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MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: ARMORED GROUP IN AN AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION

SCOPE: A resume of the participation of the 20th Armored Group
in the Okinawa Operation, and the missions this group
was called upon to perform.

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ARMORED GROUP
IN AN
AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION

"Battalions of tanks, armored infantry, and armored artillery, taken from nondivisional pools, could, instead of being added to armored divisions, be combined with each other under group headquarters and with such service units as were needed, and thus in effect constitute small **temporary** armored divisions."¹
Such was the feeling in Headquarters Army Ground Forces in August, 1943, concerning armored groups.

THE PREPARATION

The 20th Armored Group, in early January 1945, was engaged, as part of the XXIV Corps, in the final phases of the capture of the Island of Leyte, when orders were received making the XXIV Corps part of the assault echelon of the 10th Army in the invasion of Okinawa, scheduled for the first week in April.

1. Historical Division, Department of the Army, United States Army in World War II p. 328.

The Commanding Officer 20th Armored Group, on receipt of the XXIV Corps Field Order, directed the amphibious units in the Group to conduct show-down inspections; to submit loading plans; to submit requisitions for shortages; and to maintain command liaison with the divisions to which they were to be attached. Attachment to these divisions to be effective at the time the amphibious units crossed the beach to load. The tank units of the Group remained with the divisions that they had been working with during the Leyte Campaign. During this preparatory phase of the operation, the Group Headquarters and Staff acted in an advisory capacity regarding tactical and logistical matters. The issue of major items of equipment for the tank units was controlled by Group, through coordination with XXIV Corps Special Staff Sections. Major items of equipment for the amphibious units were issued by the Group, utilizing an expanded S-4 Section in Group Headquarters. Thus, control over major items of equipment for all armored units of the XXIV Corps was maintained by the Commanding Officer of the 20th Armored Group in his capacity of Armored Advisor to the Commanding General XXIV Corps. This system proved highly satisfactory, as it enabled the specialized equipment required on amphibious operations to be placed within the Corps promptly and impartially. Frequently, limited supplies required an uneven distribution, and placed the bulk of the supplies within the unit, making the major effort.

During this preparatory phase, several supply problems worthy of note developed. A change in the TO&E of the amphibious units required the requisitioning of some 3500 life vests, Air Corps type. A critical shortage of approximately one half million cap screws developed. These are 3/4 inch bolts that hold the grousers on the tracks of the LVT's, enabling them to maneuver in the water. A large number of vehicles were deadlined, due to a shortage of gasket material. These three items were not available in the quantities desired in Army Depots, and had to be requisitioned from the Zone of Interior, and delivered by air-shipment. The life vests and the gasket material arrived in ample time to be issued to the units prior to landing. However, the cap screws did not arrive in the group supply section until the units were loaded aboard assault shipping, and a landing craft had to be used to distribute the required quantities from ship to ship in the convoy. This necessitated many units performing their last maintenance while actually enroute to the target.

At a conference between the Corps Shore Party Commander and the Commanding Officer of the 20th Armored Group, it was decided to establish a control and liaison party of two officers and two enlisted men at the Corps Shore Party Headquarters, on the target, to coordinate requests for vehicles from the LVT Units in the unloading of priority cargo in the early stages of the landing and to attempt to eliminate some of the confusion that had developed during this stage of the operation on Leyte.

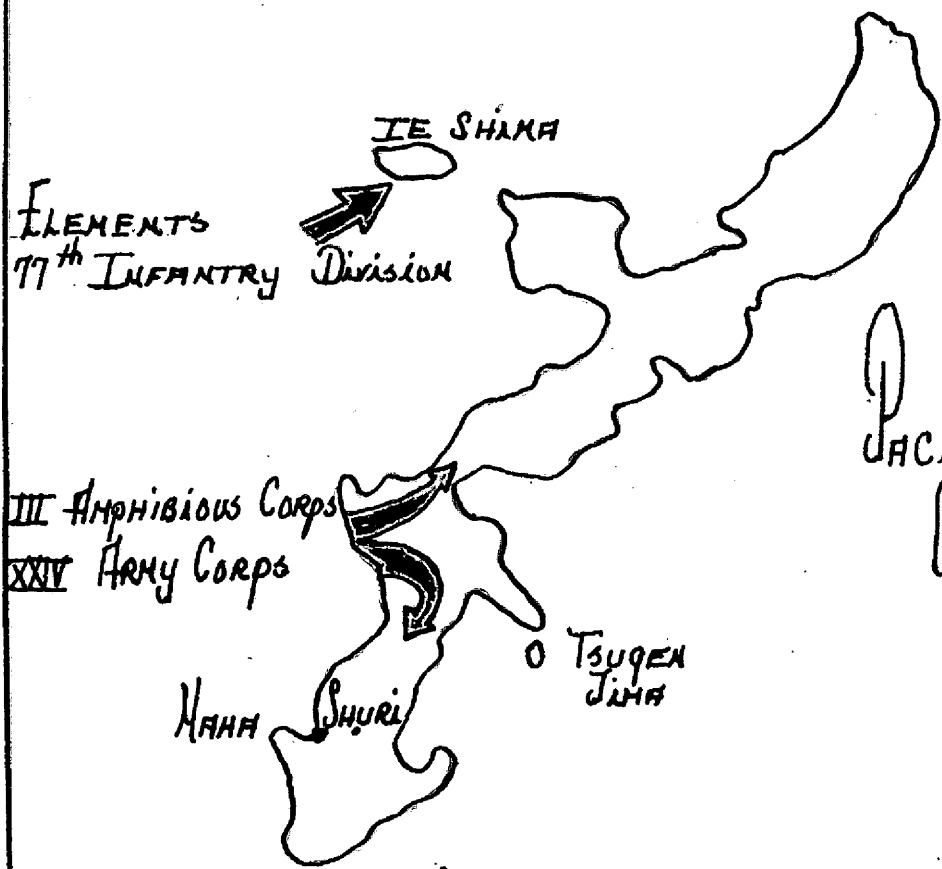
Group Headquarters remained ashore until completion of the last elements of the Amphibious Battalion's loading; at which time the Forward Echelon of the Group Headquarters loaded. The Rear Echelon of the Group remained to follow in the resupply echelons of the Corps shipping, and was under the command of the Assistant S-4 of Group Headquarters. All the battalion rear echelons were consolidated under the command of this Group staff officer, who coordinated the loading and the administrative details of the Group Rear Echelon, while the Forward Echelon was enroute to the target.

The training and rehearsal phases for this operation were limited by the time required to perform the necessary maintenance to get the vehicles in condition for training, and the time required to put the vehicles in condition for the final assault after the training and the rehearsal had been completed. Experience had shown in the Leyte, the Saipan, and the Tinian Operations, that considerably more time was required for amphibious units to perform their final vehicle maintenance after the rehearsal, than was needed by the other ground units participating in the operation. This was due largely to the specialized maintenance required on the amphibious vehicles.

During the training phase, training was largely devoted to improving indirect fire with the amphibious tanks and to individual training for the replacements received.

The final preparation of the Group for combat neared completion. The rehearsal was finished when Group Headquarters was directed to arrange the areas for staging and assembling the units for the actual loading. The Divisions were responsible for the actual loading, but the Group Commander, in his capacity as Corps Armored Advisor, recommended staging areas for the loading of the Corps Amphibious Units. Loadings were accomplished under division control as the shipping became available.

China
Sea



ELEMENTS
77th INFANTRY Division

III Amphibious Corps
XXIV Army Corps

Naha Shuri

Tsugen Jima

2nd MARINE DIVISION
DEMONSTRATION

Pacific
Ocean

OKINAWA ISLAND
STATUTE MILES



THE LANDING

The 20th Armored Group units which loaded over the beach at Leyte for the operation, and their initial attachments were as follows:

7th Inf. Div.
536th Amph. Tractor Battalion
718th Amph. Tractor Battalion
776th Amph. Tank Battalion
711th Tank Battalion

96th Inf. Div.
788th Amph. Tractor Battalion
728th Amph. Tractor Battalion
780th Amph. Tank Battalion
763rd Tank Battalion

77th Inf. Div.
773rd Amph. Tractor Battalion
715th Amph. Tractor Battalion
708th Amph. Tank Battalion
706th Tank Battalion

In addition to these units, the following were attached during the course of the operation;

27th Inf. Div.
193rd Tank Battalion

Tenth Army
713th Tank Battalion
(Provisional Flame Thrower)

On April 1st, 1945, at 0700, the Command Group of the 20th Armored Group loaded in three LVT's and headed for the line of departure. One staff section was to land with the 7th Inf. Div. and one staff section was to be with the 96th Inf. Div. The Group Commander remained afloat until 1200 contacting the battalion commanders, and prepared for the coordination of the defense of the Corps Service Area. At 1200, the Group Commander landed and established a temporary headquarters on the beach.

By the 3rd of April, the amphibious units of the group had completed their initial mission of landing assault elements of the infantry divisions with their supplies and equipment. The group headquarters had moved to a permanent location 300 yards inland. The S-4 section of the group had established a small dump in the vicinity of the group headquarters, and had begun supplying the amphibious units and the 284th Ordnance Maintenance Company Tank, which had been attached to the group for supply and administration. The control and liaison party from the group had reported to the XXIV Corps Shore Party Commander. However, as the two headquarters were placed almost adjacent to each other, on the beach, it was decided that coordination could be effected just as well from group headquarters. In addition to assisting in unloading the bulk supplies of the corps' shipping, the group commander assigned four amphibious tractor battalions a sector of the corps beachhead area to defend. The battalion commanders were designated as sector coordinators and each commander was responsible directly to the group commander for the defense of his sector. A small detachment of nine LVT's was placed as a defense force on Kadena Airport, approximately a mile from the beach.

On the 7th of April, the 713th Tank Battalion(Flame Thrower,) arrived on the island, and A and B companies were attached to the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions, respectively. One platoon of B company, 713th Tank Battalion, was assigned to Kadena Airport and relieved the amphibious tractor detachment.

On the 8th of April, the 780th Amphibious Tank Battalion and the 728th Amphibious Tractor Battalion, loaded on LSTs to move one battalion of the 27th Infantry Division from Kerama Retto. This was an operation to clear the small island of Tsugen Jima, off the east coast of Okinawa, of any hostile forces. The particular aim was to eliminate artillery elements that might harass the left flank of the XXIV Corps Sector, as it moved southward.

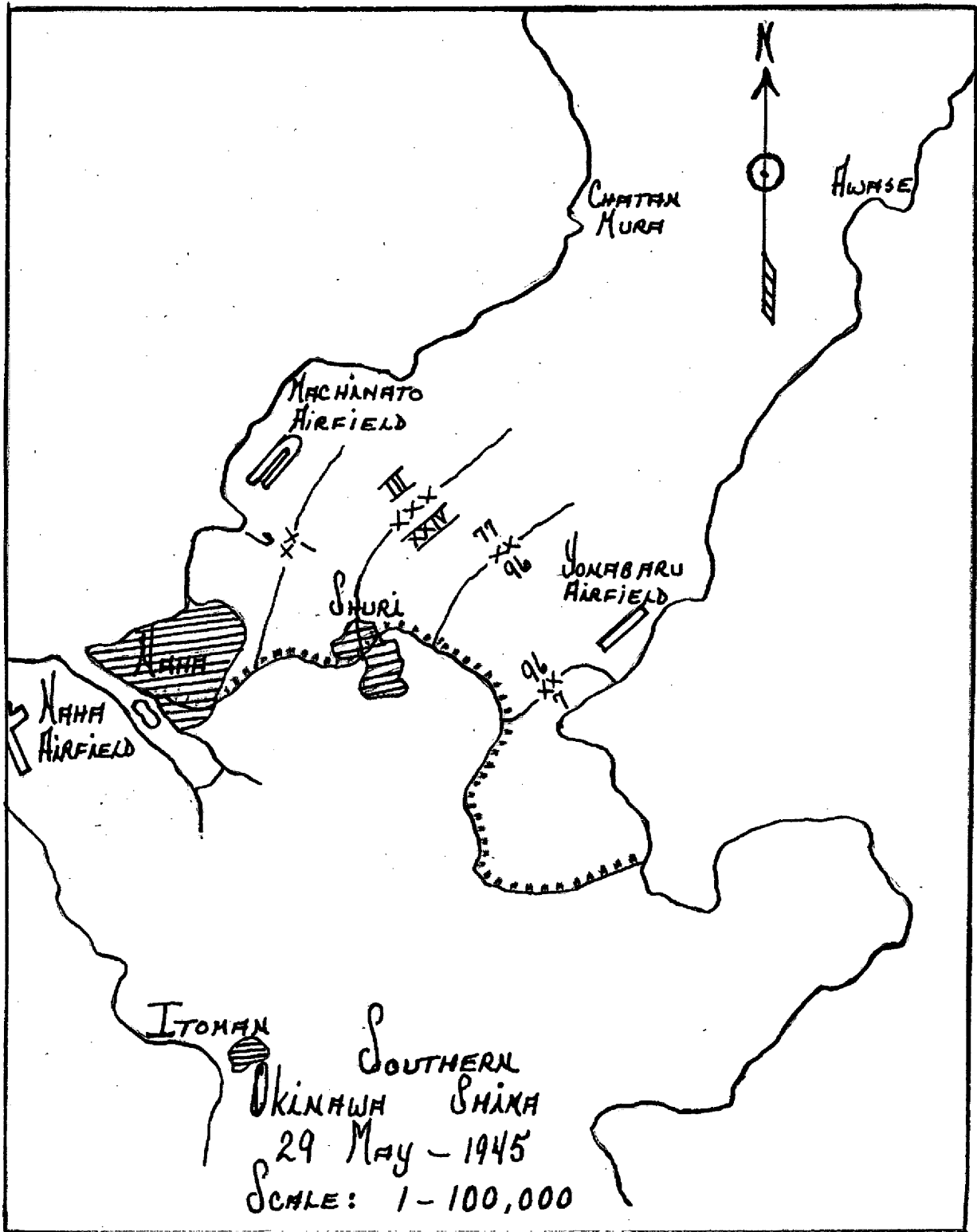
Upon completion of this mission, on the 12th of April, A and B companies, 780th Amphibious Tank Battalion, were again attached to the 27th Infantry Division; this time to support by indirect fire the advance of the division as it attacked south along the west coast or right flank of the Corps Sector. These units retained this mission until the 1st of May, at which time they were assigned to support the 1st Marine Division in the relief of the 27th Infantry Division in the front lines. During this one period, one platoon of amphibious tractors from the 718th Amphibious Tractor Battalion, moved supplies and evacuated wounded for units of the 27th Division that were in the vicinity of Chatan Mura.

On the 26th of April, the battalions of the group that had been assigned to the 77th Infantry Division, arrived on Okinawa from IE Shima where they had been initially employed. These amphibious units reverted immediately to Group control, and were used to strengthen the beachhead defenses. The 706th Tank Battalion remained attached to the division, and moved up to support the front line sector assigned to the division.

On the 9th of May, a small task force of one platoon of amphibious tanks from the 780th Amphibious Tank Battalion, and one platoon of amphibious tractors from the 718th Amphibious Tractor Battalion with troops from the 165th Infantry Regiment, made a landing on Tori Shima. The troops remained here as a small garrison with two tractors and crews to be used to resupply the unit over the reefs from ship to shore.

The protection of the eastern side of the island, in the Corps rear, had been a considerable problem. Initially, the 7th Infantry Division cut the island in two, by moving directly from the beachhead east, and then turning south with the Pacific Ocean on its left flank and the 96th Infantry Division on its right. The 776th Amphibious Tank Battalion moved to the east coast, on the 16th of April, and was deployed under operational control of the Corps Reserve south of the Awase Peninsula. The 776th Amphibious Tank Battalion remained in this area until the 20th of May, when the Group assumed the mission of the coastal defenses of the entire Corps area from the beachhead area to Yonabaru Airport.

Ever since the assault elements of the 27th Division had left the island of Tsugen Jima, there had been persistent reports, (largely from the pilots,) that the island was still occupied by the enemy in an undetermined number, and that they had been using artillery against the east coast defenses of the Corps.



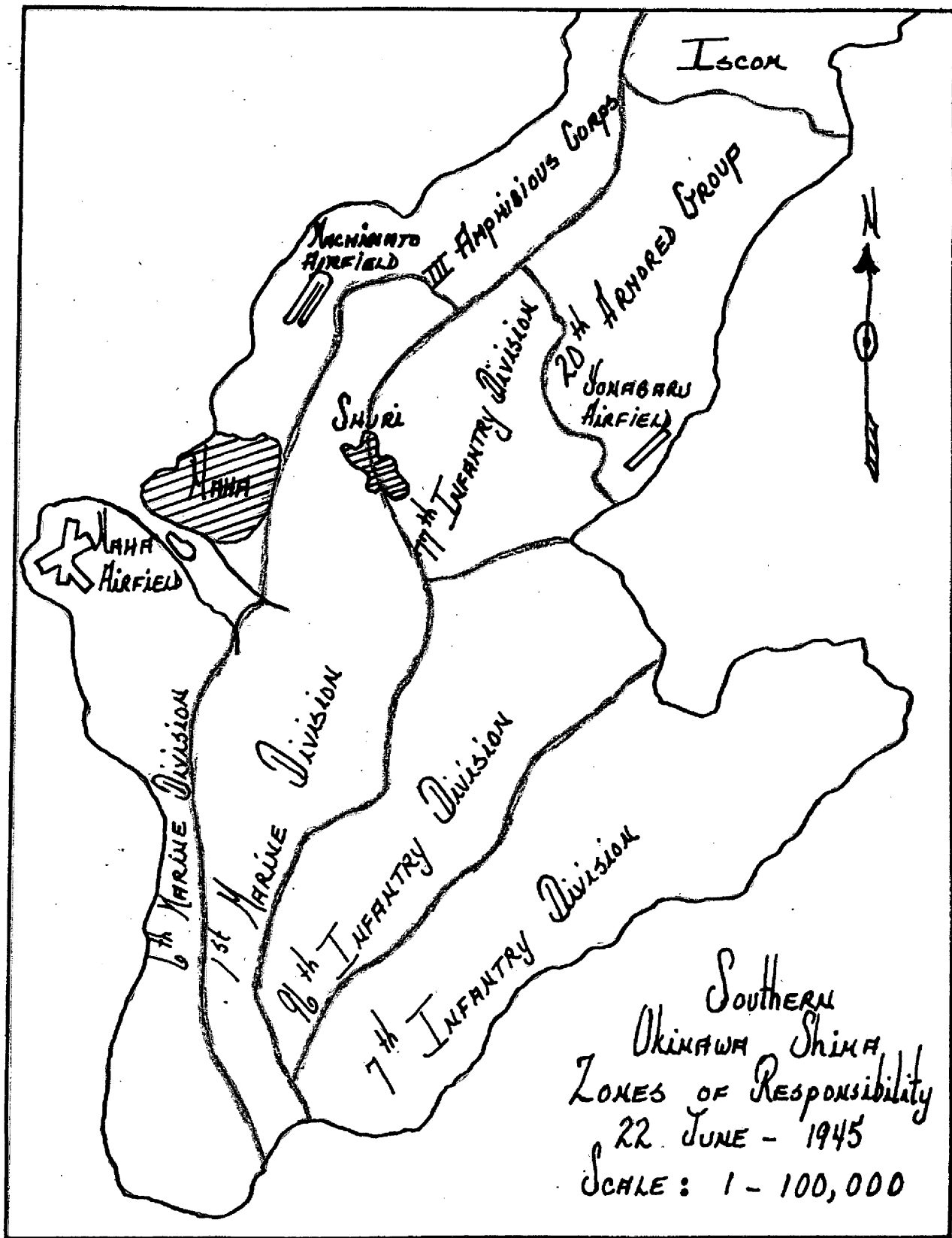
Therefore, on the morning of the 22nd of April, the Group Commander received verbal orders from the Corps Commander to conduct a reconnaissance in force on the island. On the 23rd, 150 dismounted troops from the 728th Amphibious Tractor Battalion, and 17 amphibious tanks from the 780th Amphibious Tank Battalion, under the Group Commander, reconnoitered the island. In this action, one 75mm field piece, and two 5 inch guns were found and put out of action. Also considerable quantities of supplies and ammunition in caves were destroyed and 366 civilians were returned to the main island for internment under the Military Government Authorities. As the transportation of these civilians required more time than was anticipated, a small detachment returned on the 26th of April and gathered 56 more civilians that had been hiding. They also sealed the last of the caves. In this operation, a total of 51 Japanese were known to have been killed outright. However, construction parties that investigated the caves in June, reported finding 382 dead bodies, bringing the estimated total to the number 433.

On the 29th of May, the 708th Amphibious Tank Battalion was attached to the 6th Marine Division, with a beach defense mission in the vicinity of Naha. This unit also acted as a support element in the assault opposite Naha Airfield, and relieved the assault elements as they moved forward, of beach defense positions. In this action, two platoons of the 788th Amphibious Tractor Battalion were utilized to transport assault elements of the 6th Marine Division.

From the 9th until the 24th of June, elements of the 715th Amphibious Tractor Battalion, loaded aboard LST's, daily transported rations and ammunition from beaches at Hagushi to Itoman for front line troops of the III Amphibious Corps. On the return trips, civilians that had been captured in the south were returned to Military Government installations. Also, in this phase of the operation, was the 780th Amphibious Tank Battalion, which established security detachments around the XXIV Corps supply point at Minatoga. It was here that the unit established a blocking line to intercept Jap stragglers, trying to get out of the southern combat area. On the 19th of June, a patrol from this unit, which was investigating island caves, killed 148 Japanese and captured the unprecedented number of 153.

In addition to tactical employment, the Group had been ordered by the Corps Commander to establish and operate a Corps Casual Center. This unit received casualties arriving on the Corps beaches. It fed and cared for all casualties and patients discharged from hospitals in the Corps Service Area prior to their returning to their own units. It re-equipped all casualties before returning them to their own units, and fed all casualties leaving the area via the XXIV Corps beaches. This unit operated adjacent to the Group Headquarters until the 7th of May, when the Army Replacement Battalion took over the processing of all casualties in the Army Area. At this time, the unit was moved to the loading area at Yonabaru to process Corps casualties arriving at this location by ship.

On the 22nd of June, the island was declared secure. As a matter of interest, however, it might be noted that the Group Headquarters Company had accounted for an additional 21 Japanese killed and 3 captured, as of the 30th of June.



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NACHIMINTO AIRFIELD

III Amphibious Corps

20th Amphibious Group

Shuri

11th Infantry Division

JONABARU AIRFIELD

Waha AIRFIELD

Yaha

6th MARINE DIVISION

1st MARINE DIVISION

9th INFANTRY DIVISION

7th INFANTRY DIVISION

27th INFANTRY DIVISION

20th Amphibious Group



SUMMARY

In the preparatory phase of the operation, the 20th Armored Group performed the following function:

- (1) Coordinated and effected the resupply and rehabilitation of all amphibious units assigned to the XXIV Corps. To accomplish this, an expanded S-4 Section of the Group Headquarters operated a provisional supply dump to handle Class I, II, and certain scarce Class III supplies.
- (2) Coordinated the issue of major items of equipment to the tank units attached to the divisions of the corps, through Corps Special Staff.
- (3) Acted in an advisory capacity to all armored units of the corps during the training, rehearsal, and loading phase.

In the landing phase of the operation, the 20th Armored Group performed the following functions:

- (1) Coordinated the use of all amphibious tractor units, (nine battalions) of the XXIV Corps, after division assault elements had been unloaded. During the period 1 April- 27 May, 21,287 LVT loads, (over 60,000 tons) of supplies were moved by units of the 20th Armored Group over the beaches.

- (2) Established and operated a Corps Casual Center.
The initial capacity of this unit was 100 persons, but a rest camp was established on the order of the Corps Surgeon by this unit, bringing its total capacity up to 200 persons.
- (3) Coordinated and supervised the defenses of the XXIV Corps Service Area against amphibious and airborne attack, hostile infiltration, and rendered useless caves and enemy defense works located in this area.
- (4) Conducted a reconnaissance in force against the island of Tsugen Jima, utilizing dismounted personnel of one of the amphibious tractor battalions as infantry.
- (5) Conducted a defense along a shore line using dismounted personnel of both amphibious tractor and amphibious tank battalions as infantry.
- (6) Established and maintained a blocking line to prevent enemy infiltration into Service Unit Areas by utilizing dismounted personnel of the amphibious tractor and amphibious tank battalions as infantry.

The employment of the 20th Armored Group in the Okinawa Operation, though quite contrary to the concept of employment of an armored group as visualized by Headquarters Army Ground Forces in 1943, illustrates the flexibility of this type unit and the value of a unit of this type to a corps commander. Particularly when the corps is in an amphibious operation or where the corps rear areas are subject to numerous infiltrations or airborne attacks.

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