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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 7TH INFANTRY DIVISION
ON KWAJALEIN ISLAND
31 JANUARY - 5 FEBRUARY 1944
(EASTERN MANDATES CAMPAIGN)

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 7TH INFANTRY DIVISION
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

Covered in this monograph are the operations of the 184th and 32d Infantry Regiments of the 7th Division on Kwajalein Island.

Within eight months after the floodgates of Japanese conquest in the Pacific were opened wide at Pearl Harbor the Allies found themselves stripped of their holdings in the Far East. (1)

Meanwhile, during these fateful days of 1942, the remnants of the Pacific fleet, having been organized into compact and efficient task groups, were engaged in hit-and-run operations designed chiefly to harass Japanese fleet movements. Early in February of that year enemy garrisons in the Marshalls and Gilberts were caught off guard during swiftly-conceived and cleverly-executed raids. Wake was struck in late February and the Central Pacific Island Marcus hit during the following week. (2)

Five months later Makin Island was raided by a Marine landing party which moved in by night, via submarine and rubber boat, wiping out the entire enemy garrison and destroying all usable military stores. (3)

From 7 August 1942--the day of our landings on Guadalcanal in the southern Solomons--to the latter part of 1943 a gradual halting of the Japanese offensive was effected. During this period the initiative passed into the hands of United States forces. (4)

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- (1) A-8 p. 33
(2) A-1 p. 185
(3) A-1 p. 227
(4) A-8 p. 41

Meanwhile, less than two years after the Pearl Harbor debacle, Hawaii had become not only a great advance base from which vast tonnages of supplies were being relayed to the battle zones each month but also a well-equipped troop training center and staging area. (5)

Late in November of 1943 American forces applied pressure against the group of Japanese-held islands in the Central Pacific known as the Gilberts, a vast collection of atolls each made up of a lagoon surrounded by land masses of varying size linked by jagged, treacherous coral reef. The Gilbert Archipelago, a British possession before its fall to the Japanese in 1942, was made secure by our troops just one week after the landings on the bitterly defended ground of Tarawa. (See Map A) (6)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Plans for invasion of the Marshalls were formulated even before the assault against the Gilbert Islands was undertaken. After careful consideration, a tentative scheme calling for attacks on several islands in the Radak chain of the Marshalls was abandoned in favor of a plan to by-pass the strongly fortified eastern atolls of Maloetap, Mille, and Wotje, and strike Kwajalein. (See Map A) (7)

Sprawling across the vast reaches of the Central Pacific the Marshall Islands, garrisoned by some twenty-four thousand Japanese troops, denied us direct and safe access to the mighty naval base at Truk and the home islands farther west. (See Map A) (8)

Furious air strikes of land and carrier based planes were carried out against all six of the better fortified Marshall atolls with enough

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- (5) A-1 p. 190
 - (6) A-1 p. 126
 - (7) A-9 p. 5
 - (8) A-9 p. 6

impartiality to prevent the enemy from determining our actual objective. The Japanese anticipated an attack on the Marshalls, but apparently expecting the first blow to fall upon one of the eastern islands moved to strengthen Mille with troops transported from Kwajalein. Both lagoon and seaward beach defenses were improved on all islands. (See Map A) (9)

In order to ready transports and warships for the Marshall operations garrison forces and combat troops moved together in the assault on the Gilbert group. By means of this plan it was possible when hostilities ceased to withdraw many ships now badly needed as part of the Marshalls invasion fleet. (10)

After decision was reached by Imperial Headquarters not to commit units of the fleet in defense of the Marshall group it became imperative that the regions of possible United States attack be located and islands situated therein be immediately reinforced. A member of the Japanese staff when recounting some of the discussions which took place among members of the Combined Fleet Staff during this pre-assault period stated: "There was divided opinion as to whether you would land at Jaluit or Mille. Some thought you would land at Jaluit or Mille. Some thought you would land at Wotje, but few thought you would go right to the heart of the Marshalls and take Kwajalein." (See Map A) (11)

The final decision to make a bold strike, aimed at the inner fortress of the archipelago and designed to surprise and confuse the enemy, was made by the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Chester Nimitz, after staff air officers and his new war plans officer, Rear Admiral Forrest Sherman, assured him that enemy air power in the Marshalls could be neutralized

(9) A-1 p. 185
(10) A-5 p. 175
(11) A-1 p. 185

in advance. (12)

After the securing of Tarawa, aircraft from a naval task group under Rear Admiral Alfred E. Montgomery surprised the Japanese at Kwajalein on 4 December 1943, sinking or damaging most of the fifteen ships found at anchor before enemy planes were able to take to the air. (13)

During the next six weeks Japanese airfields in the Marshalls were rendered 25 to 75 per cent inoperative as a result of daily strikes carried out by land based planes from the Gilbert and Ellis Islands. At the same time our bombers and photo-reconnaissance planes were taking thousands of photographs of enemy terrain and installations both by day and by night. (14)

Final plans for the Marshall Islands attack, which had been designated Operation Flintlock, were rushed to completion in the early days of January, 1944. (15)

PLANS AND DISPOSITIONS OF THE V AMPHIBIOUS CORPS, JOINT EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Heading the Joint Expeditionary Force was Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, under whose command were a naval support group and the V Amphibious Corps of Major General Holland M. Smith, USMC. The V Amphibious Corps was made up of Northern, Southern, and Reserve Landing Forces. (16)

The Fourth Marine Division, comprising the Northern Landing Force was assigned the mission of seizing the islands of Roi and Namur at the northern end of the atoll, while the Southern Landing Force, formed by Major General Charles H. Corlett's 7th Division, had as its principal duty the capture of the southern island of Kwajalein. (See Map B) (17)

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- (12) A-5 p. 164
 - (13) A-5 p. 164
 - (14) A-9 p. 6
 - (15) A-5 p. 165
 - (16) A-10 p. 7
 - (17) A-10 p. 7

Included in the reserve landing force were the 22d Regiment of the 6th Marine Division and the 27th Division's 106th Infantry Regiment (less the 2d Battalion), which was assigned the task of occupying Majuro, with little opposition anticipated. (See Map A) (18)

Twelve fast carriers of the Fifth Fleet organized as Task Force 58, under the command of Rear Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, began intensive supporting air operations on D-minus-2 Day, 29 January 1944, and were so successful in fulfilling their mission that by late evening of that same day all Japanese air power east of Eniwetok had been destroyed. (See Map A) (19)

The perimeter of Kwajalein Atoll, a ribbon of earth, coral reef, and water, with its 26 "land masses" located over 50 miles from each other, measures about 230 miles. It was because of these geographic peculiarities that the attacking forces had been divided into the two distinct assaulting groups. (See Map B) (20)

But before the main body of foot troops was to be committed in the Kwajalein operation on D-plus-1 Day supporting artillery units were to be landed on adjacent islands within effective supporting range of the main objectives. With this unique procedure in mind Ennuebing and Mellu were declared secure early on D-Day morning, and one hour later field artillery units were ashore and ready to fire in support of the assaults on the nearby objectives of Roi and Namur. (See Map B) (21)

The following morning all guns fired into the landing areas at their maximum rates for more than an hour in an attempt to flatten everything that the Japanese had on the islands. Enemy resistance had ceased on Roi and Namur by noon of D-plus-2 Day. (22)

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- (18) A-4 p. 74
 - (19) A-4 p. 73
 - (20) A-5 p. 165
 - (21) A-9 p. 9
 - (22) A-9 p. 9

THE LOCAL SITUATION PRIOR TO INVASION

Kwajalein is a crescent-shaped island, one end of which points west, while the other much narrower end faces the north. (see Map C)

Ships and troops destined to participate as part of the Joint Expeditionary Force in the landings on Kwajalein Island were gathered from widely separated points. The 7th Infantry Division, the unit with which we shall be principally concerned, was ordered to a jungle and amphibious training center on Hawaii after completing its highly successful campaign on Attu in the Aleutians. (23)

In preparation for the forthcoming assault against the defenses of Kwajalein, and after a careful study of intelligence reports of the Gilbert Islands operations, Major General Charles H. Corlett, 7th Division Commander, sought a feasible plan of neutralizing strongly-fortified installations of the enemy. At Tarawa it was discovered that even after beach emplacements and strongholds had been subjected to heavy preparatory fires the defenders were still able to return to their fortified positions in the time interval between the lifting of the final bombardment and the arrival of the first assault troops. Guns were remanned by the Japanese in sufficient time to inflict severe casualties upon the initial landing waves. Then, too, the enemy, which had elaborately fortified the Gilberts during just 23 months of occupation, had had over 20 years to prepare efficient shore defenses and landing barriers on Kwajalein. (24)

Development of Infantry-Engineer teams to land with the first assault wave and immediately utilize vastly improved methods of neutralizing pillboxes and blockhouses was to prove highly successful at Kwajalein, as we shall later see. (25)

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- (23) A-5 p. 167
(24) A-1 p. 184
(25) A-6 p. 30

Just before dawn on D-Day elements of the 7th Reconnaissance Troop and Company B, 111th Infantry, landed on two small islands northwest of Kwajalein, thought to be Gea and Ninni. Gea was secured by 1100, but the other assaulting force, having discovered that it had landed in error on the island of Gehh, just north of the intended objective, Ninni, withdrew from Gehh and seized Ninni without opposition. With islands on both sides of Gea Pass in friendly hands it was now possible for minesweeper groups to proceed with safety through the pass, after which they were able to clear an anchorage area within the lagoon for the use of warships and transports. (See Map B) (26)

Five thousand yards northwest of Kwajalein is located the island of Enubuj, while about five miles distant its northern neighbor is to be found. Elements of the 17th Infantry required less than three hours to capture these two objectives. Both islands were declared secure at 1130, at which time 105 mm and 155 mm howitzer batteries of the 7th Division Artillery were brought ashore at Enubuj and assigned the mission of supplying prearranged and supporting fires for operations on Kwajalein Island. (See Map B) (27)

Ebeye, located on the eastern side of the atoll and the only island within effective artillery range of the opposite end of Kwajalein, was the site of a Japanese seaplane base. Known to be strongly fortified and defended its capture could not be effected until forces were freed from other missions. At 0930 on D-plus-3 Day troops of the 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry, were ordered ashore at the conclusion of a one-hour naval

(26) A-9 p. 9

(27) A-4 p. 74

bombardment, but were unable to crush all resistance on the island until the following afternoon, about two hours before Kwajalein was declared secure. (28)

Taking full advantage of the high tide on the morning of D-Day, a special reconnaissance force, operating in rubber boats under the covering fires of two battleships and three destroyers, succeeded in reconnoitering the principal approaches to the southwestern shores of Kwajalein. Another daring inspection was carried out from LVT's at low tide during the afternoon. (29)

Meanwhile, earlier that afternoon, Gea Pass and selected anchorages within the lagoon were reported clear and available for safe movement of warships and transports. (30)

All 7th Division Artillery units, now occupying their newly-acquired position areas on Enubuj, succeeded in registering on Kwajalein by nightfall of D-Day. Under cover of darkness a number of the transports together with supporting combatant units moved into selected lagoon anchorages. During the night naval guns delivered concentrated fires against Kwajalein in preparation for the main assault to be initiated on the following morning. (31)

At 0600 on D-plus-1 Day Admiral Turner ordered General Corlett to take charge of the landing forces of the Southern Transport Group in preparation for debarkation. (32)

NARRATION

THE FIRST DAY ON KWAJALEIN

In accordance, the 7th Division Commander moved Regimental Combat Teams 184 and 32 across the line of departure at 0900. At precisely 0930 the first

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- (28) A-1 p. 200
 - (29) A-9 p. 10
 - (30) A-9 p. 8
 - (31) A-4 p. 74
 - (32) A-9 p. 9

assault wave jumped ashore from unarmored Alligators and armored Buffaloes. These landing vehicles were dispatched from LST's, on which the attacking forces had loaded the night before, and moved in column of battalions along the reef toward the western shores of Kwajalein. (33)

Hitting Red Beach 1 on the northern flank was the 184th, Colonel Curtis D. O'Sullivan commanding, with the Third, Second, and First Battalions going ashore in that order. Just south of this landing, the 32d, Colonel Marc J. Logie commanding, moved onto Red Beach 2, with the First Battalion leading, followed by the Second and Third in that order. (34)

The boundary line dividing the two regimental areas of responsibility had been selected after study of maps and aerial photographs of the island and ran approximately through the center of the island. (35)

Along the crescent-shaped island's inner side, which faced the lagoon, the 184th was scheduled to move, while the 32d was assigned the outer, or ocean, side as its zone of responsibility. Since, at no point did the breadth of the island exceed 2000 feet, the two regiments began their pushes forward on respective fronts which averaged in width only 1000 feet. (36)

In contrast to the deadly firing reception given our initial landing forces at Tarawa, most of the troops upon gaining the beach at Kwajalein were still unscathed and even dry, although some of those who chose to vacate their craft via the stern received salty duckings upon their unexpected arrival in deep shell craters which dotted the shoreline. (37)

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- (33) A-9 p. 9
(34) A-9 p. 10
(35) A-1 p. 196
(36) A-1 p. 199
(37) A-1 p. 199

Both regiments met little immediate opposition. The 32d was at first virtually unopposed, although Companies L and K, leading the forward movement of the 184th, were forced to dispose of a determined handful of Japanese who had taken refuge within a battered coast artillery position in their sector. (38)

Within an hour after the securing of the beachhead at 1030 amphibious trucks, or Ducks, were beginning to come ashore at Red Beach 2, releasing their loads of combat supplies at an advanced dump established in a wooded area near the western end of Wallace Road. By noon naval craft supporting the operation were ordered to take up new alert positions within the lagoon as an added precaution against the possibility of enemy submarine attack. (39)

It soon became apparent that the employment of two regiments on such a narrow front was destined to produce complications. The immediate disadvantage apparent to the regimental combat team commanders was the fact that only a small portion of the total troop strength available could be profitably employed in the front line positions. Not over two battalions could efficiently operate abreast at any time. (40)

And then too, the first tanks, which arrived on the island at 0955, experienced unexpected difficulties. Prominent terrain features which had been so easily recognizable when indicated on the brightly-colored relief maps aboard the transports were now simply non-existent on the ground. Much of the land mass, racked and torn as it had been for long hours both by air and battleship bombardment, was now a maze of vari-sized craters. (41)

(38) A-5 p. 171

(39) A-5 p. 171

(40) A-1 p. 199

(41) A-1 p. 199

Consequently, during much of the first day on Kwajalein the tankers, suffering not a little from irritation and frustration, were engaged primarily in extricating tanks—some stalled in the soft sand just off shore with drowned engines, others ditched in great craters, and still others bogged down in the swampy area just beyond the beachhead. In the right sector it finally became necessary for Engineers to construct a special road before tanks could join companion infantry units of the 32d. (42)

About midday Company B of the 32d, assault company for the battalion, encountered some spotty fire from automatic weapons, with one platoon incurring several casualties. Disorganized enemy sniping along the Wallace Road route was silenced only after minute and careful searches were made of bomb-battered defensive installations and rubble piles covered with torn palm leaves and burned brush. (43)

Company E relieved Company B and moved to the assault line at 1625. No resistance of any magnitude was reported by Lieutenant John J. Young, commanding Company E, until advance units reached Canary Strong Point, about 1500 yards along the southern battle sector. Here, on both sides of Wallace Road in plain view, was a baffling array of enemy rifle emplacements, pillboxes, air-raid shelters, and debris heaps. From the amount of fire being received from the Japanese defenders in this area there appeared to be not over forty to fifty of the enemy hiding in the strange collection of interconnecting tunnels, passages, and chambers. (See Map C) (44)

For over an hour a concerted attempt was made to destroy the enemy lodged within this obstacle by direct fire alone, by frequent use of grenades and satchel charges, and finally by the flanking of individual strongpoints. Most of the defenders eventually were able to withdraw safely, primarily

(42) A-5 p. 171

(43) Statement of Captain Norvin E. Smith, 16 November 1949

(44) A-3 p. 22

through use of the cleverly-improvised underground passageways. (45)

In the left sector I and L, assault companies of the 184th, moved along abreast without incident until Company L, on the right, sighted ahead a flat cleared field almost untouched by artillery fire. Under cover of the supporting fires of Company I, Company L was able to advance 200 yards across this bare and exposed area. Company I now assumed new positions to the rear of Company L, while Company K moved into the firing positions just vacated by Company I. (46)

After Wilma Road was reached at 1300, it became possible again for two assault companies of the 184th to maneuver abreast. (See Map C) Consequently, Company I was relocated on Company L's right flank, where it was engaged until 1415 in clearing out a group of Japanese signal installations and living quarters located next to the island's air strip. A score or more of enemy pillboxes and emplacements were neutralized or destroyed during the next hour. However, it was found that these shelters could not be completely reduced through use of rocket launchers or flame throwers. The provisional engineer squad attached to each rifle company answered the question of how to destroy these defensive installations which were primarily converted air raid shelters constructed of coconut logs and sand, or hexagonal-shaped reinforced concrete pillboxes. (47)

These engineers operated with infantry troops in efficiently-operating Infantry-Engineer teams. In the first phase, infantrymen would lay down upon the apertures of the enemy installation intense barrages of fire, through which engineer members of the team could move, placing their bangalore torpedoes under barbed wire or other obstacles encountered.

(45) A-3 p. 22
(46) A-3 p. 23
(47) A-6 p. 32

Upon explosion of the bangalores the infantry troops would rush through the breached obstacles, utilizing smoke from the blast as a screen. At this point, after groups of the advancing infantry had again placed heavy fire upon the pillbox from their newly-occupied positions, the engineers would move forward to the installation, promptly locate their 25-pound satchel and 10-pound shaped charges, then rapidly withdraw. (48)

The ensuing detonations were a signal for infantrymen to assault the installation with grenades and bayonets in a final or "mopping up" operation. Time and time again on Kwajalein the value of employing such joint Infantry-Engineer tactics as these against installations of reinforced construction was to be clearly demonstrated. (49)

Colonel O'Sullivan ordered the 3d battalion of the 184th to halt at 1635 and to prepare night defensive positions by 1700. Company K on the right had found it extremely difficult to maintain contact with forward elements of the 32d during the afternoon, since the leading troops of Company B moved forward along Wallace Road, leaving a gap of over 250 yards between the regiments at the lower end of the airstrip. (See Map C) In order to cover this area Company K's lines had become dangerously overextended by 1700. Consequently, Company I was ordered to withdraw from its positions on the right side of Will Road and to begin covering the lower left sector of the airfield, thus relieving Company K of part of its extended responsibility. (50)

Company L received orders to prepare and occupy defensive positions across the entire battalion front from the lagoon beach to the air strip. Captain R. L. Pelloux, commanding Company L, after allotting the left defensive sector between the lagoon and Will Road to the 1st platoon, and assigning the balance of the line from the road to the air strip to the 2d platoon, was forced to employ part of the 3d platoon to plug the gap existing on the right between the 2d platoon and Company I. (See Map C) (51)

(48) A-6 p. 32

(49) A-6 p. 32

(50) A-3 p. 24

(51) A-3 p. 24

THE FIRST NIGHT ON KWAJALEIN

When darkness descended upon the island before a reconnaissance of the enemy ground to the front could be undertaken, it became apparent that offensive operations for the day should have been terminated at an earlier hour. (52)

The light machine gun section of Company L had to be hastily emplaced in positions left of Will Road, while a section of heavy machine guns from Company M was located right of the road. A company command post was established about 25 yards in rear of the 1st platoon positions. The 60 mm mortar section was located near Will Road about forty yards back of the 1st platoon area. (53)

About 1900 the 3d battalion commander sent Lieutenant Shapiro forward with one platoon from Company K to reinforce the thinly-spread front lines of Company L. After consultation with Captain Pelloux, Lieutenant Shapiro located his platoon in defensive positions well to the rear of Company L. As late as 1930 only sporadic fire was being received from the enemy. An uneasy quiet pervaded the entire front. (54)

A heavy downpour began at 2245 and lasted for over an hour. Immediately after the rain ceased Japanese mortar concentrations hit the 1st platoon area. Grenades began falling as far as 25 feet in rear of the front-line foxholes. Both platoon machine guns were out of action because of stoppages. After the radio of a forward observation party went out as a result of the rainfall, the members of the group received permission from the company commander to return to the company rear command post. The too-rapid movement to the rear of these observers was interpreted by many of the front-line riflemen as

(52) A-1 p. 199

(53) A-3 p. 26

(54) A-3 p. 27

sign of retrogression. Some followed at a run. Others quickly joined the rearward movement. Within a short time the forward defensive positions of the 1st platoon were practically non-existent. (55)

About this time on the right flank the 2d platoon was receiving heavy grazing machine gun fire from the enemy. And, even though the left platoon had fallen back before the weight of the counterattack, no attempt was made by the Japanese to consolidate these gains. Instead, enemy forces moved across Will Road and assaulted the 2d platoon area. Unfortunately for the attacking forces liberal and effective use was made by Colonel O'Sullivan of both flares and searchlights of ships anchored in the lagoon, causing consequent loss by the enemy of the surprise element. Then, too, because of an almost total disruption of Japanese communications on the island, the assault lacked drive and coordination. (56)

Lieutenant William R. Gauger, 2d platoon leader, having already noticed the heavy enemy barrage fires being directed against the 1st platoon positions of his left flank, was consequently alerted to this impending threat to the security of his own position. When many of the 1st platoon troops were observed moving rapidly to the rear, and Japanese infiltration was first noticed in 2d platoon positions just south of Will Road, Lieutenant Gauger made a bold decision to which was later to be attributed a large share of the credit for thwarting the Japanese counterattack plan. (57)

Assuming that most of the men of the 1st platoon were retreating from their prepared positions in varying states of near panic he ordered his left heavy machine gun to begin firing across Will Road directly into the area where just minutes before forward positions of the 1st platoon had been manned. This timely band of fire struck the flank of the attackers

(55) A-5 p. 171

(56) A-3 p. 30

(57) A-3 p. 33

by surprise, effectively sealed off Will Road from further enemy advance in force, and quickly silenced a light machine gun just set up by a Japanese crew to the right of the road in the 2d platoon area. Enemy pressure soon lessened. The force of the counterattack had been dissipated. Lieutenant Jack H. Prizer, with the assistance of Captain Pelloux and the battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Roy A. Green, was now able to move the member of his 1st platoon back into the vacated forward positions. (58)

Even though enemy activity ceased entirely after artillery fires were brought down forward of the original night line, confidence, nevertheless, was slow to return to the 1st platoon of Company L, for three sergeants had been among the casualties of this short engagement, which was to serve as the enemy's single brief period of success during the entire operation on Kwajalein Island. (59)

At 0300 two platoons of Company C, 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry, moved forward to temporary positions approximately 80 yards in rear of the reestablished front lines of Company L, from which location they were scheduled to renew the attack at 0715. (60)

Meanwhile, forward elements of the 32d were spending a quiet and uneventful night while occupying prepared positions in the vicinity of Canary Strong Point. Troops of Company E, 32d Infantry, were scheduled to jump off at 0715 and renew their forward movement along both sides of Wallace Road in a northeasterly direction. (See Map C) (61)

THE SECOND DAY AND NIGHT ON KWAJALEIN

After field artillery preparatory barrages had been fired and lifted on schedule, Company C of the 184th on the left and Company E of the 32d on

(58) A-3 p. 34

(59) A-3 p. 34

(60) A-3 p. 34

(61) Statement of Captain Norvin E. Smith, 16 November 1949

the right, together with supporting engineers and tanks, jumped off at exactly 0715 on D-plus-2 Day. Progress of both regiments during the second day of fighting on Kwajalein was generally unchecked, with only sporadic rifle and automatic weapons fire limiting the speed of advance of the 184th through the open ground on the lagoon side of the island. A series of enemy strongholds, already partially reduced by heavy pre-invasion artillery bombardment were confronted and neutralized by advancing troops of the 32d during the day's movement. (62)

As darkness blanketed the island, front-line units were already occupying carefully prepared defensive positions and consequently were better prepared mentally than on the previous evening for the long night vigil which lay ahead. Company and platoon leaders, having been specifically reminded during the day by their respective battalion commanders to personally supervise unit preparations for flank and rear security during the hours of darkness, were well satisfied with the results as their troops dug in for the night. (63)

Action during the second day on Kwajalein had produced advances of nearly a mile on the lagoon and ocean flanks with some additional gains in the center, where the island air strip had been entirely overrun. (See Map D) (64)

THE THIRD DAY ON KWAJALEIN

At 0715 on D-plus-3 Day, after preparatory fires had been lifted and shifted to enemy targets farther north, assaulting forces of the 184th, with Company B on the extreme left or lagoon side of the line, and Company A on the right flank of Company B and to the right of Will Road, relieved Company C and moved across the line of departure to resume the attack. (See Map D) (65)

(62) A-3 p. 35

(63) A-3 p. 35

(64) Statement of Captain Norvin E. Smith, 16 November 1949

(65) Statement of Captain Norvin E. Smith, 16 November 1949

At the same time Company K, 32d Infantry, replacing Company E for the third day's assault, jumped off and began its forward movement from positions astride Wallace Road on the eastern or ocean side of Kwajalein Island. (66)

Company B had moved out minus its tank support because of a misunderstanding as to the exact location of a rendezvous point where a company guide had been scheduled to meet the tank commander. Both parties waited for over an hour—actually just 200 yards apart. (67)

For over 100 yards the advance was easy with little resistance being encountered in the open ground to the front. The only obstacles at first were large sand knolls near the lagoon on the left flank in the path of the 2d platoon, and scores of bomb-battered palm trees limiting somewhat the free movement of the 1st platoon on the right. (68)

About 0815, when the bend of the island was reached, installations not previously located by reconnaissance were suddenly revealed. Directly to the front on the left were concrete pillboxes and shattered defensive strongpoints, while to the right of Will Road were battered air-raid shelters and wrecked buildings of varying sizes and type. And at the intersection of Will Road and Nora Road, blocking the forward movement of the two platoons, was the largest and most imposing blockhouse on the island. (69)

As the direct fires of the enemy gradually increased in intensity Lieutenant Frank D. Kaplan led the 2d Platoon, Company B, 184th Infantry, along the left side of the blockhouse, while Lieutenant H. D. Klatt moved the 1st platoon past the blockhouse by way of the opposite side. When fires of the long overdue medium tanks, which had just arrived on the scene, and those of 37 mm guns both proved ineffective against the immense installation, 25-pound satchel charges were placed inside to effectively neutralize the big obstacle. (70)

(66) Statement of Captain Norvin E. Smith, 16 November 1949

(67) A-3 p. 35

(68) A-3 p. 36

(69) A-5 p. 172

(70) A-5 p. 172

Attempts were made during the next hour by Captain Charles A. White, commanding Company B, to coordinate the forward movement of the tank units with the advance of his rifle platoons. He felt that extensive use of demolition charges would be absolutely necessary if the network of strong enemy defensive positions within this blockhouse area (See Map D) were to be rapidly breached. Unfortunately, though, because of insufficient engineer support at this time, Company B personnel were forced to place and blow their own explosives. With an alarmingly low supply of satchel charges on hand improvisation became almost a necessity. (71)

A company detail, which prepared effective demolition charges by placing fixed quantities of "Composition C" in gas mask containers, later received, as a result of this battlefield ingenuity, both commendation from the battalion commander and censure from the division chemical officer. (72)

The meager reserves of explosives and limited amounts of tank ammunition available were largely dissipated in a wasteful manner during the balance of the morning. In the case of the former it was simply a matter of infantrymen being forced to blow their own charges while lacking any real knowledge of the actual capabilities and limitations of the explosives being employed. In the latter case tank weapons frequently fired excessive quantities of ammunition against heavily reinforced installations in a wasteful and unprofitable manner. In far too many instances concentrated fires were placed on pillbox entrances rather than against the outer walls. When employed in the latter fashion enemy occupants would be compelled to move out and into close range infantry small-arms fire. (73)

Despite the many disappointing delays of the early morning Company B had moved a distance of nearly 700 feet through the deadly defenses of the blockhouse area by noon. Meanwhile Company A, on the right flank, had almost lost contact with Company B. Having been assigned the difficult task of clearing the Admiralty area (See Map D), a maze of installations which had

(71) A-3 p. 39

(72) A-3 p. 39

(73) A-3 p. 39

served as the headquarters of the Japanese island commander, Rear Admiral Monzo Akiyama, 1st Lieutenant Norvin E. Smith, commanding Company A, found his job full-time. The 1st battalion commander, having been informed of the difficulties confronting both companies, dispatched Company C to occupy positions at the right rear of Company B, where it could protect the flanks of the front-line companies, while at the same time would avoid direct contact with enemy forces. (74)

During the morning's fighting several peculiar situations were encountered and successfully coped with by the advancing infantry. First of all, huge craters dug by aerial bombs and surrounded by giant sand dunes and great masses of debris were a constant threat to the foot soldier. In some cases all inflammable material on the ground in these areas had to be burned off with gasoline before units could safely move ahead. (75)

At one point it was discovered that enemy occupants of pillboxes were taking hold of explosive charges immediately after they were thrown inside and were quickly stripping the fuzes before activation could take place. This problem was solved by wiring on fuses so thoroughly that over 10 seconds would be required to remove the fuzes. (76)

By midmorning it had become apparent that, owing to the narrowness of the island, Kwajalein could not be made secure within the period of time originally allotted for its capture. Movement forward could be speeded only by the commitment of additional troops and even this would be impossible to accomplish if the general direction of attack were not altered immediately. With two attacking regiments moving forward side by side it was simply not feasible for more than two companies from each to participate in the assault at any one time. (77)

At 1330 on the third afternoon, after the difficulties of the morning had been outlined at a conference between the assistant division commander

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- (74) Statement of Captain Norvin E. Smith, 16 November 1949
(75) Statement of Captain Norvin E. Smith, 16 November 1949
(76) A-3 p. 46
(77) A-3 p. 70

and the 184th and 32d regimental commanders, a new division order was issued which redefined the regimental zones of responsibility. Company B of the 184th was to hold positions which would extend generally on a line to the front of the huge blockhouse. Companies A and C would then move north of Company B with principal direction of attack westward toward the lagoon. At the same time the 2d Battalion, 184th Infantry, would advance northward and swing around the 1st Battalion, attacking toward the lagoon, to win all ground beyond the 1st Battalion as far as Nob Pier, at which point the 184th would be pinched out of the fight and the 32d drive then widened to include the balance of the island. (See Maps E and F) (78)

Meanwhile Companies I and L of the 32d continued their steady progress northward along Wallace Road, during the afternoon, receiving only intermittent small arms fire from the enemy. On the other hand, Company K, holding the exposed flank of the 32d, had sustained heavy casualties as darkness neared. Company C, engaged throughout the day in mopping-up operations in rear of the leading units of the 3d Battalion, had killed or captured by nightfall over 300 Japanese while clearing scores of bypassed installations of their entrenched enemy defenders. (79)

As the sun moved below the horizon the 2d Battalion had successfully executed its pivoting movement around the assault companies of the 1st Battalion, although as darkness came to the island the leading companies of the 2d were still far short of their lagoon goal. (See Map E) (80)

THE THIRD NIGHT AND FINAL DAY ON KWAJALEIN

Overextension of the front lines of both the 184th and 32d Regiments made preparation of secure night defensive positions doubly difficult. (81)

On the left the 2d Battalion, 184th Infantry, emplaced its forward guns within two hundred yards of Nero Point, the regimental objective at

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- (78) A-5 p. 172
(79) A-3 p. 79
(80) A-3 p. 79
(81) A-5 p. 172

the northern tip of the island. (See Map E) Other weapons were set up to protect the rear and particularly the right flank, where the battalion, although in contact with the 32d, was in danger of receiving fire during the night from scattered hideouts not yet cleared of disorganized enemy holdouts. (82)

Over in the right sector of the 300-yard front occupied by forward elements of the 32d Infantry, troops of Company L dug in on the left of Wallace Road, while I Company defensive positions extended from the right flank of Company L across Wallace Road and terminated at the oceanside. Directly in rear of the front-line units the three platoons of Company C of the 32d occupied positions abreast to provide rear security for I and L Companies. (83)

Extreme confusion ruled during the final night on Kwajalein. Troops of the 2d Battalion, 184th Infantry, which unfortunately had had insufficient time in which to prepare their individual defensive positions, felt during the long night stand that perhaps more of the enemy were in rear of their lines than were forward. (84)

During conferences held at 184th and 32d headquarters about 2330 both regimental commanders expressed the feeling that the assaulting companies were now located in positions approximately on the Nathan Road—Nob Pier line. (See Map E) Such optimistic assumptions were dangerous, since, in reality, the 2d Battalion of the 184th was nearly 200 yards short of the pier at sundown. Colonel Logie, basing his estimate of the situation upon the erroneous progress report forwarded by the battalion commander of the 2d Battalion, 184th Infantry, to Colonel O'Sullivan, ordered Company C to

(82) Statement of Captain Norvin E. Smith, 16 November 1949

(83) Statement of Captain Norvin E. Smith, 16 November 1949

(84) A-3 p. 82

be prepared to move off the right flank of the 2d Battalion, 184th Infantry, and form the main effort of the regiment to the left of and astride Will Road during the final day's drive toward Nero Point. (85)

Because Lieutenant Robert Kretzer, commanding Company C, 32d Infantry, did not know that the 184th had failed to occupy the important ground between Will Road and the lagoon, he confidently moved his company all the way to the shoreline, unwittingly leaving a 100-yard stretch of his left flank exposed to possible enemy action. Fortunately in this case for Company C, the hopelessly confused Japanese, failing to recognize the knock of opportunity, remained in their interconnecting underground shelters until Company B, 184th Infantry, had been granted ample time to move through positions of the stalled 2d Battalion and on to the final regimental objective—Nob Pier. Thus the mission of the 184th Infantry on Kwajalein was accomplished at 1030 on D-plus-4 Day. (86)

Meanwhile, throughout the preceding evening, the 3d Battalion of the 32d Infantry, manning forward positions along the ocean side of the island, was receiving severe artillery and mortar fire originating from gun positions near the northern end of Kwajalein. Casualties of I and L Companies, located farthest forward, were not as great as the losses suffered by M Company gun crews, whose positions were scattered throughout the entire perimeter defense band of the battalion. (87)

The operational pattern of the enemy's final night attacks was plain from the preliminary fires delivered under poorly timed, artificial illumination to the subsequent futile assaults launched against the deadly machine gun defensive fires of the battalion. (88)

(85) A-3 p. 81

(86) A-3 p. 81

(87) A-3 p. 86

(88) A-3 p. 86

Early on the morning of D-plus-4 the front lines of the 3d Battalion, 32d Infantry, were still intact. At 0715 Company A was scheduled to move through the positions of Company I and renew the attack northward along Wallace Road, while Company B was due to relieve Company L on the left flank at the same time. As Company A prepared to move out, flanking fires from enemy bunkers halted the lead force and dictated deployment of the platoons. This local encounter blocked the movement of Company B, also.(89)

Meanwhile Company L was being fired upon by concealed enemy machine guns on its left flank. (90)

About 0830 A and B Companies, after managing to break their untimely contact with the enemy delaying forces, began their slow march through the lines of I and L Companies. (91)

At 1000, because of the meager progress reported by both Company A and Company B at that hour, Colonel Logie alerted the 2d Battalion for possible utilization at the front. When by 1345 the general tactical situation had improved but little, Company G was ordered to relieve Company B on the left, while Company F was dispatched to take over the lagging attack of Company A on the right flank. (See Map G-1) At 1445, Captain Mark E. Barber, commanding Company F, had placed his leading 2d and 3d platoons within 30 yards of Nancy Road; on the left, under Captain Albert L. Pence, Company G had moved one third of the distance between Nancy Road and Nero Point. (See Map G-2) A large blockhouse which stood in the path of advance of the 2d platoon of Company F was neutralized with satchel charges after 75 mm shells from supporting tanks failed to seriously damage the installation. (92)

(89) A-3 p. 85

(90) A-3 p. 87

(91) A-3 p. 87

(92) A-3 p. 88

At 1515 troops of the 1st platoon of Company G moved over the seawall at the northwestern tip of the island. (See Map G-3) Consequently, at 1600, Lieutenant Colonel John M. Finn, Executive Office of the 32d, after completing a personal reconnaissance of that area, announced to division headquarters that the battle for Kwajalein Island was over. But later events were to classify this report as premature, for about 1545 F Company's 3d platoon encountered a series of three stout pillboxes, the first of which was bypassed and left for support units to neutralize. The other two shelters were destroyed by demolition teams of the 3d platoon before the general advance of Company F could be resumed. (93)

When forward elements of F Company pushed within 150 yards of Nero Point (See Map F) they were suddenly pinned down by enemy grazing fire apparently originating in a battered Japanese lighthouse located to the right front. The supporting tanks, which had moved to rear area dumps for replenishment of dwindling stocks of fuel and ammunition returned in time to lead Company F's successful final assault against the last three enemy shelters located at the norther tip of the island. When these installations had been destroyed with satchel and shaped charges and the last resisting enemy soldier killed by Sergeant Jesse McGhee darkness had already settled over the island and the time was 1920. (See Map G-4) (94)

During the successful four-day operation 177 men of the 7th Division had been killed. Our wounded totaled 712. Japanese dead exceeded the 5000 mark. The casualty ratio of fatalities was 28 to 1 for Operation Flintlock compared with Tarawa's ratio of 5 to 1. (95) *1-5 8-3*

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. UNIT RESPONSIBILITIES AND OBJECTIVES

It is my opinion, after careful study of this operation, that the responsibilities of the 184th Infantry and the 32d Infantry on Kwajalein

(93) A-5 p. 173

(94) A-3 p. 95

(95) A-5, p. 173

were too small for assignment to two regiments operating abreast on an island with a width varying from only 1000 to 2000 feet. One regimental combat team operating alone, in all probability, could have successfully accomplished the mission of securing Kwajalein in fewer hours and perhaps with a slightly lower casualty rate, although our losses during the combat phase were not excessive for an operation of this type. However, the decision to use two regiments abreast enabled the attacking forces to deliver sustained assaults with ample reserve power being available throughout the operation. On the third day of operations the two regiments were attacking with individual frontages of approximately 600 feet, hardly sufficient space for even one company of each unit to efficiently maneuver. At this critical point, because of the increasing narrowness of the island, the division commander deemed it necessary to alter the original plan for reaching final objective by allowing the 184th Infantry to be pinched out at Nob Pier and ordering the 32d Infantry to continue its assault northward to Nero Point on a front which now extended from lagoon to ocean.

2. TYPES OF PRE-INVASION SUPPORTING FIRES AND BOMBARDMENT

At 1130 on D-Day, after units of the 17th Infantry had captured the tiny island of Enubuj, just two miles northwest of the objective, 105 mm and 155 mm howitzer batteries of the 7th Division Artillery were moved ashore and effectively utilized to support the opening phases of the assault on Kwajalein. If the artillery, under the original plan of employment, had simply been brought ashore on Kwajalein Island after the successful establishment of a suitable beachhead, the effectiveness of its fires during the critical opening phases of the island assault could not have been realized. In addition, the intensive pre-invasion naval fires and aerial bombardment aided materially in producing initial landings which were virtually unopposed.

3. PRE-INVASION RECONNAISSANCE OF ISLAND APPROACHES

Heavy protecting fires delivered by strong covering forces of naval vessels paved the way for successful completion of two daring reconnaissance missions, both of which were carried out near the southeastern shore of Kwajalein on D-Day. Invaluable information concerning the condition of principal approaches to this sector of the island was secured with no casualties resulting from either movement.

4. INFANTRY-TANK COORDINATION DURING EARLY PHASES OF THE OPERATION

Coordination of the movement of infantry units and supporting tank elements proved difficult during the initial phases of the operation. Many prominent island terrain features which were clearly identifiable on maps issued aboard ship just prior to the "jump-off" on D-plus-1 Day were practically unrecognizable on the ground. Instead, immense craters, created by our own heavy pre-invasion aerial and naval bombing of Kwajalein, became in effect deadly tank traps. Then, too, many tanks after stalling in the soft sand of the beaches and the swampy ground beyond the beachhead, were able to push ahead in effective support of the assaulting ground forces only after engineer troops had constructed special roadways for their initial movement forward.

5. NEUTRALIZATION OF REINFORCED DEFENSIVE INSTALLATIONS BY INFANTRY-ENGINEER TEAMS

Frequently, during the course of the four-day Kwajalein operation, use of rocket-launchers, flame-throwers, and 37 and 75 mm guns as effective agents in the neutralization of heavily reinforced pillboxes and other types of strongly-constructed defense installations proved futile. Such failure can be attributed partially to the inherent limitations of the weapons themselves and, in addition, to the ingenious methods employed by the

occupants for withdrawal into interconnected underground passageways. Only proper and prompt employment of 25-pound (or larger) satchel charges and 10-pound (or larger) shaped charges within these installations produced satisfactory results. Successful reduction of these obstacles, which could not be safely bypassed, was generally achieved throughout the operation by the joint action of closely-cooperating groups of engineers and infantrymen. Members of these teams, having thoroughly learned their respective duties during realistic "wet" training on Hawaii prior to departure of the invasion fleet, applied their lessons on Kwajalein with impressive results.

6. OCCUPATION OF TEMPORARY NIGHT DEFENSIVE POSITIONS

At the end of the first day's fighting Company I of the 32d Infantry was ordered to cover the lower left sector of the airfield so that Company K could be relieved of a portion of its area of responsibility for the night. Consequently, Company L was faced with the problem of preparing defensive positions for the entire battalion front before darkness enveloped the island. When night fell before a reconnaissance of the enemy area forward of the location of Company L could be completed it was apparent that halting of the advancing troops should have been ordered at an earlier hour in the afternoon. During the night a Japanese counterattack of considerable force succeeded in penetrating the partially-organized defenses of Company L. Utter confusion resulted, with the consequent loss of several lives.

7. GENERAL COORDINATION AND CONTROL

On D-plus-2 Day, because of a misunderstanding as to the exact location of a predetermined rendezvous point, an infantry guide and a tank unit commander waited for each other at points just 200 yards distant from one another for over an hour. As a result, tank support, critically needed at this time, was denied to Company B, 184th Infantry, for a period of over two hours.

8. WASTE OF MEAGER RESERVES OF EXPLOSIVES AND TANK AMMUNITION

During the latter phases of the operation dwindling supplies of effective explosives and limited amounts of 75 mm tank ammunition were not husbanded. Actually, in many cases, the absence of badly-needed engineer support forced infantrymen with little or no real knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of explosives to blow their own demolitions with resultant waste and lack of effectiveness. In the latter case, tank gunners frequently fired against enemy reinforced strongholds in unprofitable and careless fashion. Fires would be placed on entrances to pillboxes rather than against the outer walls where hits would serve to force the enemy to move out and into effective range of rifles of the waiting infantrymen.

9. COMMUNICATIONS FROM FRONT TO REAR

Because of the extremely narrow frontages employed on Kwajalein, the leading battalions were generally extended to the rear in unusual depth. As a result the lengthy communication lines stretching from assaulting companies back to the respective regimental headquarters were conducive to delays in the dispatch of action results and the transmission of frequent inaccurate battle reports.

10. TENACITY OF THE ENEMY THROUGHOUT THE OPERATION

The superb air and naval bombardment of Kwajalein prior to launching of the coordinated amphibious assault resulted in the partial disruption of the enemy's overall plan for defense of the island, but nevertheless failed to "wipe off the map" all of the stubborn Japanese fighters. In fact, many of the fanatical defenders had to be destroyed in their underground establishments before the operation could be successfully terminated.

LESSONS

1. Although assignment of small frontages may produce superior assaulting power it may conversely cause disruption of communication, increase of net casualties, and reduction of maneuverability.

2. Effective pre-invasion air and naval bombardment plus intensive artillery fires to support initial landings will serve to minimize beachhead casualties.

3. Aggressive pre-invasion reconnaissance of beachhead approaches by revealing types and locations of obstacles will tend to speed arrival of the leading assault forces and reduce initial landing casualties.

4. Coordination of infantry and tank units during early phases of an amphibious operation becomes doubly difficult if conditions to be faced on the ground are not properly predicted, understood, and analyzed during pre-invasion training.

5. Use of thoroughly trained Infantry-Engineer teams is one of the most economical methods of reducing heavily-reinforced defensive installations of the enemy.

6. Termination of daylight operations at too late an hour may prevent the occupation of adequate night defensive positions.

7. Designation of a feature easily recognized on the ground is imperative if the exact location of a rendezvous point is to be clearly understood.

8. A small reserve of supplies which may be vital to the ultimate success of an operation must be employed to maximum effect by the commander.

9. Operation of communications system generally overextended from front to rear may frequently result in the receipt of battle reports of inaccurate nature.

10. Intensive and prolonged bombardment of an objective prior to invasion may not be sufficient to force surrender of an entrenched defender.