

ISLAND-HOPPING IN THE PACIFIC 1943–1945

RIGHT: Chance-Vought gull-winged F4U-1 Corsairs taxi across a captured airstrip on Bougainville for a raid on Rabaul. Once Marine pilots began receiving Corsairs in 1944, they had the fastest, most maneuverable Zero-killer in the Pacific.

In mid-January 1943, during a joint meeting in Casablanca between Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt, Admiral King obtained approval for opening in the central Pacific a second line of advance against Japan. After revisiting the 1921 Orange Plan, the JCS prepared the first operating initiative for Nimitz to leapfrog across the Pacific and acquire island airfields large enough to bring B-29 Superfortress bombers within range of Japan's homeland. The plan also called for establishing fighter-bomber bases for aggressive offensive operations against Japanese ground and naval forces each step of the way. To further the plan, Nimitz asked for more carriers, more aircraft, and more Marines.

A thousand miles northeast of the Solomons lay Tarawa and Makin atolls, equatorial outposts of Japanese strength in the Gilbert Islands. Though mere specks on a map, they provided stepping stones to the Marshalls and the Marianas. Atolls created new landing problems because they were not typical islands with

Even though you Navy officers do come into about a thousand yards [to support an assault], I remind you that you have a little armor. I want you to know that Marines are crossing the beach with bayonets, and the only armor they'll have is a khaki shirt.

Major General Julian Smith to Rear Admiral H. F. Kingman at Betio.



sandy beaches, but tips of submerged mountains ringed by razor-sharp reefs and underwater shoals, both crowned with coral. Natural landing sites were few, and the low contour of atolls offered little or no cover for amphibious assault vehicles bringing troops ashore.

Tarawa resembled a triangular necklace of flat coral islets with a thirty-one-mile hypotenuse and an eighteen-mile base that contained Betio, a 300-acre island on the atoll's western extremity. Betio contained the only airfield. Japanese defenders, burrowed deep into fortified bunkers, could withstand the heaviest air and naval bombardment with little loss, and these conditions remained unknown to American forces when planning Operation Galvanic, the assault on Tarawa, Makin, and Apamama.



LEFT: After losing the airfield at Gloucester, New Britain, the Japanese launched a counterattack on December 29 but were brutally hammered by a 75mm pack howitzer manned by two Marine artillerymen and the crew of shell-handlers.



Tarawa—Operation Galvanic

Nimitz put Admiral Spruance in charge of the Fifth Fleet, Admiral Turner in charge of the assault force, and Marine Major General Holland M. "Howling Mad" Smith in charge of the newly created V Amphibious Corps. The idea for the V Amphibious Corps grew from Marine doctrine developed during the Solomons campaign. For operations in the Pacific, Nimitz kept

amphibious assault responsibility with the Marines. Holland Smith formed the V Amphibious Corps around Major General Julian C. Smith's 2nd Marine Division and the army's 165th Infantry Regiment, the latter of which he assigned to assault Makin. Smith retained the Marine division for the Betio assault. Marines had trained for seven months in New Zealand and were in good fighting trim.

Admiral Spruance assembled the mightiest task force ever formed in the Pacific, and he expected his fleet to reduce Betio to a pile of rubble. He did not know that Admiral Meichi Shibasaki, commanding the 4,836-man Japanese garrison, had sited mines and erected anti-boat obstacles that would canalize assault vehicles into fire-lanes for shore batteries. A coconut-log seawall five feet high encapsulated Betio, and situated along its length were 106 steel-reinforced concrete pillboxes equipped with 13mm machine guns, augmented by fourteen coastal guns, twenty-five field guns, and fourteen tanks.

Marines had a better idea of what they would face going ashore than Spruance, who was usually thorough

LEFT: Senior officers convene to discuss the Tarawa assault on board the USS Maryland. Seated from left to right are Colonel Merritt A. Edson, USMC, Chief of Staff, 2nd Marine Division; Brigadier General Thomas L. Bourke, USMC, commanding 10th Regiment, 2nd Marine Division; Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill, USN, Commander of Group 2, 5th Amphibious Force; Major General Julian C. Smith, USMC, commanding 2nd Marine Division. Standing in back are Captain Thomas J. Ryan, USN, Chief of Staff, Group 2, 5th Amphibious Force, and Captain Jackson R. Tate, USN, commanding Advanced Island Base (Tarawa).

RIGHT: Although the beaches on Tarawa Atoll had been distinctly delineated for the assault, the shallow reef lying inside the lagoon had not been reconnoitered. Landing craft operators became disoriented, some struck the reef, and others spent time under heavy fire looking for an opening into the shallows. As a result, many men were improperly disembarked. Some drowned in deep water; others struggled ashore on the wrong beach.



RIGHT: Although heavy navy fire had torn up the surface of Betio, the huge enemy bombproof between Red Beach 1 and Red Beach 2 remained untouched and held out for four days before Marines captured it by frontal attack.



and cautious. At 5:00 A.M., November 20, 1943, the campaign opened with battleships and cruisers delivering a sixty-minute bombardment. Carrier planes followed and bombed the remains of what appeared to be a desolate island. Marines began dropping into boats and formed for the assault. A few destroyers worked carefully into the lagoon to provide support. Clouds of smoke and dust reddened by fires hung like a pall over Betio. As the first wave of amphibious tractors approached shore, Marines doubted that anyone could still be alive there, but they were wrong. As soon as the shelling stopped, Japanese troops emerged from underground bunkers and began delivering a murderous fire against the assault force approaching Red Beaches 1, 2, and 3.

Some Marines walked through 700 yards of water to reach the beach. Each step they took made them bigger



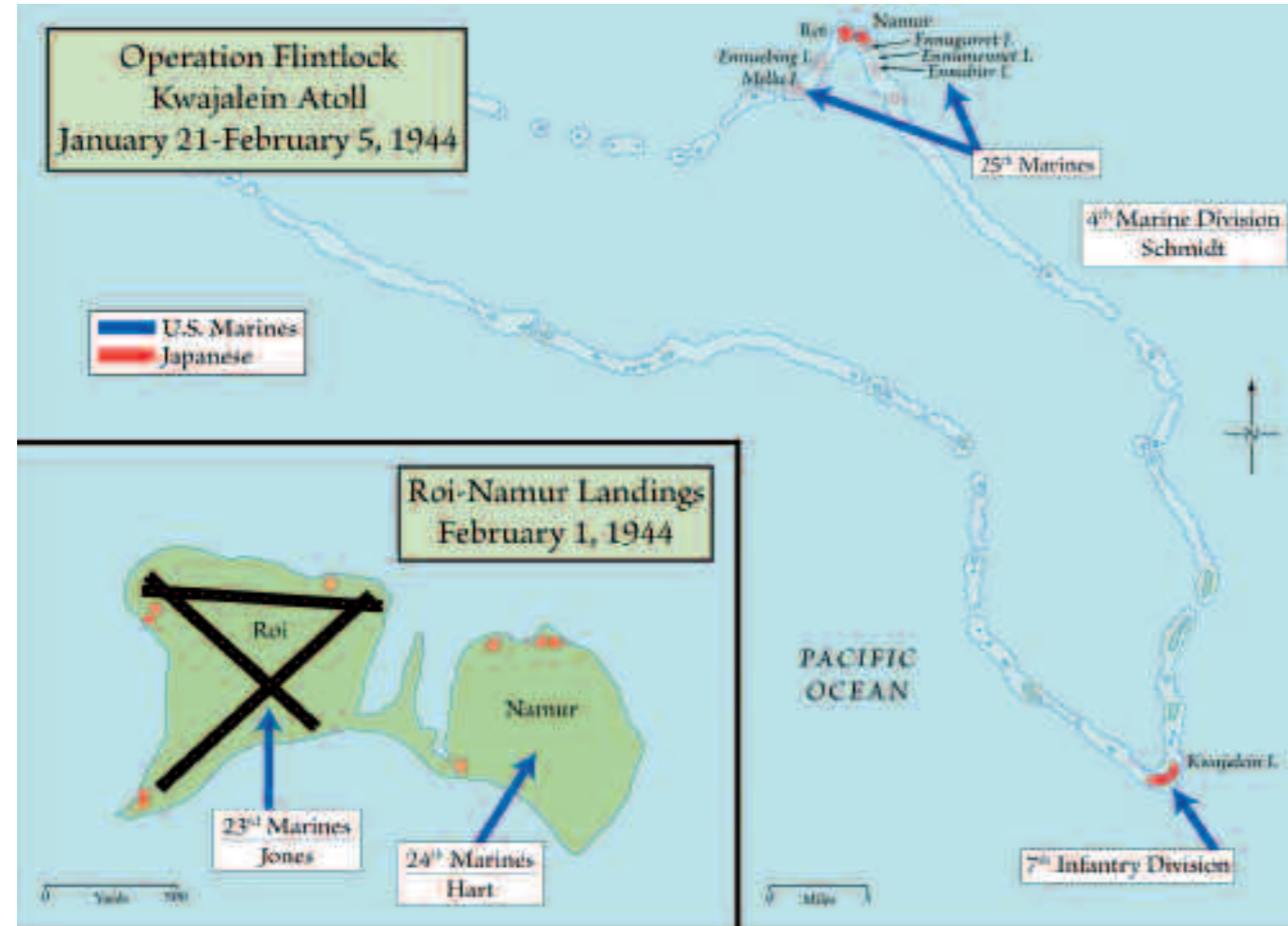
LEFT: In the aftermath of the Betio assault on November 20-21, 1943, wounded Marines are towed on rubber boats to the reef, from where larger vessels will take them to base hospitals for proper care. More than 1,500 Marines were killed or wounded on Betio.

targets. Those off Red Beach 2 took temporary cover under a long pier jutting into the lagoon. Half of the LTVs were destroyed in the water, and those that made it ashore often landed on the wrong beach. None of the vehicles could mount the seawall, so there they sat. Unanticipated low tides stranded LCVPs on reefs hundreds of yards from shore. Marines dropped into the water, and some of smaller stature, weighted down by equipment, drowned. Marines coming ashore on the wrong beach could not find their units. Somehow they reorganized. Two battalions mounted an attack supported by medium tanks. They crossed the airstrip taxiway and established a 300-yard perimeter. Battalion commanders expected a night attack and called for reinforcements. None came, but neither did the expected night attack because the enemy's



LEFT: Taking refuge behind the remains of damaged coconut trees, Marine snipers pick off Japanese naval infantry in pillboxes by firing into the small slots used by the enemy for aiming and firing their weapons.

RIGHT: The Japanese had several small bases scattered along the necklace of Kwajalein Atoll. The most important targets were located near the top of the atoll at the twin islands of Roi and Namur, where the Japanese had built an airfield. Without much difficulty, the 23rd and 24th Marines landed on Roi-Namur on February 1, 1944, and captured the islands.



communications had been destroyed by the bombardment.

Throughout the night and early morning American units linked up as reinforcements arrived. The division inched forward with tanks and flamethrowers. By nightfall the second day, Colonel David Shoup's 2nd Marines pushed across the airfield to the southern shore, cutting Betio in two. On November 23 only 146 Japanese survivors surrendered: the others died fighting. To annihilate an enemy force of 4,836 naval infantry, the Marines lost 985 killed and 2,193 wounded. The butcher's bill raised eyebrows. On Tarawa, Marines had lost in four days half as many men as they had lost in six months on Guadalcanal. Clearly, something different had to be done.

Kwajalein Atoll—Operation Flintlock

With the Gilberts secured, Nimitz began final preparations for Operation Flintlock—the invasion of the Marshalls—but he gave the Marines time to make tactical amphibious adjustments. Because Spruance's pre-invasion bombardment had inflicted too little damage on Tarawa, the navy added armor-piercing shells for penetrating steel-reinforced bunkers and strongly barricaded defenses. Underwater Demolition Teams (UDTs) joined the assault to blast openings in reefs for landing vehicles. Marines obtained new amphibian tanks and tracked vehicles armed with bunker-busting weapons. Leathernecks had become the guinea pigs of the Allied powers, and Marine tactical planners predicted that with small improvements the



LEFT: Following the capture of Roi-Namur on Kwajalein Atoll, Pfc. N. E. Carling stands beside a medium tank "killer" on which is mounted a dead Japanese light tank.

ABOVE: With their equipment on Higgins boats stranded on reefs, 4th Regiment Marines wade ashore at Emirau Island in the St. Matthias group between New Ireland and the Admiralties, and on March 20, 1944, complete the encirclement of Rabaul.

Corps could get ashore despite obstacles.

Holland Smith beefed up the V Amphibious Corps for Operation Flintlock. Kwajalein Atoll, the next giant step toward Japan, lay 750 miles northwest of Tarawa. The Japanese naval base on Eniwetok, a second atoll, lay another 360 miles to the northwest. The twin islands of Roi-Namur, located 50 miles to the north of Kwajalein and at the apex of the atoll, came first because a major Japanese airfield covered the entire island of Roi. Smith assigned Major General Harry Schmidt's newly organized 4th Marine Division to assault Roi-Namur, and gave Major General Charles H. Corlett's 7th Infantry Division the task of assaulting Kwajalein.

On January 29, 1944, a three-day naval and aerial pre-invasion bombardment saturated the atoll, with

devastatingly improved results compared with Tarawa. Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's carrier aircraft virtually wiped out Roi's once-vaunted 24th Air Flotilla. UDTs cleared the lagoon of obstructions, and on the morning of February 1, some 240 LVTs and seventy-five armored tracked amphibians carried the 23rd Marines ashore on Roi and the 24th Marines ashore on Namur. The only misstep occurred when the navy failed to get the 24th Marines ashore on schedule. Japanese troops put up a savage fight but, capitalizing on lessons learned on Tarawa, Marines overran the defenders. Of 3,600 Japanese garrisoning Roi-Namur, only ninety-one were taken alive. The others fought to the death or committed suicide. The 4th Marine Division lost 195 killed and 545 wounded.



ABOVE: Eniwetok Atoll provided another important stepping-stone in the Pacific. Only 2,586 Japanese troops held the three principal islands of the atoll. The 22nd Marine Regiment, aided by the 106th Infantry Regiment, began the assault on February 18, 1944, and quickly secured the islands.

RIGHT: After two days and two nights of fighting for control of the airfield on Eniwetok, three weary and begrimed Marines take a break; nineteen-year-old Pfc. Farris M. Touhy, is holding a coffee cup.



Eniwetok—Operation Catchpole

On February 18, 1944, because the V Amphibious Force's reserves had not been needed on Kwajalein, Holland Smith moved them up to Eniwetok lagoon. After Rear Admiral Henry W. Hill's fire-support squadron pummeled the three principal islands, Brigadier General Thomas E. Watson put the 22nd Marines ashore on Engebi Island, the strongest of the island bases and the only one with an airfield. At dark, the V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company with light artillery battalions moved ashore on the two unoccupied islets next to Engebi and hammered the enemy throughout the night. In the morning the 22nd Marines landed from the lagoon in medium tanks, attacked straight across the island, wiped out half of the enemy's veteran 2,200-man 1st Amphibious Brigade, and secured Engebi during the afternoon.

Next came the assault of Eniwetok by the 106th Infantry Regiment, which encountered resistance and stalled. Watson sent in the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marines, and later learned that the battalion had to do most of the fighting. On February 21, disenchanted by the performance of the 106th Army Regiment, Watson pulled it from the attack on Parry Island and sent in the 22nd Marines. The leathernecks pushed the last defenders into the tip of the island and declared Parry secured. At a cost of 339 killed, Watson's force annihilated the Japanese garrisons on all three islands.

During the Eniwetok campaign, Admiral Mitscher took his carrier task force southeast to the Caroline Islands, struck the Japanese naval base at Truk, sank 200,000 tons of shipping, and destroyed 275 Japanese planes.

The Tactical Learning Curve

Every campaign led to adjustments in Marine amphibious assault doctrine. Naval gunfire support drastically improved after Marines put specialized

communication teams into key observation points to control targeting. New armored LCI-Gs (Landing Craft, Infantry, Gunboats) made their appearance, and when employed in mass, laid down a covering fire with rockets and 44mm guns. By early 1944, amphibian tractors were running off stateside assembly lines at the rate of 500 a month. With them came amphibian trucks (DUKWs) to provide logistics support. For the first time, naval star shells turned darkness into a panorama of light and illuminated enemy counterattacks. New rocket-carrying aircraft were able to pinpoint and demolish targets near the beach. The 4th Marine Division, which had taken casualties on Roi-Namur, developed the first highly effective system of tactical air observation, targeting on enemy ground positions not readily seen from the air. Specially designed command ships became available to provide mobile headquarters and communications centers for control and coordination of landing and beach-head operations.

With every battle, beginning with Guadalcanal, a persistent argument ensued over who would be responsible for amphibious operations: Admiral Turner of the navy or the Marine officer in charge of the expedition. In 1942 Admiral King ruled that the commander of the landing force should be co-equal with the naval commander. Nimitz defined the directive to mean that when time for the assault came the landing force commander would take full control of the fighting.

Turner still tried to muscle Holland Smith aside. King believed he could stop the bickering by giving Turner and Spruance another star, but not Holland Smith. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox scuttled the scheme, overruled King, and made Smith a lieutenant general. Smith's advancement did not change his attitude toward Turner, and bickering continued over the issue of leadership.



Evolution of Tactical Air

Marine air wings made a significant tactical change during 1943 by switching from Grumman Wildcats to the gull-winged Vought F4U-1 Corsairs, which at 417mph could fly faster than any Japanese plane. The switch to Corsairs came when General Geiger commanded the 1st MAW, which he left in mid-1943 to become director of aviation for a second time. The aircraft arguably became the best-recognized Marine plane of all time. Marine aces flying Corsairs included Major Gregory "Pappy" Boyington with twenty-eight kills, 1st Lieutenant Robert M. Hanson with twenty-five kills, and 1st Lieutenant Kenneth A. Walsh with twenty-one kills.

During World War II, Marine aviation grew to five wings consisting of 31 groups, 145 squadrons, and 112,626 Marines, including 10,457 pilots. Admiral King thought the whole program too large, but the Marine Corps had to compensate for the lack of aircraft carriers by utilizing airstrips. Commandant Vandegrift agreed to drop one wing provided that

King would use the pilots on escort carriers. Soon, composite squadrons built around Corsair fighters and Avenger torpedo-bombers began flying off carriers. In 1944 Marines also began flying new tactical aircraft, including the Grumman F6FN Hellcat night-fighters and naval versions of the North American B-25 Mitchell (PBJ) medium bomber.

TOP: A pilot flying close air support in a Vought F4U launches a load of rocket projectiles on the Japanese stronghold at Shuri during June 1945 operations on Okinawa.

ABOVE: During operations on Okinawa, ordnance men from Marine Air Group 33 hang five-inch rockets under the wing of an F4U Corsair. Safety pins will not be removed and or the rockets charged until takeoff.



ABOVE: Two Marine divisions assaulted Saipan on June 15, 1944, in the first major amphibious operation in the Pacific. The entire effort centered around the capture of Aslito airfield, from which B-52 bombers could directly strike Tokyo. There were 29,662 Japanese defenders on Saipan, 10,000 more than intelligence at Pearl Harbor had predicted. As Brigadier General Merritt “Red Mike” Edson predicted, “This one isn’t going to be easy.”

We are through with flat atolls now. We learned how to pulverize atolls, but now we are up against mountains and caves where Japs can dig in. A week from today, there will be a lot of dead Marines.

General Holland Smith, quoted in On to Westward, by Robert Sherrod.

On to the Marianas

From the outset of the war, Admiral King maintained an unwavering conviction that the Mariana Islands held the key to the Central Pacific. Located a thousand miles west of Eniwetok, the airfields on Saipan, Tinian, and Guam offered strategic bases for attacking the enemy’s sea-air communications. From Saipan, General Henry H. “Hap” Arnold’s AAF B-29 Superfortresses could strike the Palaus, the Philippines, Formosa, China, and the Japanese mainland. King had been looking for a way to draw out the Japanese fleet, and he believed invading the Marianas would do it.

On March 12, 1944, Holland Smith and Admiral Turner began planning Operation Forager. Having mastered the problem of assaulting small islands on coral atolls, planners now shifted their efforts to invading large islands crowned with rugged mountainous, carpeted with deep forests, and defended by 60,000 enemy troops, half of which were on Saipan. Unlike atolls, Saipan consisted of seventy-two square miles enclosed by reefs and containing a large civilian population.

On February 23, 1944, as Operation Forager entered the final planning stage, Admiral Mitscher’s carrier task force paid the Marianas a visit and plastered enemy airfields, and frequently returned to maintain air superiority. Admiral Spruance, commanding Operation Forager, used the time to pull together 800 ships to land and support three Marine divisions, two army divisions, and a reinforced Marine brigade—a total of 127,000 men. Turner headed the Joint Expeditionary Force while Holland Smith, commanding the V Amphibious Corps, led the assault. General Geiger, former director of aviation, commanded the III Amphibious Corps and drew the task of capturing Guam.



ABOVE LEFT: During early July men from the 2nd Marine Division capture an enemy howitzer while swinging north through the hills and turn the weapon against Japanese defending Garapan, the island’s administrative center.

ABOVE: Men from the 4th Marine Division coming ashore south of Charan Kanoa crawl across the beach to their assigned positions as Japanese machine gun and sniper fire whines overhead.

LEFT: Men of the 2nd Marine Division move cautiously through the debris-littered outskirts of Garapan as they prepare to assault the island’s main communication and control center, June 23, 1944.



Operation Forager

On the morning of June 15, after a prolonged naval bombardment augmented by carrier air attacks, the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions of the V Amphibious Corps fought their way ashore on Saipan’s southwest coast to flank the principal city of Charan Kanoa. Four battleships, eight cruisers, and seven destroyers arced a rolling bombardment over the first wave of leathernecks while twenty-four LCI-gunboats with 44mm guns sprayed the beach. As Marines sprinted for

cover, 700 amphibian tractors, sixty-eight with special armor and a new 77mm gun, pressed inland and cleared a path. Overhead, Corsairs from escort carriers flew close air support. Marines landed 8,000 men over a six-mile front. Smith trusted the beachhead to his Marines, retaining the 27th and 77th Army Infantry Divisions in reserve.

Major General Thomas E. Watson, commanding the 2nd Marine Division, swung north to attack Mount Tapotchau, a 1,554-foot ridge in the island’s center. Major General Harry Schmidt, commanding the 4th Marine Division, moved on Mount Fina Susu, a long, narrow ridge blocking the way to Aslito Airfield. Japanese Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saito waited on the ridges with massed field artillery, partially buried tanks, and reserve infantry. Saito’s plan to crush the Americans on the beach failed, and by nightfall Marines landed 20,000 troops, seven pack-howitzer battalions, and two armored units.

Progress inland became stoutly resisted. Only the battle-hardened 25th Marines, 4th Division, secured the first day’s objective on the far right flank. Enemy troops sheltered on the ridges overlooking the beaches pinned down the 2nd Marine Division. Around



TOP: The first wave of the 4th Marine Division disembark from amphibious vehicles on beaches south of Charan Kanoa and take defensive positions as three more waves approach from the sea.

ABOVE: Short of vehicles for transportation on Saipan, Marines attempt to induce an uncooperative ox to move a cartload of supplies and ammunition to a battalion screaming for replenishments on the front line.

midnight the enemy came out of their holes and launched a counterattack using a reinforced armored battalion against the 6th Marines. By failing to contest the landing, Saito hastened his own defeat. With the aid of naval gunfire, the 6th Marines threw the enemy back with heavy losses, but took significant casualties themselves. When General Smith learned that his Marines had lost more than 2,000 men and half of their armored amphibians, he pointed an accusing finger at the navy, and said, “We did not soften up the enemy sufficiently before we landed.”

While Marines expanded the beachheads and repulsed counterattacks, another important development occurred at sea. As Admiral King predicted, the Imperial Japanese Navy dispatched Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa to the aid of General Saito with five battleships, thirteen cruisers, twenty-eight destroyers, and nine aircraft carriers stacked with 473 planes. Not wanting to risk his ships, Ozawa sent planes against Mitscher’s carriers. He intended that the pilots land on Mariana airfields after striking Mitscher’s ships, refuel and rearm, and strike the American carriers again while returning to the Japanese fleet. Ozawa miscalculated. Mitscher’s carrier aircraft had destroyed all the airfields and wiped out the land-based planes. Instead, Ozawa lost three carriers during operations in the Philippine Sea, and Mitscher’s pilots shot down all but thirty-five of Ozawa’s carrier planes and hundreds of others in what became known as the Marianas Turkey Shoot.

Meanwhile, on June 17, Holland Smith came ashore on Saipan, established a command post at Charan Kanoa, and landed the 27th Infantry Division in support of the 4th Marine Division. Five days later the Marines announced the southern section of Saipan secure, including Aslito Airfield.

As the Marines pressed north from Aslito, the pace noticeably slowed. Army and Marine commanders quibbled over doctrinal differences. Major General

The Holland Smith Controversy



ABOVE: Much inter-service controversy ensued when the irascible Lieutenant General Holland “Howling Mad” Smith, USMC, relieved the army’s Major General Ralph C. Smith from command of the 27th Infantry Division on June 24, 1944. Here, Holland Smith (right) is shown at the V Amphibious Corps command post with (left) Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, USN, and Major General Harry Schmidt, USMC, following the two Jima assault on February 19, 1945.

Ralph Smith of the 27th Infantry Division advocated a cautious advance. Holland Smith, aware of the vulnerability of the fleet offshore and anxious to assault Tinian, urged utmost speed. On June 24, when Ralph Smith balked, Holland Smith relieved him and put in motion another skirmish between the army and the Marine Corps that had nothing to do with the Japanese.

On July 6, Marines pinned down the last Japanese force in the northern reaches of Saipan. General Saito gathered together his staff and feasted on sake and canned crabmeat. With his stomach full, he cleaned off

Sixty-two-year-old Holland “Howling Mad” Smith earned his nickname in 1916 while serving as a scowling, caustic lieutenant in the Dominican Republic. In June 1917 he went to France as a captain with the famous 5th Regiment, Fourth Brigade, and returned to take up the work of personally horsepowering the development of amphibious warfare.

Always combative, and among the most competent commanders in the Marine Corps, Smith was a superb tactician, a consummate strategist, also a harsh taskmaster. Marines serving under Smith described him as a vigorous and demanding commander, irascible and quarrelsome, and, like General George Patton, one of America’s colorful field commanders. When on June 24, 1944, he relieved Major General Ralph C. Smith, USA, from command of the 27th Infantry Division, the incident underscored the differences between the aggressive operational doctrine of the Marine Corps and the army’s more conservative approach to warfare. The removal of Ralph Smith sparked a heated controversy with the army for Admirals Turner and Spruance, who approved it, and for Nimitz, who attempted to ignore it.

During the war in the Pacific, five army generals were relieved, but only one by a Marine officer. Whether Ralph Smith lacked “aggressive spirit,” as Holland Smith claimed, can be debated, but for reasons that remain unclear today, the 27th Infantry Division’s attack moved much slower than those of the Marine division’s on each flank. During the advance on Garapan, Saipan’s other principal city, the 2nd Marine Division on the left pushed to the outskirts of the city, and the 4th Marine Division stormed through stiff opposition on the right and

pushed across Saipan to the Kagman Peninsula. Both wings overlapped the 27th Infantry Division, which had bogged down in the center. After Holland Smith relieved Ralph Smith, news correspondents fueled the controversy into a bitter interservice rivalry.

On July 12, before fighting stopped on Saipan, Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson, USA, arrived without consulting Nimitz, for whom he worked, to vindicate Ralph Smith, a personal friend. Richardson convened a board to clear Smith’s name, and by doing so thrust himself into the position of passing judgment on Marine and navy officers neither under his command nor answerable to him. Richardson then went directly to the 27th Infantry Division and improperly passed out decorations without approval from Holland Smith. Spruance pleaded with Holland Smith not to explode when he met with Richardson, which was no easy task for “Howling Mad.” Despite one of the greatest victories in the Pacific, due mainly to Marines, Richardson cornered Major General Harry Schmidt of the 4th Marine Division, and said, “You and your commanders aren’t as well qualified to lead large bodies of troops as general officers in the Army. We’ve had more experience in handling troops than you’ve had, and yet you dare to remove one of my generals! You Marines are nothing but a bunch of beach runners anyway. What do you know about land warfare?”

Holland Smith controlled his temper, but Turner and Spruance kept the controversy going until 1948. The debate lost steam until January 12, 1967, when Holland Smith died, giving veterans and historians an opportunity to rekindle an almost forgotten episode of interservice rivalry.

a rock, faced east, shouted “Banzai!” and carved out his bowels with a ceremonial sword. A day later in a cave nearby, Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, the man who had launched the attack on Pearl Harbor, put a pistol to his head and blew out his brains.

Marines pressed ahead and on July 9 secured Saipan after an episode of mass suicide performed by thousands of Japanese soldiers and islanders. Soldiers stood in line atop a cliff to be ceremonially beheaded by their comrades. Entire families stepped to the edge of 1,000-foot Marpi Point and threw themselves into the



ABOVE: Japanese trapped by the 2nd Marine Division north of Garapan attempt to escape to the few ships not already burning in Tanapag harbor. Time had already run out on a dead Japanese soldier lying on the beach.

sea because Japanese officers had told them that, should they be captured by the Americans, they would be prostituted and sold into slave labor. Marines set up loudspeakers in an effort to stop the slaughter, but Japanese officers persisted until the waters below Marpi Point became so cluttered with the dead and dying that the propeller blades of rescue boats clogged when attempting to recover those still alive.

When the fighting ended on July 12, only a handful of prisoners remained from the 30,000-man Japanese garrison on Saipan. American forces suffered 16,525

casualties, including 3,426 deaths. Of those, 12,934 were Marines.

The battle of Saipan, the Marianas Turkey Shoot, and the repulse of the Japanese navy in the Philippine Sea permanently changed the character of the war. Japanese strategists, aware that B-29s would now reach the homeland, admitted that the “war was lost with the loss of Saipan.” A ripple effect ensued. On July 18, 1944, Japanese Emperor Hirohito forced General Tojo and his military cabinet to resign, and in November Franklin Roosevelt won an unprecedented fourth term as president.

Tinian—“The Perfect Amphibious Operation”

On July 12, 1944, and despite his altercation with the army, Holland Smith assumed command of the new Fleet Marine Force Pacific and turned the V Amphibious force over to General Schmidt. In turn, Schmidt yielded command of the 4th Marine Division to Major General Clifton B. Cates, who four years later became the Corps’ 19th commandant.

On July 24, Schmidt focused his attention on Tinian, a smaller island three miles south of Saipan. Surrounded by reefs and heavily defended by coastal guns, Tinian created another difficult task for Marines. Schmidt posted the XXIV Army Corps artillery on the south side of Saipan to shell powerful enemy batteries lodged in the hills of northern Tinian. Because the dismissal of Ralph Smith still reverberated at headquarters, Schmidt kept the 27th Army Division on Saipan and used his two battered Marine divisions to spearhead the assault. He planned to have General Watson’s 2nd Division feint against Tinian Town to the south while Cates’s 4th Division landed on the northwest coast.

Admiral Kakuji Kakuta and Colonel Kiyochi Ogata, together commanding 9,162 Japanese troops, expected the attack to come near Tinian Town because the island had no other suitable beach for landing. Kakuta stopped work on fortifications on the north side of the island because the shelling from Saipan had driven the workers away, and he brought them south to strengthen Tinian Town.

Schmidt’s strategy worked perfectly. On July 24, Watson’s 2nd Division executed a masterful feint off Tinian Town while Cates’s 4th Division landed three companies of Marine riflemen in twenty-four amphibian tractors on the northwest shore. By dusk, Cates had three regiments and four pack howitzer battalions ashore—15,614 Marines in all. On August 1, at a cost of 328 killed and 1,571 wounded, the 4th Division secured the island in what Holland Smith praised as “the perfect amphibious operation of the Pacific War.”



ABOVE: Twelve days after the fighting ended on Saipan, the 4th Marine Division, already battle-scarred and weary, makes a surprise attack on the northern coast of Tinian, while the 2nd Marine Division makes a demonstration against the island’s principal city of Tinian Town.

RIGHT: A "water buffalo" loaded with a squad from the 4th Marine Division heads for the beaches in northern Tinian, while U.S. Army XIV Corps artillery located on Saipan hammers Japanese coastal defenses 3,000 yards away.



BELOW: Lieutenant General Holland M. "Howling Mad" Smith, second from left, confers with navy and Marine commanders at temporary headquarters set up near Asan Point, Guam, on July 22, 1944.



Guam—Operation Stevedore

The assault on Guam required a different plan. The island resembled Saipan's topography but was much larger, with more jungles, mountains, and ridges. Unlike Saipan, Guam's Chamorro inhabitants wanted to be liberated, so the recapture of the island became both symbolic and strategic.

On Guam, Lieutenant General Takeshi Takashima commanded the 19,000-man 29th Army Division, which included a large naval defense force armed with fifty-five guns in coastal batteries. However, Takashima did not have large supplies of ammunition, but he did have large quantities of whiskey, sake, and Asahi beer, which he distributed to inspire his men to fight to the death.

General Geiger drew the task of capturing Guam. He planned to spearhead the attack with the 3rd Marine Division, commanded by Major General



LEFT: The Japanese had spread about 19,000 troops around the thick jungle interior of Guam. Landing force commander Major General Roy S. Geiger, USMC, planned to assault the middle of the island on July 21, 1944. While the 3rd Marine Division landed above the heavily defended Orote Peninsula, a mixed force of Marine and army infantry would go ashore farther south, after which both groups would close on the main body of the enemy.

Andrew H. Turnage, and deploy Brigadier General Lemuel C. Shepherd's First Provisional Marine Brigade and Major General Andrew G. Bruce's 77th Infantry Division on another beach. For the assault, Geiger teamed with Rear Admiral Richard L. Connolly, another no-nonsense veteran, who looked Geiger straight in the eye, and said, "My aim is to get the troops ashore standing up. You tell me what you want done to accomplish this, and we'll do it." Connolly made good on his promise. For thirteen

days prior to the assault, battleships, cruisers, and carrier-based aircraft pounded the enemy's coastal and inland defenses.

On July 2, the 3rd Marine Division landed on Guam's west coast near the capital of Agana. Signs on the beach read: "Welcome Marines." The First Marine Provisional Brigade and the 77th Infantry Division came ashore near Agat, south of the Orote Peninsula. In a brilliantly executed pincers movement, Geiger trapped the Japanese on the peninsula and surround the



ABOVE: A leatherneck from the 3rd Marine Division ascends a stairway to a second story balcony where one or more Japanese snipers are operating from a cottage on the shore near Asan, Guam.

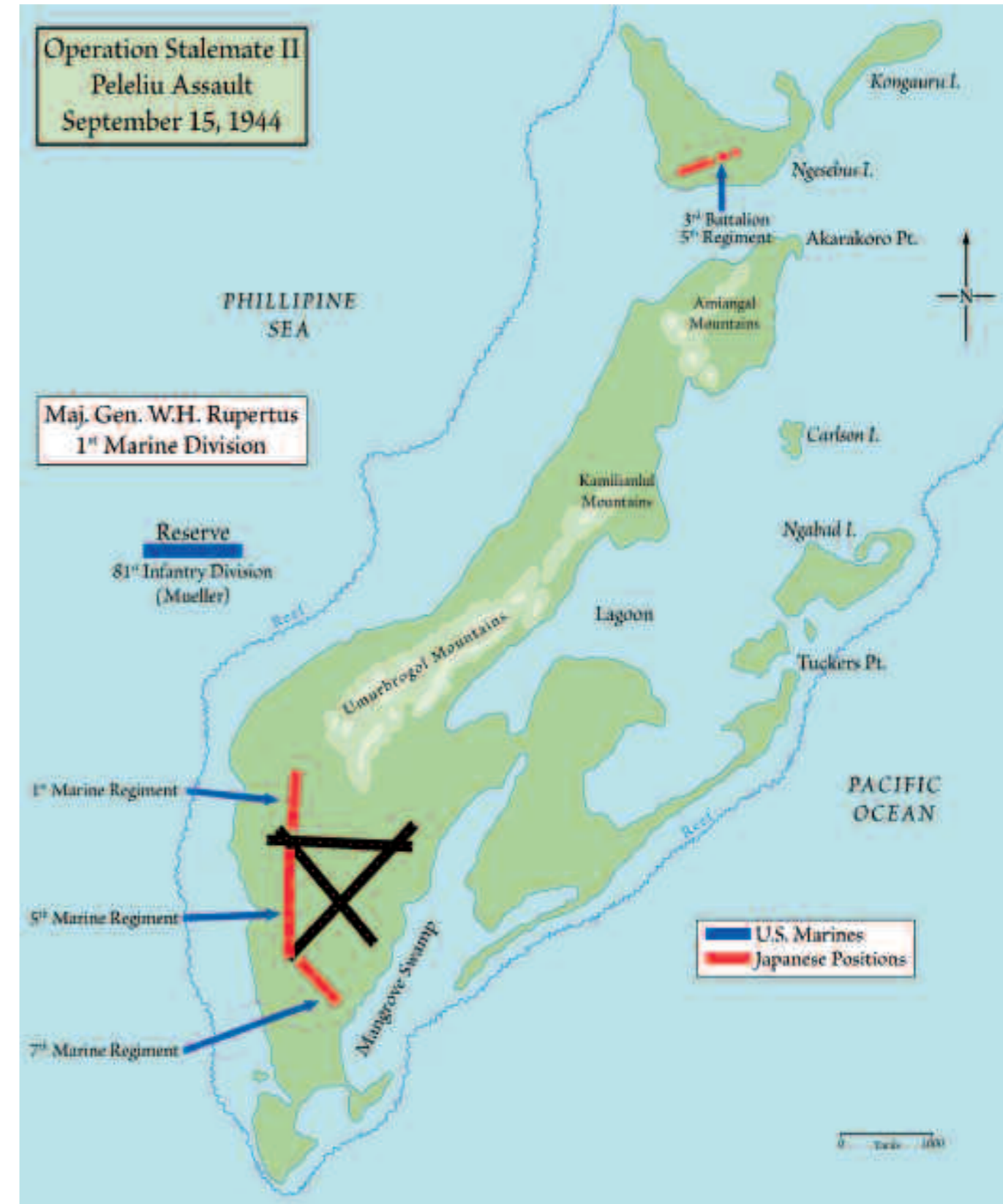
RIGHT: Eight minutes after army and Marine assault troops landed on Guam, two U.S. officers planted the Stars and Stripes on a strip of beach after borrowing a boat hook to use as a staff.

enemy's airstrip. On July 25, the Japanese launched two frenzied counterattacks, both of which were repulsed with enormous loss to the enemy. Bitter fighting continued, but gradually petered out. Finally, on August 10, organized resistance ended when thousands from Takashima's army took refuge in the jungle. Sporadic fighting continued until the end of the war. The last Japanese survivor held out until 1960, when he finally came out of the jungle and surrendered.

The tactics developed between Geiger and Connolly at Guam set new standards for amphibious operations. Working with navy and Marine pilots, Connolly perfected a system that allowed naval gunfire and air support to be delivered against the same target at the same time. Navy vessels were able to deliver flat trajectory fire while aircraft delivered plunging fire. The tactic was largely responsible for putting Marine aircraft on escort carriers and implementing the Marine air-ground team for the specific purpose of supporting infantry units on the ground.

Peleliu—Operation Stalemate

One of the most controversial operations in the Pacific involved the islands of the Palaus, Ngulu, and Ulithi in the Philippine Sea. On July 31, General MacArthur's forces secured New Guinea, opening the way to the Philippines. Peleliu in the Palaus lay about 500 miles southeast of Leyte. Like Truk, Peleliu now seemed less important, but Nimitz wanted it neutralized. Nimitz also wanted a forward base at Ulithi, which happened to be undefended and about 700 miles from Leyte. Nimitz also decided that Ngulu had to be neutralized because the island stood between the Palaus and Ulithi. Had Major General William H. Rupertus, commanding the 1st Marine Division, not predicted that Peleliu could be captured in two or three days, Nimitz might have considered other options because, in the end, "Stalemate" accurately described the results of the Peleliu assault.



LEFT: Before assaulting Peleliu on September 15, 1944, Major General William H. Rupertus, commanding the 1st Marine Division, predicted: "We're going to have some casualties, but let me assure you that this is going to be a short one, a quickie. Rough but fast. We'll be through in three days. It may take only two." Nothing went according to plan. The Marines captured the airfield only after a stubborn fight and then spent the next two months rooting the enemy out of Umurbrogol Ridge.



LEFT: Along a tenuous perimeter established at the far end of Peleliu's airfield, Marine Pfc. Douglas Lightstreet (right) cradles his .30-caliber machine gun and takes time out for a smoke with his buddy, Pfc. Gerald Churchby.

For Operation Stalemate, General Geiger offered Rupertus part of the 81st Infantry Division. Because of ripples from the Ralph Smith affair, Rupertus decided to assault the island without the army's help. Though Geiger warned that Colonel Kunio Nakagawa's 10,700 defenders came from one of Japan's best infantry divisions, Rupertus remained unimpressed. Aerial reconnaissance showed hundreds of honeycombed caves imbedded in the Umurbrogal Ridge, which ran through the center of the island and stopped short of an airfield near the island's southwestern tip. Rupertus expected to

capture the airfield quickly and mop up the island using 1st Marine Division veterans.

On September 15, 1944, Rupertus landed three regiments 500 yards from the Japanese airfield and spent the next five days engaged in fierce fighting before capturing the airfield. The 1st Marine Regiment, commanded by Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, ran into stiff resistance at Umurbrogal Ridge and called for reinforcements. Puller concluded that 1,406 tons of navy projectiles hurled at the island had not touched the enemy burrowed in the ridge.

FAR LEFT: Unexplored coral ridges and mangrove swamps slowed the assault on Peleliu, forcing one scattered squadron of Marines to take shelter under a "duck" while two amphibious tractors burned on the beach.



ABOVE: Operations on Peleliu ground to a standstill in late September 1944 when Marines moved toward Umurbrogol Ridge. With a walkie-talkie flimsily strapped to his back, and clutching a radio in his right hand, a Marine reconnoiters the ridge looking for signs of the hidden enemy.

Now far behind schedule, Rupertus decided to encircle the ridge instead of attacking it, thereby leaving thousands of Japanese hidden in caves to harass the airfield. Geiger became impatient and ordered in the 321st Army Infantry Regiment. Rupertus then

If military leaders were gifted with the same accuracy of foresight that they are with hindsight, undoubtedly the assault and capture of the Palaus would never have been attempted.

Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf, March 25, 1950.

discovered that Umurbrogol was not one ridge but a series of five ridges all interlocked with tunnels that had to be blown one by one. What Rupertus envisioned as a three-day “quickie” took one day more than a month and delayed operations elsewhere. On October 16, after the 18th Infantry Division relieved the Marines, six weeks elapsed before the army declared the island secure. The Marine Corps lost 1,252 killed and 6,526 wounded on Peleliu, and the army lost 208 killed and 1,185 wounded, the highest ratio to date of American to Japanese casualties in any campaign. Only 302 Japanese surrendered. Rupertus spent the rest of his career wondering what went wrong.



Marines on the Philippines

On October 20, 1944, MacArthur launched his promised return to the Philippines and assaulted Leyte. The expedition would be mainly an army-navy event with the Marine Corps playing a secondary role. The four embattled Marine divisions needed a rest, and the 5th and 6th Marine Divisions were still in training.

Holland Smith lent the V Amphibious Corps artillery, about 1,500 Marines under Brigadier General Thomas E. Bourke, to the XXIV Army Corps. During the Leyte assault, Bourke demonstrated the special skills born of Marine doctrine for amphibious operations by coordinating all artillery, naval gunfire, and supporting aircraft during and after the landing.



ABOVE: Operations soon shifted to the Philippines where on October 20, 1944, landing barges loaded with troops are shown churning toward the beaches of Leyte Island, while American and Japanese planes duel to the death overhead.

LEFT: General Douglas MacArthur, positioned directly beneath the flag, and members of his staff attend a ceremony on March 2, 1945, to re-raise the Stars and Stripes on the liberated island of Corregidor.



ABOVE: The hard-worked 4th Marine Division, recently reinforced after operations on Tinian, begin moving onto the beaches near Iwo Jima's Airfield No. 1 on D-Day, February 19, 1945. The assault will be the fourth in thirteen months for the 4th Marine Division. An LSM (Landing Ship, Medium) is offloading equipment further up the beach.

On October 25, Major Ralph J. Mitchell, commanding the 1st Marine Air Wing, touched down on Tacloban Field, Leyte, looking for work for his flyers. A few days later he brought in MAG-12, commanded by Colonel William A. Willis, whose group included night-fighter squadron VMFN-541. When the Leyte operation ended in late December, five Marine squadrons had destroyed sixty-three enemy aircraft, seven destroyers, seventeen transports, and damaged another twelve vessels. MacArthur awarded MAG-12 an army citation, saying, "Your night-fighter squadron has performed magnificently repeat magnificently."

During December, before MacArthur invaded Luzon, Mitchell observed that neither the army nor the navy understood close air support the Marine way. He

brought Lieutenant Colonel Keith B. McCutcheon's MAG-24 up from the Solomons to teach close air support to army pilots. When MacArthur ordered the 1st Cavalry Division to capture Manila, he sent MAG-24 along to cover the division's left flank. During the assault Brigadier General William C. Chase, USA, whose First Brigade led the division, insisted that the Marine air liaison jeep stay beside him. In reporting progress, he informed division headquarters, "I have never seen such able...and accurate close support as Marine flyers are giving us." When the 1st Cavalry entered the outskirts of Manila, Marines jury-rigged an airstrip on Quezon Boulevard and flew dive-bombing sorties from the street. By February, every army unit in the Philippines wanted Marine squadrons to support their ground movements.

Iwo Jima—Operation Detachment

Iwo Jima, an eight-square-mile volcanic island, lay exactly in the middle of a near-straight line drawn across 1,800 miles of ocean between Saipan and Tokyo. The small Japanese-controlled island operated two airfields with a third underway. In the overall strategy to assault Japan, Iwo meant very little. As a mid-ocean airbase to rescue B-29 bombers damaged over Japan, it meant everything. AAF chief General Arnold convinced Nimitz to capture the island, thereby enabling fighters to fly top cover for bombers, offer a haven for cripples, and provide an intermediate fueling stop, thereby enabling B-29s to carry more ordnance. On October 3, 1944, the JCS authorized Operation Detachment and put Nimitz's planners to work organizing another mission for the Marine Corps.

During 1944, Imperial General Headquarters sent Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi to the island to turn it into an invader's death trap. With the exception of Mount Suribachi, an extinct volcano situated on the southern tip of the island, Iwo Jima's terrain consisted of coarse black sand, fissures emitting



LEFT: During a pre-invasion briefing, Marine Lieutenant Wade gives his company specific landing and target acquisition instructions on the day before the scheduled assault of Iwo Jima.



ABOVE: Three Marine divisions participated in the assault of Iwo Jima, an eight-square-mile island defended by 21,000 veteran Japanese troops. General Holland Smith predicted: "We may expect casualties far beyond any heretofore suffered in the Central Pacific." Smith even underestimated the losses: the brutal five-week campaign that began on February 19, 1945, cost the V Amphibious Corps some 5,981 killed and 19,920 wounded.



ABOVE: When members of the 2nd Battalion, 27th Marines, went ashore near the southern tip of Iwo Jima, they crawled up a natural barrier of coarse black sand and came in view of Suribachi Yama, the ominous dead volcano they had been ordered to assault.

sulfurous fumes, and a few stunted shrubs. Kuribayashi garrisoned the island with 21,000 infantry and put them to work building pillboxes, blockhouses, masked batteries, and concrete-lined caves interconnected by 13,000 yards of tunnels. He fortified the island with hundreds of large coastal guns, masked artillery batteries, ninety mortars and rocket-launchers, sixty-nine anti-tank guns, two hundred machine guns, enormous quantities of ammunition, and twenty-four tanks dug hull-down into pockets.

In October 1944, Holland Smith and Turner began planning Operation Detachment. Smith chose General Schmidt to lead the assault, and Turner chose Admiral Hill to provide naval support—two veterans with impressive records for executing amphibious landings. Smith wanted the V Amphibious Corps assault to be exclusively a Marine operation and gave Schmidt two battle-hardened divisions, the 3rd and 4th, and added the rookie 5th Division, also led by seasoned veterans. Schmidt placed the 3rd Division, led by Major General



ABOVE: After 5th Division Marines piled ashore on Iwo Jima, they began inching their way to the crest of Suribachi Yama and quickly came under fire from Japanese mortars, artillery, and machine guns concealed in a network of tunnels carved in the volcanic ash and rocks of the mountain.

Graves B. Erskine, in floating reserve while General Cates's 4th Division stormed the beach adjacent to Airfield No. 1, and Major General Keller E. Rockey's 5th Division landed on the southern shore near Mount Suribachi. The plan called for the 4th and 5th Divisions to wheel north and assault the heavily fortified Motoyama Plateau, leaving the 28th Regiment with the daunting task of capturing Suribachi, a prominence providing the enemy with a full view of the battlefield.

From early December until mid-February 1945, B-24s and B-29s bombed the island for seventy-two days in a row. Smith wanted the assault set back to allow for another ten days of bombing but was given only three. He provided aerial reconnaissance photographs showing that during the bombardment the enemy had actually increased major land defensive positions from 450 to 730 and more than doubled its coastal gun emplacements. On February 16, Rear Admiral William H. P. Blandy's six battleships and five



cruisers, augmented by escort carrier Hellcats and Avengers, began hurling 14,000 16-inch, 14-inch, and 8-inch shells at Kuribayashi's coastal batteries and AA installations. Rain and misty conditions made targeting difficult, and when the weather cleared on D-minus-1 Day, Blandy discovered far more guns emplaced than anyone had anticipated. When Holland Smith predicted 15,000 casualties, nobody believed him.

On February 19, as dawn broke over a calm sea dotted by 450 ships of Spruance's Fifth Fleet, Smith watched as 482 LVT(A)s assembled under Blandy's rolling barrage. Sixty-eight LVT(A)s peeled off for the 4,000-yard dash to shore. Forty-five minutes later amtracs hit the black sand beaches with Rockey's 5th Division on the right and Cates's 4th Division on the left. Kuribayashi made a fatal mistake by allowing the Marines to push 300 yards inland before opening with raking fire on the flanks. Marines weathered the fire and fought back. By nightfall, more than 30,000 Marines supported by tanks and artillery commanded



LEFT: A few hours after Marines established a foothold on Iwo Jima, hundreds of landing craft began arriving with tons of ammunition and supplies.

ABOVE: By afternoon on D-Day, dozens of disabled trucks and amtracs litter the beach while first aid stations receive the wounded and prepare to have them transferred by boat to hospital ships.



ABOVE: Shortly after the first wave of Marines hit the beaches on Iwo Jima, an LST pulls alongside the USS Hartford and begins loading a medium tank.



ABOVE: A Marine observer on the front lines of Iwo Jima spots a Japanese machine gun nest, orients its location on a map, and transmits the coordinates to supporting artillery and mortar units in the rear.

RIGHT: Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal captures on film the historic moment when Marines reach the crest of Mount Suribachi and raise the Stars and Stripes. After more than sixty years, the photograph is still recognized by most Americans as a World War II icon.



the beachhead. At a cost of 2,400 casualties with 600 dead, Rocky's and Cates's divisions secured the southern neck of the island, isolated the enemy on Suribachi from the main Japanese force, and gained a foothold on Airfield No. 1.

With Marines firmly established on the island, it became a matter of time and casualties before exterminating the enemy. On the left flank the 28th Marines, commanded by Colonel Harry B. Liversedge, spent three horrific days using flamethrowers and satchel charges to blow the enemy out of their holes on Mount Suribachi, and on February 23 they planted the Stars and Stripes on the summit. The following day the 3rd Marine Division came ashore to break through General Kuribayashi's iron belt of cross-island defenses protecting Airfield No. 2. Now with 82,000 men ashore, the 4th Division on the right, the 5th Division on the left, and the 3rd Division in the center, the men snaked through stinking sulfur pits, lunar-like crags, and sunken pockets to flush out the enemy. Directly across from Airfield No. 2, all three divisions struck heavily fortified hills running through the center of the island. Smoke from high explosive shells shot into one hole puffed out another. The breakthrough required a thunderous artillery barrage augmented by naval guns and a heroic 800-yard sprint by Erskine's 3rd Division to flank Kuribayashi's rear.

While Marines continued to push the Japanese into the northern sector of the island, Seabees cleared Airfield No. 1 for landings. Marine Corsairs flew in from Agana, followed by Torpedo-Bombing Squadron 242 and the AAF's VII Fighter Group, whose pilots soon acquired the art of close air support. Before fighting for control of the island ended on March 24—the day General Kuribayashi committed *hara-kiri*—damaged B-29s returning from bombing missions over Japan were already making emergency landings on the airfield. By war's end, 24,761 flyers from 2,251 B-24s and B-29s had reason to thank the Marines for capturing Iwo Jima.

The butcher's bill came high. While nobody had believed Holland Smith when he predicted 15,000 casualties, the general's estimate fell lamentably short. The V Amphibious Corps counted 25,851 casualties, including 5,931 dead. Out of more than 20,000 Japanese on the island, only 216 surrendered. Twenty-two Marines were awarded the Medal of Honor, twelve of them posthumously. Smith called Iwo Jima the toughest fight "we've run across in 168 years." The battle nearly decimated three Marine divisions.

On March 26, 1945, two days after securing Iwo Jima, the pre-invasion bombardment of Okinawa began.

RIGHT: Artillery from the 4th Marine Division shells enemy positions in the hills flanking the northern end of Iwo Jima's Airfield No. 2, which is covered over with the debris and litter of bitter fighting.

BELOW: Navy Chaplain Lieutenant (jg) John H. Galbreath (center), who is attached to the 5th Marine Division, kneels beside a wounded leatherneck who has just been brought to the aid station from an artillery battery fifty yards away.



ABOVE: Wounded Marines on Iwo Jima assist navy corpsmen who are bringing the more seriously wounded to first aid stations set up short distances behind the front lines.



ABOVE: The Japanese fielded 100,000 men on Okinawa, and most of them occupied defensive positions south of Yontan airfield. When the assault began on April 1, 1945, it marked the first operation in the Pacific not commanded by a Marine.

Okinawa—Operation Iceberg

Okinawa, in the Ryukyu Islands, lay 325 miles south of Kyushu, Japan, and provided an essential stepping stone for Allied forces assaulting the home islands. Imperial General Headquarters could not afford to lose Okinawa and poured more than 115,000 army and navy personnel into the defense of the island. Like Kuribayashi on Iwo Jima, Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima believed that any attempt to destroy Americans on the beach was futile and the best way to defeat an assaulting force was to lure it into a heavily fortified defensive position branching across the southern sector of the island from Shuri. Ushijima also



TOP: Marines of Company A, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, discovered that the only way to root out Japanese lurking in tunnels was to blast them out with bazookas or flamethrowers.

ABOVE: Tired of being pinned down by snipers firing from caves, a demolition crew from the 6th Marine Division trigger a pack charge hurled into the tunnel's mouth.



ABOVE: Marines advancing along the Shuri defensive line are suddenly pinned down as they attempt to move through and over a patch of ground called "Cemetery Ridge."

LEFT: A Marine from the 1st Division takes aim with his .45-caliber Thompson submachine gun on a sniper, covering a buddy who is moving forward in a crouch on Wana Ridge near Shuri, Okinawa.



ABOVE: During the fight for Shuri, a Marine dashes through Japanese machine gun fire while crossing a draw called Death Valley, where 125 American casualties occurred during a period of eight hours.

counted on the Japanese navy and a thousand *kamikaze* suicide planes to destroy Spruance's Fifth Fleet, thereby denying Americans on the island naval or air support.

Being ignorant of Ushijima's game-plan, Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, USA, and Spruance designed a typical king-sized beach assault involving 1,457 ships and more than 183,000 men. Buckner's Tenth Army consisted of General Geiger's III Amphibious Corps of 80,000 Marines and Major General John S. Hodge's XXIV Army Corps. Geiger's command consisted of the 1st, 2nd, and 6th Marine Divisions and the 2nd Marine Air Wing for close air support.

On April 1, 1945, after a furious week-long bombardment, the 1st Marine Division, commanded by Puerto Rico-born Naval Academy graduate Major General Pedro A. del Valle, went ashore near Yontan Airfield. The 6th Marine Division, commanded by Virginia Military Institute graduate Major General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., went ashore beside the 1st Division to cover del Valle's right flank and the army's left flank. The 2nd Marine Division, Geiger's floating reserve, steamed around the tip of Okinawa and made a diversionary feint along the southeast coast. Ironically, the 1st and 6th Divisions went ashore against weak resistance, but the 2nd Division suffered the greater



TOP: A Marine F4U Corsair performing close air support fires a broadside of eight five-inch rockets into a Japanese position on a ridge near Shuri. An army P-38, flying fifty feet off the Corsair's tail, snaps the photograph.

ABOVE: Artillerymen from the 15th Marines angle their 105mm howitzer into a new firing position on June 9, 1945. A Marine astride the barrel attempts to aid the move by functioning as a counterbalance.

casualties when their transports were hit by two *kamikazes*. Such *kamikaze* threats sent the floating 2nd Division back to Saipan.

The 6th Marine Division immediately overran Yontan, and by April 2 the 6th Engineer Battalion had the airfield in partial operating order. The 6th Division then wheeled north, toward the Motobu Peninsula, while the 1st Division mopped up the area. Hodge's army Corps turned south to assault the massive elevated enemy emplacements that began at Naha on the west coast and stretched through Shuri Castle to Yonabaru on Nagagusuku Bay on the east coast. The defenses resembled everything the Marines had experienced on Iwo Jima, but nobody in Hodge's XXIV Army Corps had been there. While the 6th Marine Division made steady progress on the Motobu Peninsula, Ushijima stopped Hodge's army Corps at the Shuri defensive line.

Geiger suggested an amphibious end run south of Shuri, but Buckner vetoed the movement as too risky. Instead, he brought the 6th Marine Division, already reduced by casualties, down from the Motobu Peninsula and joined it with the 1st Division, which Buckner had used sparingly. While the army held its position, the 6th Marine Division took heavy casualties securing three mutually supporting hills—Sugar Loaf, Horseshoe, and Half Moon—which anchored the western flank of the Shuri line. The veteran 1st Division, one of the toughest units of the war, took severe casualties overrunning Dakeshi Ridge, the key terrain feature obstructing Hodge's advance, and Wana Ridge, the most formidable eminence and worst deathtrap in Ushijima's defensive line.

After the 10th Infantry Division reached a stalemate against Ushijima's defenses on the Oroku Peninsula at Naha, Geiger convinced Buckner that the easiest way to break the bottleneck without heavy loss was to launch an amphibious assault in the rear of the enemy. Lieutenant Colonel Victor H. Krulak put the plan

together in five days and on June 4 the 4th and 29th Marine Regiments landed from LVTs and LCTs and rapidly pushed inland. Joined by the 6th Division, the Marines squeezed the Japanese into a corner.

Peering from his command post on June 15, Ushijima wired Tokyo, "Enemy tanks are attacking our headquarters. The Naval Base Force is dying gloriously." Ushijima shut down radio communications and committed suicide. Three days later, during the final days of the Okinawa campaign, a wayward artillery shell killed Buckner. General Geiger took charge of the Tenth Army and became the only Marine to command a field army during the war. The army did not want a Marine in charge of their bailiwick, and pulled General Joseph W. Stilwell out of retirement to replace Geiger.

War's End

On May 7, 1945, during the battle for Okinawa, the war in Europe ended. The United States began moving more divisions to the Pacific for the invasion of Japan. On August 6, more than 300,000 troops were being trained on Okinawa. On that day, a B-29 named *Enola Gay* flew over Honshu and dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, killing 80,000 inhabitants in a city of 500,000. Three days later the air force dropped a second atomic bomb, on Nagasaki, a seaport on Kyushu, and killed 20,000 more. On August 14 Japan surrendered unconditionally. The following day every American, whether on Okinawa or in Peoria, Illinois, celebrated V-J Day.

On September 2, Japanese officials signed the instrument of surrender on the battleship *Missouri* (BB-63) in Tokyo Bay. MacArthur signed for the Allied powers and Nimitz for the United States. During the ceremony, Geiger represented the Marine Corps. He also represented the 86,940 leathernecks who had died during an unbroken series of victories in the Pacific. Eighty Marines were awarded Medals of Honor.

The Corps' six divisions made fifteen major



ABOVE: A few days after the first atomic bomb leveled Hiroshima, a Japanese soldier surveys the desolation from a distance, perhaps lamenting his nation's decision to go to war with America.



LEFT: On August 15, 1945, Marine, air force, and navy personnel arrive at Atsugi airfield and the search begins for American and British prisoners. In a mission headed by Commander Roger Simpson and Commander Harold Grassen into the wretched Aomori camp near Tokyo, the first of the near-dead prisoners are carried away on litters for medical treatment.

amphibious landings, and its air arm destroyed 2,355 enemy aircraft. Growing from a force of 70,000 in December 1941, some 670,000 men and women served the Corps during World War II. On V-J Day, the Corps still numbered 458,000 officers and enlisted personnel. Then suddenly, once again, the future of the Corps faced another threat to its existence.