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THE ADVANCE IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC
(TARAWA TO IWO JIMA)
21 NOVEMBER 1943 - MARCH 1945

Type of operations described:
AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS

Captain Frank L. Shenk, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. I

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of the United States Armed Forces in the Central Pacific Area from 21 November 1943 to March 1945. All operations are of a combined nature including Army, Navy, and Air Force.

The Central Pacific Area is a portion of the Pacific Ocean Area Command. This Command was divided into three parts: the North, Central, and South Pacific Areas. (See Map A) Command unity was established by placing Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz as the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Ocean Area. (1) Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson, Jr., was the Army Commander in this Area. It was the primary mission of General Richardson to train units for combat within the Pacific. This was accomplished by establishing jungle and amphibious training centers under combat-tested leaders. Both Command Headquarters were located at this time on the island of Oahu, in the Hawaiian Islands group. (2)

Due to the characteristics of the area, the Central Pacific campaigns were dependent on the superior power of the United States Navy over the Imperial Japanese Fleet. The war in the Pacific had to be won by naval strength, with Army and Marine troops securing the land masses. (3)

Distances from one land mass to the other are tremendous: Manila in the Philippines is 6,750 miles from San Francisco; Pearl Harbor in Hawaii is 2,100 miles from San Francisco. In

(1) A-1c, p. 556; (2) A-2, p. 68; (3) A-5, p. 5.

addition to the large ocean barrier which had to be secured by our Navy, the terrain fought over was varied. Land masses consisted of small islands surrounded by tiny coral atolls which were seldom more than ten to twelve feet above the water and supported only coconut, breadfruit, and pandamus trees. Coral reefs surrounding these islands made landings extremely difficult and hazardous, costing many lives. This was one type of terrain. Another was the volcanic type: islands rugged and broken, with sharp ridges which in most cases were honeycombed with gun emplacements. These ridges were not mountains in our sense of the word, but were, however, given that title. In most cases this type of island was also surrounded with coral reefs. (4)

Logistics in the Pacific presented a big problem, but by giving certain logistics responsibilities to each service the problem was solved. As an example, the Navy provided all fuel needed for the services and the Army provided all rations for shore personnel. (5) These supplies were generally stored or warehoused in the Hawaiian Islands and brought forward to advance bases as they were taken. "In excess of 600,000 tons of supplies were transhipped every month from Hawaii to the battle zones." (6)

AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS

Due to the characteristics of the Central Pacific Area all operations were amphibious. Therefore, before specific operations are discussed it would be well to consider the general pattern of this type operation.

(1) Shore defense installations must be softened up days,

(4) A-4, pp. 124, 263; (5) A-1c, pp. 642, 643; (6) A-3, p. 72.

weeks, or months in advance by air attacks from land-based bombers or, if this is not possible, from carrier-based planes. This is a joint function of the Army, Air Force, and Navy.

(2) Mine sweeping operations must be employed and underwater obstacles removed at landing beaches.

(3) A three-to-one superiority over the enemy is needed to make the landing.

(4) During the approach to the island, prior to landing, bombardments of the landing beaches must be carried on by land-based or carrier-based planes and Naval gunfire of the assault forces.

(5) Landing fires are continued until the troops hit the beaches, and are then lifted to other targets farther inland.

(6) Troops are brought to the beach by special landing craft which also bring in supplies. This is done under cover of the ships' guns.

(7) Support is continued by the Navy until shore-based aviation can relieve the carrier of its support mission and units are well established on shore.

(8) Reserve troops must be kept "floating", ready to reinforce when needed.

(9) Battlefield isolation must be accomplished by carrier- and land-based strikes on nearby enemy air fields prior to D-Day.

(10) Supply line security is furnished by the Navy for the invasion forces. (7)

(11) Surprise is needed to prevent the enemy's massing troops at the landing beaches.

(12) Command of the sea is essential to insure the success

(7) A-1c, pp. 647, 648; A-14, p. 419.

of the mission.

(13) Adequate supplies are needed to support the landing once it has been made. (8)

(14) A naval officer is in command of an amphibious operation until the troops have embarked and gained their first objective on shore. The ground force officer then takes over and calls upon the naval officer for whatever support he may need.

SITUATION

In the spring of 1943 the Japanese controlled the ocean area lying approximately west longitude 180 degrees and north latitude 5 degrees. (See Map B) This area included a chain of islands which had been in Japanese hands for a period of twenty-five years. They extended from the southern tip of Japan down to and including the Marshall Islands. The Gilbert Islands were taken over by the Japanese during the first six months of the war, extending this chain of islands which already included the Marianas and Carolines. Their main southern base was on Truk in the Carolines. This base was supported from Japan by a series of air fields on the above-mentioned islands. Allied forces up to this time were on the defensive. However, submarines were quite active during this period and caused severe losses to Japanese shipping along with disruption of their lines of communication. (9)

In August of 1943 the Japs had been forced out of their foothold in the Aleutians. These bases could then be used for attacks on the Japanese Kuril Islands. The Aleutians were also a main threat to the Japanese homeland. (10)

(8) A-15, pp.5,6; (9) A-6, p. 76; A-4, p. 125; A-1c, p. 556; (10) A-3, p. 50.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

At the Quadrant Conference in Quebec August 1943, the combined Chiefs of Staff decided the main routes of advance toward Japan. General MacArthur was in command of all allied forces in the Southwest Pacific and was directed to continue his advance up the New Guinea coast and reach the Philippines by fall of 1944. The plan for Admiral Nimitz, commanding the Pacific Ocean Areas, to begin operations west of Hawaii, taking strategic Japanese-held islands in the Gilbert, Marshall, and Marianas Islands was approved. It was believed that by spring of 1945 attack on the Japanese Ryukyus could be made. (11) (See Map C)

The United States joint Chiefs of Staff determined to take the initiative and keep it. By this time air and naval superiority was a reality and therefore we could attack whenever and wherever we desired. It was not the intent to take all the islands, but only those needed for advance bases and airfields. It was intended to by-pass the more strongly held islands whose defenses were complete and whose capture would mean great losses in time and men to the allied forces. By cutting off these strong points from the main supply and communication lines, they would become ineffective. This sweep to the southwest would also protect our supply lines to Australia and leave the main enemy naval base at Truk bottled up. It was also decided that captured islands would serve as B-29 bases for the bombing of Japan proper. (12)

THE GILBERT ISLANDS CAMPAIGN

On 20 July 1943 Admiral Nimitz was instructed by the joint Chiefs of Staff to attack and garrison the Ellice and Gilbert

(11) A-2, p. 63; (12) A-2, p. 63; A-1c, p. 586.

Island groups. Upon this order, Admiral Nimitz began assembling naval forces in the Pacific Area and conferred with commanders of units to participate in the operation. The mission was to secure islands in the Gilbert group from which future raids and attacks could be launched by land-based planes on the main Japanese Pacific bases in the Marianas and Caroline Islands and on Truk. This attack would also place an additional burden on the Japanese, presently engaged to the southwest in New Guinea. (13) Admiral Nimitz directed carrier-base strikes during the months of August, September, and October on Marcus, Tarawa, Apamama, and Wake to prevent the Japanese from knowing where and when the main strike in this area would be. Land-based aircraft operating from the Ellice, Phoenix, and Samoan Islands were to conduct photographic reconnaisance of this area and attack enemy bases within range. (14)

Admiral Nimitz' operation order issued to the Commander of the force making the attack contained the following mission:

"Capture, occupy, defend, and develop Makin, Tarawa, and Apamama and vigorously deny Nauru, in order to:

(a) Gain control of the Gilbert Islands;

(b) Prepare to gain control of the Marshall Islands;

(c) Improve the security of lines of communication;

(d) Support the operation in the South-Southwest Pacific and Burma Areas by extending pressure on the Japanese." (15)

The target date for the attack was 21 November 1941. Vice Admiral R. A. Spruance commanded the entire expedition. The assault forces were under the command of Admiral Turner. This force was divided into two task forces, one which attacked

(13) A-10, p. 1; (14) A-10, p. 2; (15) A-10, p. 2.

Makin Island in the North and one which attacked Tarawa in the South. Both assaulting forces were under the command of Major General Holland M. Smith, U. S. Marine Corps, commanding the V Amphibious Corps divided into a northern and a southern attacking force. The northern landing force was commanded by Major General Ralph C. Smith, U. S. Army, and was composed of the 165th Regimental Combat Team of the 27th Division. The southern landing force was commanded by Major General Julian C. Smith, U. S. Marine Corps, and was composed of the 2nd Marine Division. (16) (See Map D)

Admiral Nimitz sent the largest U. S. fleet ever committed into action for this operation. It was composed of seven battleships, seven heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, eight escort carriers, and thirty-four destroyers. Their mission was to bombard Tarawa and Makin on D minus 1 and to support the landing on D-Day. (17)

The landing on Makin was on schedule 0830 21 November 1943. However, some of the troops scheduled to land in succeeding waves were unable to land due to a tie-up of landing barges on coral reefs. Attempts made to get these barges off the reefs proved unsuccessful until Navy demolition teams blasted a path through the coral, enabling them to advance to the beach. Reinforcements immediately needed on the beach had to be reloaded from barges to LVT's (landing vehicles, track) to be taken in. (18)

Only moderate opposition was encountered, and on the night 22-23 November, after a vigorous counterattack by the Japanese, the island was captured. One hundred prisoners were

(16) A-3, p. 51; (17) A-3, p. 51; (18) A-11, pp. 40,41.

taken. (19)

Tarawa was a different story. Japanese shore batteries opened up on the southern task force at 0507 after one of our ships failed to answer an enemy blinker challenge; the battle was on. (20) Navy guns went into action and carrier-based planes began their air strikes in an effort to silence the shore batteries. In the meantime, mine sweepers went into action sweeping the channels of the lagoon and a smoke screen was laid by boats carrying ignited smoke pots. As the landing craft reached the line of departure enemy shore batteries opened up again, delaying their departure. Counter-battery fire was continued. H-Hour was changed from 0830 to 0845 and again to 0900. Long range naval gunfire had to be lifted while the assault troops were landing, which resulted in the first three waves receiving heavy machine gun and anti-boat fire, damaging most of the tractors employed in these waves. Some units were forced to wade 500 yards to shore because their landing vehicles were aground on the coral reefs. Thirty-five percent casualties were suffered. The reefs in front of the landing beaches caused, as they had in the Makin landing, reloading from barges to tractors. This caused further delay and furnished the enemy excellent targets. In addition, other tractors ran into barbed wire entanglements which completely stopped them, and the men had to walk through crossfire to the beaches. Many men loaded with heavy equipment drowned because of deep underwater holes. As a result, units, upon reaching the beach, were completely disorganized. Radio communication was almost completely out. Most of the radios had been hit by many

(19) A-3, pp. 51, 52; (20) A-6, p. 86.

machine gun bullets or were soaked with salt water. Runners were pinned down under enemy fire; units were impossible to locate. (21)

By evening the reserve battalion had been committed and the situation on shore was dangerous. No continuous line had been established on the beach. The Marines dug in, fearing a counterattack which fortunately never materialized. The following day when reinforcements had arrived, a system of advancing was begun which resulted in a break-down of hostile resistance.

On the night of 24 November the Japs counterattacked and it was successfully broken up. It proved to be the last organized resistance encountered. At 1330 on 25 November Major General Julian C. Smith announced that all organized resistance had ceased, and "mopping up" began. (22) Losses to our forces were 985 killed and 2,193 wounded; the enemy losses: 4,500 killed and 200 taken prisoner. (23)

This was the first time in history a sea-borne assault was launched against a coral atoll and many lessons were learned, to affect all future operations of this type. In the pre-invasion phase 3,000 tons of high explosives were dropped on Tarawa yet four thousand Japs were able to meet the assault and cut our forces down as they waded ashore. The largest bomb dropped on the island was 1,000 pounds. Heavier bombs and longer periods of pre-invasion bombing and shelling were needed for future operations. We needed heavier armor-plated tractors and barges capable of going over coral reefs. Underwater demolition teams were needed to make pre-landing reconnaisance of

(21) A-10, pp. 14-24; (22) A-10, pp. 18, 59; (23) A-3, p. 53.

beaches to pick out the best ones and to blow up obstacles in the water. (24) Supporting artillery must be placed on adjoining islands where their fires could cover the landing and the period to follow. (25)

THE MARSHALL ISLANDS CAMPAIGN

After the fall of the Gilbert Islands it became apparent to the Japanese that the next attack would be somewhere in the Marshall Islands. In order to prepare for the coming attack, the Japanese by the end of January 1944 had approximately 24,000 troops spread out over six main atolls. On Kwajalein were about 8,000 and on Eniwetok about 1,000. (26)

The Marshalls occupy a diagonal distance from the southeast corner to the northwest corner of 650 miles and are composed of thirty-two or more separate atolls. Six of the thirty-two were more heavily defended than the others. However, the Japanese had a most difficult job to defend such a large area. They did not know where the attack would come from nor which atoll in the group would be attacked first. (27)

Forces making the landing were the V Amphibious Corps, under Major General Holland M. Smith, U. S. Marine Corps. The Corps was divided into three groups: (1) a northern striking force composed of the 4th Marine Division, under command of Major General Harry Schmidt, U. S. Marine Corps, (2) a southern striking force composed of the 7th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Charles H. Corlett, U. S. Army, and (3) the reserve landing force, which included the 22nd Regiment of the 6th Marine Division and the 106th Infantry Regi-

(24) A-10, p. 166; A-5, pp. 7,8; (25) A-3, p. 54; (26) A-3, p. 73; A-4, p. 184; (27) A-3, pp. 73, 74; A-4, p. 185.

ment, less one battalion, of the 27th Division. (28) (See Map E)

Preparatory to the landing by our troops, land-based planes attacked the Marshall Island strong points. These planes, in most cases, were based on the newly won Gilbert Islands. Far-reaching air strikes were also made on enemy air bases within range of the Marshall Islands. On D minus 2 seven hundred carrier-based aircraft attacked the airfields in the Marshalls. By D-Day there was not an operational enemy plane east of Eniwetok. (29)

Following an intense naval bombardment a portion of the assaulting troops landed on a small unfortified island near Kwajalein for the purpose of placing 105 mm and 155 mm howitzers to support the landing. This occurred on 31 January 1944. On 1 February all weapons were fired on Kwajalein at their maximum rate for a one-hour period prior to H-Hour. Two minutes before the troops hit the beach the fire lifted and moved farther inland. (30) The assault was not a frontal attack and only slight resistance was encountered. This assault was made by the 7th Infantry Division. In the northern portion of the island the 4th Marine Division landed after placing on adjacent islands their artillery, which also covered their landing on the beach. Within six days the entire Kwajalein atoll was in our hands. (31) Our losses: 372 killed and 1,582 wounded; enemy losses: approximately 8,400 killed and 265 captured. (32)

The reserve force uncommitted at Kwajalein set sail on 15 February for the westernmost atoll in the Marshall Islands,

(28) A-3, p. 73; (29) A-3, pp. 73, 74; A-4, p. 185; (30) A-3, p. 74; (31) A-5, p. 8; (32) A-3, p. 74.

Eniwetok. (33)

It was found to be less heavily defended than had been suspected. On 17 February 1944 two reinforced regimental combat teams, using the same tactics employed on Kwajalein, assaulted the atoll and within five days all resistance had ceased. Our losses: 299 killed and 786 wounded; Japanese losses: approximately 3,000 killed and 48 captured.

At this same time, 17-18 February, Admiral Mitscher conducted a two-day strike against the main Japanese naval base at Truk to screen the attack on Eniwetok. He found that most of the fleet had left, due to stepped-up carrier attacks against shipping in this area. However, 270 aircraft and 32 ships, mostly merchantmen, were destroyed. (34) Admiral Mitscher continued on into Japanese water and on 23 February with hundreds of carrier-based planes attacked Saipan, Tinian, and Guam in the Marianas. This resulted in severe damage to enemy defense installations. 120 enemy aircraft and 11 small ships were sunk or damaged. (35)

THE MARIANAS ISLANDS CAMPAIGN

The Marianas were the first of the volcanic type islands that the U. S. Forces met in the Central Pacific. The fighting before had been on the low lying atolls which were overrun in hours. The volcanic islands were much larger and the terrain more rugged. The islands are of coral-volcanic origin, with the coral base pushed upward by volcanic pressure, causing precipitous cliffs and deep ravines. (36)

Saipan, the first island of the group to be invaded, was twenty-five miles long and five and one-half miles wide. The

(33) A-3, p. 74; (34) A-3, p. 74; (35) A-3, pp. 74, 75; (36) A-3, p. 75; A-4, p. 224.

highest elevation was Mount Tapotchan, 1,554 feet. The southern part of the island was low and gently rolling, while the northern portion was overgrown, including a plateau with sheer cliffs ending in a low shelf to the water's edge. There was a civilian population on the island in the vicinity of twenty thousand. (37)

The decision to invade Saipan was based on the following reasons: (1) The main Japanese base of Truk would be cut off in the north from the homeland. (2) A serious breach would be made in the inner Japanese defense line. (3) Airfields on Saipan could be established to service B-29's for the bombardment of the Japanese homeland. (4) The main Japanese supply line to the Central and South Pacific would be cut. (5) Our northern flank would be protected.

The invasion was made by the largest and most powerful force sent out in the Pacific. It was divided into three groups: (1) The northern group for the invasion of Saipan and Tinian was composed of the V Amphibious Corps including the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions supported by the Army's XXIV Corps artillery and the Corps troops. This group was commanded by Major General Holland M. Smith, U. S. Marine Corps. (2) The southern group for the invasion of Guam consisted of the III Amphibious Corps, including the 3rd Marine Division, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, and Corps troops. This group was under the command of Major General Roy S. Geiger, U. S. Marine Corps. (3) The Floating Reserve was composed of the Army's 27th Infantry Division. The Army's 77th Infantry Division was in general reserve in Hawaii 3,350 miles away. (38)

(37) A-4, pp. 224, 227; (38) A-3, pp. 75, 76; A-4, p. 222.

(See Map F)

The enemy forces on Saipan numbered about 29,000, on Tinian about 7,000, and on Guam about 18,000. Four days before the attack on 11 June 1944 naval-based aircraft struck Saipan, Tinian, Guam, and Rota, bombing landing beaches, airstrips, and any target that looked like a military installation. (39) Surface vessels arrived on 13 June and began a pre-landing bombardment. (40)

Tactical surprise, so necessary in an amphibious operation, was achieved by bombing all the larger islands in the 400-mile Marianas chain. The Japanese did not know where we would attack until 13 June when the intense two-day naval bombardment began on Saipan, and they could not defend adequately all of the islands in the group. As the Japanese high command had given other islands higher defense priorities, the Marianas did not receive adequate material to build the proper defenses; November 1944 was to be the completion date of the defense. (41)

While landing craft were assembling at the line of departure preparing to move to the beaches, a group of fighter planes smoked the beaches, concealing from view the craft enroute to make the landing. At 0843 on 15 June the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions landed abreast on the southwestern portion of the island. However, Japanese mortars and artillery had been previously registered in on the beaches and hits were made on several of the landing craft. When the troops hit the beaches the mortar and artillery fire shifted onto the beaches and rained down on them. Despite this bombardment

(39) A-6, p. 228; (40) A-3, p. 76; (41) A-4, p. 228; A-6, p. 220.

by the Japanese, within thirty minutes after the initial landing a force of 8,000 men had been landed and by evening, 20,000. (42)

Due to the losses suffered as a result of this heavy mortar and artillery fire on D-Day, the reserve 27th Infantry Division was committed D plus 1. On 18 June the Japs attempted to land troops behind our front lines by moving them on barges around our flank and to beaches secured by our troops, but an alert Navy spotted them enroute and sank thirteen of the twenty making the attack. On 19 June the airport on the southwestern portion of the island was secured. (43)

On 18 June, the date for the attack on Guam, the Navy received word that a Japanese naval force was enroute to reinforce the Marianas. All naval support except the supply ships unloading equipment to support the troops on shore was withdrawn to meet this new threat, and attack on Guam was postponed. The resulting naval encounter, known as the First Battle of the Philippine Sea, proved to be a decisive victory for the United States Navy, and this premature sacrifice of the Japanese fleet opened up the Philippines for an early entry. On 21 June naval support was returned to the Marianas and with this returned help the Saipan campaign ended on 9 July 1944. Our losses: 3,126 killed, 326 missing, and 13,160 wounded. Only 2,068 Japanese prisoners were taken out of 29,000 which garrisoned the island. (44)

Tinian was only four miles from Saipan, and on 24 July the battered 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions conducted a shore-

(42) A-6, pp. 230, 231; (43) A-3, pp. 76, 77; (44) A-3, pp. 77,78.

to-shore attack against this island. The landing was made on a narrow beach on the northern portion of the island in an area where the Japanese did not believe an attack possible. (45) Support was received from the artillery on Saipan. Enemy resistance was light until the Marines reached the center of the island. By 1 August the island was secured. Our casualties: 295 Marines killed and 1,554 wounded; enemy losses: 7,000 killed and 316 taken prisoner. (46)

Meanwhile, the attack on Guam had begun. The initial landing included the 3rd Marine Division and the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade reinforced by a Regimental Combat Team of the 77th Division which had been brought in from Hawaii.

Guam resembles a peanut in shape and is the largest and southernmost of the Marianas group. It has high cliffs and coral beaches similar to other coral-volcanic islands previously described. (47)

A softening-up bombardment which lasted for a period of thirteen days was laid down by air and naval gunfire prior to the landing on 21 July 1944. (48) For the first time in the Pacific, naval gunfire and aircraft bombarded the same target simultaneously. The pilots flew at 1,500 feet and the highest point of naval gunfire trajectory was at 1,200 feet above the ground. The pattern of invasion was similar to that on Saipan and Tinian. Organized resistance ended on 10 August, but "mopping up" continued for many months to come. (49) Our losses were 1,919 killed and 7,122 wounded. Enemy losses were about 17,000 killed and 485 taken prisoner. (50)

Some of the important results of the Marianas campaign

(45) A-5, p. 10; (46) A-3, p. 78; (47) A-6, p. 266; (48) A-3, p. 78; (49) A-6, pp. 266, 267; (50) A-3, p. 79.

are as follows: (1) Eighteen days after the fall of Saipan, Tojo's Cabinet fell. (51) (2) Marianas-based superfortresses joined with China-based bombers in bombing Japan on 24 November 1944. Japan was only 1,500 miles from Saipan and 630 miles from Iwo Jima. (52) (3) The largest airbase in the world was built by the Seabees on Tinian. Its measurements are larger than those of Idlewild in New York. (53) (4) Admiral Nimitz established an Advance Headquarters on Guam during January 1945 for the purpose of supervising further operations more closely. (54)

THE PALAU ISLANDS CAMPAIGN

The Palau Islands are located at the southwestern end of the chain of Caroline Islands, 530 miles east of Mindanao, Philippine Islands. The important Japanese base of Peleliu was located in this group. (55)

Due to their location, the Palau Islands were determined the next target in the Central Pacific Area. This decision was based on the following facts: (1) These islands garrisoned by the Japanese would present a threat to any force attacking the Philippines. (2) Bombers based here would be within easy range to invade the Philippines and to support the coming attack by General MacArthur. (56) (3) Truk would be completely cut off from any direct Japanese support. (4) A connecting line would be established between the Philippines and the Marianas Islands.

The attack on the Palaus was made by the III Amphibious Corps consisting of the 1st Marine Division, the Army's 81st

(51) A-6, p. 276; (52) A-2, p. 71; A-6, p. 77; (53) A-9, p. 33; (54) A-1c, p. 582; (55) A-4, p. 294; (56) A-4, p. 294.

Infantry Division, and special troops, the entire force being commanded by Major General Julian C. Smith, U. S. Marine Corps. Major General Roy S. Geiger, U. S. Marine Corps, commanded the III Amphibious Corps and Major General Paul J. Mueller, U. S. Army, commanded the 81st Division. (57) (See Map G)

Peleliu, believed to be the most vulnerable in the group, was the main target. While it was not the largest island, it contained the principal airport, and the nearby island of Ngesebus, connected to Peleliu by a narrow coral reef, contained an excellent fighter strip. Peleliu is six miles long and about two miles wide. The airfield is in the southwestern portion of the island, which is generally low and contains on the western side of the sector a dense mangrove swamp. Through the center of the island and continuing on to the northern tip, is a chain of ridges whose estimated height is from 150 to 200 feet. The invasion beach decided on was in the southern part of the island, adjacent to the airport. (58)

Estimated enemy strength on Peleliu was slightly more than eleven thousand troops made up of the famed Japanese Kwantung Army of Manchuria. The enemy was embedded in caves both natural and man-made, blockhouses and pillboxes all extremely well camouflaged and located to make best use of the terrain. (59) The Japanese high command had given the defense of Peleliu top priority in the Pacific and the garrison troops had been warned to be ready for an attack by 15 September. This warning proved to be quite correct.

Between 19 August and 14 September the Palau Islands were

(57) A-3, p. 180; (58) A-4, pp. 295-297; (59) A-5, p. 11; A-4, pp. 294-303.

bombarded twenty-one times. (60) Three days prior to the invasion of Peleliu, bombardment ships poured twelve million pounds of explosives, causing considerable damage to defense installations. (61) This was supplemented by intensive aerial bombardment by naval and land-based planes prior to H-Hour.

The first wave of Marines landed at 0832 15 September 1944 after crossing the worst coral reef since Tarawa. Enemy artillery and mortar fire hit the beaches and landing craft approaching them. However, by 1800 on D-Day the 1st Marine Division had established a beachhead approximately three thousand yards long, with an average depth of five hundred yards. The situation was well in hand. (62)

The primary mission of the 81st Infantry Division was the seizure of Angaur, seven miles southwest of Peleliu. Two reinforced Regimental Combat Teams of the 81st Division, with naval and air support plus the fires of corps artillery on Peleliu, made the attack at 0830 17 September 1944. Angaur is 5,000 yards in length and 4,000 yards in width, with terrain similar to that of Peleliu. (63) Opposition was light, and Angaur was declared secure 20 September. (64)

The 3rd Regimental Combat Team of the 81st Division, which was in floating reserve for the invasion, was sent 21 September 345 miles northeast to invade Ulithi, which was found upon arrival 23 September to be undefended. It was taken over without incident and later proved to be the largest base for the U. S. Pacific fleet outside of Pearl Harbor. (65)

By this time, 23 September, it was D plus 8 on Peleliu and the 1st Marine Division had suffered a great number of

(60) A-3, p. 79; (61) A-6, p. 290; (62) A-4, p. 293; (63) A-4, p. 305; (64) A-3, p. 81; (65) A-4, p. 305.

casualties. The Regimental Combat Team of the 81st Division which had captured Angaur was sent as relief, (66) and the operation against Peleliu was completed 12 October. However, "mopping up" continued for many months, even up to and including V-J Day. (67)

On 16 October a Regimental Combat Team of the 81st Division occupied Ngulu atoll, which was undefended. This, together with the occupation of Ulithi, isolated the Japanese stronghold at Yap 100 miles northeast of Ngulu. (68)

Our losses in the Palau operation (Peleliu and Angaur) were: 1,097 killed, 242 missing, and 6,792 wounded. Enemy losses: 11,968 killed and 468 captured. (69)

THE IWO JIMA CAMPAIGN

Iwo Jima is in the Bonin-Volcano Island group, 660 miles southeast of Japan and 625 miles north of Saipan. It is composed of volcanic rock, supports only a scrub growth, and is without its own water supply. Although volcanic in origin, the volcano Mount Suribachi, which rises 556 feet, is extinct. (See Map H) However, there is evidence of volcanic action all over the island, due to sulphur steam rising from many fissures in the ground. Iwo Jima is approximately six miles long and two and one-half miles wide, emerging from the water rather abruptly on all sides. Mount Suribachi is at the southern end, but the main body of the island is flat, and rises from the ocean as a plateau. Toward the center are two higher areas known during the invasion as Hill 362 and Hill 382. Two complete airfields are located on the plateau, and at the time of the invasion a third was being completed. (70)

(66) A-4, p. 306; (67) A-4, p. 312; (68) A-3, p. 81; (69) A-3, p. 81; (70) A-12, p. 3; A-4, p. 331.

Iwo Jima was important to us for the following reasons: (1) It could be used as an air base for all future operations and particularly against Japan. (2) Iwo Jima would be a base from which fighter planes could give support to B-29's which were bombing Japan. (3) It would afford an emergency landing field for crippled bombers returning from an attack on Japan. (4) In Japanese hands it was a constant threat to the Marianas, and Japanese fighters based here were attacking our B-29's going to and from raids on Japan. (71)

This island was within the inner defense ring of Japan and was garrisoned by almost twenty-three thousand men in infantry, tank, and artillery units. There were also seven thousand navy ground troops which intelligence had failed to reveal. Most of the defenses of the island were man-made, cut out of volcanic rock and well dug in. Underground areas were found which were interconnected with elaborate communication and electrical systems, while pillboxes and gun positions dotted the island and were well camouflaged. Volcanic ash combined with concrete made a superior concrete and was used to reinforce walls and gun emplacements. The southern end of the island was one large defense area centering around Mount Suribachi, and upon capture was found to have more than a thousand separate installations. The central and northern portions of the island were other defense areas in depth, honeycombed with gun emplacements and an underground network of communications. (72)

Tactical surprise was almost impossible because the invasion of Iwo Jima was the most likely step for the forces in

(71) A-13, p. 52; A-4, p. 328; A-1c, p. 662; (72) A-13, p. 52; A-4, pp. 331, 332.

the Pacific to take. It is believed also that the Japanese had information on the invasion prior to D-Day due to a "leak" in Hawaii where some of the units staged. (73)

The attacking force consisted of the V Amphibious Corps of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions. Major General Harry Schmidt, U. S. Marine Corps, was in command of the Corps, but under Fleet Marine Forces Pacific, in turn commanded by Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, U. S. Marine Corps. The plan of attack was to land the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions abreast and keep the 3rd in floating reserve. (74)

The "softening up" of Iwo Jima began with airial bombardments as early as August 1944, and attacks were continued during the following months in an effort to knock out anti-aircraft fire received by United States bombers attacking Japan. In December 1944 saturation bombing of the island began and attacks were made daily until D-Day: a total of 72 days prior to the landing. The last three days a naval bombardment of six battleships and supporting cruisers rained tons of bombs on the island, at the conclusion of which a landing was made at 0900 19 February 1945.

The landing was made on the southeastern beaches. Since there was no coral reef around the island, landing boats could come directly to the beach to unload. Resistance was light, and by 1000 hours, under the protection of naval guns, the assault battalion with their equipment, tanks, and artillery bulldozers, was landed. Three hundred yards of beach had been secured. Then all "hell" broke loose. The enemy laid down on the beaches and the area off shore a murderous barrage of

(73) A-1c, p. 662; A-4, p. 327; (74) A-13, p. 53; A-4, p. 335.

mortar and artillery fire which came from the cliffs of Mount Suribachi in the south and the plateau to the north. In addition, the tanks and artillery pieces which had just been landed became bogged down in the soft volcanic ash of the beaches, and the landing troops found it difficult to walk in the black muck. During the enemy fire many vehicles, other equipment, and troops were hit, causing many casualties and much confusion. The pre-landing bombardment had not neutralized the enemy's defense installations. The fire was deadly and had been carefully zeroed in prior to the landing. To add still more confusion and hardship to the landing, heavy swells caused landing craft to be thrown up on the beach and swamped by successive waves. Unloading was more difficult and wreckage was piled higher and higher on the beaches. However, the 5th Marine Division succeeded in reaching the other end of the island and secured the lower portion of airfield number one. Bad weather continued for four more days and troop supplies became critical. However, on 25 February the weather changed and supplies were replenished on shore.

On 23 February men of the 5th Division whose mission it was to clear out the Japs on Mount Suribachi succeeded in completing this mission and raised an American flag on its summit. The flag could be seen over most of the island and proved to be a big morale booster to the men. On 24 February, due to the heavy casualties suffered, the 3rd Marine Division less one regiment held in reserve was committed to aid the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions then beginning their advance toward the northern part of the island. (75)

(75) A-4, pp. 338, 342; A-13, p. 54.

The securing of Iwo Jima was one of the most difficult assignments performed by the Marines in the Pacific. Every inch of ground was paid for in American lives. Attempts made to encourage the Japanese to surrender by propaganda means failed; (76) the Japs had taken an oath "to kill ten men before dying". (77) Iwo Jima was the most strongly defended island in the Pacific, and maneuver was impossible due to the limited space. On 16 March Iwo Jima was officially secured, but "mopping up" continued for days. Our losses: 5,471 killed and 15,000 wounded; enemy losses as of 21 March 1945: over 21,000 dead and 212 taken prisoner. (78)

SUMMARY

The mission given to Admiral Nimitz by the Combined Chiefs of Staff had been accomplished. He was in a position to attack the Japanese Ryukyus by spring of 1945. All islands were not occupied by our forces; the enemy still remained in most of the Caroline Islands, as well as Marcus, Wake, and Truk. However, these islands were completely cut off from any Japanese support and therefore had become ineffective.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Making an analysis and criticism of operations over such a long period of time and including so many separate invasions is extremely difficult. However, all operations had various points in common, and it is these points that will be brought out.

Each operation undertaken involved a great amount of preparation and planning, beginning at the top level on the part

(76) A-4, p. 355; (77) A-4, p. 333; (78) A-5, p. 12; A-13, p. 54.

of the Amphibious Force Commander, his staff, and down to and including small unit commanders. Work by intelligence officers had to be thorough, particularly in estimating enemy troop strength on the islands in order to insure that the invading troops had the three-to-one superiority needed for this type of operation. Also, enemy defense installations had to be located by intelligence personnel and pin-pointed so that pre-invasion bombing would be successful in destroying them. The thorough amphibious training given the troops in Hawaii and other places saved many lives on landings. Orders must have been thorough, complete, and detailed to result in the complete coordination as was evidenced in each invasion.

In my opinion, the Navy had the biggest job to do of any of the services in the Pacific. Their Pacific fleet was necessarily split into two parts: one part operating with Marine, Army, and Air Forces in the Central Pacific and the other part operating in the South Pacific with General MacArthur. Their duties were many, and it would be a difficult task to find examples of wherein they failed to uphold their many missions. On each invasion they kept on the lookout to prevent the enemy's bringing in reinforcements over the assault beaches in the rear of our own troops. The Navy's mission of keeping supply lines open was successfully carried out; our supplies moved forward after every new objective taken. Carrier-based aircraft successfully neutralized enemy air prior to and during the invasions. Their mission was always carried out and was essential if an amphibious attack was to be successful. The Navy was successful in keeping the Japanese fleet from interfering with any operation, this being accomplished by aggressive action, exemplified by the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

The decision to by-pass the enemy's strongest fortified islands and secure only those islands which would be of most strategic value to us proved to be sound. Through the isolation of these strongly fortified islands they became ineffective to the Japanese because they could not be resupplied. The enemy base at Truk was never assaulted by U. S. troops during this period in the Central Pacific war, yet was one of the main bases of operation for the Japanese in this area, and through isolation was eliminated as a threat to us. Another example was the enemy base at Yap in the Palau Islands. In addition, men's lives were saved through by-passing strong points and assaulting the weaker defended islands.

The cooperation of all the armed forces in these operations was most outstanding. All units served under commanders of different branches successfully and without noticable friction. All branches cooperated with each other with the common objective in mind: that of defeating the enemy each time he was met. The success of each invasion is a testimonial to this fact.

In a theater covering as much area as the Central Pacific, logistics is always a problem, but through cooperation of the services this problem was solved. Equipment in the right amount was always available for the successful completion of the mission even though severe losses were encountered during landing operations as was the case at Iwo Jima. The decision to "island hop" and push supplies forward to each new base occupied proved most successful and sound. Bases were taken to provide security for the flow of supplies to a base previously taken.

Surprise was successfully achieved through deception. This was accomplished by bombing attacks and destroyer attacks on a

large number of enemy installations in the area where the main attack would take place. By-passing the main bases of the Japanese also proved confusing to the enemy. Most island groups covered quite a large area and number of islands, so to protect them all Japanese forces were out of necessity spread thin, not knowing where the main attack would be. However, as we were closing in on the Japanese homeland, this policy did not work due to the fact that in order to defeat Japan and protect the islands already gained it became obvious to the Japanese which island would be invaded next. This is exemplified by the Iwo Jima attack.

LESSONS

1. Teamwork among all services is absolutely necessary for the success of an amphibious operation.

2. Mobility and flexibility of all services is essential.

3. Command of the sea and air must belong to the attacker.

4. The securing of intermediate bases is necessary to prevent the overextending of supply lines.

5. The ocean is not a "supply barrier" when command of the sea belongs to the attacker.

6. Complete neutralization of an island through bombardment is impossible.

7. Land masses must be secured by ground troops.

8. Deception and surprise are necessary to save the lives of the invading forces.

9. Artillery, when placed on an island in supporting distance of the attack, is necessary to give close-in support for the invading force.

10. Naval vessels are excellent for pre-invasion "soften-

ing up", but cannot give as close support to the attacking force as the artillery.

11. Amphibious force commanders must have the knowledge and ability to use successfully all branches of the service.

12. Ground troops used to make the assault must be specially trained for this type of warfare.

13. Intelligence must be accurate for the completion of a successful mission.

14. The enemy must be prevented from reinforcing his position. If reinforcing is possible the mission cannot be accomplished with the initial assaulting troops.