike.

In short order, the Marines, now supported by three tanks, broke through the battered Japanese positions and began fighting their way southward. An hour later, Company I moved into reserve behind 1/7, releasing Company C, which crossed over to the promon-

tory and joined the attack on A's right. Shortly thereafter, Company B also moved to Ngarmoked Island and took up reserve positions immediately behind the two assault units that were pressing the attack with vigor. A measure of revenge was granted the fast moving Marines, for they finally succeeded in knocking out the high velocity guns that had enfiladed the Orange beaches for so long. When darkness halted the day's advance, the two rifle companies had a firm hold on both the eastern and western shores and a defensive line running almost halfway across the promontory.

The next day, 18 September, the resumption of the attack was delayed until 1000 to permit a more thorough preparation. Marine artillery blanketed the enemy-held part of Ngarmoked Island, while riflemen, with their armor and supporting weapons, carefully deployed into the most advantageous jump-off positions. Just to the front loomed a sizeable swamp, approximately in the center of the promontory. Company A attacked to the left of this impassable terrain, Company C to the right, with both units reestablishing contact on the opposite side. Company B had the task of seizing a piece of land that protruded from the eastern shore just in front of the line of departure.

Attacking units were instructed to leave bypassed Japanese for later destruction by demolition teams, but Company C was early treated to an example of the enemy's tactics of passive infiltration, *i.e.*, allowing positions to be overrun in order to be in the rear of the

American attacking force. During the advance south around the swamp, 15 riflemen were detailed to remain behind to guard suspected cave openings and pillboxes where Japanese might still be lurking. No sooner had the front lines surged forward than a large number of enemy soldiers suddenly emerged from their concealed holes and took the small Marine detachment under fire. The situation became so critical that both the Division Reconnaissance Company, attached to the regiment since D-Day, and most of Company I had to be committed to maintain control of the bypassed areas.

By 1344, the two attacking rifle companies of the 1st Battalion had seized the southern shore of Ngarmoked Island. Company B, on the other hand, had experienced tougher going; its assault squads, attacking towards the eastern shore, ran squarely into the extensive fortifications that the Japanese had prepared to prevent any penetration into the cove between the two promontories. The advancing Marines continued a yard by yard conquest of the dug-in positions, which seemed to be crowded literally on top of each other. At 1354 the attack stalled, after the Shermans had withdrawn to rearm and the half-tracks had become bogged down in the miry ground. By this time, the company had killed an estimated 350 enemy soldiers and had restricted the pocket of resistance to an area of some 50 square yards.

While waiting for a bulldozer to arrive, Marines in the frontlines could hear the sound of shots, as some of their opponents, faced with the inevitable choice of death or surrender, chose to

commit suicide. Other Japanese leaped into the sea and attempted to escape across the tetrahedrons to the southeastern promontory, only to run into 3/7's riflemen, who promptly slew some 60 of them. After the bulldozer extricated the half-tracks, Company B resumed the assault and quickly overran the last remaining defenders, bringing the unit's estimated total of enemy killed that day to 425.

The 7th Marines informed division at 1525 on 18 September that its initial mission on Peleliu was completed. In seizing the southern part of the island, the regiment uncovered much-needed maneuver area and destroyed to the last man an excellently trained and well-equipped Japanese infantry battalion. During its first four days of fighting, the 7th Marines, less its 2d Battalion, accounted for an estimated 2,609 enemy dead. The fierce determination of the Japanese was reflected by the fact that not a single one was taken prisoner. In accomplishing its mission, the regiment suffered 47 killed, 414 wounded, and 36 missing in action. The disproportionate number of Marine casualties to enemy dead was surprising, for the four-day long assault had constantly pitted exposed Marines against entrenched Japanese in strongly fortified positions. Using proven small-unit assault tactics and making full utilization of all supporting arms, especially demolitions and flamethrowers, the Marines succeeded in annihilating the enemy garrison. Only a unit like the 1st Division, containing a sizable number of veteran troops who had been tested in battle, could have executed such a mission with a minimum of casualties.

## ACROSS THE AIRFIELD AND UP THE PENINSULA<sup>9</sup>

The first task confronting the 5th Marines as 16 September dawned was seizure of the airfield, the primary objective on Peleliu. Fortunately for the battalions, their night positions placed them in an advantageous location for that day's advance which was to be a turning movement northward, using the extreme left flank of the division as a pivot point. On the left was the 1st Battalion strung out along the woods' edge. The 2d was deployed in the middle about halfway across the open terrain, and the 3d was on the right at the southern fringe of the airfield.

With the coming of daylight, the enemy laid down an intense shelling upon these frontlines. One Japanese shell landed directly on the regimental CP, and another one destroyed vital communications equipment. Several staff officers became casualties, and Colonel Harris' knee was severely injured, making it extremely difficult for him to move about. Division rushed replacements to staff the 5th's CP adequately, which allowed the regiment to jump off on schedule.

At 0800, the 1st Battalion moved out of the woods onto the open runways with two companies in assault, the other in reserve and echeloned to the left rear. Although a few riflemen benefited somewhat from the cover provided by

the scrub growth and rubble along the northern fringe of the airfield, most had to brave the open runways in an open order formation with intervals of about 20 yards. "The advance of the assault companies across the fireswept airfield," reminisced the battalion commander, "was an inspiring and never to be forgotten sight."<sup>10</sup> Despite heavy casualties, the Marines surged across the exposed runways to reach the main hangar area on the northeast side of the airfield in little more than an hour.

Here, the leading troops encountered stiff resistance from enemy soldiers entrenched among the ruins of the buildings, a large V-shaped antitank ditch, and two stone revetments that housed 20mm guns. As large numbers of the attackers became casualties, the advance faltered, for the Marines' strength had been severely weakened by numerous heat exhaustion cases. When LVTs attempted to evacuate the wounded, they attracted such a deadly rain of fire from Japanese guns emplaced in the commanding ground north of the airfield that Shermans had to run interference for the thin-skinned amphibian vehicles.

A platoon moving in defilade of a Marine tank finally managed to outflank the enemy positions holding up the attack, and, once the reserve company was committed, a vigorous assault overran the Japanese defenders in the hangar area after some furious hand-to-hand fighting. Pushing on, the 1st Battalion gained phase line 0-2 before dark, but Japanese gunners on nearby ridges unleashed such an intense and

<sup>9</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: *5th Mar OpRpt*, 16-23Sep44; *1/5 B-3 Jnl*, 16-23Sep44; *2/5 OpRpt*, 16-23Sep44; *3/5 Rpt of Ops*, 16-23Sep44; *5th War Dog Plat IIIAC, Peleliu OpRpt*, 16Sep-18Oct44, dtd 17Nov44, hereafter *5th War Dog Plat Peleliu OpRpt*; Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp*.

<sup>10</sup> Boyd, *1/3 PalauOp*, p. 19.





*75MM GUN in firing position on Peleliu. (USMC 95050)*



*1st MARINE DIVISION tanks at Peleliu airfield. (USMC 94876)*

accurate fire upon the exposed infantrymen that the decision was made to withdraw to the antitank ditch to set up night defenses.

The 2d Battalion spent the day fighting its way up the east side of the airfield through an almost impassable scrub jungle that degenerated into a thick mangrove swamp along the eastern shore. Supporting Shermans could operate only along the fringe of the woods, and the riflemen had to plunge alone into the thicket infested by enemy soldiers, who often had to be ousted in close combat. When darkness began closing in, the Marines tied in with 1/5 on the left flank and fell back a short distance on the open airfield in order to have clear fields of fire to their front.

On the extreme right, the 3d Battalion soon found itself in an unusual predicament as the attack progressed. Company I started the day in reserve, but was shifted northward about noon and used to cover a threatening gap that developed between assault units of the 1st Marines. Company L, meanwhile, remained tied in with 2/5's drive northeastward, while Company K renewed its eastern advance on the left flank of 3/7. As a result, the 3d Battalion's two rifle companies had to overextend themselves to retain contact as they assaulted in different directions. About 1500, Major John H. Gustafson, formerly executive officer of 2/5, replaced Lieutenant Colonel Walt as battalion commander. Walt promptly returned to the 5th's CP and resumed his duties as regimental executive officer, thereby taking some of the load off the injured Colonel Harris. Shortly after this

change in command, the 3d Battalion was ordered to displace forward in preparation for relieving the 1st Battalion the following morning.

Before passing into reserve on 17 September, however, the 1st drove forward against light resistance to regain the previous day's positions on phase line 0-2. During this advance, one of the rifle platoons was subjected to a rocket strike from a carrier plane. This unfortunate incident occurred when the man responsible for removing the panels signalling an earlier air strike "had been evacuated as a casualty and provisions had not been made for someone else to take over his responsibilities."<sup>11</sup> After taking over 1/5's zone, the 3d Battalion moved out in coordination with elements of 2/5 on its right, but the heavy flanking fire from the Japanese on the central ridges with their clear fields of fire and excellent observation effectively prevented any real gains that day.

On the right, the 2d Battalion resumed its slow advance through the dense jungle between the airfield and the mangrove swamp. When a Sherman attempted to assist infantrymen working their way through the undergrowth at the edge of the airfield, Japanese observers on the ridges called down such a concentration of artillery and mortar fire upon the tank that it departed to spare the nearby Marines. As the men attempted to maintain a skirmish line while moving through the jungle against the sporadic fire of scattered snipers, the enervating heat caused greater casualties than did the Japanese. Pla-

---

<sup>11</sup> Boyd, *1/5 PalauOp.* p. 25

toon leaders halted their men frequently for rest periods, but the number dropping from heat prostration continued to mount. Day's end, nevertheless, found the battalion some 600 yards beyond phase line 0-2, with one flank anchored on the swamp and the other firmly tied in with 3/5's right flank.

On this day, the Japanese fired a few rockets, possibly of the spin stabilized type, although they had a very erratic corkscrew type of trajectory. These rockets appeared to be about the size of 5-inch shells and were loaded with picric acid. The bright, yellow burst caused brief excitement when a few cries of "Mustard Gas" were raised. Prompt reassurance by radio that it was only explosion of picric acid quelled the excitement.<sup>12</sup>

The next day, 18 September, the 5th Marines' attack on the left ground to a halt by noon, when the 3d Battalion ran into an increasing volume of fire from the same towering central ridges that had prevented any gains the previous day. On the right, in the 2/5 sector, Japanese machine gun and rifle fire from the mangrove swamp on the battalion's east flank made any advance very costly. Artillery and mortar fire had little effect until a call was made for air bursts about 30 feet above the swamp. This proved highly effective and permitted a rapid advance. Jumping off at 0700, 2/5 moved forward rapidly in the face of only scattered resistance, protected from enemy artillery observation by the canopy of tree tops and reached the road leading to the

village of Ngardololok and the north-eastern peninsula.

The mangrove-choked waters separating this peninsula from the mainland, however, pressed in so close to the road on both sides as to make the approach virtually a causeway. About 1040, a small patrol ventured across to test enemy reaction. When it returned safely without drawing any fire, an air strike was requested to pave the way for a crossing in force. To the Marines' disappointment, the carrier-based planes missed their target completely, and artillery concentrations had to be called down instead to soften up the Ngardololok area.

At 1335, a reinforced rifle company began crossing over the narrow approach route. Unknown to the battalion commander, the 5th Marines' CP had already ordered a second air strike to rectify the earlier abortive attempt. As the company negotiated the open causeway, U. S. Navy planes suddenly swooped down out of the skies to strafe the exposed troops. The Marines pushed on, despite heavy casualties, and established a firm bridgehead.

As if to compound the 2d Battalion's misfortunes that day, the unit was subjected twice more to misplaced American fire. An artillery concentration hit the battalion in the process of displacing forward, and later, mortar fire struck some elements as they crossed the causeway. Of the 34 casualties suffered by 2/5 on 18 September, almost all resulted from friendly fire.

The 3d Battalion's front, on the 18th, had been pinched down between the ridges and the sea to a size manageable by a single company. Accordingly, the

---

<sup>12</sup> *Harris ltr.*

other two companies displaced to positions on the right (south) flank of 2/5. By nightfall, the two battalions were dug in facing the Japanese installations at Ngardolok. The reserve 1st Battalion, which had been flushing out snipers in the rear, now moved up to support the next day's drive.

After dive bombers blasted the objective, the 2d Battalion attacked the remains of Ngardolok during the morning of 19 September. Only sporadic fire from scattered holdouts opposed the advance. As the 2d continued its push forward past the ruins, the 3d Battalion drove southward in the wake of artillery and mortar fire against extremely light resistance. In the following days, the 5th Marines systematically mopped up isolated enemy holdouts on the peninsula, which was secured on 21 September, and the off-shore islands, the last of which was seized on the 23d.

During this period of extensive patrolling, war dogs had about their only opportunity for effective use on Peleliu. Brought ashore on D-Day and sent up to the front lines, the dogs became extremely nervous under the constant shelling. Many even attacked their handlers and had to be destroyed. As a result, the dogs were brought back to the rear areas for night security duty at CPs, while their handlers served as stretcher bearers. When the war dogs operated with patrols of the 5th Marines, however, in a role for which they had been trained, their keen scent saved many Marine lives. On 20 September, for example, a Doberman-Pinscher scouting ahead of Company I's point detected an enemy ambush some 75 to 100 yards away. Once the dog alerted

the Marines to their imminent danger, they were able to escape the trap laid by 20-odd Japanese armed with machine guns and other automatic weapons. The fruitful activities of the war dog platoon came to an untimely end when the 5th Marines reached northern Peleliu. An erratic salvo of white phosphorus shells landed in the area occupied by the platoon, and this unfortunate accident marked the end of its activity on the island.<sup>13</sup>

#### ASSAULT OF THE RIDGES<sup>14</sup>

Puller's 1st Marines jumped off in the general attack on the morning of 16 September and began a turning movement northward in coordination with the 5th Marines. The first problem of the 3d Battalion, on the left, was the long coral ridge that had blocked any successful advance on the previous day. It was not until noon, after the last fresh company of the regimental reserve, 1/1, was thrown into the struggle, that the riflemen, supported by two Shermans, were able to surge up the slopes and wrest a large portion of the high ground from the entrenched enemy.

With control of the commanding heights in their hands, the Marines were soon linked up with the survivors of Company K on the Point. These men had been isolated for some 30 hours, although reinforcements, consisting of shore party personnel and stragglers

<sup>13</sup> *Harris ltr.*

<sup>14</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: *1st Mar Hist*; *1/1 UHist*; *3/1 Rec of Events*, 16-18Sep44; *2/7 WarD*, 15-18Sep44; Capt George P. Hunt, "Point Secured," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 29, no. 1 (Jan45), pp. 39-42, hereafter Hunt, "Point Secured."

on the beach, weapons, and supplies had been brought in over the water by an LVT early on the 16th. By nightfall, even though the mission of reaching phase line O-1 had not been accomplished by 3/1, the worst features of the tactical situation confronting the battalion—a frontline dotted with enemy-created wedges, and gaps between its own units—had been rectified.

Coordinating its attack on the right flank with that of 1/5, Honsowetz' 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, moved out in the wake of the preparatory fires across the northwestern portion of the airfield. When the advancing riflemen reached the building area, stiffening resistance from Japanese hiding among the ruins, plus a brief loss of contact with neighboring units, slowed the attack momentarily. Despite heavy casualties, however, the battalion overran the enemy defenders in savage hand-to-hand combat and began fanning out toward phase line O-2. The onrushing troops made good progress at first, but the Japanese bitterly resisted all efforts by the Marines to advance toward the important road junction linking the East and West Roads. Despite a substantial gain, the men halted for the night some distance short of phase line O-2, the West Road.

That night, the enemy made a determined effort to retake the Point regardless of cost. With this strategic elevation once again in their hands, the Japanese could set up their weapons and play havoc with the men, supplies, and vehicles crowded on the White Beaches. The counterattack came at 2200, when an estimated 500 enemy soldiers, following preparatory mortar

and grenade fire, suddenly rushed Company K's positions on the coral outcropping. The defenders opened up with automatic weapons and hurled grenades, while supporting artillery and mortars blasted the terrain to the front.

In spite of this concentrated hail of fire, some 30 Japanese still managed to penetrate the frontlines. These attackers were dispatched in fierce fighting, while other enemy troops, attempting to flank the Point along the water's edge, were rooted out of the coral crevices by Marines employing thermite grenades and automatic weapons. By 0200, the counterattack subsided as swiftly as it had begun. The overwhelming fire superiority of the Marines had decided the issue. The light of dawn, remembered Captain Hunt, revealed 350 "more Japanese dead sprawled before our lines. Their rear units, horribly mutilated by our artillery and mortars, had been lugging a 40mm gun, for it lay in their midst, scarred by shrapnel, an abandoned symbol of their efforts to recapture the Point."<sup>15</sup> That morning, Company K was finally relieved, but it mustered only 78 men out of the 235 that the captain had led ashore on D-Day.

On 17 September, Colonel Puller had to put all three battalions in the line to press the attack, for his regiment had suffered over 1,000 casualties in just two days of battle. The 3d Battalion was on the left, the 1st in the center, and the 2d on the right, while 2/7 was in reserve. The last-mentioned battalion had finally landed the previous day to support its parent unit's drive south, but

---

<sup>15</sup> Hunt, "Point Secured," p. 42.

had been diverted north instead to support the more hard-pressed 1st Marines in their assault on the ridges.

Lieutenant Colonel Sabol's 3d Battalion pushed steadily ahead against light sniper fire for a gain of 700 yards, and only the danger of overextending itself prevented the battalion from advancing farther up the west coast that day. In the middle, the 1st Battalion's attack ran squarely into a heavily fortified group of mutually-supporting positions consisting of a huge reinforced-concrete blockhouse with four-foot thick walls and 12 pillboxes emplaced nearby. A hurried call to the battleship *Pennsylvania* brought 14-inch armor-piercing and high explosive shells slamming into this unmarred fortification that had somehow escaped the preparatory bombardment of the island. The shells breached the walls, and concussion killed the 20 enemy soldiers inside. Other supporting arms, meanwhile, had eliminated the surrounding pillboxes.

Resuming the advance, Major Raymond G. Davis' 1st Battalion surged forward across the road marking phase line O-2. Here, the terrain began sloping upward as the riflemen approached the foothills of the Umurbrogol Mountains. Since the entrenched foe to its front was pouring down a very heavy volume of fire that inflicted severe casualties, the battalion quickly regrouped and drove straight up the slopes. Aided by tanks, the infantrymen made good use of their bazookas to knock out 35 separate Japanese-infested caves before digging in for the night. Marine positions had been firmly established on the forward slopes of the first series of hills, notwithstanding the enemy commander's claim that this

assault had been "repulsed by our timely firing."<sup>16</sup>

During its rapid advance to the right on 17 September, the 2d Battalion gained the distinction of being the first to encounter the Umurbrogol ridges, a misshapen conglomeration of soaring spires, sheer cliffs, and impassable precipices that was to become infamous in the weeks ahead. Some of the problems confronting the 1st Marines in its assault of this high ground were recorded by the regiment's history:

Along its center, the rocky spine was heaved up in a contorted morass of decayed coral, strewn with rubble, crags, ridges and gulches thrown together in a confusing maze. There were no roads, scarcely any trails. The pock-marked surface offered no secure footing even in the few level places. It was impossible to dig in: the best the men could do was pile a little coral or wood debris around their positions. The jagged rock slashed their shoes and clothes, and tore their bodies every time they hit the deck for safety. Casualties were higher for the simple reason it was impossible to get under the ground away from the Japanese mortar barrages. Each blast hurled chunks of coral in all directions, multiplying many times the fragmentation effect of every shell. Into this the enemy dug and tunneled like moles; and there they stayed to fight to the death.<sup>17</sup>

Early in the morning, the 2d Battalion surged forward to overrun the important road junction that the Japanese had defended so bitterly the previous day. Continuing up the East Road that ran along the base of the ridges, the exposed infantrymen came under increasing fire from enemy soldiers en-

<sup>16</sup> *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> *1st Mar Hist*, pp. 11-12.

trenched on a 200-foot ridge to the left flank. This high ground, called Hill 200, paralleled the road and formed a threatening salient into the battalion's center. From these commanding heights, observers called down accurate artillery and mortar concentrations not only on the 2d Battalion, but also on the troops of the 5th Marines moving across level ground on the extreme right.

Orders came down from regiment for the troops advancing up the East Road to wheel left and take the ridge under assault. As the Marines attacked up the steep slopes, the Japanese unleashed a devastating fire of mortars and machine guns, while mountain guns and dual-purpose artillery pieces suddenly emerged from hidden positions to blast away at pointblank range before disappearing again into caves. Casualties mounted alarmingly, and many of the tanks and LVT(A)s brought up to support the infantry were knocked out by the accurate enemy fire. The Marines grimly continued climbing upward, however, and succeeded in clearing the crest of all defenders by nightfall. The men dug in quickly, for a slightly higher ridge to the west, Hill 210, still remained in the possession of the Japanese, who now brought a heavy and concentrated fire to bear on the newly-won Marine positions.

As this sustained enemy fire continued throughout the night, casualties became so heavy that a company from 2/7, the 1st Marines' reserve battalion, had to be rushed up the hill to bolster the depleted strength of the defenders. An overwhelming Japanese counterattack to retake this vital terrain probably was prevented only by the well-placed

naval salvos on the enemy-held approaches to Hill 200. Elsewhere, however, the alert foe spotted the gap that developed between the 1st and 2d Battalions as they tied in their lines after dark. Infiltrating in force, the Japanese began exploiting their opportunity. Not until another reserve company from 2/7 fought its way forward into positions covering this void in the 1st Marines' line was the enemy finally contained.

During this same night, Colonel Nakagawa displaced his CP farther inland to a cave deep within his prepared final defensive perimeter in the Umurbrogol ridges. Such a move by the enemy commander underscored the tactical importance of the Marines' seizure of Hill 200. This accomplishment of the 2d Battalion removed a dangerous Japanese salient and replaced it with an American one jutting into the enemy-held terrain; the feat also eliminated the heavy flanking fire that had been hampering the progress of 2/1 and the 5th Marines. All that Colonel Nakagawa admitted to his superiors that night, though, was that "under protection of heavy naval gunfire, an enemy unit composed of two tanks and approximately two companies of infantry successfully advanced up to a high spot on the east side of *Nakayama* (Hill 200)."<sup>18</sup>

On 18 September, the same day that the 7th Marines finished its seizure of the promontories and the 5th Marines began its sweep up the northeastern peninsula, the 1st Marines returned to its bitterly-contested, yard-by-yard assault on the central ridges. Some of the

---

<sup>18</sup> *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 87.

difficulties involved in fighting over this terrain, according to Lieutenant Colonel Spencer S. Berger, whose 2/7 joined the struggle on the Umurbrogols that day, were:

. . . there was no such thing as a continuous attacking line. Elements of the same company, even platoon, were attacking in every direction of the compass, with large gaps in between. When companies were asked for front lines they were apt to give points where the Company Commander knew or thought he had some men. It did not mean that he held a continuous unbroken line across his front. There were countless little salients and countersalients existing.<sup>10</sup>

Three days of continuous assault on fortified positions had so depleted Colonel Puller's rifle battalions—the 1st Regiment had suffered 1,236 casualties—that frontline replacements were absolutely essential, if the attack was to continue. To remedy the situation, Puller ordered the supporting units stripped of personnel to fill the gaps in his rifle platoons. Out of the 473 men jumping off in the 3d Battalion's zone on the 18th, for example, 200 were fresh from regimental headquarters. The 1st Pioneer Battalion also sent up 115 men to strengthen the assaults units. Just prior to the morning's attack, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines relieved 1/1, which then passed into reserve.

The 3d Battalion moved forward on the left between the central ridges and the western coast against only scattered rifle fire, but was held to a day's gain of merely a few hundred yards because of the necessity of remaining tied in with 2/7. This battalion found the going

slow in the center over the rugged coral ridges, where it cooperated with 2/1 in pinching out the enemy-held Hill 210 that jutted into the Marines' lines. The attackers stormed up both sides of this threatening salient, and their determined rushes finally carried the crest.

In 2/1's zone, the Japanese had been subjecting the riflemen on the northern slopes of Hill 200 to severe artillery and mortar fire in addition to savage counterattacks. By 1400, the battalion had withdrawn its men a short distance from its hard-won conquest of the previous day after reporting that its situation was desperate. Puller's reaction was typical. He instructed Lieutenant Colonel Honsowetz to hold at all costs. Marine mortars immediately placed a smoke screen on the hill to obscure Japanese vision, while Company B of 1/1 was ordered forward from its reserve area to assist.

This rifle unit aggressively assaulted the nearby enemy-held ridges in an attempt to divert fire from the sorely-pressed Marines on Hill 200. The closest ridge, Hill 205, was seized with light casualties, but when the riflemen attempted to press the attack toward the next row of commanding heights, they ran into the precipitous coral rampart that marked the perimeter of Colonel Nakagawa's final defensive positions. Unable to scale the almost sheer cliffs in the face of withering fire from Japanese entrenched on high ground both to the front and flanks, Company B was stopped cold. This failure terminated the day's action. On the extreme right of 2/1, meanwhile, some Marines had succeeded in moving along the base of Hill 200 to reach the ruined village of

<sup>10</sup> *Berger ltr.*



Asias and to tie in with the 5th Marines before halting for the night.

This day's assault pushed the 1st Marines' total casualties over the 1,500 mark, but the regiment had straightened its frontline, located the Japanese weakness along the western shore, and discovered the strongpoint of enemy resistance within the Umurbrogols. Puller would order an all-out attack the following morning in hopes of breaching Colonel Nakagawa's defensive positions among the ridges, but the high tide mark of the southern assault had been reached. Henceforth, the Marines were committed to a bitter war of attrition with a fanatical and tenacious foe, who had converted the jumbled coral cliffs, ravines, and precipices of the Umurbrogols into a nearly impregnable fortress.

#### *CASUALTIES, CORPSMEN, AND CLIMATE*<sup>20</sup>

To speed evacuation of the wounded during the assault, medical planners arranged for the empty amphibian vehicles to carry casualties on the return trip from the beach to the transfer line. Here, waiting boats finished transporting the injured Marines the rest of the way to the ships. Those LVTs and DUKWs evacuating men to whom minutes meant the difference between life and death made a beeline for the nearest transport still flying the signal flag that indicated empty beds, and then hurried back to the line of transfer to

resume their primary task. So successfully did this humane plan work that wounded Marines were being treated on ships within an hour of the initial landing. An unfortunate drawback, however, was that the unexpectedly large number of casualties right from the start tied up an excessive number of amphibian tractors. As a result, the shortage of LVTs and DUKWs was intensified, and later waves of troops and supplies were delayed in being transported across the reef and onto the beach.

For support of the combat teams, Company A of the 1st Medical Battalion was attached to the 1st Marines, Company B to the 5th, and Company C to the 7th, while a surgical team from Company D was especially assigned to 3/5 for its later Ngesebus operation. These medical companies had come ashore early, but their equipment had been delayed in landing. Not until 21 September were any of them set up and operating with adequate hospital facilities. Prior to this date, the units aided the shore party in collecting and evacuating the wounded, and provided replacements for the RCTs' organic medical personnel, who had suffered severe losses.

Although 40 hospital corpsmen and 96 stretcher bearers accompanied each combat team, the high initial casualty rate quickly revealed a need for more. The stretcher bearers, fortunately, had received actual practice in first aid during the staging period, and they formed a nucleus of trained personnel when rear echelon troops were pressed into service. These men came from all supporting and garrison units for, as the

<sup>20</sup> Sources of medical data particularly consulted for this section include: *IIIAC Palaus Rpt*, Encl J, "Medical Report of Palaus Operation"; *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx D, "Medical."



*CLOSE FIGHTING at edge of Peleliu airfield. (USMC 95260)*



*CASUALTY is hoisted aboard amtrac en route to hospital ship off Peleliu. (USMC 94940)*

G-1 officer remarked, "I had no difficulty in obtaining volunteers for this important task, so anxious were the 'rear area' men to aid their infantry 'brothers.'" <sup>21</sup>

Over and above the toll exacted by the seemingly ubiquitous enemy fire, there were the many victims of the tropical island itself. "Peleliu is a horrible place," <sup>22</sup> remarked a civilian correspondent, and Marines echoed his sentiments. The blazing sun, stifling heat, jagged coral, rugged terrain, and lack of readily available water all combined to make the island a living hell.

Heat exhaustion cases increased alarmingly as the fighting progressed, and stocks of salt tablets ashore quickly disappeared. Since they "were worth their weight in gold in preventing heat exhaustion," <sup>23</sup> all salt tablets that the support ships could spare were sent ashore. Although several combat commanders believed that they lost as many men to the enervating heat as to enemy fire, no definite count of such casualties existed. <sup>24</sup> The high incidence of heat prostration cases, nevertheless, severely overloaded the limited medical facilities

and incapacitated valuable, trained Marines during the critical assault phase.

Compounding the unpleasantness of Peleliu was the unforgettable "sickening stench of decaying bodies which added to the difficulties under which the troops fought." <sup>25</sup> Not enough men could be spared during the first few days to collect and bury the dead whose bodies lay where they fell, exposed to the elements and insects. To prevent the spreading of disease by flies, three 15-men sanitary squads, equipped with knapsack sprayers, came ashore on D-Day and followed the combat teams, carefully spraying the newly-developed insecticide, DDT, on opened enemy supply dumps, bodies, uncovered human feces, and other fly-feeding and breeding places. Twelve days later when the tactical situation permitted, low-flying aircraft dusted all of Peleliu with DDT, while the malaria control unit operated a truck-mounted power sprayer in the swamps and other suspected areas.

Peleliu was the scene of the first large-scale combat testing of DDT as a sanitation control agent. All mosquito nets and jungle hammocks were treated with a combination of DDT and kerosene, as were tents and other personnel shelters that came into use later. Sanitation experts soon made the discovery, however, that while the new insecticide worked excellently against adult flies and mosquitoes, it proved ineffective in killing the larvae. As a result, flies continued to breed, despite the combined efforts of planes, trucks, and portable DDT sprayers. In fact, the swarms

---

<sup>21</sup> Col Harold O. Deakin ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar50, in *Peleliu Comment File*. Negro Marines from the 16th Field Depot "were most proficient in this type of activity. All Unit Commanders praised their efficiency, zeal and cheerfulness in performing their duties." *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx D, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Martin in *Time*, 16Oct44, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> Col Richard P. Ross, Jr., memo to Maj Frank O. Hough, dtd 7Nov49, hereafter *Ross memo*.

<sup>24</sup> Most heat prostration cases were usually treated at the medical aid stations close to the front, where no records were kept.

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ross memo*.

of flies exceeded anything that American troops had seen to date. During the second week in October, a gradual decline in the fly population set in. Apparently, the exertions of the DDT sprayers had not been in vain. "Probably for the first time in the history of military operations," stated the corps after-action report, "there had been a negligible number of casualties that could be attributed to flies or mosquitoes."<sup>26</sup>

### SUPPORTING THE DRIVE INLAND<sup>27</sup>

For the first few days on Peleliu, conditions for rendering effective logistic support to the assault units left much to be desired. The inadequate beach space for receiving the mountains of materiel required to keep the advance alive permitted little organization of the support area. Supply dumps, bivouac areas, artillery emplacements, and equipment were located helter-skelter on the first piece of unoccupied land. This random location of logistical activities made more difficult the tasks of coordinating and controlling resupply missions, undertakings which were fre-

quently delayed because motor vehicles had severed vital telephone lines. Marines under enemy fire soon discovered that it was much faster to lay a new line than to search for a broken one. Adding to the cluttered appearance of the beachhead were the countless foxholes and shell craters that pockmarked the entire area.

When Rear Admiral John W. Reeves, Jr., responsible for the future base development of the Western Carolines Area, visited Peleliu shortly after D-Day, he was appalled by what he saw. The admiral at once requested through higher channels that certain artillery batteries be displaced immediately to allow supply dumps to occupy their permanent locations in accordance with the base development plan. General Rupertus, however, countered with the argument that these batteries firing from their present positions were essential in order to support the infantry and that it would be folly to tamper with an already critical tactical situation just to simplify some future garrison function. Since the recommendations of the ground commander are usually accepted during the combat phase, nothing ever came of Admiral Reeves' complaint.

As the assault troops pushed inland, regimental dumps displaced forward to support the attack. The Marines were fortunate in that the island's roads were capable, at least temporarily, of handling the division's transportation needs. For hauling supplies up to the front, each regiment had four LVTs, augmented by six 2½-ton cargo trucks once they became available.

<sup>26</sup> IIIAC Palau Rpt, Encl J, "Medical Report of Palau Operation," p. 5. One chaplain, however, clearly remembered "the havoc dysentery worked with the troops—almost equal to the heat and shells—and how everyone from the top down blamed it on the flies." LCdr Byron E. Allender ltr to CMC, dtd 8Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

<sup>27</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: *5th Mar Sup-EvacRpt*; Blackford, "Giants at Peleliu;" BuDocks, *Building the Navy's Bases in World War II: History of the Bureau of Yards and Docks and the Civil Engineer Corps 1940-1946*, 2 vols. (Washington: GPO, 1947), hereafter BuDocks, *World War II Hist.*

To facilitate unloading at the beach, a detachment of the 1054th Naval Construction Battalion (Seabees) began installing a pontoon causeway from Orange Beach 3 to the outer reef on 18 September, and the first LST unloaded over it on the following day. When additional pontoon causeways were added at the reef, the simultaneous unloading of three LSTs became possible. By 21 September, when the need for more unloading points became pressing, elements of the 1st Engineer Battalion and the 73d Seabees began work on access roads leading to the eastern and southern beaches. Two days later, both these beach areas were receiving LSTs for unloading.

On 19 September, the 33d Seabees started clearing the Peleliu airfield of all land mines, duds, debris, and shell fragments. Once the heavy engineering equipment began coming ashore, work on the repair of the existing fighter strip was immediately begun. Within 72 hours after having received the construction equipment on 20 September, the Seabees had cleared and leveled an operative strip, 260 feet by 3,875 feet, complete with runway lights.

The 1st Pioneer Battalion continued its shore party function, often unloading around the clock, until 28 September, when stevedores of the Island Command took over the beaches and supply dumps. While engaged in performing their assigned mission, the pioneers operated bulldozers on two different occasions to knock out enemy-held pillboxes; they supplied frontline troops directly from the shore dumps, often going to great lengths to locate vitally needed items; and once they even re-

linquished their own machine guns to fill an urgent infantry request.

Although during the initial phases of the landing no infantryman or artilleryman suffered from lack of ammunition—thanks to the acuity of the logistic planners and their innovations such as the waterborne supply beach—Marines found it difficult to build up desirable levels of 105mm and 81mm ammunition, as well as 60mm illuminating shells. Selective discharge of these needed items took place the day after the first ammunition resupply ship dropped anchor at Kossol Roads on 21 September. The high rate of ammunition expenditure continued, however, because of the strength of the enemy's defenses. The heavy fighting also resulted in many weapons being either damaged in combat or lost through carelessness. The 5th Marines, for example, had lost or damaged over 70 percent of its flamethrowers and bazookas by 17 September. In spite of the heavy fighting, which demanded large amounts of ammunition, weapons, and supplies, and the unforeseen beach congestion, which seriously hindered resupply operations, no real shortages of shells, weapons, or supplies developed during the first couple of weeks.

#### *TACTICAL SUPPORT*<sup>28</sup>

Until Marine artillery was emplaced ashore on Peleliu and could assume responsibility for providing direct fire support to the infantry battalions, carrier-based aircraft had to fill part of the gap. As early as 17 September, how-

<sup>28</sup> An additional source used for this section was *11th MarOpRpt*.

ever, the reduction of all targets, except those in defilade or on reverse slopes, became the exclusive province of the artillery, and, by the 21st, almost all air missions were of the deep support type. On the whole, Marines were satisfied with the kind of air support given them by the naval pilots, but felt that their attempts to strafe were "of little value, due to the fact that the strafing runs were begun and completed at too high an altitude; pullouts from such never were made under 1,800 feet."<sup>29</sup>

One other vexation was that some naval officers, prior to the landing, had led the Marines to expect too much from the use of napalm, considered at that time somewhat of a miracle weapon following its limited employment during the Marianas campaign. One briefing officer ever assured 1/7 that its assault to the south on Peleliu would encounter the infantryman's dream, "an objective stripped of concealing vegetation and devoid of live enemy soldiers."<sup>30</sup> The disappointment experienced by these Marines when they ran into some 1,500 elite Japanese troops who tenaciously resisted the southward advance can be imagined. Later, after the results of the first extensive use of napalm had been analyzed, the division recommended that the new weapon "should be used either on pinpoint targets or in such quantities that complete saturation of an area can be achieved. It is wasted when used in small quantities in area bombing."<sup>31</sup>

Carrier-based planes also provided aerial observation until Marine Observation Squadron-3 (VMO-3), whose first planes touched down on the partially repaired airstrip on 18 September, began operating ashore. The 11th Marines' battalions, in addition, had forward observers up with the advance infantry units. Since the officers coordinating the missions of air, naval gunfire, and artillery were all located at the division CP, each prospective target was assigned to the supporting arm best suited to reduce it.

For the first two weeks ashore, Marine artillery performed according to the operation plan, delivering preparatory, harassing, and interdicting fires as requested. When corps artillery came ashore on the second day, it was placed under control of the 11th Marines and tied in with the regimental fire direction center. Most artillery units massed their fires northward to support the assault on the ridges, but the 3d Battalion and a battery of the 3d 155mm Howitzer Battalion faced south to assist the 7th Marines' drive to the promontories. On 18 September, these units also shifted their fires northward against the entrenched Japanese amidst the central ridges. One battery of the 8th 155mm Gun Battalion, meanwhile, had taken up firing positions in anticipation of providing supporting fires for the 81st Infantry Division's landing on 17 September, but the expected call never came and this unit also faced about on the following day.

As a close support weapon on Peleliu, armor ranked just behind artillery, and far ahead of air or naval gunfire. "Tanks were so invaluable during the

<sup>29</sup> *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase I, Anx L, pp. 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Worden ltr.*

<sup>31</sup> *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx L, p. 6.

first few days that tank units enroute to support designated units were repeatedly intercepted by other units in dire straits which would beg for tank assistance."<sup>32</sup> Whenever possible, this aid was given by the tankers before continuing on to their assigned destinations. Until the 155mm guns came ashore, the Shermans provided the only flat-trajectory, high-powered weapon that proved effective in sealing caves, blasting pillboxes, and reducing other fortifications. In fact, the tanks served as mobile artillery.

Because of the elaborate enemy underground defenses and the high value that Marines placed upon tank support, the Peleliu operation resulted in the longest continuous commitment in action experienced by any Marine tank battalion up to that time. The Shermans were seldom in reserve, even in the later stages, and often had to rearm several times daily. Their ammunition expenditure on D-Day, for example, was so high that an advance on the following day was possible only after shells were salvaged from damaged vehicles.

Throughout the campaign, supporting armor fought together with the assault troops as a team; only on three minor occasions did tanks ever advance without accompanying infantry. Because of the Shermans' better communication system and their constant presence near rifle units, division frequently made use of the tank radios to locate infantry elements or to pass on instructions to them.

Owing to mutual respect and admiration, the teamwork between the rifle-

men and the tankers was superb, and each went to heroic lengths to support the other. On one occasion, a rifle squad protecting the advance of a tank platoon melted away under enemy mortar fire until only two survivors remained, but these infantrymen doggedly kept on with their task of shepherding the Shermans. As if in an attempt to match the undaunted courage of their supporting infantrymen, the tankers reciprocated by risking both their bodies and their vehicles to aid hard-pressed Marines. Whenever the job could not be done any other way, the Shermans maneuvered into the most vulnerable positions, and crew members fought with part of their bodies protruding from the tanks' interiors to gain better observation. Indicative of the danger inherent in this practice was the high casualty rate among the tank battalion's officers. Eight out of the total 31 were killed, and only eight emerged from the long harrowing campaign unscathed. No Sherman was ever lost to close-in enemy assaults, however, for not even suicidal-minded Japanese, lugging Bangalore torpedoes or demolition charges, ever succeeded in breaking through the protective screen of Marine riflemen.

The Marines especially valued the tanks for their ability to quickly and safely reduce enemy fortifications that proved impervious to either infantry weapons or assaults. With their heavy armored plates warding off the hail of deadly automatic fire from Japanese fortifications, the Shermans could move up to pointblank range. After firing three or four rounds of high explosives, the gunner would shift to white phosphorus shells, a few of which usually

---

<sup>32</sup> *Stuart ltr.*

silenced all enemy resistance. One tank crew actually destroyed 30 pillboxes and fortified positions within a single day's action.

Often, two Shermans would work in coordination with the thin-skinned LVT flamethrower to remove a particularly difficult position. After moving up and blasting the enemy fortification, the tanks would lay down covering fire while the flamethrower placed itself in between the protective hulls of the Shermans and burned out the target.

As an experiment, a small capacity flamethrower was installed in a Sherman, but the short range of the burst necessitated the tank's moving in at such close range that it became vulnerable to close-in enemy assaults, against which it was helpless since its bow machine gun had been removed to permit installation of the flamethrower. Primarily because of its lack of success in combat, this specially-equipped tank destroyed only a few enemy fortifications, and its assigned missions were more like battlefield experiments than anything else.

Another innovation tried by the 1st Tank Battalion on Peleliu was spaced armor. While still in the staging area, the tankers welded spare track over the turret and front slope plate of each Sherman, since earlier tests had demonstrated that this technique would increase the vehicle's resistance to both armor-piercing and large high-explosive projectiles. This unique use of spare track proved extremely effective and was officially credited with preventing the destruction of three tanks from direct hits by 75mm armor-piercing projectiles.

Without question, however, the most significant armored innovation on Peleliu was the flexible basis of tank employment. Previously, a tank company was attached to a rifle regiment and remained with it throughout the campaign regardless of whether the unit was in reserve or fighting over terrain unsuitable for tank employment. For the initial assault, Company A of the 1st Tank Battalion was attached to the 1st Marines, Company B to the 5th, and Company C to the 7th, but even after control reverted to the battalion commander on 16 September, the tank units still remained in direct support of the regiments. The radical departure from previous tank employment doctrine came when the insufficient number of Shermans within the division resulted in a widespread shifting of tanks and crews. Although the tank company commanders and liaison personnel remained permanently attached to the various regiments to insure continuity of liaison, the tank platoons were freely shifted from one rifle unit to another to replace battle losses, support a major effort, or take advantage of terrain suitable for tracked vehicle operations. The new policy proved its worth, since the maximum utilization of the limited number of tanks was realized.

The 1st Tank Battalion also experienced certain difficulties on Peleliu, for an "overoptimistic logistic concept of the Palau Operation resulted in an entirely inadequate amount of spare parts and maintenance equipment being taken forward."<sup>33</sup> Only by the salvaging of parts from damaged vehicles was the

---

<sup>33</sup> *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx J, p. 9.



average of 20 operative tanks maintained throughout the campaign. Moreover, the repair crews suffered considerable casualties while stripping the immobile tanks under the identical enemy fire that had knocked them out. "Additional spare parts," the tank battalion reported, "would have saved both men and time."<sup>34</sup> Just three tanks equipped with bulldozer blades and one tank retriever were landed, but they quickly proved invaluable. Besides serving to clear away debris and to fill anti-tank ditches, the tank-dozers were found to be quite useful in sealing up apertures of Japanese bunkers while the occupants were still active and firing.

Like the tankers, the combat engineers, including Headquarters and Service Company of the 1st Engineer Battalion, landed with the infantry regiments to which they were attached. Even after reverting to battalion control on 26 September, the engineers still worked closely with the assault troops. Often, details of combat engineers went forward of front lines to hack out trails, clear away mines and boobytraps, or blast enemy-held caves and fortifications. As the official report stated, demolitions proved to be "the greatest engineer problem."<sup>35</sup> One demolition team attached to 3/1 was credited with killing over 200 Japanese during a five-day period of neutralization of enemy pillboxes and caves. These demolition experts also cleared away coral heads that impeded the landing of amphibian vehicles, blasted water wells in the coral

subsurface, deactivated duds and boobytraps, and cleared the beaches and access roads of all mines.

### *DEADLOCK AMIDST THE RIDGES*<sup>36</sup>

By the fifth day of the assault, practically all those Japanese who were able to withdraw before the swift onslaught of the Marines had rejoined Colonel Nakagawa's main forces in the Umurbrogols. Here, according to General Inoue's master plan, the decisive struggle for Peleliu would be waged. In contrast to earlier Pacific campaigns, no large-scale *banzai* charge was contemplated. General Inoue had specifically warned the Peleliu Island Commander against wasting his battle strength in futile attacks; instead, Colonel Nakagawa was instructed to defend his hold on the high ground to the last man in an attempt to deny, or at least delay, the use of the airfield to the invading Americans. As long as some of the Japanese remained in their fortified positions, hidden high-velocity guns could bombard the airstrip, or suicide squads armed with high explosives could sally forth to wreak havoc on the runways. As a result, the advancing Marines were forced to assault each enemy emplacement individually, while Japanese artillery and mortar fire continued its rain of death and destruction along the front and to the rear.

At 0700 on 19 September, the attack was resumed along the entire 1st Ma-

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx I, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Additional sources used for this section are: *1st Mar Hist*; *1/1 UHist*; *3/1 Rec of Events*, 19-23Sep44; *7th Mar R-2 Jnl*, 19-22 Sep44; *1/7 HistRpt*, 19-22Sep44; *2/7 WarD*, 19-22Sep44; *3/7 WarD*, 19-22Sep44.

rines' front. Colonel Puller had received no new directives; his regiment still had the assigned mission of seizing the high terrain up to phase line 0-2. The 3d Battalion, unmolested except by snipers, moved up the western coastal flats for some 400 yards before halting in order to retain contact with neighboring units advancing more slowly over the ridges. Here, 2/7, still under operational control of the 1st Marines, overcame stiff resistance to seize the forward slopes of Hills 200 and 260, for a day's gain of 300 yards. Company A of 1/1 passed through to press the attack, but it ran headlong into a sheer 150-foot cliff which, coupled with heavy enemy fire, stopped the assault cold. Only six men out of the entire rifle company managed to regain 2/7's lines without either being killed or wounded.

It was the 2d Battalion, however, that first tested the strength of Colonel Nakagawa's final bastion. After a 500-yard advance in the face of increasing enemy resistance, the foremost assault units encountered the same foreboding hill mass that had blunted the attack of Company B the previous day. This dominating piece of terrain became known as the Five Sisters, because it contained five peaks; they averaged 250 feet in height and were separated from each other by steep cliffs. The southern face was at first dubbed "Bloody Nose Ridge" by the Marines. No sooner had the battalion consolidated its forward positions than it launched a full-scale assault directly at the forbidding height.

Preparatory air and artillery strikes thoroughly plastered both the forward and reverse slopes of the hill mass, while

all tanks and mortars attached to 2/7 were brought over to support the all-out effort of Honsowetz' battalion. Rushing forward in small groups to minimize casualties from the terrific enemy fire, the Marines grimly fought their way ahead, and their Shermans, mortars, and LVT flamethrowers ventured as far forward as possible to provide direct fire support. Despite the vigor and determination with which the riflemen pressed the assault, it collapsed completely by noon. Even the most pessimistic Marine present there that day did not dream that the defenders of the Five Sisters would frustrate all attempts to storm them for over two months.

Later in the afternoon, the attack was resumed. This time, the battalion commander committed all three of his rifle companies in a frontal assault, meanwhile attempting an enveloping movement from the east with Company C of 1/1, fresh from regimental reserve. If this force could seize Hill 100 (later to be christened Walt Ridge) whose summit dominated the East Road and adjoining swampy terrain, a springboard would be gained for an attack on the hill mass from the rear.

Captain Everett P. Pope led the 90 men of Company C through a swamp on the right flank of 2/1 to emerge on the East Road. No sooner had the group begun assault operations against two large pillboxes discovered near the base of Walt Ridge, than a Japanese machine gun opened up from the right flank across a small pond some 50 yards away. Pinned down without any hopes of reaching the enemy gunner, whose accuracy inflicted numerous casualties,

Captain Pope finally withdrew his men for another try along a different approach.

The concentrated Japanese fire, meanwhile, was exacting a stiff toll among the exposed men of the 2d Battalion as they struggled toward the towering Five Sisters. The losses within two of the rifle companies that afternoon became so great that they were combined in the field into a still-understrength company, even though a squad of men from the 4th War Dog Platoon had been thrown in as a reinforcement.

It was late afternoon before Company C, now supported by the division reconnaissance company, was in position to renew its assault on Walt Ridge. This time, Captain Pope planned to approach by way of a causeway over a large sinkhole and to continue up the East Road to the base of the objective. Armor was scheduled to spearhead the advance, but the first Sherman to venture onto the narrow causeway slipped off to one side, while a following tank also lost its traction and slid off the other side.

Since the partially-blocked route barred the approach of additional tanks, Captain Pope's men did the only thing left to them. Crossing the exposed causeway in squad rushes, the riflemen raced on to the base of the ridge, paused briefly to catch their breaths, and then assaulted directly up the slopes. With only machine gun and mortar fire supporting them, the climbers clawed and pulled their way up the rugged slides, and the swiftness of their attack took the enemy by surprise. The Marines carried the crest, but, to their disap-

pointment, they immediately received extremely heavy fire from positions about 50 yards up the ridgeline, where the Japanese held a knoll that completely dominated the newly-won terrain.

Reluctant to abandon the summit that had cost them so many dead and wounded, the men of Company C held out in their isolated and exposed positions throughout the night, while the enraged foe hurled everything he had into the struggle in a desperate bid to oust the Marines from the vital crest. Machine gun bullets crisscrossed the entire ridgetop, and large-caliber shells and mortar rounds plummeted down from above with devastating effect. Using the darkness as a shield, Japanese infantry moved forward to launch one savage counterattack after another. Before dawn arrived to bring surcease to the besieged Marines, they had expended all of their ammunition and were forced to use their fists, broken ammunition boxes, and chunks of coral to hurl their assailants back down the slopes. Only Captain Pope and 15 men remained when the first light of morning revealed to the weary survivors that the enemy had moved up machine guns, which now opened with deadly effect. Since the Marines' positions were clearly untenable in the face of this new threat, permission was granted to withdraw.

That morning, 20 September, the 1st and 2d Battalions of Puller's regiment combined in a final all-out effort to retake Walt Ridge. Every available supporting arm, from LVT(A)s to 37mm guns, was brought up as far as possible,

while regimental headquarters was stripped of personnel to bolster the depleted ranks of the assault units. Even a provisional company was formed of cooks, wiremen, and supply handlers, who manned 12 machine guns in support of the attack.

Somehow the weary Marines, already exhausted physically and mentally by five days of constant assault over rugged terrain and against fanatical resistance, summoned up enough reserve energy and courage to make another valiant attempt. One private remembered the ensuing assault that sixth day, when he and his comrades were waved forward toward the towering ridges by their sergeant:

'Let's get killed up on that high ground there,' he said. 'It ain't no good to get it down here.' As the men stumbled out for him, he said, 'That's the good lads.'

The whole motley lot—a fighting outfit only in the minds of a few officers in the First Regiment and in the First Division—started up the hill. I have never understood why. Not one of them refused. They were the hard core—the men who couldn't or wouldn't quit. They would go up a thousand blazing hills and through a hundred blasted valleys, as long as their legs would carry them. They were Marine riflemen.<sup>37</sup>

Their bold rushes that day carried some of them to positions so advanced that the Marines killed in the fighting could not be removed for many more days. Their heroic sacrifice was in vain, however, for the seized ground proved untenable in the face of the concen-

trated and sustained enemy fire, which had already knocked out so many tanks and other supporting arms. "Despite the intense barrage, weapons which were not hit continued firing. The mortars glowed red, and machine guns blew up, but those that could, continued to fire."<sup>38</sup>

An accurate, if terse, account of the day's furious struggle was contained in Colonel Nakawaga's report to General Inoue that night:

Since dawn, the enemy has been concentrating their forces . . . vainly trying to approach *Higashiyama* [Walt Ridge] and *Kansokuyama* [Hill 300] with 14 tanks and one infantry battalion under the powerful aid of air and artillery fire. However, they were again put to rout receiving heavy losses.<sup>39</sup>

That afternoon, the battered Marines of the 1st and 2d Battalions were relieved in their frontline positions by 1/7, while 3/7 replaced 2/7. The 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, still remained in its zone along the western coast for two more days, but the rest of the regiment had sustained too many losses and been strained too often to the breaking point during the battle of the ridges to be effective in any further assault effort.

On 21 September, two companies of the relatively fresh 1/7 moved up the East Road in column to attempt recapture of Walt Ridge. The lead unit, Company C, which was scheduled to make the assault, passed over the causeway, still partially blocked by the immobilized Shermans, and continued up the road

<sup>37</sup> Russell Davis, *Marine at War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), pp. 113, 114, used with permission.

<sup>38</sup> *1st Mar Hist*, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 88.

to the point where it skirted the base of the objective. Here, supporting tanks, which had to bypass the causeway sink-hole, joined the advance.

As the leading elements of Company C came abreast of the ridge, enemy fire increased, and when the assault up the eastern slope began, the Japanese greeted the Marines with a mortar barrage that completely blanketed them. Soldiers in the caves above sprayed the scrambling Marines with automatic fire and lobbed grenades down on them, while artillery pieces, cunningly concealed on nearby high ground and impossible to spot, blasted the attackers. Weakened by excessive losses and unable even to hold the ground gained, the Marines evacuated the hillside and returned with their support unit, Company A, to the battalion lines, where Company B had remained poised all day.

On the same day, 3/7 assaulted over the ridges in the center. After a fast start, the progress, "for the rest of the day was slow and tedious and measured in yards."<sup>40</sup> Since it was evident that the only real gains would be made over the level ground, the battalions' zones were shifted, which narrowed 3/1's front and permitted this left flank unit to exploit the enemy's weakness in the area without breaking contact. Before 3/1 was relieved two days later, it succeeded in pushing a tank-infantry patrol forward 1,000 yards to reach the village of Garekoru without encountering serious opposition.

The next day, 22 September, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, attacked across the left portion of the ridges over ter-

rain that steadily grew more difficult. The day's gain was a mere 80 yards, for skillfully concealed Japanese machine guns pinned the lead units down time and time again. In the center of the ridges, the 2d Battalion, whose exhausted troops had been brought out of reserve, remained on the defensive and did not attempt any offensive action. On the right, however, the 1st Battalion spent most of the day making careful preparation to seize the Five Sisters.

At 1445, after Marine artillery blasted the enemy front with heavy concentrations, Company B of 1/7 moved out in attack, followed by Company A in close support. Riflemen and supporting tanks made their approach to the objective under a screen of smoke laid down by Marine mortars, while Weapons Company blazed away at Walt Ridge in an attempt to confuse the enemy as to the direction of the attack. For the first 250 yards, the riflemen received only sniper fire; then hidden machine guns on the nearby ridges opened up with a murderous stream of fire.

By this time, the foremost Marines had begun venturing into the mouth of a draw, soon to be known as "Death Valley." Its steep walls on both sides were dotted with mutually-supporting enemy gun emplacements and rifle pits. The accompanying Shermans were barred from entering, for the floor of the declivity proved to be mined, but they fired white phosphorus and high-explosive shells into the caves lining the canyon's cliffs as the Marine riflemen pushed on. The Japanese gunners, however, with their clear fields of fire, exacted such a heavy toll that a platoon

---

<sup>40</sup> 3/7 WarD, 21Sep44.

from Company A was rushed up to bolster the depleted ranks of the assault unit.

The Marines did not venture much farther into the funnel-like canyon before running into a sheer cliff that barred the way. At this point, the lead riflemen were actually within 100 yards of Colonel Nakagawa's CP and the last enemy stronghold to be reduced during the long campaign. Since the precipitous walls on all three sides made any infantry assault of the Japanese cave positions impossible, a withdrawal was ordered to prevent any additional losses from the deadly rain of fire that raked the Marines. The supporting company and its Shermans moved up under a cover of smoke to support the evacuation, and, by 1830, the entire force had withdrawn.

When darkness settled over the battlefield on 22 September, one phase of the Peleliu campaign had ended and another had begun. No longer would Marines, soon to be reinforced by Army troops from Angaur, suffer prohibitive casualties in fruitless frontal assaults on the ridges from the south. Instead, an end run around Colonel Nakagawa's devilishly-designed last-ditch positions would be made up the western coast in

search of a better attack route to the final pocket of Japanese resistance.

Although the campaign was to drag on for another two months of bitter fighting, the 1st Marine Division in a week of constant assault had seized the vital airfield, the commanding terrain behind it, and all of the island south of the Umurbrogols. Ample room for the proper deployment of both division and corps artillery had been gained, and all hindrances to unloading over the beaches had been removed, leaving only the weather as an unknown factor.

All of Peleliu containing strategic value had been captured by the Marines, but the cost had been high. Casualties totaled 3,946. These heavy losses eliminated one regiment as an effective assault unit and severely depleted the strength of the other two. The 1st Marines, for instance, suffered 56 percent casualties and, among the nine rifle platoons of its 1st Battalion, not one of the original platoon leaders, and only 74 of the riflemen, remained. As a sergeant remarked upon relief, "This ain't a regiment. We're just survivors."<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> George McMillan *et al*, *Uncommon Valor: Marine Divisions in Action* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1946), p. 58.

# Angaur and Ulithi<sup>1</sup>

## ANGAUR: THE MEN AND THE PLAN

On D-Day, while the Marines fought tenaciously to secure a beachhead on Peleliu, the IIIAC landing force scheduled to seize Angaur participated in a feinting movement northward against Babelthuap. The convoy of transports and LSTs carrying the 81st Infantry Division, accompanied by a protective screen of destroyers, hove to off the coast of the huge enemy-held island about noon and began to engage in pre-landing activities. Besides serving to confuse the Japanese as to the real target of the American attack, the force afloat provided a handy source of combat-ready troops in the eventuality that the Peleliu landing ran into trouble.

Though still untested in combat, the Army division had been training and preparing for this role for over two years. The insignia of the 81st was an angry wildcat, its nickname was the Wildcat Division, and the men referred to themselves as Wildcats.

Slated for the Pacific Theater and participation in Operation STALE-

MATE, the Army division debarked in July 1944 at the Hawaiian Islands, its staging area. While the men topped off their stateside training with amphibious exercises, the staff planners busied themselves with the essential tactical and logistical preparations, coordinating them whenever necessary. The assigned target was Angaur Island, situated just south of Peleliu and possessing extensive low level areas which were considered ideal for the construction of a heavy bomber field.

Like the 1st Marine Division, the 81st found its planning complicated by the changing concept of Operation STALEMATE. The Navy plan for the invasion of the Palaus had called for seizure of Angaur first, to be followed almost immediately by the capture of Peleliu. General Julian Smith, in his dual capacity as Commanding General, Administrative Command, V Amphibious Corps, and Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, took issue with this concept. He maintained that while Angaur was being attacked, the Japanese would have ample opportunity to reinforce Peleliu from Babelthuap, which was garrisoned by a force estimated at upwards of 25,000 troops. Initial seizure of Peleliu, on the other hand, would cut off Angaur from that source of reinforcement. The Navy accepted this revision of concept, but desiring Angaur for construction of a second airfield, continued throughout to

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: 81st InfDiv Op Rpt, The Capture of Angaur Island, 17Sep-22Oct44, dtd 26Dec44, hereafter *81st InfDiv OpRpt—Angaur*; Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Morison, *Leyte*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*.

press for the earliest possible landing on that island.<sup>2</sup>

The plan continued to be revised through 16 September, at which time the last change became effective. On that date, RCT 323, then serving as IIIAC floating reserve, was designated the Ulithi assault force with orders to proceed immediately on its new mission. The Army officers responsible for planning the Angaur operation were at first handicapped by the lack of intelligence about the terrain and the enemy garrison. Fortunately, recently taken aerial photographs, as well as enemy documents captured on Saipan, reached the staff officers in time to help clarify the situation.

As finally evolved, the Angaur landing became a two-pronged assault utilizing two RCTs attacking over separate beaches. Red Beach was located on the northeastern coast of the island; Blue Beach was situated near the center of the east coast (See Map 6). Two thousand yards of rocky shoreline separated the two landing points. Single lines of advance from both beaches to the interior of the island led straight into the thick, tangled undergrowth of the rain forest. Even though these beaches were the least desirable of any on Angaur the decision of Army planners to land at the two widely separated points was based on sound tactical reasons. These were the absence of a fringing reef at the proposed landing sites and the presence of weaker enemy defenses than existed elsewhere on the island.

Major Ushio Goto, the Japanese commander on Angaur, did not have suffi-

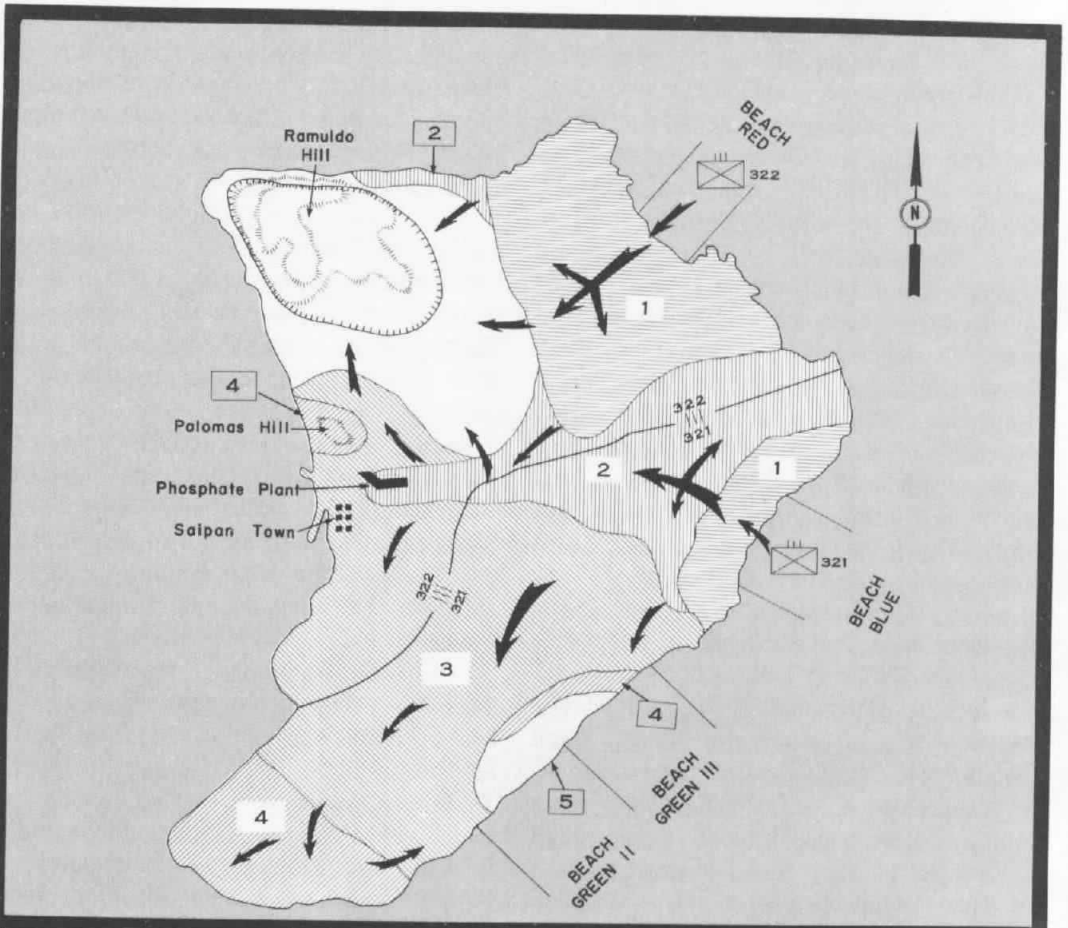
cient troops to defend all possible landing points. Even by concentrating his forces to cover only those beaches offering most advantages to an invader, he still had to spread his troops dangerously thin. To thwart the American assault, the major had only his *1st Battalion, 59th Infantry*, for General Inoue had withdrawn the remainder of the Angaur garrison to Babelthuap during the latter part of July in the belief that the larger island was the most likely objective of any Allied attack. Subsequent reinforcements from Babelthuap had brought the total Japanese strength on Angaur to 1,400 men. American intelligence overestimated enemy strength, and planners of the 81st Infantry Division expected to encounter no less than two Japanese battalions totalling 2,500 men. The decision to land two regiments in the initial assault was the direct result of this faulty intelligence.

The Japanese commander decided to rely upon the natural barrier provided by the rain forest and the distance between vital areas of the island to deter any Allied landing over Red and Blue Beaches. If the Americans chose to strike there, Major Goto expected to have ample time to concentrate and deploy his forces for a successful counterattack. The landing beaches selected for the assault were lightly fortified; the more favorable landing sites on Angaur featured elaborate defenses. These consisted of reinforced concrete pillboxes, supporting arms designed to provide clear fields of fire across the beaches, as well as mines, tetrahedrons, and barbed wire barricades. Major Goto had positioned the bulk of the island

---

<sup>2</sup> *Smith interview.*





**ANGAUR ISLAND**

Four-Day Campaign By 81st INFANTRY DIVISION

0 500  
Scale in Yards



Progress 17 Sept



Progress 18 Sept



Progress 19 Sept



Progress 20 Sept



Mopup By 321st Infantry



Enemy Cave Pocket Upon Departure Of 321st Infantry

Map 6

E. L. Wilson

garrison within close supporting distance of the southern, western, and eastern beaches.

Upon completion of last-minute training, the 81st Division sailed from Hawaii on 12 August for Guadalcanal, where it arrived 12 days later. At Cape Esperance the infantrymen made two practice landings, attempting to simulate battlefield conditions on Angaur. In early September the Western Attack Force departed from Guadalcanal for the Palaus. Confidence prevailed among the infantrymen as they neared their first action. "The troops," commented the Army division history, "were as physically fit as any that ever set forth to war."<sup>3</sup> On the coral beaches of Angaur, in the crucible of combat, the truth of this statement was soon to be tested.

On the morning of 12 September, the Western Attack Force moved into position off the Palaus. While other ships proceeded with the task of softening Peleliu's defenses, the two battleships, four light cruisers, and five destroyers of the Angaur Attack Group, commanded by Rear Admiral William H. P. Blandy, began a deliberate and systematic bombardment of their objective. Every known or suspected enemy fortification on the small island was thoroughly blasted by the heavy naval guns, or bombed and strafed by carrier planes flying numerous strikes. Minesweepers and UDT teams, meanwhile, executed their prelanding missions off Red, Blue, and Green Beaches, the latter an alternate landing site.

Early on 15 September, the 1st Marine Division landed on Peleliu and embarked upon its task of wresting a secure beachhead from the defending force. Throughout the day, General Mueller and his men anxiously followed the progress of the assault, for its outcome would determine when the Wildcats would be released from their reserve mission for the Angaur landing. So confident was the Navy that Fox Day, the invasion of Angaur, would be on 16 September that, on the previous evening, in accordance with Navy custom, they fed the soldiers the best evening meal possible, including steak, chicken, frozen strawberries, and other delicacies.<sup>4</sup> The 15th passed, however, without the arrival of the expected order.

The next morning, 16 September, Marines advanced across the runways of the Peleliu airfield, prime objective of the assault. When General Rupertus failed to request reinforcements for his division by noon, higher commanders concluded that the need for the large Army reserve had passed. Moreover, Admiral Blandy had reported that the preliminary bombardments, hydrographic conditions, and UDT preparations all favored a successful landing on Angaur. During the afternoon of 16 September, the commanders of the Western Attack Force (Admiral Fort) and IIIAC (General Geiger) conferred and decided to release the 81st Infantry Division for a landing the following day. This order was issued at 1432, and the division command on board the APA *Fremont* immediately made last

---

<sup>3</sup> Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 65.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

minute preparations for the Angaur assault, then only 18 hours away.

*THE WILDCATS SEIZE  
THEIR OBJECTIVE*<sup>6</sup>

Before dawn on Fox Day, 17 September, the warships of the task group under Rear Admiral Blandy sent shells screaming towards Angaur. The fire support plan employed by the Navy provided for fire from 2 battleships, 4 cruisers, 5 destroyers, 9 LCI(G)s, and 4 LCI(M)s, the latter firing 20mm and 40mm guns, rockets, and mortars.<sup>6</sup> Heavy explosions soon rocked the island. Shortly after 0740, 40 fighter-bombers swept down out of the skies to bomb and strafe enemy positions behind the beaches. At 0810, precisely on schedule, the approach to the shore began. LCIs led the way, blazing away with guns, mortars, and rocket concentrations. The initial assault waves made the journey in LVTs, but following waves were boated in LCVPs and LCMs, for even LSTs could beach with dry ramps on the reef-free shores.

RCT 321 landed with two battalions abreast in columns of companies over Blue Beach at 0830, while RCT 322 did

---

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from: *81st InfDiv OpRpt—Angaur*; RCT 321 OpRpt, *The Capture of Angaur Island, 1Jul–30Sep44*, dtd 26Nov44, hereafter *RCT 321 OpRept—Angaur*; RCT 322 OpRpt, *Angaur Island—Palau Group, 1Jul–23Oct44*, dtd 1Dec33, hereafter *RCT 322 OpRpt—Angaur*; *Japanese CenPac Ops*; *Peleliu Comment File*; Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*; Morison, *Leyte*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*.

<sup>6</sup> Anx C, 81st InfDiv FO No. 7, dtd 5Aug44.

likewise over Red Beach six minutes later. No entrenched Japanese infantry opposed the landing; the only enemy resistance consisted of sporadic mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire, which caused neither casualties nor damage.

As viewed through the eyes of the Japanese Army commander on Babelthuap, the American invasion of Angaur appeared to be fraught with disaster for the invasion force, and the situation at that island on 17 September was described as follows:

Under the protection of bombing, strafing, and naval gunfire enemy craft, including battleships, approached as close as 100 meters off the coast and commenced firing. This has been going on since dawn. The enemy launched a landing party of 30 barges at 0800 along our northeastern coast line. However, the Angaur Unit was able to put the enemy to rout and start a state of confusion with the aid of the guns which had been planted there.<sup>7</sup>

Shortly thereafter the Japanese conceded that a second landing attempt was more successful and that by 0900 American forces in a strength of about 2,000 men had taken up positions on land, accompanied by a large group of tanks. The American losses for the first day of operations on Angaur were listed as 30 barges blown up and sunk, 20 barges destroyed, and 15 tanks destroyed, a somewhat unreasonable figure in view of the lack of initial Japanese opposition at the beaches.

The men of the invasion force remained blissfully unaware of the rout and disaster to which the Japanese headquarters staff at Koror had rele-

---

<sup>7</sup> *Japanese CenPacOps*, p. 87.



*U.S. ARMY 81st Infantry Division invades Angaur Island. (USA SC 196034)*



*"WILDCATS" closing in on enemy pocket, Angaur. (USA SC 196033)*

gated them on paper. Rushing across some 20 yards of slightly inclined, rubble-strewn strips of sand to the crest of a low embankment at the edge of the jungle, the Army troops established a firing line. Then, with the beachheads secure, the men plunged headlong into the semi-dark, almost impenetrable undergrowth. Their immediate objective was Phase Line 0-1, some 300 yards inland. On the opposite side of Angaur, meanwhile, the transports carrying RCT 323, the IIIAC floating reserve, were feinting a landing off Saipan Town in hopes of confusing the enemy.

This ruse apparently succeeded. When Major Goto learned of the American landings, he dispatched a rifle company towards the eastern beaches to attack the Americans, but made no move to organize a large-scale counterattack. The Japanese commander's belief that the main assault would come over the southern beaches, where he had deployed the bulk of his troops, may have been further strengthened by the feint landing. At any rate, he did not attempt to shift any of his forces northward. To forestall any such move, American naval gunfire, as well as aerial bombing and strafing, repeatedly hit every potential assembly area on the island throughout the day. These interdictory fires might well have made any regrouping of the forces of Major Goto a disaster and prevented any sizeable counterattack from materializing. While the Japanese defense units prepared for combat, scouts were dispatched to observe the movements of the invasion force. In case the defense was unsuc-

cessful in the daytime, a counterattack was planned for the coming night.<sup>8</sup>

The American assault regiments advanced slowly at first from Red and Blue Beaches. No roads penetrated the almost trackless jungle, whose floor was matted and choked with fallen trees, broken branches, and snarled vines. The sweat-drenched soldiers of the 322d, hacking and groping their way through the undergrowth, found the terrain a much more formidable obstacle than the intermittent mortar, machine gun, and sniper fire from an enemy hidden by the dense foliage. On the beaches, meanwhile, the buildup of men and materiel continued. Upon coming ashore, the medium tanks immediately headed for the frontlines over trails cleared for them by bulldozers. By noon it was apparent that despite the Wildcat's lack of familiarity with combat conditions, they had made a successful amphibious assault. They were now in a position to extend their grip on the island.

Although the advance of RCT 322 was progressing on schedule, the 321st had rough going from the very outset. The regiment encountered strongly held enemy fortifications on its southern flank near Rocky Point, on its northern flank near Cape Ngatpokul, and to its front as well. Expansion of the beachhead proved extremely difficult and time-consuming.

By late afternoon of Fox Day the accomplishments of his regiments failed to measure up to General Mueller's ex-

---

<sup>8</sup> IIIAC C-2 Rpt No. 7, dtd 21Sep44.

pectations. Not all of Phase Line 0-1, which extended from the northern shore of Angaur about 500 yards southwest of Cape Gallatin to a point roughly 250 yards southwest of Rocky Point had been seized. Furthermore, a 700-yard gap still separated the two regiments. Orders issued for the attack that afternoon were intended to rectify this situation. Before nightfall, General Mueller hoped to occupy more favorable positions and ordered his regiments to probe for a possible weak spot in the enemy defenses, particularly in the area separating the two beachheads. The 322d Infantry Regiment was to push forward to Phase Line 0-2, extending generally southward from a point about 400 yards west of 0-1 on the north shore to Green Beach on the eastern shore, with emphasis on achieving a juncture with RCT 321 as soon as possible.

By 1430 the general attack had been resumed, and the soldiers of both regiments pushed forward all along the line. In the vicinity of Blue Beach a combination of naval gunfire and bombing and strafing by supporting aircraft failed to eliminate the Japanese pillboxes impeding the advance of the 321st Infantry Regiment. The task of reducing them fell to the foot soldier. Gingerly picking their way over the rubble-strewn sand, riflemen gained positions from which they furnished protective fire until a portable flamethrower could be brought into action. Once the flaming tongue of napalm started licking at the gunport of a pillbox, demolition teams rushed forward to place their charges. No sooner had the walls of the

fortification been breached than the riflemen began crawling towards the next pillbox. Though painfully slow, this method was effective. Dusk found some men of RCT 321 beyond Phase Line 0-1, but both flanks still lagged short of the first objective.

The advance of RCT 322 was progressing smoothly enough in the north, despite the failure of the two assault regiments to effect a juncture. Though RCT 322 managed to establish defensive perimeters along most of Phase Line 0-2 in its zone, it still had not been able to push patrols south far enough to join up with the adjacent unit. Out of necessity, both regiments bent their lines to form separate beachheads.

After a day of incessant pounding by American warships and planes, darkness came as a welcome relief to Major Goto and his men. This respite from the punishing interdiction fires gave the Japanese a chance to recuperate and to move to new defensive positions without fear of American interference. Like Colonel Nakagawa on Peleliu, the *Angaur Sector Unit* commander had received specific orders from General Inoue not to waste his men in any savage but short-lived *banzai* charges. Instead, Major Goto was to delay the capture of Angaur as long as possible. Once it had become clear beyond any doubt that the Americans were making their major drive over the northeastern beaches, Major Goto planned to withdraw his garrison forces from the southern part of the island and concentrate them in the hills that dotted the northwest portion of Angaur. Here, amidst the highest and most rugged coral ridges

on the island, the Japanese garrison commander would make his final stand.

The Wildcats, weary both physically and emotionally from their first taste of combat, found little relief during the hours of darkness. Not only did small enemy patrols probe and jab at the perimeters of both regiments, but Japanese infiltrators continually attempted to penetrate the frontlines. To add to the confusion of the first night, the soldiers of the 81st, like all untried troops, engaged in indiscriminate firing at imagined targets.<sup>9</sup>

The next morning, in a predawn attack, a reinforced Japanese company smashed into the extreme southern flank of 1/321, forcing the Wildcats back some 50 to 75 yards. Nevertheless, the faltering lines soon rallied, and by 0618 division received word that the Japanese counterattack had been stopped. Any premature hope that the attack could now be resumed was doomed when it became apparent that the Japanese had broken off their initial counterattack only in order to regroup. Before long they struck again with renewed vigor and the men of the 1st Battalion were quickly initiated into the ferocity of close combat with a fanatical and determined opponent. The arrival of friendly aircraft and reinforcements after daybreak quickly turned the tide of battle for the beleaguered infantry and slowly the enemy attack subsided. This action marked the first time the 81st Infantry Division found itself in a defensive situation since going ashore.

<sup>9</sup> "Stern measures were instituted to suppress the tendency toward trigger-happiness." Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 78.

While RCT 321 had been fully engaged in holding the ground it had taken the previous day, the 322d was not idle. At dawn a Japanese counterattack hit its lines, but on a somewhat smaller scale and with much less effect than the one that had hit the adjacent regiment. In launching these attacks Major Goto was complying without deviation with his orders from General Inoue "to carry out strong counterattacks, from previously planned and prepared positions in order to destroy the enemy that has landed, by dawn of the next day."<sup>10</sup>

Fortunately for the Wildcats, only one small group of enemy troops had moved into the gap separating the two regiments during the night, and they withdrew at daybreak without having fired a shot. This again represented a radical departure from previous Japanese tactics, which had required the Japanese to expend themselves as soon as possible after an American landing, often in a futile *banzai* charge. In fact, had the Japanese exploited their advantage and rushed men in force into this unprotected area, much damage might have been caused to the exposed beachheads, which by this time were crowded with supporting troops, supplies, and materiel. Such an attack would have been in keeping with the theory of General Inoue "that if we repay the Americans (who rely solely upon material power) with material power it will shock them beyond imagination. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Palau Sector Group Headquarters; Palau Sector Group training order entitled "Training for Victory," dtd 11Jul44, Item No. 11,190 in CinCPac-CinCPOA Translations No. 3, dtd 7Nov44.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Major Goto, however, had already taken steps to assure the success of his mission. According to his plans, the final and decisive battle for Angaur would be fought elsewhere on the island, in terrain of his choosing. Thus, for the moment, he had no intention of weakening his force unduly despite the confusion that could be created at the exposed beachheads by a well-timed and executed Japanese counterattack.

General Mueller's orders for the second day of operations on Angaur called for the attack to jump off at 0900. It so happened that neither regiment moved out on schedule. RCT 322 lagged behind mainly because of the confusion resulting from indiscriminate firing in the rear by nervous and inexperienced service troops that saw a Japanese lurking behind every bush and reacted accordingly. The 321st Infantry Regiment, on the other hand, was delayed by new counterattacks. At 0905 an attack hit the right flank of that regiment, but strafing and bombing runs called down by the air liaison officer quickly broke up the enemy effort. Half an hour later another counterattack struck the southern flank of the regiment. Well-timed and expertly delivered supporting fires from mortars, tanks, and an LCI lying off the beach permitted the Wildcats to hold their ground.

At 1045, RCT 321 finally jumped off with two battalions in assault. To the south, the 1st Battalion assaulted southwestward in the wake of the last abortive Japanese counterattack, only to be halted almost immediately by concentrated fire from enemy fortifications near Rocky Point. Here, to forestall any advance into the interior, the Japanese

had constructed a near-perfect defensive system. It consisted of pillboxes, dugouts, rifle pits, and interconnecting trenches, all mutually supporting and capable of delivering fires both to the front and to the flanks. A frontal assault from the beachhead would be prohibitive both in time and in casualties, and so a flanking maneuver was set into motion.

The battalion started inland over the Southern Railroad,<sup>12</sup> and followed the tracks for some distance before swerving through the jungle to approach the heavily fortified beach positions from the vulnerable rear. Dense jungle, sniper fire, and a large number of anti-tank mines all combined to hamper the progress of the battalion. When darkness closed in, the advance elements, still attempting to negotiate the trackless wilderness, were pulled back along the rail embankment to establish a defensive perimeter.

In the north that day, 3/322 attacked on the left, the 2d on the right; the 1st went into reserve. Elements of the 3d Battalion were delayed somewhat by sniper fire and wild shooting to the rear by support troops. Finally, one company, preceded by a platoon of medium tanks, moved out along the roadbed of the Pacific Railroad against stiffening enemy resistance. Supporting armor, blasting every suspicious patch of terrain that might have hidden a Japanese position, knocked out several reinforced bunkers in the process. Within two hours, the riflemen had advanced some

---

<sup>12</sup> For the sake of simplicity, the various narrow-gauge railroad spurs on Angaur were named after railroad lines in the United States, but with the nomenclature all resemblance between the two ended.



500 yards to the junction of the Southern and the Pacific Railroads. By this time, supporting fires were falling dangerously close, so the soldiers pulled back along the railroad some 75 yards, and were there joined by Company L, which had advanced behind the lead unit.

At this point occurred one of these tragic events that only too often in World War II marred a campaign that was otherwise going well. Six Navy fighter planes suddenly swept out of the skies and subjected the exposed men to heavy bombing and strafing. The full brunt of the attack fell on 3/322. Before the men could take cover or the air strike could be called off, friendly aircraft had killed 7 and wounded 46. An investigation later determined that the incident resulted from an improper marking of the target area and was not the fault of the pilots. Upon learning of the extent of the damage, General Mueller requested all air attacks against Angaur be discontinued until further notice, but this measure, aside from assuring the nonrecurrence of such a blunder for several days, could not undo the damage that had been wrought. It should be noted that on Angaur the enemy may at times have instigated and exploited such incidents.

Japanese machine gunners and snipers on Angaur used the sound of low-flying aircraft to mask their firing positions by firing only when planes passed close overhead. This led to reports from jittery troops that friendly planes were strafing them. The situation got so bad that even the air observer had to be ordered clear of the area.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Col Arthur T. Mason ltr to CMC, dtd 28Feb50, in *Peleliu Comment File*.

Despite the disorganization resulting from such severe casualties as those inflicted by the ill-timed air strike, the riflemen resumed their advance within half an hour. Pushing forward rapidly the men seized the Japanese phosphate plant north of Saipan by 1400, and during the remainder of the afternoon advanced to within 300 yards of the west coast of Angaur. Infantry-tank patrols, operating in generally open terrain, reached the northern limits of Saipan Town.

To the north of the RCT 322 zone, the 2d Battalion passed through the lines of the 1st, which then reverted to regimental reserve. Orders called for the battalion to outflank the rugged hills in the northwestern portion of the island and then to move southward along the western coast until it joined up with the 3d Battalion. The advancing Wildcats encountered only light resistance, but the terrain grew progressively more rugged. Before long the supporting armor had to be withdrawn, for the broken nature of the ground precluded the use of tanks. The infantrymen doggedly plodded onward, despite intense heat. One platoon, meeting no opposition, continued to Cape Pkulangelul, which formed the northwest tip of Angaur. The regimental commander, aware of the logistical problems involved in supporting such an advanced force, and the tactical difficulties resulting from having a weak unit occupy an exposed and vulnerable position, ordered a withdrawal to Phase Line 0-2.

The 18th of September featured the unloading of necessary supplies on a large scale. The previous day, during the

confusion of the initial assault landing, beach congestion had resulted when following waves continued to dump their loads upon the already crowded beaches. As a result, a temporary halt had been called to the unloading and no attempt was made to land artillery until afternoon, when two field artillery battalions were put ashore. By morning of the 18th, all supporting artillery was in position and ready to fire.

From the intelligence reports received during the second day, General Mueller gathered that the main Japanese strength was still concentrated on southern Angaur. This belief, coupled with orders to seize the vital level area in the south to facilitate construction of the airfield, impelled the division commander to issue orders calling for a drive southward by both regiments on 19 September to overrun Saipan Town and to divide the enemy forces.

At 0730 on the 19th, following heavy preparatory fires, the two rifle regiments jumped off in a determined bid to split the island and its defending force. To the south, RCT 321 attacked with the 3d Battalion on the left, the 2d on the right, and the 1st in reserve. To the north, RCT 322 moved out with three battalions abreast, from left to right the 3d, the 1st, and the 2d. The two battalions on the right advanced southwestward in an attempt to seize all ground south of Phase Line 0-4, except for the rugged hills, which would be mopped up later by the 2d. Phase Line 0-4 extended eastward from the west coast about 600 yards north of Saipan Town to a point northeast of Saipan where it formed a juncture with Phase Line 0-3. The 2d Battalion also had the

mission of preventing any escape by the Japanese along the northern coast. The 3d Battalion was to strike directly through Saipan Town and then occupy the area between Phase Lines 0-4 and 0-5, the latter extending southeastward from Saipan Town to Beach Green II on the southeastern shore of Angaur.

Supported by medium tanks, the two assault companies of 3/322 advanced rapidly from their nighttime positions near the phosphate plant. Only sporadic mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire opposed the advance into Saipan Town. The riflemen encountered a number of enemy pillboxes, bunkers, and other fortifications, but these defenses had been designed to prevent an attack by sea only. Since the Wildcats approached them from the rear, their reduction posed no great problem.

Following capture of the town, General Mueller conducted a personal reconnaissance of the front and ordered the drive to the south continued as rapidly as possible. Leaving small details to mop up any Japanese still lurking among the shattered buildings or hiding in caves along the edge of the water, the 3d Battalion started southwards along a railroad that paralleled the shore some 30 yards inland. The fast-moving soldiers encountered only small groups of enemy troops that were quickly bypassed and, by 1600, they had set up night positions on Cape Ngaramudel and the north shore of Garangaoui Cove.

The other two battalions of RCT 322 met little difficulty in advancing south to the phosphate plant. Here, the 1st Battalion found its zone already occupied by elements of the 2d and 3d Bat-

talions and received orders to assemble as a regimental reserve. Subsequently, its mission was to guard the rear area against possible enemy infiltration. The 2d Battalion, on the other hand, reinforced with Company B of the 1st, launched an assault against the northwest hills. A rifle company quickly occupied Palomas Hill, also known as Lighthouse Hill, in the face of only negligible opposition and dispatched a patrol to reconnoiter to the front.

This patrol failed to make any headway, for devastating fire from cleverly concealed enemy positions on high ground poured down upon the advancing men. A flanking attempt by Company G, using the Western Railroad to advance from the east, was pinned down by heavy fire from Japanese entrenched in the Lake Salome area. Blocked in every forward movement and with daylight fading rapidly, the battalion pulled back to the phosphate plant to set up night positions.

To the south that day, in the RCT 321 zone, tank-infantry teams of the 2d Battalion overcame very light opposition and by 0900 had overrun Middle Village. Seizure of this settlement, some 400 yards east of Saipan Town, was contested only by occasional groups of Japanese infantrymen. Such weak resistance to the advance of the Wildcats encouraged the commanding officer of the 710th Tank Battalion to recommend an armored reconnaissance of southern Angaur.

When higher commanders concurred in his proposal, a company of medium tanks, each mounting six or more men, started rolling southward, skirting the western edge of a mangrove swamp in

the southeast portion of the island. The remaining riflemen of the 2d Battalion followed more slowly on foot. Before the day ended, this tank-infantry reconnaissance force had completely circled the swamp area—even passing through the fortified eastern beach defenses that were still holding up the advance of the 3d Battalion. Surprisingly enough, this force did not at any time encounter serious opposition. Having reached their objective, the tanks took up positions behind the lines of the 2d Battalion, which extended across the island below the swamp to tie in with 3/322 near Garangaui Cove.

While the above action was in progress, the 3d Battalion of RCT 321 passed through the lines of the 1st Battalion in the eastern part of Angaur to strike southward from the Southern Railroad. In the course of the morning, one column pushed forward along the coast, while the other, attempting a flanking movement inland, soon ran into the mangrove swamp. Negotiating this natural obstacle prove so difficult and time-consuming that the column turned eastward to rejoin the force assaulting along the beach.

Here, the same extensive fortifications that had blunted the previous attack barred the way to the south. No sooner had the Wildcats methodically reduced one group of the mutually supporting positions than they drew fire from additional defenses farther down the coast. By early afternoon, the attack had stalled. Even a substantial increase in mortar and artillery support failed to get the advance going again.

By this time, a gap had opened between the two assault battalions of

RCT 321. To fill this void, the 1st Battalion, previously held in reserve, plunged into the morass separating the two assault units. Somehow these men managed to move far enough ahead before nightfall to set up perimeter defenses some 600 yards inland from the 3d Battalion.

That night, as General Mueller surveyed the tactical situation confronting his troops, he had every reason to feel confident. Gains for the day had surpassed his expectations, a fact also recognized by General Geiger, who dashed off the following message upon his return from a visit to the frontlines on Angaur: "The advance of your Division today reflects a commendable aggressive spirit. Well done to all hands."<sup>14</sup> The day had also brought capture of the first Japanese prisoner, who identified his unit as the *1st Battalion, 59th Infantry Regiment, 14th Division*. According to this source, in June all Japanese troops, except for a garrison of more than a thousand, had departed for Babelthuap. If true, this intelligence was welcome news for the 81st Infantry Division, since the enemy strength was apparently less than had been anticipated. A heavy fight still lay ahead, however, before the entire island of Angaur could be secured.

There were, nevertheless, bright spots on the horizon. Already seized was the level terrain for the bomber strip, the main objective of the entire operation. It appeared unlikely that the Japanese would make any serious attempt to re-

inforce the Angaur garrison in view of the situation on Peleliu. There no longer could be any doubt of the issue on Angaur.

The first Marines to arrive on Angaur were members of a reconnaissance party of the 7th AAA Battalion, which landed on 19 September. Upon the arrival of the remainder of the battalion, the Marine unit was closely integrated in the Angaur Island defense plans, operating observation posts along the coast for waterborne targets in addition to being responsible for antiaircraft defense.

Still unaware of recent changes in Japanese defensive tactics, General Mueller, as a precautionary measure, alerted all his units to take the necessary steps to fend off any last-ditch *banzai* charges. The admonition of the division commander was to prove unnecessary. For the Japanese the time had now arrived to withdraw the major portion of their troops into the rugged, coral-ridged hills of northwest Angaur. Here the Japanese commander planned to exploit the natural terrain features to the utmost, forcing the Wildcats to root every last defending Japanese out of caves and dugouts while inflicting the heaviest casualties possible on the attacking force.

On the whole, the night of 19–20 September passed without any major incident. Division artillery blasted away at enemy positions; the ships offshore could fire only illuminating shells because of the proximity of friendly and opposing lines. Towards dawn, small, scattered remnants of the Angaur garrison began filtering through the American positions. These Japanese seemed

---

<sup>14</sup> Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 93.

intent solely upon escaping from the doomed southern portion of the island, however, and gaining the northwestern hills where Major Goto still retained control.

Early on 20 September all three battalions of RCT 321 resumed the final drive south to wipe out the two isolated pockets of enemy resistance still remaining there, while RCT 322 continued its assault against the Japanese-held hills to the north. The 322d was forced to divert one battalion northward to assume defensive positions along the second phase line between Lake Aztec and the north coast. This force had the mission of blocking any possible Japanese counterattack against Red Beach, which at the time was still congested with supplies and materiel. Since another of his battalions was stationed below Saipan Town, the regimental commander, Colonel Benjamin W. Venable, had only his 2d Battalion available for the assault.

The soldiers moved out and soon reoccupied Palomas Hill. Upon resuming the advance, the Wildcats found themselves attacking uphill over terrain that greatly favored the defenders, who were entrenched on the commanding heights to the front of the battalion. Every attempt by men of the 2d Battalion to push forward drew such heavy enemy mortar and machine gun fire that it had to be abandoned. Even a flanking maneuver to the east, making use of the Western Railroad, whose tracks cut through the ridges surrounding Lake Salome, failed when three self-propelled 75mm guns which were supporting the rifle company, emerged from the 50-yard-long railroad cut only to be knocked out by enemy action. Except for the recap-

itured ground at Palomas Hill no additional gains were made, and the men of the 2d Battalion dug in for the night in substantially the same positions they had held on the previous day.

Further south that morning, 2/321 with two additional rifle companies and two tank companies, quickly overran the heavily fortified southern beaches. Fortunately for the attackers, these positions, previously held in strength, were now defended by a mere handful of Japanese survivors. The only stiff opposition came from some pillboxes clustered near a tank barrier at the southeastern tip of Angaur. A flame-thrower-satchel charge team soon eliminated this threat. By 1100, after detailing one company to mop up any enemy personnel that had been overlooked, the reinforced battalion was able to throw its weight against the southeast beaches, where Japanese diehards had for some time delayed the advance of the 3d Battalion.

In the center, the 1st Battalion, now reduced to just one reinforced rifle company, resumed its attack through the mangrove swamp to take the southeast beach fortifications from the rear. The difficulties of maneuvering through the seemingly impenetrable terrain soon forced these men to abandon their efforts and rejoin the 3d Battalion in its assault along the coast. This drive south encountered only isolated stubborn resistance, for most of the beach defenses were found to be unmanned. The Japanese had evacuated their positions and fled north under cover of darkness. When the 2d Battalion completed regrouping and struck at the enemy pocket from the south, the last phase of the

battle for Angaur began and the end of Japanese resistance was in sight. Only the inevitable mopping up by small details remained to be accomplished on southern Angaur. This was done the following day.

Earlier on 20 September, General Mueller had forwarded the following message to IIIAC: "All organized resistance ceased on Angaur at 1034. Island secure."<sup>15</sup> General Mueller made this statement because Major Goto no longer had the capability of posing a serious threat to the hold of the Army on Angaur. All necessary ground for the construction of the airfield and base installations had already been seized; an estimated 850 Japanese had been killed;<sup>16</sup> and the approximately 350 enemy troops that division intelligence figured were left had been compressed into the northwestern hills which were completely sealed off. What none of the Wildcats could visualize at this time, any more than the Marines on Peleliu, was that the elimination of such a relatively small and isolated pocket of enemy resistance would require an all-out effort by an entire infantry regiment, and that such an operation would drag on for yet another month.

The final Japanese defensive positions were located in the highest and most rugged portion of Angaur amidst the northwestern hill mass. Here the

Japanese set up a well-conceived and constructed defensive system, utilizing the broken nature of the terrain to the utmost. Caves were dug, fire lanes cleared, and the artillery, mortars, anti-tank weapons, and machine guns sited in mutually supporting positions to exploit the defensive quality of the terrain and to thwart any infantry assault. Since practically every emplacement was hidden underground, the Japanese were for all practical purposes immune to naval gunfire, artillery, or air strikes. The attackers, on the other hand, could make little use of supporting armor, for the jumbled configuration of the ridges prohibited any closely coordinated tank-infantry assault. Only the most determined rushes by American riflemen could displace the entrenched enemy from his last-ditch positions.

Once again the enemy deployment and his complete knowledge of the forbidding terrain met every attack that the Wildcats could muster. The Japanese made effective use of machine guns, rifles, antitank guns, and mortars from concealed positions on commanding ground. These weapons were fired only when the chances that the shots would find their mark were good and when it appeared that the weapons and their crews would not be seen by the attacking infantrymen. Since the Japanese used smokeless and flashless powder, the locating of a weapon by even the most alert observer was practically impossible. In short, the northwest hills of Angaur had been transformed into a virtual fortress, a miniature version of Umurbrogol Mountain on Peleliu, whose reduction was also to prove difficult, costly, and time-consuming.

---

<sup>15</sup> Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 98.

<sup>16</sup> "This casualty figure was an overestimation. Probably fewer than 600 Japanese had been killed through the 20th, and Major Goto still had possibly 750 men with which to conduct an organized defense in the northwest." Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*, p. 518.

Reduction of the enemy redoubt fell to RCT 322, because on 21 September the tactical situation on Peleliu made necessary the transfer of RCT 321 to that island. Further, because of the restricted area of the pocket, there was room for only one rifle regiment to maneuver. Subsequently, for over a month, the men of RCT 322 were forced to fight, live, and die among the jumbled, jungle-cloaked coral ridges, spires, and cliffs of northwestern Angaur before the last enemy holdout had been either killed or captured.

Repeated attempts were made to avoid unnecessary bloodshed by inducing the Japanese to surrender. Such incentives were offered in the form of leaflets and broadcasts in the Japanese language over a public address system. The wording of these was approximately as follows:

Japanese Soldiers: This island is surrounded by the American forces, and there is no reason for you to continue fighting against us. Further resistance is hopeless. Your communication and supply lines are cut. The Japanese Navy is far away. If you resist further, you will surely die by starvation and bombardment.

If you cease fighting and come to us immediately, one by one, unarmed and with your hands up, you will receive food, clothing, and medical care.

To die when encountered by a hopeless situation is neither heroic nor brave, and is only a useless death. Come over to us singly, unarmed, and with your hands up. We give you (time allotted) to come to us; otherwise we will be forced to take the only alternative action.<sup>17</sup>

Only a sprinkling of Japanese surrendered, one of them after the first

broadcast, and another immediately following the second. On the whole, the results obtained were disappointing and it seemed that the Japanese required more demonstration of the power of the attacking force.

This was furnished in abundance, as day after day the Wildcats doggedly returned to the assault. Frequently they suffered minor reverses and losses. Progress at times could be measured in yards and remained agonizingly slow. Still, with each passing day and hour victory came ever closer within the reach of the tired, dirty but determined assault troops. First portents of success came towards the end of the first week in October when 183 natives emerged from the pocket, many of them in deplorable physical condition and in dire need of medical attention which was promptly furnished. By this time the protracted conflict had degenerated into minor patrol action with sniping, ambushing, and extensive boobytrapping employed by both sides. The true situation did not deter the Japanese from reporting as late as 10 October that "judging from the flarebombs and other indications, it is certain that our garrison units in the northwestern hills (of Angaur) are annihilating the enemy in close quarter combat."<sup>18</sup>

Four days later, however, the assault phase on Angaur came to an end, and the occupation period began for the island. For practical purposes, tactical operations were to continue long beyond this date. The 81st Infantry Division was to retain responsibility for eliminating the remaining isolated pockets of

<sup>17</sup> Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> *Japanese CenPac Ops*, p. 132.

enemy resistance. All other control concerning Angaur was passed on 14 October from General Mueller to the island commander, Colonel Ray A. Dunn, USA, whose mission it was to develop the island as a forward airbase. On the same date the Marine 7th AAA Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 81st Infantry Division and assigned to the Angaur Garrison Force, while still remaining under operational control of the division.

The indomitable Major Goto survived every American attack right up to the night of 19 October, when his luck finally ran out and he was killed. A few other Japanese, determined to escape from an untenable situation, decided to swim to Peleliu. One actually covered the seven-mile stretch before he was observed. The fate of those Japanese remaining on Angaur was now sealed, and on 21 October triumphant Wildcats overran the last remaining organized enemy position. This action terminated the tactical phase of the operation, even though a few Japanese stragglers inevitably remained. RCT 322 was withdrawn to the southern part of Angaur for rest and recuperation, leaving only a couple of supporting units in the area to seek out and annihilate whatever Japanese still lurked there.

It is interesting to note that following the break in Japanese communications between Angaur and Peleliu on 22 September, Colonel Nakagawa continued to report the heroic deeds of the Angaur garrison even after the men of RCT 322 had relinquished their combat duties for the less strenuous atmosphere of garrison life. It was not until mid-November that Nakagawa admitted that

this continued resistance was just "his surmise."<sup>19</sup>

The Wildcats had accomplished the seizure of Angaur, killing an estimated 1,338 Japanese and capturing 59.<sup>20</sup> Losses sustained were 260 killed or dead of wounds and 1,354 wounded or injured as of 30 October 1944. An additional 940 Americans were temporarily incapacitated by battle fatigue, illness, or disease.<sup>21</sup>

The capture of Angaur was of prime importance because it eliminated a threat to Allied lines of communication that stretched across the western Pacific towards the Philippines. Angaur provided the Allies with another badly needed air base in a forward area. Construction of an airfield on Angaur had begun as early as 20 September, and the first aircraft touched down on the field on 15 October. It should be noted that since the island had not previously harbored any Japanese air installation the work had to start from scratch. First tasks were cutting back the jungle, filling swamps, and levelling very rough terrain.

From the Japanese point of view, the loss of Angaur and sacrifice of Major Goto's reinforced infantry battalion were more than offset by the advantages derived from this delaying action. There is evidence that General Inoue never considered Angaur as anything more than an outpost; hence his instructions to the garrison were to prolong the conflict as long as possible if attacked by a superior force. Goto's isolated battalion,

---

<sup>19</sup> *Japanese Ops in the CenPac*, p. 192.

<sup>20</sup> *81st InfDiv OpRpt*, Sec IX, p. 69.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.



without the benefit of or any hope of obtaining air support or reinforcements, was able to deny the prime objective on the island, the projected site for the airfield, for several days in the face of a determined assault by two American regiments receiving all the support from the air and sea that could be mustered. When deterioration of the situation forced the inevitable Japanese withdrawal, Major Gotō's skillful and tenacious defense of the hills in the northwestern portion of the island tied up an entire American infantry regiment for an additional month. The reward of the Japanese garrison for its tenacity was death, but death held little terror for many fatalistic Japanese.<sup>22</sup>

The men of the 81st Infantry Division emerged from the Angaur operation more combatwise and more certain of their ability to deal with a fanatical enemy. The lessons they had learned during the first combat action on Angaur were soon to serve the Wildcats well during the even more difficult and challenging mission awaiting them on Peleliu.

### ON TO ULITHI<sup>23</sup>

The original concept of the STALEMATE II Operation envisioned the employment of a regimental combat team

of the 81st Infantry Division to seize Angaur Island before the invasion of Peleliu got under way. Following the successful completion of this mission, it was planned that the division was to be further employed in operations against Yap, an island 258 miles northeast of the Palaus, with one RCT to be engaged in independent action under Navy control against Ulithi, an atoll about halfway between the Palaus and Yap.

Preliminary planning by the division for the consummation of this concept provided for the employment of RCT 322 on Angaur Island and RCT 321 on Ulithi Atoll. When revised estimates of enemy strength made it necessary to plan for the commitment of two RCTs on Angaur, RCT 321 was removed from consideration as the landing force to seize Ulithi and was reassigned to the Angaur assault. RCT 323 then was assigned the Ulithi operation; planning for it was begun on 1 August 1944.

As additional information about enemy strength in the Southern Palaus became available, it was apparent that the continued presence of elements of the 81st Infantry Division would be required in that area. As a consequence, on 22 August the division was relieved from participation in operations against Yap and Ulithi, and the mission of seizing the latter was assigned to a combat team of the 96th Infantry Division. Planning by the 81st Infantry Division for the Ulithi Operation ceased on that date. Further developments in the concept of the STALEMATE II Operation

<sup>22</sup> "To die is lighter than the birds' feathers," and "to die is like the blossoms of the cherry tree falling down." LtGen Sadae Inoue in *Worden ltr.*

<sup>23</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *81st InfDiv OpRpt—Angaur*; *81st InfDiv OpRpt—Ulithi Atoll and other Western Caroline Islands*; Marine Air Base Ulithi—Rpts and Correspondence re: Base Development Plans, dtd Oct44–Jul45; MAG-45, Rpt of Op, dtd 23Jan45, hereafter *MAG-45, Rpt of Op*; Historical Committee,

*81st Infantry Division*; Hough, *Assault on Peleliu*; Morison, *Leyte*; Smith, *Approach to the Philippines*.

involved abandoning the plan to capture the Yap Island Group and assigning the mission of seizing Ulithi to a combat team of the 77th Infantry Division.

On 15 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to speed up the Pacific timetable of operations. Although the assault on the strongly-held Yap Island remained shelved, the seizure of Ulithi was to take place as scheduled. American planners particularly desired this atoll, since it possessed a spacious sheltered anchorage that was to serve as a forward base during the imminent invasion of the Philippines. On 16 September Admiral Halsey ordered Admiral Wilkinson to seize Ulithi "with resources on hand".<sup>24</sup>

The 77th and 96th Infantry Divisions, initially scheduled for the Yap-Ulithi assault, had been transferred to General MacArthur to form part of his invasion force for the Leyte landing. Only one uncommitted regiment, RCT 323, remained under Wilkinson's control.

On 16 September General Mueller was advised that one combat team of the division would constitute the landing force to capture Ulithi. RCT 323 was designated as the landing force.

This infantry unit was then serving as IIIAC floating reserve, the sole source of combat-ready troops in the event that the Marines ran into trouble on Peleliu or the Army required assistance on Angaur. Although the commander of the Expeditionary Troops, General Julian C. Smith, recommended to Wilkinson that the rifle regiment would be needed to ensure an early seizure of the hotly contested island, the admiral did not share this conviction.<sup>25</sup>

During the night following receipt of Halsey's directive, Wilkinson instructed General Mueller to ready RCT 323 for an immediate departure to assault Ulithi Atoll. The specific mission of the regiment was "to capture, occupy, and defend Ulithi Atoll in order to establish a fleet anchorage, seaplane base, and airbase thereat to support further operations against the enemy, and to commence development of the base until relieved."<sup>26</sup>

The Ulithi Attack Group was commanded by Rear Admiral Blandy and consisted of a cruiser, 9 destroyers, 3 patrol vessels, 12 landing craft, gunboats, 2 high-speed troop transports, and 5 attack transports and cargo vessels.

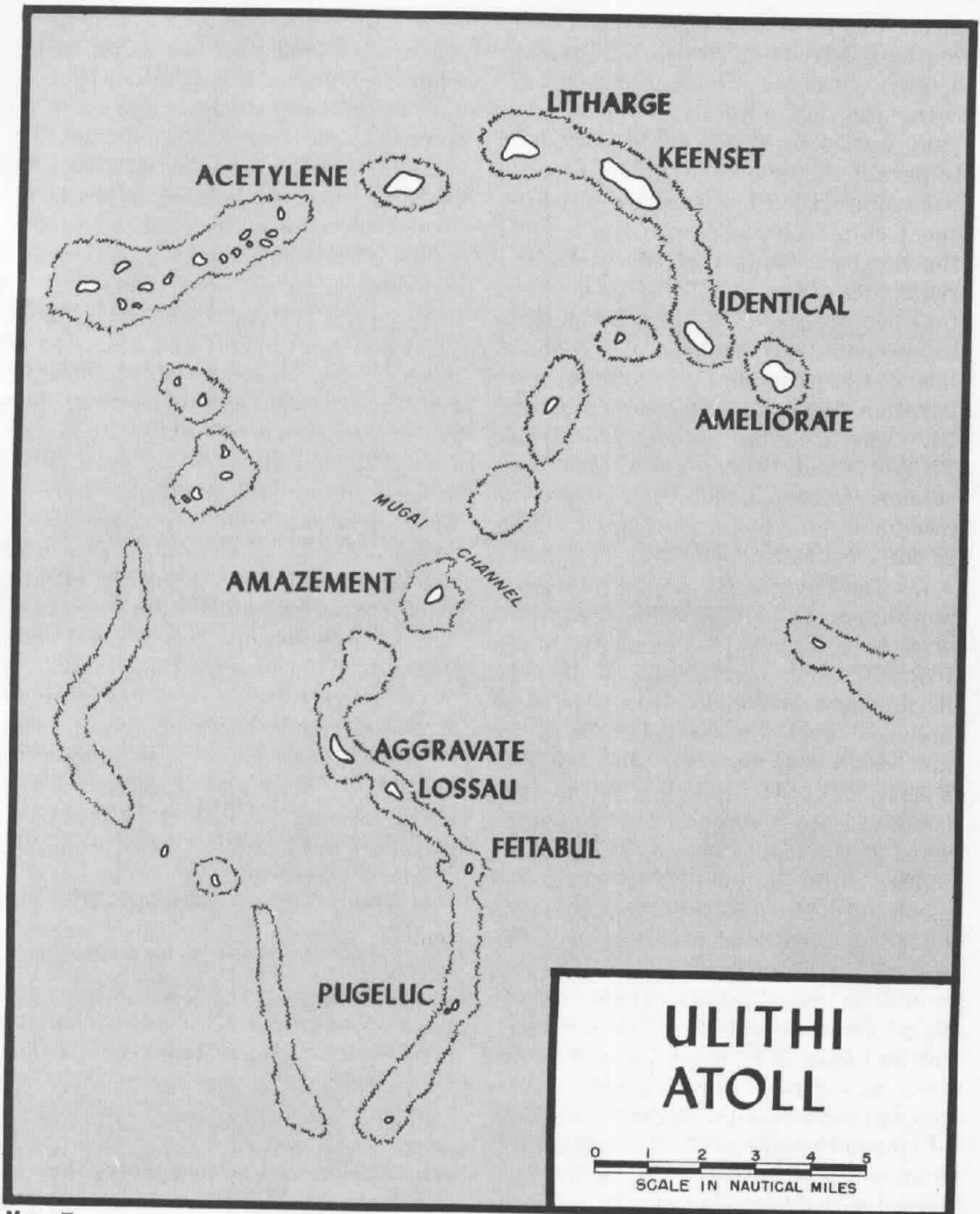
The final plan of operations presented to the Navy and approved by it provided for the landing of the reconnaissance detachment of RCT 323 on AMAZEMENT Island<sup>27</sup> prior to dawn of Jig Day minus 1. There the detachment was to establish a minor defense post in order to protect the Mugai Channel entrance into the Ulithi Lagoon, which was to serve as the transport area for the attack force (See Map 7). During the same day, a reconnaissance detach-

<sup>25</sup> "Navy officers sometimes have difficulty in understanding how idle troops can serve any useful purpose aboard ship while fighting is going on ashore." *Smith interview*.

<sup>26</sup> Attack Order No. A268-44, ComGroupOne, PhibsPac, dtd 15Sep44.

<sup>27</sup> Islands in Ulithi Atoll have been mentioned in the text by code name only. Code designations (in capital letters) were as follows: AMAZEMENT—Mangejang; KEENSET—Sorlen; LITHARGE—Mogmog; AMELIORATE—Falalop; ACETYLENE—Potangeras; AGGRAVATE—Fassarai; IDENTICAL—Asor.

<sup>24</sup> *Smith interview*.



Map 7

E.L. Wilson

ment was to be landed on one of the southern islands of the atoll to remove a few natives for intelligence purposes.

On Jig Day a reinforced rifle company was to capture KEENSET Island to permit the emplacement of the combat team artillery in support of subsequent ship to shore operations against the northern islands of the atoll. The remainder of the BLT furnishing troops for the capture of KEENSET was to be prepared to capture LITHARGE Island. Upon completion of artillery registration firing and on order, a second BLT was to capture and defend IDENTICAL Island. During these operations, reconnaissance detachments were to reconnoiter and mop-up the small islands in the west central portion of the atoll.

On Jig Day plus 1, artillery and cannon-supported shore-to-shore operations were to be carried out against AMELIORATE and ACETYLENE Islands. Reconnaissance detachments were to be prepared to assist, on order, in reconnoitering and mopping up AGGRAVATE, LOSSAU, the remaining small islands to the south, and the islets eastward of the main atoll.

The Ulithi Attack Force proceeded as planned. Troops, equipment, and supplies had been combat loaded at Oahu, Hawaii in anticipation that RCT 323 would be employed as reserve in the Palau Operation or in an assault landing on Ulithi. Movement to the objective area was made in two echelons. The reconnaissance detachment, consisting of the Intelligence & Reconnaissance Platoon, 323d Infantry Regiment, reinforced with 24 enlisted men from one of the rifle companies, departed from the Palau area at 1330, 19 September. It

arrived off Ulithi during the early morning of 21 September awaiting orders from the Commander, Ulithi Fire Support Group, under whose command the reconnaissance was to be effected. The remainder of the force departed at 1000, 21 September. Both echelons made the movement without incident.

The afternoon of 21 September saw the completion of final plans for the landing of a reconnaissance detachment on AMAZEMENT Island. Mission of this unit was to secure Mugai Channel for minesweeping and underwater demolition operations which were to be conducted in the lagoon on that date. It was decided that a preliminary offshore reconnaissance of the island was to be conducted that afternoon to determine the best beach for a landing. In the event that the reconnaissance was made without interference, troops would land that afternoon to seize the island.

The reconnaissance was carried out as planned and subsequently the reconnaissance detachment landed unopposed at 1515. A thorough search revealed no sign of recent habitation. Thirteen men stayed on the island, and the remainder returned to the ship.

During the early morning of 22 September, orders were issued to carry out a landing on AGGRAVATE Island for the purpose of removing a few natives for questioning. A detachment debarked in two rubber boats and proceeded towards the island. The entire shore was fringed with a coral reef extending out from the beach for about 150 yards. When the troops went ashore, they encountered two natives, who approached in a friendly fashion and agreed to accompany the troops back to the ship.

Their interrogation revealed that the Japanese garrison force had departed a few months earlier and that there were no Japanese on the atoll except for a crippled one on AMELIORATE Island. A thorough search of KEENSET Island failed to reveal any sign of recent occupation, though several Japanese graves were found. A search of LITHARGE Island likewise showed negative results.

During the morning of 23 September, elements of RCT 323 landed unopposed on AMELIORATE, which was officially declared secure at 1315. Once again no Japanese were found on the island, not even the reported cripple. A considerable number of inhabitants had taken refuge in a shallow cave in the northwestern part of AMELIORATE. After much coaxing about 30 natives were persuaded to return to their homes in the village. For the remainder of the day and throughout the next natives continued to leave their hiding places. In all, about 100 returned to the village.<sup>28</sup>

Occupation of IDENTICAL Island commenced at 1300, 23 September, when assault waves came ashore and found neither enemy nor natives on the island, though the bodies of two Japanese, apparently dead for several days, were discovered floating in shallow water. The seizure of LITHARGE and ACETYLENE Islands rounded out the operation, which was to become prominent for the absence of enemy resistance.

Ulithi Atoll contained a 300-berth anchorage and a seaplane base. Occupa-

tion of these Western Caroline islands provided still another base from which future operations against the enemy could be supported. The construction of an airstrip on AMELIORATE Island made possible fighter plane protection for the anchorage and afforded a base from which U. S. aircraft could continue neutralization of the nearby Japanese bases on Yap.

Together with Angaur and Peleliu Islands to the southwest and Guam, Tinian, and Saipan to the northeast, the capture of Ulithi Atoll completed a line of American bases that isolated Japanese holdings in the Central and South Pacific. The occupation of Ulithi Atoll further denied it to the enemy as a fleet anchorage, weather and radio station, and possible air and submarine base, in addition to precluding its use by the enemy to observe and report the activities of American forces in the sector.

By 25 September the unloading of all the support ships had been completed and Vice Admiral John H. Hoover, Commander, Forward Areas Western Pacific, took over the task of developing Ulithi Atoll into an advanced fleet base. Within a month after the capture of Ulithi, more than a hundred Navy craft from self-propelled types to lighters, floating drydocks, barges, landing craft, and seaplane wrecking derricks were en route to the island. During subsequent operations in the Philippines, the U. S. Pacific Fleet found Ulithi to be an extremely valuable base. Prior to the invasion of Okinawa, the island served as a staging area for fleet and amphibious forces. The atoll thus fulfilled a vital strategic role in the final phase of World War II.

<sup>28</sup> 81st InfDiv OpRpt, Ulithi, p. 17. According to Historical Committee, *81st Infantry Division*, no Japanese or natives were encountered on AMELIORATE.