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TARAWA



BEFORE THE MARINES CAME. Airfield and main pier on Betto Island.

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THE BATTLE FOR

TARAWA



HISTORICAL SECTION

DIVISION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

HEADQUARTERS

U. S. MARINE CORPS.

Capt. James R. Stockman, USMC

1947



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

Foreword

TARAWA was the first in a series of amphibious operations which carried United States forces across the Central Pacific to the homeland of Japan. When the 2d Marine Division landed on Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll on 20 November 1943, twenty years of Marine Corps study and work, already tested at Guadalcanal and at Bougainville, was put to an acid test.

Tarawa was the first example in history of a sea-borne assault against a heavily defended coral atoll. Marine preparations for this operation were thorough; its plans were executed in a noteworthy manner. In the final analysis, however, success at Tarawa depended upon the discipline, courage, and fighting ability of the individual Marine. Seldom has anyone been called upon to fight a battle under more difficult circumstances.

In capturing Tarawa, the 2d Marine Division accomplished a difficult mission in an expeditious manner. Seventy-six hours after the assault troops landed in the face of heavy resistance, the battle was over and an important base secured with the annihilation of its defending garrison.

Of even greater importance, however, was the fact that this successful operation underlined the soundness of our doctrines of amphibious assault. The lessons learned and confirmed at Tarawa paid great dividends in every subsequent operations from the Marshalls to the shores of Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

A. A. VANDEGRIFT

GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS,
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

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THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

Preface

THIS operational monograph is one of a series prepared by the Historical Section, Division of Public Information, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, concerning Marine Corps operations in World War II.

The first narrative was sent out for criticism and comment to officers who were present at Tarawa in principal positions. Upon receipt of their replies, a final revision, along with further editing, was undertaken.

"Tarawa" is as factually accurate as the sources from which its subject matter was obtained. In the first six chapters there is no surmise; the facts are presented as they were recorded or obtained through interview. The last chapter sets forth, briefly, the importance and success of the battle for Tarawa, and mentions some of the lessons learned.

It is believed, however, that it is too early to attempt a full critical analysis or detailed evaluation of the importance of the Tarawa operation in the Pacific war, of the lessons learned in that operation, or their effect upon subsequent operations.

Maps used in this monograph were prepared by the Reproduction Department, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Va. Only official Marine Corps and Navy photographs are used.

All statements contained in this monograph have been thoroughly documented, although, in the interests of textual smoothness and appearance, no citations have been made. A documented master copy of the entire monograph is on file in the Marine Corps archives and may be consulted at any time, subject to security regulations. Specific information as to documentation or source material will be furnished upon request.

W. E. RILEY,
BRIGADIER GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS,
DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

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THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

CHAPTER I

Introduction

STRATEGIC SITUATION

THE strategic situation in the Pacific in the fall of 1943 was this: The Japanese had been driven out of the Aleutians in the North Pacific; with the landing of the 3d Marine Division on Bougainville, the conquest of the Solomons in the South Pacific neared completion; General MacArthur, in the Southwest Pacific, had secured eastern New Guinea and was preparing to invade the Bismarcks.

Since the beginning of the war, it had been the opinion of the United States Chiefs of Staff that Japan "could best be defeated by a series of amphibious attacks across the far reaches of the Pacific." In 1942 and early 1943, the attacks were few and widely scattered and the land fighting was done on the edge of the enemy's island defensive perimeter, ranging from Guadalcanal to Attu. That there were few amphibious attacks in the Pacific during the first year and a half of the war, and that these were limited in scale, may be traced to the global strategy to which the United States was committed: To defeat Germany first; to maintain increasing pressure on Japan; and to keep China in the war. So long as the war in the Pacific had a second priority, increasing pressure on Japan, in the form of amphibious attacks, had to be limited to the means at hand.

IMPORTANCE OF THE GILBERTS

"The Gilbert Islands are a group of coral atolls lying athwart the equator. They had been held by the British up to the outbreak of the war in Decem-

ber 1941, when they were seized by the Japanese. Their location is of great strategic significance because they are north and west of other islands in our possession and immediately south and east of important bases in the Carolines and Marshalls. The capture of the Gilberts was, therefore, a necessary part of any serious thrust at the Japanese Empire."¹

At the Quadrant Conference in Quebec, August 1943, the specific routes of the advance on Japan were laid out and operations in the Gilberts, the Marshalls, and the Marianas were agreed to. Before the Quadrant Conference, however, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific and Pacific Ocean areas, had been alerted to begin planning for operations in the Central Pacific. On 20 July, 1943, a directive was sent by the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructing Nimitz to plan and prepare for operations in the Ellice and Gilbert Island groups.²

United States plans for the Central Pacific operations called for the capture of a succession of Japanese positions from which attacks could be launched against Japanese strong points such as Truk and the Marianas and also against essential lines of communication. The several directives issued for these operations defined the purposes as to gain control of the Gilbert Islands and the Marshall Islands, to secure a base area for the attack on the Carolines, to improve the security of our lines of communication and to support other operations in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean by extending pressure on the Japanese.

¹ From U. S. Navy at War, Official Reports by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, USN, p. 71.

² Joint Chiefs of Staff Dispatch, 20 July 1943.

PLANS FOR OPERATION GALVANIC

Operation Plan 13-43

On the basis of the directives from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Nimitz began to organize and prepare his forces for the forthcoming operations. Planning studies and directives were sent out to the various units earmarked to participate in the Gilberts operation. Early planning envisaged the seizure of Nauru, Bititu (Betio) Island of the Tarawa Atoll, and airfield sites on Apamama as the primary objectives in the Gilberts operation. As planning progressed, certain intelligence information, not previously available, indicated that Nauru was heavily defended and offered extremely poor landing beaches. As a result, it was decided to substitute Makin for Nauru.

While planning and preparations were in full swing, Admiral Nimitz ordered carrier-based strikes on Marcus, Tarawa, Apamama, and Wake to take place during the months of August, September, and October. The purpose of these strikes was to soften Japanese installations and keep the enemy guessing as to where our next full-scale attack would be delivered. The strikes were eminently successful.

Planning for OPERATION GALVANIC (the capture of the Gilbert Islands) crystallized when Admiral Nimitz issued Operation Plan 13-43 on 5 October 1943. By this plan Vice Admiral R. A. Spruance, Commander Central Pacific Force, was assigned 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 operations in the South-Southwest Pacific and Burma areas by extending pressure on the Japanese.

In addition Spruance's Fifth Fleet was to prevent enemy interference by destroying or repelling enemy forces and by attacks on enemy airfields in the Gilberts and Marshalls, and to provide naval gunfire and air support of the landings.

TASK ORGANIZATION

In October, Admiral Nimitz placed various units of the Pacific Fleet under the command of Vice Admiral R. A. Spruance, designating the new organization Central Pacific Force.³ It consisted of three major groups:

- (a) Carrier Force (Task Force 50), Rear Admiral C. A. Pownall;
- (b) Assault Force (Task Force 54), Rear Admiral R. K. Turner;
- (c) Defense Forces and Shore-based Air (Task Force 57), Rear Admiral J. H. Hoover.

Admiral Turner's Task Force 54 (Fifth Amphibious Force) was subdivided into two major units: Task Force 52 (also commanded by Turner) to capture Makin; and Task Force 53 (Rear Admiral Harry Hill) to capture Tarawa and Apamama, in that order.

Admiral Pownall's Task Force 50 had an ambitious program. In addition to establishing and maintaining air superiority in the area, this force was to neutralize enemy defenses, support the assault, conduct medium searches ahead of the assault forces, provide fighter protection, maintain antisubmarine patrol, provide gunfire spotting and maintain continuous observations and reports over the objectives, Tarawa, Makin, and Apamama.

In an effort to establish air and sea control of the Gilbert Islands the land-based aircraft of Admiral Hoover's Task Force 57, operating from the Ellice Phoenix, and Samoan Islands, were directed to conduct photographic reconnaissance missions, attack against enemy bases within range to the westward, and long-range searches.

Assigned to Fifth Amphibious Force was V Amphibious Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Holland M. Smith, USMC. The function of this corps was to exercise full and continuing operational command of the amphibious training and operations of all troops in the Central Pacific Areas assigned for the amphibious attack. The 2d Marine Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith, USMC, mounted at Wellington, New Zealand, and assigned to V Amphibious Corps, was to furnish the assault forces for the capture of Tarawa and Apamama. The 27th Infantry Division, mounted at Pearl Harbor, commanded by Maj. Gen. Ralph C. Smith, USA, was to furnish a regimental combat team for the capture of Makin. Other V Amphibious Corps

³ For task organization diagram, see appendix E.

forces to be involved were: 2d Defense Battalion (Marine), mounted at Wallis, to garrison Apamama following the attack; and 7th Defense Battalion (Army),⁴ mounted at Pearl Harbor, to garrison Makin.

TARAWA PLANNING

Task Force 53

The capture of Tarawa Atoll was the mission assigned to Task Force 53. The Task Force Commander, Rear Adm. Harry Hill, was assigned the following task groups: Rear Adm. H. F. Kingman's Support Group, comprising five fire support sections;⁵ Southern Landing Force (2d Marine Division, less RCT 6); Transport Group (Capt. H. B. Knowles); Minesweeper Group; and Rear Adm. V. H. Ragsdale's Carrier Group (five CVE's). To lend support, there was Rear Adm. A. E. Montgomery's Southern Carrier Group (a part of TF 50, Rear Adm. C. A. Pownall), to screen the operation and furnish air interception and support ashore when needed.

Intelligence reports indicated that of the islands of Tarawa Atoll, Bititu (Betio) Island was strongly held and fortified; on it the Japanese had built an airfield. In order to destroy the enemy forces on Tarawa Atoll, and to capture and use the airfield, the main attack by the landing force of Task Force 53 was to be made on Bititu Island.⁶

2d Marine Division

Early in August 1943, Vice Admiral R. A. Spruance came to Wellington to acquaint Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith with plans for the Gilberts operation. No formal orders were issued but Admiral Spruance assigned the capture of Tarawa Atoll verbally to the 2d Marine Division at this time. During this conference the question of the reef that fringed Betio Island was discussed and the decision was made by the 2d Marine Division to use amphibian tractors to carry its first three waves over the reef, pending further experiments with the tractors.

Following this conference, planning directives and studies, based on a projected plan which called for the capture of Nauru, Tarawa, and Apamama,

⁴ This Army battalion was organized on Oahu specifically for duty at Makin.

⁵ For names of ships comprising these groups, see appendix E.

⁶ Hereafter, the island will be referred to as Betio.

were received by the division. The latter objectives were tentatively assigned to the 2d Marine Division.

On 15 September, the division was attached to V Amphibious Corps and on 2 October, Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith and his staff reported to Maj. Gen. Holland M. Smith, the corps commander, at Pearl Harbor, to obtain the corps plan and secure approval of the preferred plan of the 2d Marine Division in the attack of objectives not yet definitely assigned.

Gen. Julian C. Smith was informed that the enemy was capable of making a combined air and submarine attack within 3 days of the beginning of action on Tarawa. No plan for landing artillery on the other islands of the atoll for the preliminary bombardment of Betio would be approved because of the time element involved. The initial attack had to be made on strongly defended Betio. Gen. Julian C. Smith orally requested that he be given definite orders to that effect. This request was granted and the mission was thus assigned.

In the meantime, the division continued its training and in September, when transports were made available, the battalion landing teams went aboard ship and participated in amphibious landing maneuvers. Concurrently, schools were in progress, training personnel for specialized duty. The division had lost many men who were invalidated home after the campaign on Guadalcanal because of chronic malaria attacks.⁷ However, the arrival of replacements and intradivisional transfer of personnel soon brought the division up to strength.

The mission assigned the 2d Marine Division in OPERATION GALVANIC was (1) to land at H-hour of D-day⁸ on Betio Island, on the southwest corner of Tarawa Atoll, in order to seize and occupy the island; (2) to prepare for further operations ashore on Tarawa Atoll. The code name for Tarawa was LONGSUIT. Operations to capture Apamama Atoll (code name: BOXCLOTH) were to follow those on Tarawa.

The division operation order, completed 25 October 1943, called for Combat Team 2 (2d Marines, reinforced, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, attached) to make the assault landings. The remaining two battalion landing teams of the 8th Marines, along with combat team headquarters, were to constitute the

⁷ As late as 10 October, the division had 1,387 ineffectives. Daily admissions for malaria at that time averaged 40.

⁸ Preliminary planning was done without reference to a specific target date (D-day) or landing hour (H-hour). For higher echelon planning purposes, a tentative target date was set, well in advance of the projected operation. H-hour was left to the discretion of the task force commander.

2d Marine Division's reserve.⁹ The 6th Marines was held in reserve by V Amphibious Corps.

The operation order of the 2d Marines called for three battalion landing teams to land on Beaches Red 1, Red 2, and Red 3, on the north, or lagoon side of Betio Island.¹⁰ Since the 6th Marines was not under division control, initially, Gen. Julian C. Smith, Commanding General, 2d Marine Division, could plan on having a two-to-one numerical superiority over the Japanese defenders of Betio, provided that intelligence estimates of enemy strength on Betio were correct.

Division planning was done on the basis of intelligence information furnished by Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean areas, relayed via V Amphibious Corps. According to this information, Tarawa was believed to be held by a defending force composed entirely of naval personnel. Naval units of this type are usually more highly trained and have greater tenacity and fighting spirit than the average Japanese Army unit. Most of the Japanese in Tarawa Atoll were believed to be on Betio and the estimated strength of the garrison on that island was placed at 2,500 to 2,700 men. This was later revised to not less than 2,700 men and not more than 3,100. (Actually there were 2,619 first-rate troops. See appendix F.)

Through aerial photographs, especially those obtained during the United States raids on Tarawa on 18 and 19 September 1943, planning agencies of Central Pacific Force, V Amphibious Corps, and 2d Marine Division estimated the numbers and types of weapons on Betio, and located their emplacements. A post-operation survey proved that the estimates were unusually accurate.¹¹

Information on the tides and on the reef that fringed Tarawa Atoll, both on the exterior and interior, was equally complete. To reach Betio Island from the sea or from the waters of the lagoon, regardless of the direction of approach, meant crossing the reef. "The ideal defensive barrier has always been the one that could not be demolished, which held up assaulting forces under the unobstructed fire of the defenders and past which it was impossible to run, crawl, dig, climb, or sail. The barrier reef fulfills these conditions to the letter, except when suffi-

cient amphibious tanks and similar vehicles are available to the attackers" (CincPac Op. Report November 1943). To land its assault waves on Betio the 2d Marine Division had decided to use amphibian tractors (LVTs) and had conducted successful experiments with them. Later waves would have to go in boats (LCMs and LCVPs).

It was necessary that the last of the tractor waves cross the reef as the tide approached the flood so that there would be enough water to float the boats over when they arrived at the reef. To get information on Gilbert tides, the division turned to some men who probably knew more about them than anyone else. Since available charts of the Tarawa waters were known to be inaccurate, Fifth Amphibious Force obtained the services of several British who had lived in the various islands of the Gilbert group, or had been shipmasters operating small steamers and schooners among these islands. A part of this group was sent to the 2d Marine Division to assist in its planning; it consisted of Maj. F. L. G. Holland, who had lived on Bairiki (the island adjacent to Betio) for 15 years, a Captain Warnham who had been in the atoll for about 5 years, and several small craft skippers who had sailed the waters of the Gilbert and Fiji Islands. During the early planning, Gen. Julian C. Smith learned from the tide tables furnished by these men that he could expect 5 feet of water on the reef at high neap tide, enough to get the boats in to the beaches.¹² However, General Smith also learned that these tides were not always dependable; that there were frequent dodging tides.

Early in the planning stage, when it became apparent that amphibian tractors would have to be used to get its first waves ashore, the 2d Marine Division requested that additional tractors be furnished. The division had about 100 tractors, 75 of which

¹² As late as the rehearsals at Efate, Major Holland announced, during a division staff meeting, that his earlier estimate of the height of the water over the reef had been based on flood tide. He stated that he "never dreamed that anyone would try to land on the neap tide." The latter, he said, would provide not over 3 feet of water on the reef.

Major Holland stated that the tide tables were not dependable during neap tide periods; that there might be as little as 3 feet of water over the reef at extreme high tide. Since amphibian tractors had been secured for landing the first three waves of troops, this information affected only the landing of support and reserve troops; these were to be carried in LCVPs and LCMs.

This caused another meeting of the pilots to be held and the consensus of this group was that there would be enough water over the reef at high neap tide to float the LCVPs and LCMs over the reef.

⁹ For Division Task Organization, see appendix E.

¹⁰ See map 1.

¹¹ For a comparison of estimated against actual weapons on Betio, see appendix I.

were thought to be in suitable condition for the operation. According to Colonel M. A. Edson, 100 LVT(2)'s were assigned the division but they were still in San Diego and could not be shipped out in time to reach the division at Wellington, nor could the Navy furnish sufficient LST's to transport them. However, 50 could be sent to Samoa in time, and this was done. Trained personnel from the 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion were sent to Samoa to form a new company, with the LVT(2)'s, which would join the division at Tarawa on D-day.

Also during the planning phase, the division requested Task Force 53 to use the ships carrying the 6th Marines (Corps Reserve), with a suitable destroyer escort, to make a diversionary feint off the south shore of Betio, while the main force was preparing to land on the north side, in order to confuse the Japanese on the island, but the request was denied. To do this, about 50 percent of the destroyer fire support strength would have to be diverted from the main landing to screen and protect the simulated transport area set up in the feint, leaving the main transport area unprotected.

The northern beaches of Betio were chosen as the preferred landing beaches because they vouchsafed better opportunities for securing a foothold than the others.

The presence of underwater antiboat mines was also considered. Since the Japs were still working over the north beaches, it was believed there would be less chance of encountering mines in that sector. This proved to be correct. Although mines were located there, they were not armed; mines on the other beaches were fully armed.

In addition, it was believed that water conditions desired by the division would be available inside the lagoon. The other beaches on the island were rejected for several reasons: The eastern end of the island was too narrow to be of any use; the south side had the heaviest boat obstacles and fairly bristled with gun emplacements; the west end had numerous boat obstacles, a heavily fortified beach, and led into a bottleneck where the island narrowed a short distance east of the beach. The south coast formed a re-entrant facilitating the use of flanking fire; the north beach offered a salient.

The naval gunfire support plan called for the firing to be done in three separate phases. The first phase was to begin at a time to be announced by the commander of Task Force 53; this time was to be

called W-hour. During the first phase, lasting from W-hour to H minus 60, the support ships were to fire on designated target areas; this was to insure that all important parts of the island would receive adequate attention. Phase II was to begin at 60 minutes before H-hour and would last until H-hour. During this period the ships would continue to fire at designated target areas, starting at the water's edge of each of the landing beaches and extending a short distance inland. In the last phase, the ships were to fire neutralization fires and provide call fires for the assault units ashore.

The air support plan called for bombing and strafing missions from 0545, D-day, until 0615. Then 5 minutes before H-hour, fighter planes were to strafe from the water's edge inland for about 100 yards on each of the landing beaches. Upon completion of this strafing, bombers were to attack secondary defensive positions behind the beaches.

In addition to this bombing and strafing, Col. D. M. Shoup had requested that Seventh Air Force planes drop 2,000-pound "daisy-cutters" on the beach along the landing beaches, and inland, to kill as many of the enemy as possible and to level the many buildings that would otherwise provide cover and concealment for snipers. This request, approved by division, was never fulfilled.

Briefly, the approach plan¹³ called for a part of the fire support ships to move out from the main fleet group as the transports neared the transport area, and take up positions in predesignated areas to the south, west, and northwest of Betio. Two minesweepers were to enter the lagoon ahead of the screening destroyers, which were to be followed by the LSD from Noumea carrying the medium tanks of the 2d Tank Battalion, and the landing craft comprising the initial waves of the landing force.

TARAWA

The Atoll

Tarawa is one of the coral atolls which comprise the Gilbert Islands, an archipelago that sprawls across the equator between 174° and 178° east longitude. Roughly triangular in shape, the atoll is about 18 miles long on the east side, 12 miles long on the south side and 12½ miles long on the west side. A continuous reef, the atoll consists of a narrow string of coral sand islands whose altitude varies

¹³ Prepared by Task Force 53.



JAPANESE PRACTICE GUNNERY from the southwest tip of Betio. This captured photograph shows the eastern gun of the 8-inch battery.

from 8 to 10 feet. Coconut trees, pandanus, and dense shrubs make up the vegetation found on the islands. On the east side of the atoll there are 42 little islands, and on the south side 5; across the western side, connecting the two open ends of the reversed L-shaped atoll, lies the lee barrier reef which guards the lagoon enclosed by the atoll. Entrance to the lagoon may be gained at a point where a break occurs about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of the west part of Betio Island, the southwesternmost one of the atoll. The lagoon is thickly studded by coral patches and reefs; navigation depends upon good light. Depths from 5 to 8 fathoms may be found in places.

Tarawa lies in the easterly wind belt, with a westerly season appearing along about November. Normal wind velocity for the year averages 7 knots. Rainfall is comparatively light, averaging around 35 inches annually. There are no clearly marked seasons.

JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF TARAWA

Tarawa Atoll was raided by the Japanese Navy on 10 December 1941,¹⁴ and was proclaimed occupied by the Imperial Navy, although the real occupation of the atoll did not occur until September of 1942. As a result of the United States Marine raid on Makin, 16 August 1942, action was taken immediately by the Japanese to reinforce positions in the Gilberts. On 15 September 1942, the Yokosuka 6th Special Navy Landing Force (SNLF) landed on Betio, Tarawa Atoll, for garrison duty. In December the 111th Pioneers arrived to begin the construction of the islands defenses. In February 1943, the Yokosuka 6th SNLF was redesignated the 3d Special Base Force. During that same month Rear Admiral Tomanari Saichiro, arrived at Betio to take command of Japanese forces in the Gilberts.

¹⁴ Makin was occupied the same day.

On 17 March 1943, the Sasebo 7th SNLF reached Betio and joined the 3d Special Base Force as garrison troops. Then in May another unit arrived, the 4th Construction Unit. There was a change in command in August when Rear Admiral Shibasaki, Meichi, relieved Tomonari. Shibasaki remained in command of all Japanese forces in the Gilberts until his death on 21 November 1943, the second day of the fighting on Betio. At the time of the landing of the 2d Marine Division, Shibasaki had 2,619 first-rate troops.¹⁵

JAPANESE DEFENSES ON BETIO

The Japanese concentrated their strength in Tarawa Atoll on one island—Betio. The basic over-

¹⁵ For a break-down of Japanese strength on Betio on D-day, see appendix F.

all tactical defense planned for Betio provided for a series of strong points organized with intervening distances covered by fire. The plan called for the destruction of American forces at the water's edge; if this failed, the garrison would immediately counterattack any beachhead that might be established. The principles contemplated in the defense of Betio were defined early. The Yokosuka 6th SNLF directed its personnel, in an order published in October 1942, to "wait until the enemy is within effective range (when assembling for landing) and direct your fire on the enemy transport group and destroy it. If the enemy starts a landing, knock out the landing boats with mountain gunfire, tank guns and infantry guns, then concentrate all fires on the enemy's landing point and destroy him at the water's edge."

CAMOUFLAGED 8-INCH GUNS in concrete emplacement on southwest point of Betio. This emplacement was overrun by the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, after naval gunfire neutralized the guns.



The weapons to provide the backbone of the Japanese defense were coast-defense guns (ranging from 80 mm. to 8 inch), antiaircraft guns (13 mm. to 127 mm.), antiboat guns (13 mm. to 75 mm.), and light and heavy machine guns.

The basic beach defense weapon was the 13-mm. machine gun, supplemented by the 7.7-mm. machine gun. These were sited to cover most likely approaches to the beach with frontal fire, and to cover the forward side of the diagonally placed barriers on the reef with flanking fires, these fires interlocking in front of, and protecting, other beach defense weapon installations. Carefully built rifle and light machine-gun emplacements were positioned in the log beach barricade and immediately behind it to provide local protection for automatic-fire weapons.

On the beach, the Japanese placed antipersonnel mines and out on the fringing reef there were anti-vehicle mines; these were to complement the basic weapons ashore. Out in the water from the beaches there were antiboat obstacles, the purpose of which was twofold: (1) To slow down and otherwise impede the movements of landing craft; (2) to force approaching landing craft into prearranged fire lanes where concentrated fires from all types of weapons could be employed most advantageously.

The obstacles were of several types. There was a double apron barbed wire fence, located 50 to 100 yards out, which virtually encircled the island. On the south side of Betio there was a coconut log barrier and scattered through the water were concrete tetrahedrons. On the beaches proper, the Japanese built log barriers, which in effect were retaining walls, and these were constructed to contain positions for machine guns and antiboat guns.

Defenses inland were haphazard. Command posts, ammunition dumps, and communication centers were made of reinforced concrete and were virtually bombproof. They were not purposely constructed as positions from which active resistance could be offered.

ENEMY SITUATION

Japanese Plans, Summer, 1943

In May 1943, there was a conference at Truk between the Commander in Chief of the Southeast Area, Vice Admiral Kusaka, and the Commander

in Chief Second Fleet, Vice Admiral Kondo. At this conference it was decided: first, to bring out as many reinforcements as possible from Japan; and second, to hold the Solomons and Dampier Strait area in the Bismarcks. The emphasis on aircraft reinforcements was in the Solomons and reinforcements to the Marshalls-Gilberts were to be principally in the form of troops. The possibility of United States attack in any of the Marshalls-Gilberts, Solomons, and Eastern New Guinea Areas was realized; therefore, the Second Fleet was to be concentrated at Truk to meet any eventuality. Japanese aircraft were concentrated in the Solomons, but there were relatively few in the Central Pacific due to the shortage caused by attrition in the Solomons.

The specific plan to counter an American invasion of the Gilberts was as follows: Long-range aircraft from the Bismarcks would attack the United States invasion forces and then land at fields in the Marshalls-Gilberts. Short-range aircraft would start from or stage through Truk and proceed to Marshalls-Gilberts fields and from there attack United States forces. It was expected to require 4 days for the short-range aircraft to reach the attack position from the Bismarcks. Warships at Truk would sortie and move to the Gilbert Islands where they would attack American surface and invasion forces. Six or seven submarines, which were employed in supply services in the Bismarcks, also would be ordered to assist in repelling the invasion.

This plan, a part of the larger one called the Z plan, designed to defend the outer line in the event of an American attack on the Gilbert-Marshalls area, depended on the fleet, based at Truk to assist land-based aircraft and garrison troops on the islands. The Japanese were never given a chance to place the Z plan into effect.

Situation, November 1943

The landing of the 3d Marine Division on Bougainville on 1 November 1943, and the United States carrier-based plane raid on Rabaul on 5 November had the Japanese in a bad spot. Pouring reinforcements into the Solomons had got to be like pouring sand down a rat hole. United States forces had thrust their way up the Solomons chain from Guadalcanal, through the Russells, to New Georgia, bypassing Kolumbangara, on to Vella Lavella and

from there to Bougainville, posing a dangerous threat to the Japanese strong point at Rabaul. To keep their air strength effective in the northern Solomons, the Japanese, after suffering heavy losses, were forced to draw reinforcements from the Marshalls, Truk, Marianas, and Celebes areas. The situation was critical. If Bougainville fell, Rabaul would be virtually useless. The successful United States landing on Bougainville Island, 1 November 1943, convinced the Japanese High Command that the threat in this section was greater than that of attack in the Central Pacific. A number of the naval vessels which had been held at Truk in conformity with the general plan for the defense of the Pacific perimeter were sent via Rabaul to assist in checking the United States advance toward Rabaul.

At the same time, a United States task force under Rear Adm. F. C. Sherman, built around aircraft carriers, was moving toward Rabaul. At sunrise on 5 November 1943, the Japanese force, consisting of cruisers and destroyers of the Japanese Second and Third Fleets, arrived at Rabaul from Truk and began to make preparations for fueling. Within an hour Admiral Sherman's planes came diving in on the helpless Japanese ships, attacking with bombs and torpedoes. Immediately the attack began, the Japanese ships left the harbor to gain room to maneuver. Of nine cruisers, seven were damaged badly enough to make it necessary to send them to Japan for repairs. A week later Rear Admiral Sherman and Rear Adm. A. E. Montgomery, each with a carrier task force, again attacked Rabaul and inflicted heavy damage on enemy destroyers outside the harbor as well as on cruisers, destroyers and other shipping within the harbor.

Thus it was that the Japanese found that the Rabaul attacks, the Bougainville landing, and the intensified air war in the Solomons (which had absorbed air forces already in the area, as well as required the employment of the short-range planes which were being held at Truk for the defense of the Marshalls-Gilberts), made it necessary to alter previous plans for the defense of the Central Pacific Islands. The Fourth Fleet, in the Marshalls, was too small to strike American invasion forces. The 22d Air Flotilla, also based in the Marshalls, was badly understrength. It would be up to the island garrisons to resist as best they could, aided in a small measure by harassing submarine action.

REHEARSAL AND MOVEMENT TO TARGET

Task Force 53 Assembles

On 7 November most ¹⁶ of the elements of Task Force 53 (Southern Attack Force), commanded by Rear Adm. Harry Hill, assembled at Efate in the New Hebrides for rehearsal exercises before setting out for Tarawa. Rear Adm. H. F. Kingman had brought his battleships, cruisers, and destroyers down from Pearl Harbor. From Wellington, New Zealand, came the 2d Marine Division, loaded in Transport Group 4.

The departure of the 2d Marine Division from New Zealand was ostensibly for the purpose of effecting practice landings in the vicinity of Hawkes Bay. Few officers in the division knew that there would be no such landings; that this was merely a ruse.

Operations orders for the practice landings were issued; arrangements for moving division equipment from Hawkes Bay back to Wellington afterward were made; the New Zealand Air Force was briefed on air coverage for the practice landings; and it was intended for the word to get out that the ships would return to Wellington in about a week. Not until the day of departure from Wellington was the Governor General of New Zealand notified that the division was leaving the country and would not return.

Company C, from 1st MAC, arrived at Efate with its medium tanks aboard an LSD, the *Ashland*, from Noumea, New Caledonia. The arrival of the transports was timed so that the first rehearsal could be held on the same day that they reached Efate.

During the first rehearsal Mele Bay was used for the landing of troops and Pango Point for simulated fire support targets. Following the landing exercise, the transport group entered Havannah Harbor and remained overnight. The second rehearsal was held on 9 November with the troops again landing in Mele Bay while fire-support ships held bombardment practice on Erradaka Island. Conferences and critiques were held on both the second and fourth day of the stay at Efate. Communication equipment was tested during this period and exercises were held to check the communication plan. On 13

¹⁶ Cruiser Division 13 and Destroyer Division 49 were on duty with the Third Fleet and did not join TF 53 until 16 November. Carrier Division 22 did not participate in the first rehearsal at Efate.

November, Task Force 53 left Efate and sailed for Tarawa.

It was during the rehearsals at Efate that the regimental commander of the assault regiment, Col. William McN. Marshall, became ill. General Smith named Col. David M. Shoup, the division operations officer, to take Marshall's place.

Thus, Shoup was placed in the unusual position of now being called upon to execute orders based upon planning in which he had had a major part.

Movement to Target

The first 3 days en route to Tarawa passed without unusual event. On the second day out, Task Force Commander Rear Adm. Harry Hill sent the following message to the ships of his force:

Give all hands the general picture of the projected operation and further details to all who should have this in execution of duties. This is the first American assault of a strongly defended atoll and with northern attack and covering forces the largest Pacific operation to date.

Now for the first time, the troops of the 2d Marine Division learned the name of the island they were about to assault. All data withheld previously was made available. Troop officers gathered their men

together in small groups and told them all they knew about the forthcoming operation. On 16 November the task force slowed down to permit the refueling of some of the ships. Early in the morning of 18 November, an observation plane from the *Colorado* reported sighting Task Force 52 to the north. During the afternoon a plane from the carrier *Chenango* sighted an enemy plane far in the distance.

Air and Surface Strikes

While Admiral Turner's Fifth Amphibious Force was en route to Makin and Tarawa, aircraft of Task Force 57 (Rear Adm. J. H. Hoover) were busy "softening up" the target islands, as well as others adjacent. Hoover's land-based planes flew from the Ellice, Phoenix, and Samoan groups, and from Baker Island. The planes, totaling between 350 and 400, made daily strikes on the Japanese bases in the Gilberts and Marshalls through 13-19 November. In addition, they conducted searches and photographic missions.

During the same period that Seventh Air Force B-24's (operating under Task Force 57 as striking group, Maj. Gen. Willis A. Hale, USA, commanding) were bombing Tarawa, carrier planes from Rear Adm. A. E. Montgomery's Southern Carrier

LOOKING EAST DOWN THE AIRFIELD before the Marines landed. were interrupted by United States invasion of Tarawa.

Trees had been cut in order to lengthen the field but the Japanese. This area was overrun by the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines.



Group moved in to add their bombs. Commencing at daylight on 18 November, the carrier-based planes dropped a total of 115 tons and next day again attacked Betio, this time with 69 tons. The attack on the latter day was coordinated with a surface bombardment from Cruiser Division 5, consisting of three heavy cruisers and two destroyers; the ships fired roughly 250 tons of high capacity projectiles, mostly 8-inch.

Elsewhere, other strikes were in progress. On 16 November Admiral Sherman's Relief Carrier Group came up from Espiritu Santo to attack Nauru and dropped 90 tons of bombs to neutralize the airfield. On 19 November, Admiral Pownall's Carrier Interceptor Group made 10 attacks, 1 on Jaluit and 9 against Milli, dropping a total of 130 tons of bombs.

Final Approach Task Force 53

During the morning of 19 November an enemy plane was picked up by radar about 60 miles west of Task Force 53. It was a "Mavis" and was soon shot down by the *Suwanee's* combat air patrol. In the early afternoon Task Force 53 turned from its northerly course and began the last leg of its voyage

to Tarawa, heading to the west. Out ahead of the main body of ships the destroyer *Ringgold* was on the lookout for Maiana Atoll, the last guiding mark for the force in its approach to the target. At 2033 Maiana was picked up and the force began its final approach toward Tarawa. Shortly after midnight the fire-support sections began to move to their assigned stations.

The transports were reported to be in position at 0320. It was found, however, that they had stopped in Transport Area Baker instead of Able, farther north. As soon as this was ascertained, Admiral Hill ordered the transports to move north to the proper area in order to unmask his fire-support ships so that they could place enfilade fire down Betio from west to east.

When the transports finally got to their proper area, with their small boats trailing along beside them as they moved, there was some confusion, since some boats got separated from their mother ships. This helped to delay unloading, thus changing the time table, and contributed to a delay in H-hour later on.

At 0507, on 20 November, shore batteries on Betio opened fire on the ships nearest the island. The battle for Betio had begun.

DESOLATE AND BARE. The area at the west end of the airfield as it looked after the battle for Betio.





THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

CHAPTER II

The First Day, 20 November 1943

PREPARATIONS PRIOR TO H-HOUR

AT 0441 on the morning of D-day, 20 November 1943, the Japanese on Betio fired a red star cluster. Less than a half hour later enemy shore batteries opened fire and U. S. S. *Colorado* and U. S. S. *Maryland* swung their main batteries into action to reply to the challenge. With this action the battle for Betio got underway. At the same time the shore batteries began to fire, two of the fire-support sections of Task Force 53 were in position and were able to deliver counterbattery fire at once. Within a few minutes, another section had reached its station and could add its fires to those of the other ships. Shell splashes were observed all around the firing ships but none caused any damage.

Combat Team 2 (i. e., the 2d Marines, reinforced) had breakfasted early and at 0320 the assault waves began to debark from the transports of TRANSDIV 4 (temporary) into LCV's for further transfer to the LVT's. From the beginning there was a certain amount of confusion, for the transports were too far south of their proper stations and found themselves within range of the enemy guns ashore on Betio. There was difficulty, too, in getting the first waves of the LVTs organized, and with the transports shifting positions even more delay and confusion was caused.

Until 0542 the fire-support ships delivered fire intermittently in an effort to reduce the shore batteries and to neutralize enemy positions on the island as much as possible. At this time an order was given by the task force commander to cease firing so that the planes could make their air strike scheduled for 30 minutes prior to W-hour. It was believed that the air strike and naval gunfire bombardment should not be carried on simultaneously for two reasons:

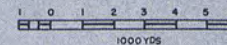
(1) Because the smoke and dust caused by naval gunfire would make it impossible for the dive bombers to see their targets; (2) Because naval projectiles in flight would constitute a menace to aircraft operating in the vicinity. The planes did not come in for their strike on time.

With the cessation of naval gunfire, the Japanese defenders of Betio had almost 30 minutes to fire on the transport area without being molested. At 0605 the order was given for the battleships, the cruisers, and the destroyers to resume their firing in order to counter the shore battery fire. Finally, at 0615, the planes came in for the air strike. Plenty of good targets remained for them to destroy. The 2d Division had asked that all buildings on the island be burned or destroyed by the plane strikes in the preliminary-to-D-day "softening up" strikes. Some were burned or demolished; many still remained standing. Some of these buildings were constructed of reinforced concrete and were so well built that the bombs and neutralizing naval gunfire had little effect upon them. The air strike lasted for about 10 minutes and while it was in progress W-hour was announced, at 0620, and the naval shelling began again. The island was almost completely covered with smoke by now and the ships could not see any point targets; however, the prearranged fires to begin at W-hour were to obliterate marked areas and the smoke only hampered the ships in making their adjustments.

Sunrise was at 0612 and a few minutes later the minesweeper *Pursuit* started to sweep the channel leading into the lagoon. On board to guide the ship was a pilot thoroughly familiar with these waters, a Lieutenant Forbes, of the New Zealand Navy. Behind the *Pursuit* was the *Requisite*, another minesweeper. Waiting to enter as soon as the entrance

TARAWA ATOLL

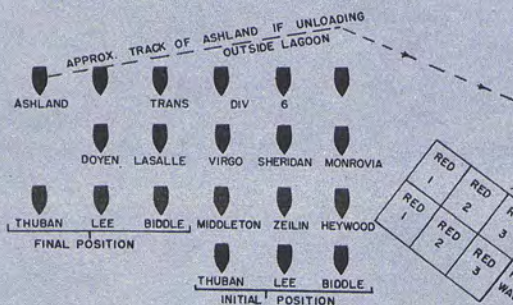
SHOWING TRANSPORT AREA, LINE OF DEPARTURE AND LANDING BEACHES 20 NOV 43



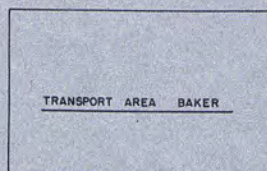
MAP I

TAKEN FROM 2D MAR DIV
SPECIAL ACTION REPORT

TRANSPORT AREA ABLE



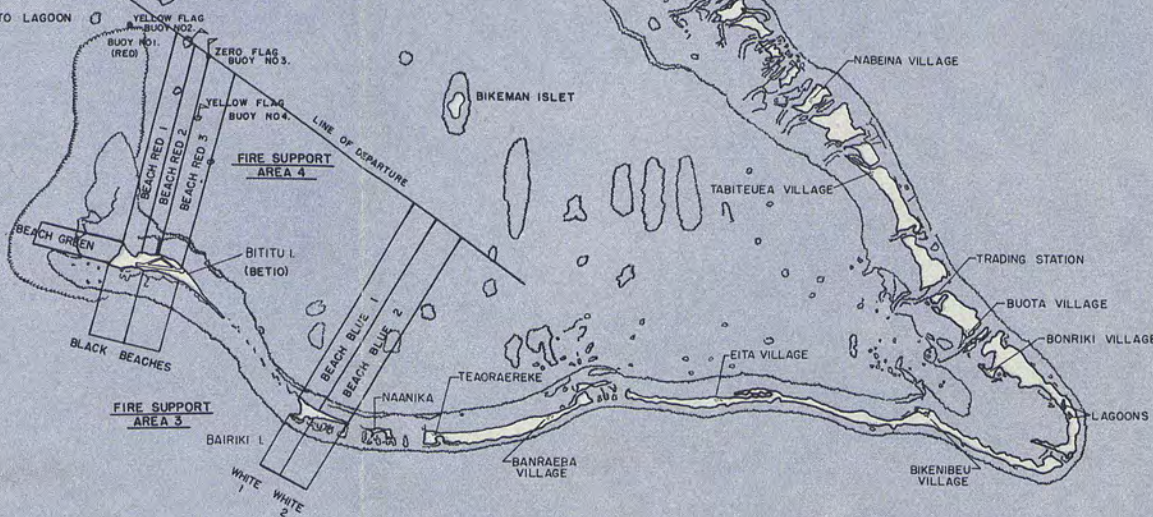
FIRE SUPPORT AREA 1



FIRE SUPPORT AREA 2

FIRE SUPPORT AREA 3

FIRE SUPPORT AREA 4



was clear were two destroyers, the *Ringgold* and the *Dashiell*. Immediately the minesweepers entered the lagoon they were taken under fire by two shore batteries, located about 200 yards east of the long pier, and the *Pursuit* requested the destroyers to lend their assistance. Both destroyers engaged the shore batteries at once and their fire was very effective; temporarily, at least, the shore batteries firing at the minesweepers were silenced. Small boats had accompanied the *Pursuit*, carrying smoke pots. It had been planned to use this smoke to conceal the movement of the first waves of LVT's as they neared the line of departure. The use of the smoke boats was not altogether successful, although the smoke did make it difficult for the Japanese to observe the fires of their batteries and to adjust them.

At 0715 the *Pursuit* took station on the line of departure and turned its searchlight on in the direction of the approaching LVT's in order to provide them with a guide. Meanwhile, the enemy opened fire again with his shore batteries and a number of splashes were observed in the water near the line of departure. At 0706 the *Ringgold* entered the channel leading into the lagoon, piloted by Lt. Gordon J. Webster, an officer of the Royal New Zealand Navy. Five minutes later the ship was hit by an enemy shell, believed to be a 5-inch shell, on the starboard side in the after engine room; fortunately, the shell did not explode. Seconds later, another enemy shell hit the barrel of a forward torpedo mount and glanced off to pass through the destroyer's sick bay and the emergency radio room. Again, this shell failed to explode. Through the smoke and dust, the *Ringgold* could see the flashes of the shore battery believed to be doing the firing. The guns of the ship were trained on the enemy battery and fired. There was a big explosion in the area where the flashes had been seen. Apparently, the ammunition dump of this battery was hit; the battery was silenced.

Meanwhile, the *Pursuit* was tracking the leading waves of the amphibian tractors with radar, and when they were within 5,000 yards of the line of departure, the ship reported them 25 minutes behind schedule. The tractors were moving against a head wind and could not make up the lost time.

In the half-light preceding sunrise, the U. S. S. *Maryland*, the flagship of Task Force 53, had launched her two float planes. In one was Lt. (jg) F. C. Whaley, and piloting the other was Lt. Comdr. R. A. MacPherson. Whaley was to observe gunnery

and MacPherson was instructed to observe the movement of the landing craft toward the beach and to control the use of the screening smoke. By 0730 reports from MacPherson and from the control vessels at the line of departure indicated that the first wave of tractors was behind schedule and would be unable to reach the beach at 0830, the time set for H-Hour. Changing H-hour was necessary, not as a guide for the first waves of the assault landing teams, since they were already on their way and could move only so fast, but as a measure to coordinate naval gunfire and the air strikes. At 0803, Admiral Hill, after consultation with General Smith, announced that H-hour would be at 0845.

Within 10 minutes it became apparent that 0845 was too early; the amphibian tractors were still behind schedule and were well short of the line of departure. At 0824 the first wave crossed the line of departure and headed in toward the beach. Again H-hour was delayed, this time until 0900. It was believed now that the first wave would reach the beach at 0900. Planes began to strafe the landing beaches at 0830 while naval gunfire continued to send salvo after salvo into the smoky burning island of Betio. At 0854 the order was given by Admiral Hill to cease all naval gunfire except for the destroyers inside the lagoon and they were instructed to keep firing until the troops were endangered. Twenty-three minutes were to elapse during which the amphibian tractors moved slowly toward the beaches without a covering barrage of naval gunfire except from the two destroyers mentioned before. The strafing of the planes had stopped temporarily.

There was a good reason, of course, for the cease-fire order. Admiral Hill and General Smith, on the *Maryland*, could see neither the island nor the leading wave of tractors due to the heavy blanket of smoke that hung between the ship and the island. It would have been to invite disaster had the naval gunfire continued without exact knowledge of the position of the first wave of assault troops. The planes made one more strafing run when the tractors were about halfway in to the beach from the line of departure. This strafing run and the fire from the two destroyers in the lagoon was the last support given the assault waves on their way to their respective beaches.

The firing of the support ships prior to H-hour was excellent, as far as it went. The coast defense guns on Betio were silent, the guns destroyed or their



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE 8-INCH GUN EMPLACEMENT overrun by Maj. "Mike" Ryan's men. Palm fronds were used to camouflage these guns, brought from Singapore to strengthen Betio's defenses.

crews killed. Most of the dual purpose antiaircraft guns were neutralized. Many of the antiboat guns were out of action. Unfortunately, however, few of the smaller beach defense guns or pillboxes were destroyed. The machine guns, some of the 37-mm antiboat guns, and the emplacements holding riflemen were still operative and constituted a serious menace to the approaching waves of landing craft. Another item of major importance that could be credited to naval gunfire was the destruction of the enemy's means of communication. The communication system on Betio was completely disrupted. According to some of the prisoners taken later, the W-hour bombardment had broken down the island's communications and control was lost. The Japanese then resorted to the use of runners but the heavy naval gunfire kept them from getting through.

The order for landing issued by Col. David Shoup called for the employment of three of the landing teams under his control in the assault and one team in reserve. Attached to the 2d Marines was the 2d

Battalion 8th Marines, commanded by Maj. Henry P. Crowe and this reinforced battalion was assigned the mission of landing on Beach Red 3, to the left, or east, of the long pier which extended from the north side of the island for some 500 yards. On the right of Crowe's battalion was that of Lt. Col. Herbert Amey, the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines. Amey was to land his battalion on Beach Red 2, on the right, or west, of the long pier. This beach was about 500 yards wide and its right flank rested on that part of the western portion of the northern side of the island where the shoreline makes a deep indentation. On Amey's right was the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines (Lt. 3/2), commanded by Maj. John F. Schoettel. This battalion was to land on Beach Red 1 on the western end of the north side of Betio. The beach was about 500 yards wide with a shoreline shaped like a crescent. In reserve for the regiment was the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, commanded by Maj. Wood B. Kyle.

All three of the assault battalions were delayed

while debarking from their transports, due to the movement of the ships from the area where they had first stopped to an area farther north. After the first waves were away from the transports in LCVP's, they had to transfer to the LVTs which would carry them to the beach. Finally, after a great deal of confusion, the troops were loaded in the amphibian tractors and reached the rendezvous area to the northwest of the entrance to the lagoon. There the waves were formed and the tractors were guided to the line of departure marked by the *Pursuit*. At 0824 the first wave crossed the line and headed toward the beach. Three minutes later the second wave of tractors crossed the line, and at 0830 the third wave was dispatched by the control vessel. The fourth wave was still boated in small boats (LCVP's and LCM's). It waited at the line for orders to go in.

Between the line of departure and the fringing reef which guarded the north side of Betio, the waves began to receive fire from the beach. About

3,000 yards from the beach the tractors came under air bursts, but these were not effective, due to the heavy charge in the shells which broke the cases into shrapnel almost as small as sand. Then came long-range machine-gun fire but still the tractors moved on toward the reef and the island. So far none of the tractors had been hit.

THE LANDINGS

The first unit to reach its beach was the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. At 0910 the tractors of this team crawled up on the coral sand of Red 1, located at the west end of the north side of the island. The first three waves were hit hard by machine gun and antiaircraft fire, damaging most of the tractors. Company I, upon climbing out of its LVTs, clambered up over the log barricade and began to advance inland on the right half of the beach. At the dividing line between Red 1 and Red 2 there was a Japanese strongpoint and the fire from it was raking the flank of the 3d Battalion. Company K was hit before it

AFTER THE BATTLE. This is how the same emplacement, pictured before, looked.



could reach the temporary protection of the log barricade. During the next 2 hours the two companies were to lose over half of their men. Meanwhile L Company and the mortar platoon came in as far as they could in their boats. About 500 yards from the beach, the boats ran aground on the reef and the troops were forced to get out and start wading toward the beach. While in the water, this company was hit hard by machine gun and antiboat fire, which caused casualties amounting to over 35 percent.

The next battalion to reach its beach was the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, on Red 3. Its leading tractors climbed out of the water at 0917. From 3,000 yards out until the leading waves had crossed the reef and were within 200 yards of the beach, the air was filled with bursts from enemy 3-inch shells. In the assault were E Company and F Company, with one platoon of G Company close behind. Two of the amphibian tractors, upon reaching the beach, found a break in the sea wall and crawled through with their troops still aboard and got as far as the south side of the northwest taxiways and the main strip. All the rest of the tractors were stopped by the barricade and the troops were forced to dismount there. Out of 522 men, fewer than 25 became casualties on the way in to the beach and during the time the troops were climbing out of the amphibian tractors. Five of the six officers in Company E were wounded or killed as they hit the beach. Company E landed on the right portion of Red 3 on a 200-foot front. On the left, and with its left flank extending to the Burns-Philp pier, was Company F. The platoon from Company G came in behind E and began cleaning out snipers left behind by that company; E moved rapidly across the taxiway and on toward the main air strip in its zone of action. It is possible that one reason why Maj. "Jim" Crowe was able to get his first waves ashore with very light casualties, was because the two destroyers in the lagoon, the *Ringgold* and the *Dashiell*, continued to fire after the other support ships had ceased firing, and these two ships laid down a blanket of destruction on a large part of Crowe's beach until about 7 minutes before the troops actually landed.

At 0922 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, reached Beach Red 2. From the reef on in, the assault companies were under heavy antiboat-gun and machine-gun fire. Company E, less one platoon, managed to reach the right half of Red 2 but enemy fire was so intense that only a shallow foothold on the western part of

the beach could be established. The 1st Platoon of L Company was driven off its course on the way in and became separated from the rest of the company. This platoon landed over on Beach Red 1 under heavy fire and took refuge in a large bomb crater. From this crater, the platoon engaged nearby enemy strong points but could not move from its position to join its parent company or elements of the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, to its right. Company F landed on the eastern half of Beach Red 2 after suffering heavy casualties in reaching the beach. At first, it was impossible for this company to contact E Company over to the west; a small beachhead, about 50 yards in depth, was gained but further attempts to move forward failed due to the intense fire delivered by enemy machine guns and riflemen in front of the company. Between the two assault companies of the 2d Battalion, Company G, the reserve company, less one platoon, made its way ashore and organized a small foothold, joining contact on the left with Company E.

Behind the first three waves of the landing teams—the waves loaded in amphibian tractors—were the other waves boated in LCVP's. At the time when the first waves crossed the fringing reef, it was discovered that the reef was partly exposed, covered in some places with 2 or 3 feet of water; in other places the water over the reef could be measured in inches. In effect, the reef acted as a barrier, excluding all craft except the amphibian tractors, and the waves of troops loaded in small boats had no way to reach the beach except to transfer to the tractors when they returned from their initial trips to the beach, or to wade ashore. Some of the later waves transferred some units to the tractors, others, and in some cases as much as an entire landing team was involved, waded the 400 or 500 yards of fire-swept water. As a result, there was a great deal of confusion at the reef and in the space between the reef and the shore. Units became separated, troops were mixed, officers lost contact with their units, and there was a serious break-down in control. Few reserve units landed on the beach as a fighting team; platoons and sections lost sight of their parent units and intermingled with other units. Much of the efficiency normally associated with a battalion landing team was lost as a result of this unfortunate situation.

Lt. Col. Herbert Amey was in command of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines. When his first three waves in amphibian tractors left the line of depart-

ture, Amey was in an LCM with the forward echelon of his command post group. Among those with him was Lt. Col. Walter I. Jordan, an observer from the 4th Marine Division. After the third wave left the line of departure, Amey followed with his group in the LCM. Upon reaching the reef, it was found that the boat could not go any farther; there was not enough water over the reef to float the LCM clear. Lieutenant Colonel Amey then secured two LVT's and transferred his group to the tractors. At this time the immediate area was under heavy enemy fire and the two LVT's were soon separated. The amphibian tractor, with Amey, Jordan, and about 13 other officers and men aboard, then headed in toward Beach Red 2. About 200 yards out from the beach the tractor was forced to stop because of a barbed wire entanglement ahead, and the group climbed over the side of the LVT and started to wade on in. Just before the group reached the barbed wire, it was hit by heavy machine gunfire from its right front. Lieutenant Colonel Amey was killed instantly and three others were casualties. The remainder of the group waded and swam to the protective lee of an abandoned boat. There was no other officer present to take over the command of the landing team; the executive officer of the team was with another wave and was deflected to Beach Red 1. Lieutenant Colonel Jordan announced at this time that he, the senior officer present, would assume command until such time as Maj. Howard Rice, the executive officer, could get ashore. Then the little group started to wade on in to the beach and at about 1000 set up a command post in a shell hole on Red 2. There was no way to communicate with other units. The radios were inoperative, either from immersion in the salt water, or because they were riddled with machine-gun bullets. Shortly after the command post began to operate, runners reported from the three companies. Their reports were gloomy. The three companies were pinned down by enemy machine-gun fire from their front and flanks and sniper fire from the trees in the area. The depth of the beachhead of the landing team was about 75 yards and its width was roughly 300 yards.

Behind the assault landing teams of the 2d Marines, and in radio communication with his battalion commanders initially, Col. David Shoup and his staff watched the waves move ashore. At this time Colonel Shoup's party was boated in an LCVP, and upon reaching the reef, found that the boat could not go on in to the shore. A nearby amphibian tractor

carrying a load of wounded men out from the beach was hailed and Colonel Shoup had the wounded transferred to an LCVP to be taken on out to a ship. Then he, Lt. Col. Evans F. Carlson, an observer, Maj. T. A. Culhane, Commander Nelson, the regimental surgeon, and Lt. Col. Presley M. Rixey, artillery commander, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, climbed into the amphibian tractor and headed in toward the left half of Beach Red 2. Before the tractor had gone far, it came under heavy machine-gun cross-fire and intermittent antiboat gun fire and was forced to withdraw to the end of the pier. Next the tractor went around the east end of the pier and joined a wave of LCM's carrying medium tanks toward Beach Red 3. When this wave was within 100 yards of the shore, the enemy opened fire with two 77-mm. guns scoring direct hits on 2 of the boats of the tank wave. One boat sank and the other was forced to withdraw in sinking condition. Obviously, this was no place to attempt to land the regimental command post group, so the tractor turned around and went back to the end of the pier to try another landing on Red 2. About halfway along toward the beach, at about 1030, the engine stopped and the group was forced to dismount and wade over to the shelter of the pier.

As early as 1000 Colonel Shoup began to worry about the 3d Battalion over on Red 1. The assault companies were in partial communication with their landing team commander, Maj. John F. Schoettel. He was with his fourth wave which was boated in LCVP's and LCM's. At 0959 Colonel Shoup received this message from Schoettel:

Receiving heavy fire all along beach. Unable to land all. Issue in doubt.

Eight minutes later Schoettel again radioed Shoup:

Boats held up on reef of right flank Red 1. Troops receiving heavy fire in water.

To this, Shoup replied:

Land Beach Red 2 and work west.

Schoettel's reply was extremely disheartening:

We have nothing left to land.

All reports from the landing teams ashore mentioned heavy casualties and although it was difficult at first to decide where the first of the reserve teams should be landed, the fragmentary reports indicated that things were going better on Crowe's beach than

the other two. At 0958, Colonel Shoup ordered his combat team reserve, the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, commanded by Maj. Wood B. Kyle, to land on Beach Red 2 and work its way to the west to assist the 3d Battalion. Kyle left the line of departure and got as far as the reef with his waves loaded in boats. At the reef Kyle was informed by the boat flotilla commander that the troops would have to transfer to LVT's. There were enough of the amphibian tractors to take Company A and Company B, but C Company had to wait until noon for transportation. The first two waves of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, were hit while landing at about 1130 by heavy enemy fire from the right portion of Beach Red 2 and part of the tractors veered off to the west where they landed on the west part of Red 1 and joined the Marines fighting there. This group from the 1st Battalion which landed on Red 1 consisted of 1 officer and about 110 men. The rest of the landing team landed on the left half of Red 2 and suffered heavy casualties while landing.

3D BATTALION, 8TH MARINES IS COMMITTED

Gen. Julian C. Smith, at his command post out on the U. S. S. *Maryland*, kept abreast of the situation through the radio messages. From the reports received aboard the ship, it appeared that a fairly good toe-hold had been secured on the beach and that it was time to think about committing more troops. At 1018 the division radioed Col. Elmer E. Hall, the commanding officer of the 8th Marines, to send his 3d Battalion to the line of departure where it would pass to the control of Colonel Shoup.

At 1103 the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, at the line of departure and in contact with Colonel Shoup, who had been notified that the landing team was now under his command, received orders from Colonel Shoup to land on Beach Red 3 and support the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines.

The first waves of the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, started in toward Beach Red 3 in their boats but were stopped by the reef and the troops were forced to leave the boats. As soon as the boats grounded on the reef, the coxswains lowered the ramps and the men rushed out over the end to begin wading ashore. Unfortunately, the water was deep, well over a man's head in places, and some of the Marines, loaded with equipment, drowned. The men scattered upon leaving the boats and deployed in a wide formation.

Then the enemy opened up with 40-mm., machine-gun and mortar fire, causing heavy casualties and scattering the formation. Out of the first wave about 100 got ashore and paused to reorganize.

Over on the pier, Colonel Shoup and Colonel Carlson could see what was happening to the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. By waving to the men of the second wave and attracting their attention, Shoup, Carlson, and Rixey directed the remainder of the landing team to come over to the protection of the pier and follow it in to the beach. Considerable time was lost, for the pier was under fire and the men had to wade along its sides, utilizing what little protection was offered. Many of the officers of the companies of the 3d Battalion and a great many of the noncommissioned officers, were either killed or wounded. As a result, the battalion was badly disorganized and shaken by its experience.

The commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, Maj. R. H. Ruud, tried to get his fourth wave in on the west side of the pier on Red 2. The boats got hung up on the reef and began to receive machine-gun fire, so they were withdrawn and joined the fifth and sixth waves to reorganize.

After giving the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, assistance, Colonel Shoup and his party worked their way to Red 2 and found Lieutenant Colonel Jordan who reported that his troops (2d Battalion, 2d Marines), were about 125 yards south of the beach with snipers and cross-fire from blockhouses making progress very difficult.

The operations during the morning had taken a heavy toll of the amphibian tractors. Until the first waves crossed the line of departure everything had gone smoothly. In the first wave were 42 tractors; in the second, 24; and in the third wave there were 21. Near the line of departure, the tractors began to receive fire from shore guns but there were no hits. About 700 yards from the beach, the tractors came under machine-gun fire, but none of the machines was stopped. Then, about 200 yards out from the beach the LVT's received fire from all types of weapons. At least eight tractors were hit and failed to reach the beach. Most of the .50-caliber machine gunners were killed. After discharging their troops the LVT's backed off the beach before turning around in order to get full benefit from their armor protection. A few more tractors were put out of action at this time; the rest backed off into the water and returned to the reef. Upon reaching deep water an undetermined number (estimated to be about

15) sank, due to holes in the hulls caused by rifle, machine-gun, antiboat-gun, and mortar fire. It appeared at this time that there was only one route to the shore that was safe to use, and this route was only relatively safe. It was the boat passage along the west side of the long pier. The amphibious tractors were used thereafter to transport troops and supplies from the end of the pier and from the small boats off the end of the pier to the beach, the inland dumps, and to the front lines.

When the naval gunfire bombardment and the bombing and strafing attacks of the planes were lifted as the first waves approached the beaches, the enemy seemed to recover from his demoralizing shock and began to use every weapon at his disposal. The immediate area of the landing beaches was raked with small-arms, machine-gun, mortar, and grenade fire. From the reef on in to the shore, except for the boat passage next to the west side of the pier, the approach to the beach resembled a trip across a veritable no man's land.

At 1036 Gen. Julian C. Smith radioed to V Amphibious Corps:

Successful landing on Beaches Red 2 and 3. Toe hold on Red 1. Am committing one LT from division reserve. Still encountering strong resistance throughout.

Due to the reef and the murderous hail of fire that blanketed the approaches to the landing beaches, there developed a slowness about the operation that was maddening to the officers and men alike. The attention was unique. In order to defeat the enemy and to seize the island, General Smith had to achieve the numerical superiority ashore demanded by this type of operation.¹ The front lines were only a matter of a few feet inland from the water's edge, so close to the beach in fact that the troops began to fight immediately they walked out of the water and set foot ashore. As the initial waves dismounted from the amphibian tractors they were joined in action with the enemy at once. Then as the first thin lines pushed inland men began to drop out, wounded or dying. The later waves were forced to leave their boats at the reef and wade from there to the beach, a long trip through water suddenly dotted by the spurts kicked up by machine-gun fire. Most of the men stayed as low in the water as possible, offering limited targets to the enemy. Holding their weapons above their heads when they could, the men waded

slowly in, sometimes stumbling in the pot holes in the coral.

This state of affairs resulted in disorganization among the units and control was virtually impossible. To compensate for this lack of control, there was a certain unity of purpose in the minds of the troops. Committed to the danger from enemy fire from the reef on in, the men moved forward anxiously to gain the beach where they could begin to fight back. Many were hit in the water; others kept up the relentless struggle, staggering through the waist-to-shoulder deep water, moving doggedly to join their comrades.

There were no covered routes of approach to the beach. There was no way to get a battalion landing team into the fire fight ashore without running the risk of casualties in the space between the reef and the beach. There was the problem of units scattering and becoming disorganized, or drifting too far to the right or left. These problems offered no easy means of solution.

By noon the situation ashore began to clear up as some measure of order appeared in what had seemed chaos. Colonel Shoup was in partial communication with his landing team commanders. Forward progress was slow, a matter of a few feet at a time, for the enemy kept the Marines pinned down. It was worth a man's life to raise his head a few inches to try to gain a view of the situation to his front. Still, there was no way to employ the firepower of his weapon unless the man did expose himself, however briefly.

From the beach the division command post aboard the U. S. S. *Maryland* received urgent calls. There were requests for bombing and strafing missions; calls for blood plasma and medical supplies; calls for ammunition.

During the early morning of D-day, the situation on Betio was literally cloudy, for the shells from the battleships, the cruisers, and the destroyers, as well as the bombs from the planes, had raised a high column of smoke and dust from the island. As the morning wore on, the smoke from burning emplacements and buildings continued to mask portions of the island so that it was impossible, even from the air, to see much of the island at one time. Neither Colonel Shoup ashore, nor General Smith out on the *Maryland*, could see what was actually going on. Shoup's vision was limited due to the fact that he was pinned down most of the time. General Smith was too far out from the beach to see the fighting, but as regards communications facilities, he was in the right

¹ At least 3 to 1.

place to control his division, his prime responsibility. Fortunately, the general could rely on another man to act as his eyes. Lt. Comdr. Robert A. MacPherson, Admiral Hill's Kingfisher pilot, spent most of the day flying back and forth over the smoldering little island, sometimes accompanied by a representative from the division staff. MacPherson radioed back to the *Maryland* what he saw on the ground and made appropriate recommendations. Lieutenant (jg) Whaley, in the other plane from the *Maryland*, was accompanied by Lt. Col. A. F. Johnston in a flight at 1447, during which the progress of the attack was observed.

From the plane, Colonel Johnston watched for signs of the enemy on Betio, as Whaley flew at tree-top height, but although detail could be observed easily (Johnston could read the license numbers on two Japanese civilian cars), no enemy troops were to be seen except for a few moving laterally behind the sea wall at the west end of Black Beach. It was evident that the Japanese, on the whole, were taking full advantage of cover and concealment.

Later Lt. Col. Jesse Cook, from the division staff, went up with Ensign G. K. French to have a look at the situation.

Besides the landing teams, there was one other unit that landed early in the morning of D-day; in fact, this unit landed prior to the landing teams. In the Headquarters and Service Company of CT 2, there was a small and select group of specially trained riflemen called the Scout-Sniper Platoon, commanded by Lt. William D. Hawkins. In the landing plan for his combat team, Colonel Shoup proposed to use the Scout-Sniper Platoon to clear out machine guns and enemy riflemen on the long pier. Unless this were done, the two landing teams assigned to assault the beaches on either side of the pier would run the chance of being hit in their interior flanks as they moved toward the beach.

Fifteen minutes before any troops reached the shore on Betio, Hawkins and his platoon arrived at the end of the pier and began their hazardous work. With Hawkins' group was Lt. A. G. Leslie with a squad of engineers. Under the covering fire of the scout-snipers, Leslie brought his flamethrower into action against the first of the Japanese positions on the pier. While burning out the Japanese, Leslie set the pier afire. It burned for several hours, resulting in a breach for a distance of 30 to 50 feet being burned completely to the water line. This damage

later complicated the using of the pier as a transfer point for unloading supplies en route from ship to shore.

Not only did the scout-snipers under Hawkins clean up the pier but they then reported to Colonel Shoup ashore and were used many times during the next three days to knock out pillboxes, blockhouses and bunkers.

At about 1530, Lieutenant Colonel Johnston reported back to the division command post aboard the *Maryland* after an aerial flight over Betio during which he had an opportunity to observe the ground action. The picture ashore was as follows:

Along Beach Red 1 it looked as though Marines were inland about 150 yards but not moving. On Beach Red 2 there were few Marines visible except on the left (east) side, where they were packed closely against the first line of enemy revetments and in the shelter of the west side of the pier. On Beach Red 3 the troops seemed packed along the water line. The eastern end of the island seemed desolate; there was no sign of life there. It appeared that about 15 amphibian tractors were abandoned on the beach and the reef; also on the reef were a few landing boats, apparently not in running condition. There was little activity between the line of departure and the beach. Four tanks could be seen near Red 1, but none were moving. So appeared the action on Betio when observed from the air midafternoon on D-day.

Colonel Shoup, at his command post on Red 2, was in communication with Crowe (2d Battalion, 8th Marines), with Jordan (2d Battalion, 2d Marines), Kyle (1st Battalion, 2d Marines), Ruud (3d Battalion, 8th Marines), and with Schoettel (3d Battalion, 2d Marines), but the trouble was that Schoettel was not ashore with his troops and Shoup had no means of knowing how that part of the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines which had landed on Red 1 was getting along. Shoettel could not get his fourth wave ashore on Red 1 and at 1458 had radioed to Shoup:

"CP located on back of Red Beach 1. Situation as before. Have lost contact with assault elements."

The answer to this came not from Shoup, but from General Smith:

"Direct you land at any cost, regain control your battalion and continue the attack."

Earlier Colonel Shoup had called division requesting information on the situation on Red 1 and suggested that a reconnaissance plane be sent over that

end of the island. Ensign French and Lieutenant Colonel Cook left immediately in one of the observation planes from the U. S. S. *Maryland*.

SITUATION ON BEACH RED 1

Although isolated from the other Marines on Betio, those on Beach Red 1 were better off than was suspected. The two assault companies of the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, were separated for a while after landing on Red 1. Enemy fire from the strong point over on the little point of beach on the boundary line between Red 1 and Red 2 had caused heavy casualties in the leading waves and had forced the tractors to scatter. In addition, fire was coming from one or two guns on Green Beach; this fire swept across the western end of Red 1. The Japanese held their fire well while the first waves were approaching, opening up when the LVT's were in very close. Some of the tractors were hit before they got all the way up to the beach barricade just in from the water's edge; others unloaded their troops and backed away to return to the reef before they were hit. Still others, miraculously, were able to get back out to the reef without being hit, but these were few. Command of the scattered elements ashore on Red 1 fell to Maj. Michael P. Ryan. He organized, as best he could, the remnants of K and I Companies and went about the business of clearing out a foothold on the western part of Red 1. Assisting Maj. "Mike" Ryan were Captain O'Brien and Capt. James W. Crain of K Company, and First Lt. Samuel C. Turner of I Company.

For a while K Company was in communication with Major Schoettel who was in a boat out at the reef. Schoettel was behind his fourth wave and was on his way to the beach when he observed the boats carrying the medium tanks, which were to land on Red 1, turning out to sea as though to leave the area. He immediately went to this group and ordered the tanks to go on in to the beach. Out of the six medium tanks that started for the beach, only two got ashore. The tanks had to leave their LCM's at the reef and cross the intervening distance of some 1,200 yards under their own power.

Guiding the tanks were tank reconnaissance men carrying flags to mark potholes in the coral. As one of these men was shot by Japanese on the island, another would take his place. Upon reaching the beach, the tanks found the area from the water's edge to the base of the log barricade littered with wounded and

dead Marines. Accurate enemy fire had the men down behind the barricade; any attempt to crawl over the barricade resulted in a heavy burst of enemy fire on that particular area. The tank men were faced with making the decision of running their heavy tanks over the bodies of the dead and wounded to reach a gap blown in the barricade by the engineers, or going around through the water to reach that gap. They decided on the latter. In moving through the water around the dead and wounded, four tanks were lost in potholes. Only two tanks got up on the island proper.

These two tanks, with the Marines under Major Ryan, began to work over the pockets of resistance on the western half of Red 1 and a part of the northern end of Green Beach. After his trip over to the tank boats, Schoettel returned to the reef and started to go in, but his group came under fire as soon as the boat grounded on the reef.

A part of L Company and a platoon from M Company followed the assault waves in and landed on the right, or west, part of Red 1, being driven to the right on the way in by the fire from the Japanese pillboxes on the boundary of Beaches Red 1 and 2. Major Ryan, in command of all the troops on Red 1, had a mixed group. The heavy and disastrous fire from the above-mentioned strong point split the assault waves of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, and later those of the 1st Battalion. By midafternoon Ryan had what was left of K and I Companies, part of L Company, and a platoon of M Company, all from his own battalion, i. e., 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. In addition there were the following units from the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines: 1st Platoon, E Company; 1st Platoon, G Company; 2d and 3d Platoons, H Company; Battalion Executive Officer and his command group; part of Headquarters Group.

Besides these troops, there was about 110 men and 3 officers from 1st Battalion, 2d Marines who were driven off their course on the way into the beach and landed on Red 1.

The battalion executive officer of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, Maj. Howard Rice, was forced by intense Japanese fire to drift to the right as he and his group attempted to land on Red 2 13 minutes after H-hour. Lieutenant Colonel Amey, the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, had divided his command post personnel into two tactical groups,

one under himself and the other under Major Rice. Both of these groups were fairly complete and each had its own radio. Upon landing on Red 1, Major Rice joined Major Ryan and it was through Rice's radio that Ryan was able to contact Colonel Shoup and advise him of the situation on Beach Red 1.

The mixed group under Ryan worked through the afternoon of D-day to expand the perimeter on the western end of the island. With the medium tanks to lend their fire power, the Marines drove to the south and by late afternoon had cleared an area 500 yards deep and about 150 yards wide.

The farthest point reached during the drive was the antitank ditch, about 300 yards from the south shore. By this time enemy fire from the south and east had become intense. Ryan had no flamethrowers or demolitions. His men could overrun the pill-boxes (and did) but had no means with which to destroy the enemy therein. After the ground was overrun, Japanese popped back up to harass troops from their rear and to prey on stretcher bearers who were carrying the numerous casualties to the northwest point of Betio to be evacuated by tractor.

During the afternoon's drive the two tanks had been invaluable. As a matter of fact, they constituted the only supporting weapons Ryan had. Beyond the tanks, his men had only their individual weapons.

Late in the day, Ryan decided to pull his line back in to enclose a smaller area which he believed he had a better chance to hold through the night.

At 1800 Ryan received a message from Colonel Shoup's command post asking him to report his situation. Ryan called back and reported that the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and other troops were holding a defensive perimeter along some Japanese trenches about 300 yards in from the northwest tip of Betio.

Almost 600 yards of enemy-held ground lay between the Marines on the west end of the island and the nearest troops on Beach 2.

When the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, was ordered ashore, Gen. Julian C. Smith had one landing team left as his reserve out of the six landing teams under his command for the operation. Early in the afternoon, it appeared that it might be necessary to send in the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, the last of the landing teams, to help those already committed. If this were done, General Smith would be left with no reserve except those troops in what was called the support group. This group consisted of the following:

(1) *10th Marines, less detachments:* H&S Battery, less detachments, 4th Battalion.

(2) *18th Marines, less detachments:* Detachment H&S Company, H Company, I Company.

(3) *Special Troops, less detachments:* Division Headquarters, less detachments; Signal Company, less detachments; Military Police Company, less detachments; H&S 2d Tank Battalion, less detachments; D Company (Scout), 2d Tank Battalion Detachment 3d Band Section; One Argus Air Warning Unit.

(4) *Service Troops, less detachments:* Detachment H&S Co., 2d Medical Battalion; E Company, 2d Medical Battalion; A Company, 2d Motor Transport Battalion; Detachments, Service and Supply Company, 2d Service Battalion; Detachment Ordnance Company, 2d Service Battalion.

It may be seen, then, that General Smith would have an assortment of artillerymen, engineers, and other specialists, as his last reserve element. If a crisis arose where the difference between victory and failure might depend upon the troops of the support group, the general would have no choice except to commit them. In the meantime, there was another combat team from the 2d Marine Division still aboard its ships in the transport area off Betio. This was the 6th Marines, the reserve element for V Amphibious Corps, and it was to be committed only on corps order.

At 1331, General Smith radioed Maj. Gen. Holland M. Smith, V Amphibious Corps Commander at Makin, requesting that CT6 be released to the control of the 2d Marine Division.

Then he turned to plan for organizing his support group into provisional battalions. Unless his radio request, concurred in by Admiral Hill, was approved and the 6th Marines released to him, General Smith planned on leading his last reserves into the battle. In his mind, the critical period of the battle was fast approaching, with success or failure hanging in the balance.

Within an hour, a message was received from Maj. Gen. Holland M. Smith granting the request. Col. Maurice G. Holmes, commanding officer of the 6th Marines, was notified of the change in status of his regimental combat team.

Now General Smith could send the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, ashore without worrying about a lack of reserve strength. Col. Elmer E. Hall, commanding officer of CT8, began to boat his headquarters



LEAVING COVER offered by the log beach barricade Marines advance across fire-swept open ground.

personnel and his remaining landing team, the 1st Battalion, commanded by Maj. Lawrence C. Hays, Jr., long before noon. At 1343 Hall's group and the 1st Battalion were ordered to the line of departure to await further orders. An hour later this message was sent from division to Colonel Shoup:

Do you consider a night landing by LT 1/8 suitable and practicable on Beach Green? If not, can reinforcements land on Beaches Red 2 and 3 after dark?

Apparently, this message never reached Colonel Shoup. There is no record that it was answered. This was due, probably, to the frequent break-downs in communication. Many of the radios ashore had received rough treatment during the landing. Some of the sets were wet and had to be dried out thoroughly before they would work; some remained inoperative during the remainder of the operation. Other radios fell victim to shrapnel fragments or rifle bullets. By cannibalizing one set, sometimes another could be made to work. At best, the radios were not altogether dependable. The SCR 300's and 610's, so common in later operations were not available to the 2d Marine Division in time for Tarawa. The division was using the TBX and the TBY; the latter was cursed by radio operators and battalion commanders alike.

The boats of Col. Elmer E. Hall, commander of the 8th Marines, and those of the 1st Battalion, idled at the line of departure during the early afternoon. Finally, at 1625, General Smith sent a message to Colonel Hall directing him to land his remaining elements (i. e., the regiment, less its 2d and 3d Battalions), on the north shore of the extreme eastern end of Betio. The landing beach designated was about 2,500 feet wide at a place where the island narrowed to a distance of from 200 to 500 feet across. The time of the landing was set at 1745. Upon reaching the shore, the scheme of maneuver called for Hall to attack to the northwest. The message never reached Colonel Hall. The message was acknowledged on the *Monrovia* but Hall was not on the ship; he was in a boat at the line of departure, waiting near the *Pursuit* for orders to land. These he believed would come to him via the *Pursuit*. His radio did not pick up division's message.

At 1548 the U. S. S. *Maryland* catapulted its No. 1 observation plane, piloted by Ensign French, accompanied by Lt. Col. Jesse S. Cook, division supply officer; the mission of the flight was to observe the progress of the assault. Col. Merritt A. Edson,

chief of staff of the division, and Lt. Col. A. F. Johnston, the plans and operations officer, contacted the observation plane and requested that French and Cook watch the line of departure and report any movement of boats from that area. It was believed that Hall had received the message from division ordering him to land on the eastern end of the island; division wanted to be kept abreast of the progress of Hall's movement to the beach. It so happened that at this precise moment, a battery of the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, left the line of departure and headed toward Beach Red 2, the beach where the artillerymen were ordered to land. The report came into the division command post on the *Maryland* from the air observers that the wave was not going toward the east end of the island, but was moving toward Red 2. Considerable consternation resulted at the command post but nothing could be done about it. Lieutenant Colonel Johnston accordingly plotted the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, on his situation map as being on Beach Red 2. It wasn't until midnight that division learned that Hall and his troops were still at the line of departure awaiting orders.

TANKS ON D-DAY

Company C, Corps Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Amphibious Corps, arrived at Betio in the U. S. S. *Ashland* (LSD-1). (This company was attached to the 2d Tank Battalion and after Tarawa became an organic part of it. Hereafter in the monograph it will be referred to as being a part of the 2d Tank Battalion, since it was operationally.) The tanks had been loaded at Noumea, New Caledonia, on 3 November. The company joined the 2d Division at Efate. The medium tanks of Company C ran into considerable trouble during D-day. Over on Red Beach 1, the 1st Platoon finally got two tanks on the beach at about 1130. These two tanks, supported by infantry, started an advance to the south which got as far as the antitank ditch about 300 yards from the south side of the western end of the island. During the advance one of the tanks was hit by antiboat gunfire, disabling the turret traverse mechanism. While the tank moved in to destroy the gun, it was hit again this time on the tube of its 75-mm. gun, and was forced to retire. The enemy fire that immobilized the 75-mm. gun on the tank came from a Japanese tank which was promptly put out of action by the other medium tank. Shortly after, the one tank remaining

in action was hit by enemy fire and burned. The disabled tank was used for flank protection on Red 1 for the night; its bow machine gun was still working.

The 2d Platoon landed on Beach Red 3 and found a break in the seawall where the tanks could get up off the beach and move inland. The platoon, with three tanks, moved over to Beach Red 2 to a previously designated assembly area. At 1130 Colonel Shoup directed the tanks to move to the right flank of the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. As they moved to the west, the tanks were waved back by infantry. Finally, the platoon gave its support to a part of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, and helped the advance over to the west runway of the airfield. While working on pillboxes and shelling enemy positions, one tank dropped into a shell hole and could not be retrieved until next morning. Another tank was put out of action by what was believed to be a magnetic mine.

The 3d Platoon of Company C, 2d Tank Battalion, landed on Red 3 without losing a tank. Upon reaching the beach, the platoon commander reported to Major Crowe of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, and was ordered to attack to the south and knock out all enemy positions encountered. During the first hour's operation, one of the tanks was lost when hit by a friendly dive bomber. Shortly afterwards two more tanks were hit, this time by enemy gunfire. One of these tanks dropped into an excavation holding an enemy fuel dump. The dump was set on fire by the dive bombers and the tank was burned. The other tank hit by enemy fire caught on fire and had to be abandoned. Another tank caught on fire and returned to the beach where the fire was extinguished; this tank remained in action throughout the operation. At the end of the day only one of the four tanks of the platoon remained operative.

With Colonel Shoup all during D-day was Lt. Col. Evans F. Carlson, detailed for the Tarawa operation as an observer. Carlson came ashore in the morning in Shoup's LVT and accompanied Shoup to Red 2 where the command post of the 2d Marines was installed. At 1230 Colonel Shoup asked Carlson to make a trip out to the *Maryland* to see General Smith and present to the general and staff a verbal picture of the situation on Betio. Shoup considered this liaison mission necessary to supplement the regular means of communication. Shoup asked Carlson to tell General Smith that he (Shoup) intended to stick and fight it out regardless of how tough the situ-

ation became, and that Red 2 was the beach to use to send reserves ashore. Shoup said that his plan was to expand the beachhead to the south and to link up all the landing teams on all of the beaches. Carlson requested permission to use an amphibian tractor to bring in some of the elements of Ruud's battalion from where they were clinging to the pier. Shoup agreed to this and Carlson left immediately. After carrying in several loads of troops from the end and sides of the long pier, Carlson left his tractor at the reef and took a boat out to the *Pursuit*; there he transferred to a boat going to the *Zeilin* and finally caught another boat which took him over to the *Maryland*. Upon his arrival on the command ship, Carlson then presented his information to General Smith and Colonel Edson.

HERMLE'S MISSION

Early in the afternoon the Assistant Division Commander, Brig. Gen. Leo D. Hermle, was ordered by General Smith to assemble boats and prepare to land his group on order. General Hermle was embarked aboard the U. S. S. *Monrovia*, where he maintained a command post with his own staff. At 1343 General Hermle received the orders which stated that he was to proceed to the end of the pier, form an estimate of the present situation, and report his findings to division. He was instructed that Maj. Rathvon McC. Tompkins was en route to the pier and that he was to contact Tompkins. On the way to the pier, General Hermle radioed to Colonel Shoup, requesting the location of Shoup's command post, but received no answer. At 1740 division received a message from Hermle saying that he had arrived at the end of the pier and was under fire. He had picked up Tompkins on the way. Seventeen minutes later, General Hermle attempted to get a message through to division, but because of communication difficulties was unable to do so. He and his staff were still under fire at the end of the pier and were with elements of the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. Being unable to apprise division of his situation, Hermle sent his information by messenger out to one of the ships so that it could be radioed on to division.

Upon reaching the end of the pier, General Hermle contacted Maj. Stanley E. Larsen, executive officer, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, who was pinned down under the end of the pier with remnants of his headquarters company and two other companies of the battalion. Larsen stated that Major Ruud had

gone forward with Colonel Shoup and the rest of the battalion and that he had been out of communication with Ruud for several hours.

Through intermittent radio communication with Shoup and Crowe, General Hermle learned that their immediate need was ammunition and water. Many casualties were under the pier and in the water. With General Hermle was the assistant division surgeon Capt. French Moore (MC), USN.

Under Moore's direction casualties were collected, given first aid, and then evacuated in boats as supplies were unloaded on the pier. Captain Moore later returned to a transport with a boat load of seriously wounded Marines.

Hermle directed Larsen to form carrying parties from his troops and, as they moved along the pier toward the beach, they were to carry ammunition and water. Throughout the night, supplies arriving at the end of the pier were sent forward along the pier as far as the boats could go and then unloaded by the carrying parties and manhandled to the beach. The Marines in the carrying parties had to wade along the pier through a fire-swept area about 50 yards wide as they approached the beach.

Radio contact with Shoup and Crowe, intermittent thus far, failed completely at about 1930, so General Hermle sent Major Tompkins and Capt. Thomas C. Dutton to find Shoup's command post. They were to find out from Shoup which beaches he thought were best for landing reserve units, and when he wanted the reserves landed.

The distance from the end of the pier to Shoup's position was slightly more than 600 yards, but because the pier and adjacent areas were under Japanese machine-gun and antiboat-gun fire, the trip involved was, of necessity, slow and laborious. Tompkins and Dutton accomplished their mission, but did not return until 0345. Hermle now had his information, but had no means of communicating it to division. Consequently, he and his party moved out in the lagoon to the U. S. S. *Ringgold* and went aboard to use the ship's communication facilities. At 0445 Hermle sent a message to division recommending that the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, land on Beach Red 2 close to the pier; the message never reached division. He also informed division that he was on the *Ringgold* awaiting further instructions. At 0510 General Hermle radioed Colonel Shoup and told him of his recommendation to division. A few minutes later he received a message from General

Smith which instructed him to remain on the *Ringgold* and to come aboard the U. S. S. *Maryland* when the *Ringgold* came alongside.

What General Hermle did not know was that at 1750 General Smith had sent a message to him instructing him to take command of the troops ashore and to report when a command post had been established on the island. This message, because of communication difficulties, never reached Hermle. The command ashore was to remain the responsibility of Colonel Shoup for another day.

When General Hermle left the *Monrovia*, he left behind the ADC-4 group under Lt. Col. Cliff Atkinson, Jr., whose mission it was to coordinate the ship-to-shore movement of supplies under Capt. H. B. Knowles, USN, the transport group commander.

When, following the dispatch from General Smith directing General Hermle to land on Betio and assume command, subsequent dispatches from forces ashore still continued to bear Colonel Shoup's signature, concern was felt on the *Monrovia* for the safety of General Hermle and his staff.



Shoup's dispatches repeated earlier requests for ammunition, water, plasma, etc., and since such material was being sent continuously from the transports with no report of its receipt on the beach, Captain Knowles directed Maj. Ben K. Weatherwax, Assistant D-4, to proceed to the beach, locate General Hermle or Colonel Shoup, and determine the status of supplies ashore.

At 2100, Weatherwax left the *Monrovia* and went to the *Pursuit* where he obtained directions for landing. From the control ship, he then went on in to the pier, landing along its side on the beach side of the gap burned by Lieutenant Leslie early in the day. Weatherwax did not know that General Hermle was at the end of the pier, the part that was separated by the burned-out section from the rest of the main pier. Upon reaching the side of the pier, Weatherwax worked his way to Colonel Shoup's command post and obtained the required information about supplies, desired by Captain Knowles. He made two attempts to get this information through to the *Manrovia* by radio, but had no success. He then made his

way back out on the pier to the landing boat and arrived on the *Monrovia* shortly before dawn. Weatherwax's reconnaissance was duplicated by Tompkins and Dutton who went ashore from Hermle's boat, as mentioned before.

LANDING THE ARTILLERY

It had been planned to land artillery in support of the 2d Marines as soon as a sufficient beachhead had been established by the assault units. The artillery annex to the operation order of the 2d Marines called for the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, to land on Beach Red 1, since this area seemed the only feasible position area from which the artillery could give full support. In command of the battalion, which was a 75-mm. pack howitzer unit, was Lt. Col. P. M. Rixey. As a member of Colonel Shoup's command post group, Colonel Rixey had landed before noon. In the meantime, the batteries of his battalion assembled at the line of departure where they waited for further orders. During the afternoon, it became apparent to

WITH FIXED BAYONETS Marines pause in the cover of the beach barricade before moving out into the open. Wrecked amphibian tractors lie in the water to the left.



both Shoup and Rixey that it would be impracticable to land the artillery on Red 1, and it was finally decided later in the afternoon to bring it ashore on Red 2. Since boats could not cross the reef, it was necessary to procure LVT's. Two gun sections, one from A Battery and one from B Battery, were transferred and ordered in at dusk. Through a misunderstanding that three sections of C Battery were in LVT's, they were also ordered to land. Actually, the C Battery sections were still in boats, but they went to the end of the pier anyway, and the men carried the pieces of their guns along the pier through waist-deep water in to the beach. The A and B sections landed in LVT's on Red 2. At the close of D-day, then, there were five sections of artillery ashore and they were ready to go into position at dawn.

Due to the fact that all the approaches to Betio were under enemy fire, the logistical problem was a difficult one all through D-day. Since small boats could reach the end of the pier, supplies were landed there and some ammunition and water reached the shore through manhandling. A few of the LVT's were still in operation during the afternoon and some supplies were sent directly to the beach in them.

The transports unloaded as quickly as possible all through the day. As a result, the area around the *Pursuit* was filled with loaded boats unable to reach the beach where their cargo could be discharged. There were too few LVT's, still operative, to relieve this congested situation.

EVENING D-DAY

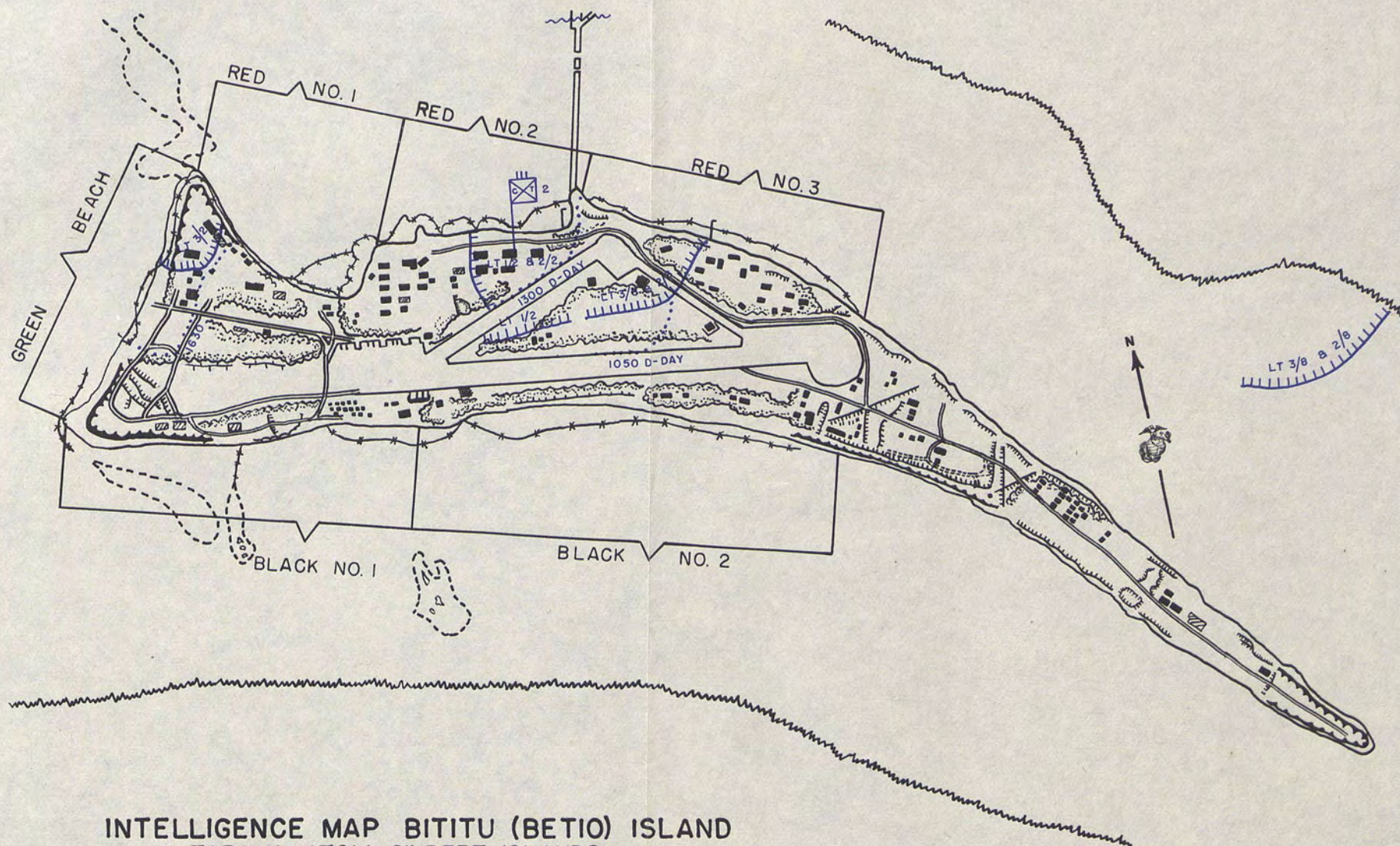
As darkness fell on Betio, the situation of the Marines of the 2d Marine Division ashore was precarious. On the left of the beachhead (looking south) was the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, whose left flank was anchored on the beach just short of the Burns-Philp pier. A part of the battalion landing team was in the eastern portion of the triangular area enclosed by the air strip and its taxiways. Helping to hold the line with the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, was that part of the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines which had reached the shore during the afternoon. Next on the beachhead line, and on the right of Crowe's battalion, were the troops of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines. There was no continuous line; the defensive perimeter was held by small groups of men who occupied shell holes and covered positions in the western part of the before-mentioned triangular area. The positions continued

in a northerly direction from the west taxiway over to about the center of Red 2. The ground west of these positions remained in Japanese hands, except for the foothold on the northwestern tip where Maj. "Mike" Ryan and the mixed troops under his command were dug in for the night. Most of the work done during the afternoon had been directed toward expanding the initial positions of the assault troops and in attempting to join contact in order to form a defensive perimeter by sundown. Most of the Marines prepared for the night with the feeling that a Japanese counterattack was inevitable. Even out on the control vessels and on the ships in the transport area there was a restless feeling that any moment during the night, reports would come in saying that the Japanese were attempting to force the Marines back into the sea. Despite the universal apprehension there was no counterattack. The first night ashore on Betio saw remarkable fire discipline. There was no promiscuous shooting. What little firing was done happened only when a wandering Japanese stumbled near the fox holes of the Marines. Out on the *Maryland* the staff of the division listened for reports of rifle fire announcing an enemy counterattack. They were relieved when the night passed quietly.

According to Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith, Japanese General Shibasaki made his greatest mistake by not counterattacking the slim Marine beachhead during this night. Never again was it so vulnerable. Shibasaki's failure to counterattack may be traced, probably, to a break-down in control. Naval gunfire had disrupted his communications so that he was never able to control his units after early morning of D-day. He was killed on the second day of fighting on Betio.

Colonel Shoup's Japanese language officer, Capt. Eugene P. Boardman noted that: "Strangely enough, the naval troops on Tarawa used no field message blanks. In previous operations, as on Guadalcanal, field message blanks constituted a prominent part of the 'take' of captured Japanese documents. This total absence of message blanks surprised us. It showed, I believe, the complete doctrinal reliance of the defenders of Betio upon wire communication and indicated a lack of training in using runners. The effectiveness of the preliminary naval bombardment in breaking up the Japanese wire communication system was possibly all the more fateful on this account."

..... ADVANCES DURING DAY
 ||||| POSITIONS AT SUNSET



INTELLIGENCE MAP BITITU (BETIO) ISLAND TARAWA ATOLL, GILBERT ISLANDS

SITUATION 1800 D-DAY



MAP 2

TAKEN FROM 2D MAR DIV
 SPECIAL ACTION REPORT

NOTE: LINES ARE GENERAL INDICATION ONLY.
 GAPS WERE COVERED BY SMALL GROUPS
 AND BY FIRE. SECONDARY LINES WERE
 ESTABLISHED WHERE POSSIBLE BEHIND
 FRONT LINES.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

The Second Day, 21 November 1943

CHAPTER III

1ST BATTALION, 8TH MARINES, LANDS

COL. ELMER E. HALL, commanding officer of the 8th Marines, with his headquarters group and the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, spent the night near the control vessel at the line of departure. As had been related, Hall did not receive the message from division sent during the afternoon of D-day instructing CT 8 and LT 1/8 to land on the eastern end of Betio. After waiting for several hours at the line of departure, Hall finally received a message from division at 0200 on the morning of 21 November requesting information as to the whereabouts of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, and the condition of the troops. Hall replied that the battalion landing team was resting easy in its boats near the *Pursuit*. Two and one-half hours later Hall received another message from division, this time ordering the same landing on the eastern end of the island planned the day before. The landing was to be made at 0900, and Hall was to make arrangements with the control vessel at the line of departure to mark a new line from which the boats would depart, well to the east of the present line. While Hall was making preparations to carry out this order, division received a message from the assistant division commander, Brigadier General Hermle, now on the *Ringgold*. With Hermle were Tompkins and Dutton; it will be recalled that these two officers had talked with Colonel Shoup at his command post ashore the night before. On the basis of what Shoup had told Tompkins, Hermle radioed division:

"Shoup desires 1/8 to land on Beach Red 2."

This message was sent at 0513. A few minutes later, Colonel Hall received new instructions from division. CT 8 and LT 1/8 were to land on Red 2 at

once. When ashore, LT 1/8 was to attack to the west.

At 0615 the first wave of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, climbed out of its boats at the reef, about 500 yards out from the beach, and started to wade in to Red 2. The first four waves of the landing team came in in normal landing formation and came directly into the fire-swept zone north of the strong-point on the boundary line of Red 1 and Red 2. Casualties were very heavy. From the reef in, each wave was hit by machine gun fire from both flanks and the troops that reached the beach were badly disorganized. As the first wave arrived on the beach, Colonel Shoup sent the men over to reinforce the units holding the right portion of the beachhead. By 0800, Maj. L. C. Hayes, Jr., the battalion commander, had over half of his team ashore and under cover; he then reported to Shoup for orders. Shoup instructed Hays to feed his landing team into the line on the west part of Red 2, and when in the line and fully reorganized, to attack to the west to establish contact with the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. The rest of the morning was spent getting the troops moved up into position for the forthcoming attack. All flamethrowers, demolitions, and other heavy equipment were lost en route to the beach.

With the coming of dawn on the second day of the fight for Betio, sharp bursts of small arms fire served notice that the bitter action of the day before was to continue with unabated vigor. Aware that his best chance for success lay in splitting the enemy forces and expanding the beachhead as quickly as possible, Colonel Shoup directed the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines, to attack to the south with the mission of seizing the south coast of the island.

There was little opportunity for any of the units on Betio to do any tactical maneuvering. There were



ADVANCING AROUND THE END of a barbed-wire entanglement, these Marines are rushing to the next cover available.

no ground forms large enough to provide cover for forming up an attack. The only cover or concealment offered the Marines was that afforded by shell holes, destroyed enemy emplacements, fallen coconut trees, and the scattered piles of battle detritus littering the scant beachhead. Often the advance of a unit was occasioned by two or three men working their way forward by fire and movement to where they could throw grenades into an enemy bunker, or deliver a sudden burst of automatic fire into an enemy position. Engineer personnel, attached to the rifle companies, tied blocks of TNT together and hurled them into blockhouses and pillboxes. The men handling the flamethrowers would work their way up near an enemy position and, while covered by riflemen, then suddenly jump up and run to the entrance, spray the area with flame, and drop back to the nearest position of safety while the riflemen

mopped up. If these attempts were successful, i. e., if the Marines attacking the positions lived long enough to complete their task, then sometimes a whole platoon would be able to move forward a few more feet.

1ST BATTALION, 2D MARINES

On the morning of the second day on Betio, Maj. Wood B. Kyle, of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, had about 300 men of his landing team on the western part of the beachhead inland from Red 2. Two of Kyle's companies were over in the triangle formed by the airfield; another joined with them on their right and extending over to the beach, and his weapon company was in reserve. Early in the morning, the machine gun platoon was sent up to Company C north of the west taxiway, and from advanced positions brought fire to bear on a number of Japanese



JAPANESE COMMAND POST with enemy tank in foreground. Shells and bombs had little effect on this reinforced concrete structure.

machine guns to the west which denied the open ground caused by the taxiway. The enemy had set up these guns during the night to sweep the taxi strip, and by so doing, isolated Companies A and B over in the triangle. With the enemy machine guns silenced, contact was reestablished with the two companies and then C Company was ordered to start a drive to the south. Mixed in with the troops of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, were men from units of the 8th Marines, from the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, and other organizations. During the morning carrier-based planes came in to bomb and strafe the area south of the main air strip. Early in the afternoon, Companies A and B of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, and most of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines (i. e., what was left of the waves that had reached the shore on D-day), crossed the main runway and occupied the empty defensive positions along the south shore. Later, the remainder of the 1st Battalion moved over to join the troops south of the air strip.

2D BATTALION, 2D MARINES

Around noon on this day, Lt. Col. Walter I. Jordan, in command of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, reported to Colonel Shoup that he had sent out runners to contact his elements over in the triangle and that none of the runners had reported back. Jordan was not in contact with the above elements by radio. Colonel Shoup directed Jordan to move his command post over to the south side of the island and regain control. At 1600 Jordan arrived over south of the main strip and found the following units, which he immediately assumed command:

Captain Williams (Company B), with about 60 men.

Captain Clanahan (Company C), with about 70 men.

Captain Tynes (Company E), with about 100 men.

A unit of Regimental Weapons, with about 100 men.

PRIZE ON BETIO was the airfield, crossed on the second day of the battle by the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines. Naval gunfire was purposely controlled to avoid hitting the airfield so as not to destroy it.



One platoon of machine guns from Company H. About 10 men from Company F.

The troops named above arrived on the south coast with little ammunition, no water, and no rations. There were strong Japanese positions to the east and to the west of the defensive perimeter set up by the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines. Soon after reaching the south side of the island, the Japanese counterattacked from the east, causing heavy casualties. After Lieutenant Colonel Jordan joined the group, a phone wire was laid to connect the two landing teams with Colonel Shoup's command post. Before Jordan crossed the island, Colonel Shoup instructed him to try to advance on the left in order to join forces with Major "Jim" Crowe's battalion. Immediately upon reaching the troops on the south side, Jordan contacted Williams and Clanahan and discussed the planned attack with them. Due to the lack of ammunition and the heavy enemy resistance from the east, it was agreed that the attack was not feasible at this time. Jordan then called Shoup on his phone and told him of the situation, and Shoup granted permission to delay the attack until the following morning. Then Shoup sent amphibian tractors across the island with ammunition, food, and water; on their return trip the tractors evacuated about 30 wounded men. At 1800 Major Kyle joined Jordan at the latter's command post over on the south side and, since most of the troops in the area were from the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, Jordan turned over command to Kyle after explaining the present situation and the proposed plan for next morning. At this time, contact with Shoup was broken. There was no radio in working order at Jordan's command post and the telephone wire had been severed. Jordan, after turning over the command to Kyle, left with two wiremen and worked over to Shoup's command post, laying a new wire. Upon arriving at the command post of Colonel Shoup, Jordan reported what had happened to Shoup and Col. Merritt A. Edson, the division chief of staff, who was now at Shoup's headquarters.

GREEN BEACH IS SECURED

Over on Beach Red 1, Major "Mike" Ryan prepared, on the morning of the second day, to drive to the south in order to secure Green Beach, the entire west end of the island. On the southwest corner of the island the Japanese had emplaced 12 antiaircraft

guns and 2 naval-turret guns of 5-inch caliber. Protecting these positions were numerous machine-gun positions and rifle pits. Enclosing the whole area was an antitank ditch which reached from Green Beach over to the south shore. The naval gunfire preliminary to the landing on Betio had neutralized or destroyed the 5-inch guns and most of the antiaircraft guns. However, Ryan felt that before attacking the Japanese remaining in the area, more naval gunfire should be placed on the positions. With Ryan was Second Lt. Thomas N. Greene, a naval gunfire spotter, and Greene had his radio with him. While Ryan explained his plan to attack to the south in order to secure the whole of Green Beach to the officers and many of the men from the different units now under his control, Greene made preparations to call fires in on the southwestern part of the island. Finally at 1110, Ryan and his men attacked, effectively supported by two medium tanks. Greene had contacted a destroyer and called her fires directly on the enemy positions. Shortly afterward another destroyer added her fires to those of the first. Greene observed and conducted the fire of the ships from a Japanese concrete emplacement that still remained standing on the northern part of Green Beach. When enough of a naval gunfire preparation had been placed to satisfy Ryan, Greene gave the order to cease fire, and Ryan and his troops moved out in attack. Little resistance was offered, and within an hour all of Beach Green was secured. Over on the south shore, Ryan could look east along the beach and see the Japanese positions that were still occupied by the enemy. The elements of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines, were not visible. Ryan now turned to building up a defensive line across the west end of the island about 200 yards inland from Green Beach.

CROWE'S BATTALION

On the east end of the beachhead, Major Crowe was unable to take much ground during the second day of the battle for Betio. Crowe's battalion, the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, was deployed with Company F on the left, facing almost due east. This company had its left flank on the beach (Red 3) just short of the Burns-Philp pier and to its front were several partially destroyed buildings, a reinforced steel emplacement on past the pier, and a large bombproof shelter inland and to its front. Over to the right (south) of F Company was a small group of shore party personnel and some stray Marines

from different units, organized into a provisional unit by First Lt. Orlando A. Palopoli. Then on to the south and within the triangle of the airfield was Company E, and the remnants of Companies I and K of LT 3/8.

When the 2d Platoon of Company F attempted to move up and destroy the steel emplacement on D-day, the enemy laid down such a withering fire that the group was almost wiped out. E Company had been successful in penetrating the triangle and had moved over to the north side of the main air strip only to withdraw late in the day in order to tie in its lines with adjacent units for the night. On D-plus-1-day, Company F again tried to advance but had little success. The company was exposed to enemy fires in its positions along the beach and Major Crowe finally ordered it to withdraw to better positions and placed a 37-mm. gun on the beach to provide protection against enemy tanks or personnel. No advance was made in the triangle on the second day and at dusk the units there still had no contact on their right with friendly troops. During the day the remainder of Company G reported and was divided to support Company K and Company F. At dusk a 12-man patrol was sent forward on the left flank to deny the enemy the opportunity of reoccupying the Burns-Philp pier. During the night this group killed 15 of the enemy at the expense of 2 casualties to itself. The best that the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, could do during the second day was to strengthen its positions and prepare for the next day's attack.

SUPPLY SITUATION

Lt. Col. Evans F. Carlson, an observer for this operation, had acted as Colonel Shoup's liaison officer with division on D-day. In the afternoon, as described before, Carlson left Shoup's command post on Red 2 and made his way out to the *Maryland*, where he talked with General Smith and the division staff about the situation ashore. Early in the morning of the second day, Carlson made the trip back to the beach to find Shoup again. Reaching the area off Red 2 at daylight, Carlson saw the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, go in on Red 2 with heavy casualties. Carlson joined Colonel Hall until he could get an

PREPARING TO RUSH THE NEXT PILLBOX. Men of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, take cover while Betio smolders in the background.





LVT to take him the rest of the way in to the beach. When an LVT had been secured and Carlson was on his way, he noticed a large amount of supplies on the end of the long pier. Enemy fire from east of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, on Red 3, was hitting the pier and the area around it, pinning down a large group of men who, apparently, were trying to move the supplies ashore. Shoup was found at his command post, about 30 yards inland on Red 2. The command post was built against the side of a Japanese air-raid shelter which still contained about 25 of the enemy. Sentries posted at the entrances prevented these Japanese from escaping. Shoup told Carlson that all positions had been held through the night of D-day by each landing team providing its own security. Colonel Rixey now had five sections of his artillery battalion ashore and was already firing his pack howitzers. Shoup said that his greatest need at this time was for water and ammunition. The situation had changed little since Carlson had left the island the day before. Flamethrowers and bundles of TNT were being used successfully to destroy some of the enemy strong points.

Shoup asked Carlson to act again in a liaison capacity in the afternoon and to report to General

Smith out on the *Maryland*. Carlson reached the end of the pier about noon and found Lt. Col. C. J. Salazar, the shore party commander, waiting in a boat to get ashore.

A plan was then worked out to assemble all LVTs still in working condition and establish a shuttle service from the end of the pier to the beach.

After unloading supplies on the beach, the amphibian tractors would carry a load of wounded men out to the end of the pier where they could be transferred to LCVP's to be taken on out to the ships. Boats from the ships would operate as far as the end of the pier, which they could reach without grounding on the reef. In effect, what this plan proposed was to set up a false beach as a transfer area. To control the flow of supplies so that items of critical importance would be sent in first, priorities would be established by the man in command of the troops ashore, Col. David Shoup. Other supplies would be accumulated on the pier to await calls from the beach.

Maj. Ben Weatherwax, assistant to Lt. Col. Jess Cook, D4, had made a trip to Beach Red 2 at 2200 on D-day to find out what he could about the supply situation and what supplies were needed most. The

STOPPED AT THE BEACH BARRICADE. This LVT was put out of action by enemy fire on Beach Red 1.





SUPPLIES STACKED ON PIER were manhandled to dumps on Beach Red 2 from which they were distributed to the battalions.

was done on the orders of Capt. H. B. Knowles, USN, transport group commander, to whom Weatherwax was attached.

Capt. J. B. McGovern, USN, commander of Transport Group 4, had been sent to the *Pursuit* to take charge of the ship-to-shore situation and obtain control where it was needed most. McGovern rounded up 18 amphibian tractors with which to begin the shuttle service, mentioned previously.

It was through the efforts of Salazar, McGovern, Carlson, Weatherwax, and Maj. George L. H. Cooper, that the supply situation gradually began to clear up as control was established.

On the *Maryland*, Carlson talked with Colonel Edson, chief of staff, and Edson told him that the situation on Betio was beginning to progress very favorably. Edson said that Ryan had secured Green Beach, that troops in the center of the island had crossed to the southern side and that the island west of Red 3 was now in the hands of the Marines. He also stated that the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, would land on Green Beach that evening and that another landing team from the 6th Marines would land on the adjacent island of Bairiki, to the east of Betio. Edson also said that the division command post would move ashore that evening and that he (Edson) would join Shoup at the command post of CT 2 for a conference.

At 1158 the following message was received on the *Maryland* from the assistant division commander, Brigadier General Hermle, on the U. S. S. *Ringgold*:

Supply summary about as follows: Captain McGovern has been on the *Pursuit* all morning making every effort to forward ammunition, water, rations to Beach Red 1 and 2. These supplies boated and are in the lagoon area. Division quartermaster sent in with working party to gather supplies from various boats in lagoon and deliver Red 1 and 2. Three (3) LVT's dispatched 1145 with 75-mm. gun ammunition for Beach Red 2. Division quartermaster and McGovern are working together to land all working parties and supplies now in lagoon area.

THE PACK HOWITZERS

Two of Lt. Col. P. M. Rixey's pack howitzers had gone into action early in the morning of the second day. While the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, was moving in from the reef to Beach Red 2, the Japanese began to deliver devastating fire into the approaching troops from two blockhouses located on the beach at the dividing line between Red 1 and Red 2; this was the same strong point that had given the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, so much trouble on the previous day. Two of the pack howitzers which had been

landed during the night were laid to place direct fire on the blockhouses where the Japanese were using machine guns on the wading troops of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines. These guns were silenced by the howitzers which used fuse delay in order to penetrate the coral and log structures. By 0800 the whole composite battery of the 75-mm. pack howitzers was in position facing to the east with the guns laid to support the troops in the triangle. Because of a mask to the left front of the battery, close support could not be given to the left flank elements of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, on Red 3. The total frontage of the battery was about 50 yards and the right flank gun was well out in enemy territory. The entire battery was exposed to enemy rifle fire. By using rubber boats and life rafts, and by manhandling some of the guns the length of the pier, all of the artillery battalion got ashore during the day. For its first night ashore, the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, placed one

section to cover the beach junction of Red 1 and 2. Two more sections were put into positions to cover grounded Japanese vessel which lay off Red 2; it was believed that this ship was occupied by enemy snipers on the second day and several bombing and strafing attacks had been called on the vessel during the day. These two sections were also to cover disabled American craft in the event they were occupied by Japanese snipers. The rest of the guns were laid to provide fire on the eastern part of the island.

THE 6TH MARINES

Although V Amphibious Corps had released the 6th Marines to the control of the 2d Marine Division, General Smith had not seen fit to commit any part of it until he had more definite information on the progress of the situation ashore on Betio. At

BATTLE JETSAM on Beach Red 2. The tractor on the log wall was hit while attempting to carry its load of Marines up on the island.



time during the morning of the second day was there any reason for any optimism on the part of division or Colonel Shoup. In anticipation of several possible missions that might be assigned the 6th Marines, General Smith called for a conference on the *Maryland* at 0900, to be attended by the commanding officer of the 6th, Col. Maurice G. Holmes, and a part of his staff. At this conference, the several missions upon which the 6th Marines might be employed were discussed. Holmes left the conference with the understanding that he was to prepare to accomplish any of the missions discussed and await further orders from division. Holmes then returned to his ship and called his battalion commanders to join him so that he could brief them on the subjects discussed at the earlier conference. While Holmes was talking to his battalion commanders, he received a message from division directing Holmes to land one of his teams in rubber boats on Green Beach South immediately. It was suggested by division that the landing team land in a column of companies and, after reaching the shore, to pass through the troops of the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and attack to the east. In addition, Holmes was directed to boat another landing team which was to be prepared to land in close support of the first team. The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, under Maj. W. K. Jones, was chosen by Holmes to make the rubber boat landing and LT 2/6, to be prepared to land behind Jones.

At 1303 a message reached division that a few Japanese were trying to cross the long, partially submerged, sand spit which ran from Betio to Bairiki, the next island to the east. This message came via TBS, and the originator is unknown. Thirty minutes later, division received a message from Colonel Shoup's command post saying that a report had been received that enemy troops were leaving the island via the eastern tip. Shoup requested naval gunfire on that end of the island to forestall the possibility of any considerable number of Japanese escaping from Betio to Bairiki, where they might resist a landing on that island. In the meantime, division had ordered Colonel Holmes to send his second landing team over to Bairiki where it was to land on Beach Blue 1 or Blue 2 to prevent the withdrawal of hostile forces from Betio.

Prior to noon, Colonel Holmes held a conference with his battalion commanders on board his ship, the *Ormsby*. At that time Lt. Col. Raymond L. Murray received orders to boat and land his battalion on Green Beach, following the 1st Battalion, 6th

Marines. Murray's first wave of troops had hardly got into their boats when Murray received a message from division to "boat and land LT 2/6 on Beach Blue immediately."

Calling his company commanders together, Murray issued the new orders to land on Bairiki. Maj. Leroy P. Hunt, Jr., was left aboard ship initially, and Murray directed him to query division as to whether it was intended for him to land his entire landing team, i. e., tanks, artillery battery, shore party, etc. It was later found that division wanted only the battalion to go ashore, less its attached units.

Now Colonel Holmes had one team preparing to land on Betio and one on Bairiki; the other team, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, commanded by Lt. Col. Kenneth F. McLeod, was boating up, prepared to land on either of the islands in support.

THE LIGHT TANKS

At 1408 division directed that Company B, 2d Tank Battalion (Capt. Frank R. Stewart, Jr.), land with all its tanks to support LT 1/6. Because of mines and obstacles on Green South, Company B was instructed to land on Beach Green North. Unfortunately, B Company had all its platoons loaded in the bottom of the hold in three ships: The 1st Platoon was aboard the U. S. S. *Ormsby*; the 2d Platoon aboard the U. S. S. *Bell*; and the 3d Platoon was aboard the U. S. S. *Harris*. These three ships were a part of TRANSDIV 6. Immediately the order from division regarding the employment of Company B was received, the commander of TRANSDIV 6 ordered all the ships in his division to send their LCM's to the three ships carrying the tank company in order to facilitate their movement ashore. Before the tanks could be unloaded, however, the gear and supplies loaded above the tanks in the bottom holds had to be moved and several hours were lost before the tanks were actually lowered over the side into the waiting LCM's.

In the meantime, the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, was preparing to land in rubber boats on Green Beach. At first, it was believed that the landing team would start landing at about 1500. At 1420 Jones radioed the 6th Marines: "We are going into the boats now. Will call as soon as we clear the ship." At 1525, Colonel Shoup called division asking when the 6th Marines would land. Colonel Holmes answered this question in a message to division which said that the 1st Battalion would land at about 1700.

At the time that the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, was ordered to land in rubber boats, the battalion's transport—the U. S. S. *Feland*—was fairly close to the beach. The estimate of the probable hour of landing was based on that position of the *Feland*.

Just as Jones started to lower his rubber boats, the *Feland* was ordered to get away from the reef into deeper water. Later the ship was ordered back in and Jones then was able to debark his troops. Through no fault of Jones much valuable time had been lost.

Colonel Shoup sent a message to division at 1748 asking if Jones' battalion had landed on Green Beach. Shoup asked division to instruct Jones to merely hold a beachhead after getting ashore until daylight, when an attack could be started. This word was passed to Holmes, who passed it on to Jones, instructing him further to consult Major Ryan about where to deploy the landing team when it got ashore.

BAIRIKI

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Murray landed the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, on Bairiki at 1655. Division had received word from Murray on the way in to Blue Beach on Bairiki that his assault waves were getting some machine-gun fire. There were about 15 Japanese on Bairiki and this group had built a pillbox which contained 2 machine guns. Before Murray's battalion started to land, division called for naval gunfire and aerial bombardment and strafing to cover the landing. When division received the message about the machine-gun fire, planes were requested to come in low and try to locate the machine-gun positions and take them out. For some strange reason, the Japanese in the pillbox had a can of gasoline with them, and one of the planes, in strafing the position, put a .50-caliber bullet through the gasoline can; the Japs were burned and the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, landed against no resistance. After landing, the team scoured the little island but found no enemy.

1ST BATTALION, 6TH MARINES, LANDS

At 1840, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, landed on Beach Green North and went into position behind the mixed troops of the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. Maj. William K. Jones lost one of his two supply amphibian tractors when it hit a Japanese "teapot"

mine. This vehicle was blown apart and turned over, killing all hands except one man. Jones found Ryan and made a reconnaissance of the lines prior to attacking. Jones planned at this time to attack at 2000 that night. The message being relayed from Shoup by division through Holmes to Jones did not reach Jones until 1920. Upon receipt of the message, Jones organized his companies for the night, prepared to effect a passage of lines next morning when he would attack to the east.

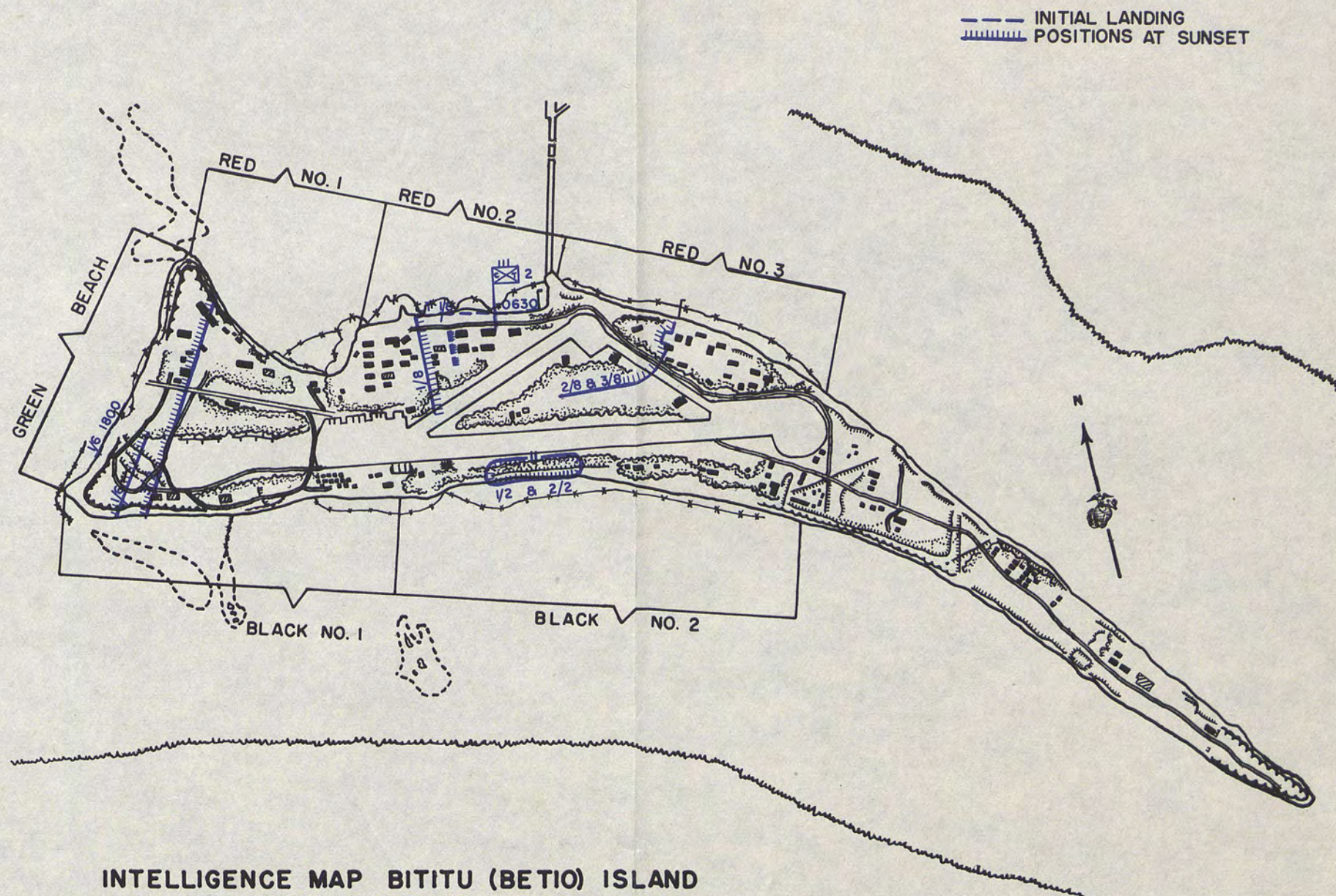
The 3d Platoon of Company B, 2d Tank Battalion, had considerable difficulty in negotiating the reef off Green Beach and did not get ashore until 1830. The platoon then reported to Major Jones and prepared to support the attack of his battalion next morning. In the meantime, the commander of Company, having noted the poor hydrographic conditions off Green Beach, requested permission to land the remainder of his tanks on Beach Red. Division granted this request, instructing the tanks to follow the west side of the pier, where the best avenue of approach to the beach lay. It was not until early in the morning of the third day that the 2d Platoon and the 1st Platoon were able to reach Beach Red 2.

SITUATION ASHORE, SECOND AFTERNOON

Late in the afternoon of the second day of the battle for Betio, Colonel Shoup sent a message to division, reporting the situation ashore. This message received by Division at 1706, stated:

Situation at 1600; Our line runs generally from the Burns-Philp pier across the east end of the triangle formed by the airfield to the south coast and along the coast intermittently to a place opposite the west end of the triangle; then from the revetments north of the west end of the main air strip on to the north; another line from west of the center of Red 1 across the east of the island to the south coast west of the end of the main strip. Some troops in 227 (gunnery target-area designation) dishing out hell and catching hell. Pacific howitzers in position and registered for shooting the tail (of Betio). Casualties many; percentage dead not known; combat efficiency: We are winning. Shoup.

Every battle has its turning point, that time when the balance of things seems to tip almost imperceptibly in one direction. It is not always possible for the mind, during heated combat action, to grasp this point for it is so difficult to perceive that it eludes



INTELLIGENCE MAP BITITU (BETIO) ISLAND
TARAWA ATOLL, GILBERT ISLANDS
SITUATION 1800 D+1

500 400 300 200 100 0 1000 YDS

MAP 3

TAKEN FROM 2D MAR DIV
 SPECIAL ACTION REPORT

NOTE: LINES ARE GENERAL INDICATION ONLY.
 GAPS WERE COVERED BY SMALL GROUPS
 AND BY FIRE. SECONDARY LINES WERE
 ESTABLISHED WHERE POSSIBLE BEHIND
 FRONT LINES.

even the practiced eye of the professional. After the battle is over, it is easier to establish the time when the high point was reached: That time when momentum accelerates and planning tends to materialize into fact. On Betio there were few who were willing to go on record and say that the crisis was past until late in the afternoon of the second day. Lt. Col. P. M. Rixey, in command of the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, observed at dusk that, "I thought up until 1 o'clock today that it was touch and go. Then I knew we would win."

Lt. Col. Evans F. Carlson, upon returning to Colonel Shoup's command post at midnight of the second day, found that the situation ashore had changed little during his absence through the afternoon except that the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines, had pushed across the island to the south coast, and the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, was now ashore on the west end of Betio. The areas separating the landing teams on the western half of Betio were far from being under control and many points of resistance had been bypassed. However, Carlson felt sure that the turning point of the battle had passed.

The messages exchanged between the command post of Colonel Shoup on Betio and that of Gen. Julian C. Smith out on the U. S. S. *Maryland* tell a story in which the rise and fall of the tide of battle are readily apparent. At 1022 division sent a message to Shoup asking if he had sufficient troops on Betio to complete its occupation; this information was requested in order to plan for the employment of the 6th Marines elsewhere if the situation warranted it.

Shoup replied to this saying that the situation did not look good ashore; in addition, he asked if division had any instructions for him. At 1140 division radioed Shoup again, this time to request immediate clarification of the situation ashore. Thirty-four minutes later Shoup replied:

Situation ashore uncertain. Colonel Carlson en route to division with picture of situation.

At noon division learned that the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, under Maj. "Mike" Ryan, had cleared Green Beach so that a landing could be made by a reserve landing team on that end of the island without enemy opposition. This prompted division to direct Colonel Holmes to send the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, ashore on Green Beach as quickly as possible. Then division learned that some of the enemy were trying to escape from Betio over to Bairiki. To

counter this, division instructed Colonel Holmes to send one landing team over to Bairiki.

By 1345 Colonel Shoup had received word that the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, was to land on Green Beach and, at that time, Shoup sent a message to Jones:

Bring in flamethrowers if possible. We are on the southern part of Red 2 and Red 1 zone. Doing our best.

Early afternoon saw the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines, reach the south coast; the Japanese forces on Betio were now split into two groups. Supplies were getting ashore. Reinforcements were on the way. The picture had brightened perceptibly. Then, at 1706, Shoup sent his message to division which ended with these words:

* * * Combat efficiency: We are winning.

The chief of staff of the 2d Marine Division, Col. Merritt A. Edson, left the U. S. S. *Maryland* at 1750 in the afternoon of the second day of the fight for Betio and went to the end of the pier, where he left his boat and made his way on in to Colonel Shoup's command post on Red Beach 2, arriving there at 2030. Shoup acquainted Edson with the situation ashore and then the two officers began to make their plans for the following day. The arrival of Colonel Edson meant some measure of relief for Colonel Shoup who had borne the responsibility of command of the troops on Betio thus far. Separated from division by distance as well as communication difficulties, Shoup had been faced with the problem of trying to coordinate the attacks of the landing teams during the first 2 days when control was almost impossible. With his landing teams badly disorganized and with their troops scattered and mixed with other units, Shoup had no opportunity to maneuver, tactically, component elements of his combat team whose fighting integrity was unimpaired. He had faced, and overcome, the difficulty of fusing the efforts of his badly scattered and demoralized units toward one common end; this was done in the face of intense and bitter enemy opposition from prepared defensive positions and in spite of the obstacles thrown in his path by numerous break-downs in communication and in supply. Edson, division chief of staff, immediately assumed the burden of command of all the forces involved in the action on Betio, leaving Shoup to concentrate on his own combat team, which now consisted of seven landing teams.



CASUALTIES BEING EVACUATED by rubber boat. Floated out to the reef, the wounded were then transferred to boats and removed to the transports.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

The Third Day, 22 November 1943

CHAPTER IV

PLANS FOR THE DAY

Immediately upon arriving at the command post of Colonel Shoup, Colonel Edson began to make plans for the next day's attack. The two colonels first took up the problem of naval gunfire support and air support. They requested naval gunfire to work over the eastern end of Betio, starting on a line across the island east of the turning circle at the east end of the main air strip and including the rest of the eastern part of Betio. The heavier fires, i. e., the 14- and 16-inch shells, were to be placed only on the eastern one-third of the island, 500 yards from the nearest friendly troops. The air support was to bomb and strafe the same general areas assigned to naval gunfire. At 0700, the ships and planes were to bombard the assigned target areas for a period of 20 minutes. Then at 0830, the same fires on the same areas were to be repeated for another 20-minute period; this was to be followed by another 20-minute bombardment at 0930 and another at 1030.

Next, Edson turned to the reserve landing team waiting for orders to land. Lt. Col. Kenneth McLeod had boated his team, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, at 1600 on the day before and was still waiting near the control vessel at the line of departure. Shoup's command post was in radio communication with division, but neither division nor Shoup were in contact with either McLeod or Jones. To reach either landing team, it was necessary first to contact the 6th Marines and have the message relayed. Edson set to work to have Jones come up on the command net of the 2d Division. Until such time that more troops of the 6th Marines were landed, it seemed best for the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, to be controlled by Shoup. It was well after

dawn before communication between Shoup and Jones was established. Acting on Edson's recommendation, division sent a message to McLeod at 0319, ordering him to land on Green Beach North at 0800 on the morning of 22 November and to be prepared to attack on order from division. Relative to this, Edson sent a message to division at 0359 to have the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, rendezvous off Green Beach South at 0800 and to wait for further orders to land. Finally, division sent a message to the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, at 0641, directing McLeod to wait off Green Beach next morning prepared to land on either half of the beach when so ordered by Colonel Shoup.

After consultation with Colonel Shoup, Edson issued verbal orders at 0400 to Shoup and Col. Elmer E. Hall regarding the attack to take place at daylight on the morning of 22 November, the third day of the battle. To make sure that Maj. W. K. Jones, commanding the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, received his orders, Colonel Edson directed Maj. R. McC. Tompkins, an assistant to Colonel Risely, the operations officer of the division, personally to carry the message to Jones over on Green Beach. At the time that Edson issued his attack orders he was not in communication with Jones.

The attack order for the morning of 22 November called for the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, to pass through the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and attack to the east along the south coast of Betio to establish contact with the troops of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines. At daylight, Hays was to attack with his team, the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, to the west along the north beach to eliminate the pocket of resistance still holding out on the border line between Beach Red 2 and Beach Red 1. Colonel Hall,



LOOKING EAST ON SOUTH SHORE along the airfield where the attack of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines began.

with the 8th Marines (less his 1st Battalion, which was attached to the 2d Marines), was to continue his attack to the east.

Besides the air and naval gunfire support ordered for the morning of 22 November, the division prepared to augment the fires of its artillery ashore on Betio by placing two batteries over on Bairiki. As soon as the report from Murray, of the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, was received that his landing on Bairiki had been made against no opposition, division instructed Colonel Holmes of the 6th Marines to send the 2d Battalion, 10th Marines, less Battery D, ashore on Bairiki the first thing next morning. Holmes then notified the 2d Battalion, 10th Marines, to boat up at 0330, 22 November and to land on Beach Blue 2.

ARTILLERY ON BAIRIKI

At 0300, the 2d Battalion, 10th Marines, began to load its men and equipment in boats. An air alert interrupted the loading operations, the transports moving out to sea in accordance with orders from Task Force 53. At the time, Battery E was completely loaded, and a part of the battalion's headquarters and service battery was boated. Leaving Battery F and the remainder of H & S to come ashore when the transports returned after the alert, Batteries E and a part of H & S Battery went on over to Bairiki, arriving there at about 0630. Immediately after landing, Battery E went into position and, with its fires controlled by the fire direction center of the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, on Betio, registered in

on the tail of Betio, adding its firepower to that on the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines. The transports returned to their unloading area at 0700 and it was not until noon that Battery F and the rest of H & S Battery reached Bairiki. Battery D, originally ordered to land on Green Beach on Betio, found that the hydrographic conditions off that beach were not favorable to landing artillery and was then ordered to go to Bairiki instead, there to rejoin its parent organization.

ATTACK OF HAYS' BATTALION

At 0700 in the morning of the third day on Betio, the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, attacked to the west in an attempt to clear the strong Japanese positions on the boundary between Beaches Red 1 and Red 2. On the right of the battalion front and next to the north shore was Company B. In the center of the line was Company A, and over on the left Company C reached over to the enemy revetments along the north side of the west end of the airfield. During the morning the attack was supported by three light tanks from Company C, 2d Tank Battalion. The tanks, covered by infantry, moved up to several pillboxes which were halting the advance of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, and maneuvered so that the muzzles of their 37-mm. guns were almost pointing directly into the openings of the pillboxes before firing. The construction of the pillboxes and the manner in which they were reinforced made it impossible for the 37-mm. guns to do much damage. Strong points of resistance were ultimately reduced by a combination of bangalore torpedoes and shape charges placed under most hazardous conditions.

One tank was put out of action during the morning by what was believed to be a magnetic mine. At 1130 the tanks were ordered to report back to the command post of the 2d Marines and a section of 75-mm. self-propelled guns from Weapons Company, 2d Marines, under Maj. Frederic R. Smith, were sent up in their place. One of these half-tracks immediately received small arms fire which damaged its radiator, forcing it to retire.

During the afternoon Companies A and C of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, made good progress, but Company B, over against the beach, was held by intense enemy fire from its front.

Although little ground was gained, as far as area is concerned, several strong points of resistance were destroyed by Hays' landing team during the day.

At least, the Japanese core of resistance in the Red 1-Red 2 region was contained. Late in the afternoon the enemy in this compact area tried one small counterattack against the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, but gained no success.

ATTACK OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 6TH MARINES

As late as 0505, 22 November, Colonel Edson had no contact with Maj. W. K. Jones of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. An hour had elapsed since Edson had issued his attack orders and he was anxious for Jones to learn of his mission in plenty of time to make the necessary preparations. At that time, Edson sent a message to division asking that Jones be notified of the plan. It was learned a little later that the 6th Marines was not in contact with its 1st Battalion. However, on the way over from the command post of Colonel Shoup, Major Tompkins was slowly making his way to Jones' position. Finally at 0653 Edson received a message at Shoup's headquarters that division was in communication with Jones.

Then at 0735, Tompkins got a message through to Edson and Shoup, telling them that he had contacted Jones and had acquainted him with the operation plan for the attack.

After a delay necessitated by refueling tanks, Shoup ordered Jones to attack at 0800 with the mission of clearing the south side of the island as he attacked east until he reached the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines. When the troops of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines, were reached, Jones was to pass on through them, prepared to continue the attack on order. With three tanks from the 3d Platoon of Company B, 2d Tank Battalion in the lead, Jones attacked at 0815. The zone of action assigned the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, was little more than a hundred yards wide and Jones attacked on a one-platoon front with Company C in the assault. The three tanks, out about fifty yards in front of the infantry, were instructed to destroy any enemy strong-points that might be encountered. The troops behind the tanks were always close enough to give protection against enemy personnel bent on the suicidal mission of placing a magnetic mine against a tank. Resistance was light initially and Jones reached the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, at 1100. During the attack along the south coast, Jones' men had killed about two hundred and fifty of the enemy at the expense of only light casualties to themselves.



COL. DAVID M. SHOUP (map case on hip) confers at his command post with one of his officers during the battle. Helmeted figure with hands on hips (second to left of Shoup) is Col. Merritt A. Edson.

Just before the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines was reached, Jones received orders to report to Colonel Shoup at Shoup's command post. From Shoup, Jones then received instructions to continue the attack to the east at 1300. With the exception of the pocket of resistance that still held out on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2, the western half of Betio was now held by the 2d Marine Division. That pocket was being reduced by Hays from the east

while Ryan held on the west; it no longer constituted a serious threat to the capture of the island. For his attack in the afternoon, Jones was to be provided with all available tanks, naval gunfire on the eastern part of Betio, and support from the two battalions of artillery on Betio and Bairiki. At the same time, the 8th Marines, less Hays' landing team, would attack to the east in conjunction with Jones' attack. Colonel Hall had pointed out that the condition of his troops was such that he felt that they could make probably one more attack and after that would have to be relieved. The 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, with elements of the 3d Battalion attached, had worked for 2 days on the strong Japanese positions northeast of the east taxiway and the resistance had been so heavy as to deny much in the way of progress. Edson told Hall that as soon as the 8th Marines finished cleaning up the strong Japanese pocket near the east end of the airfield, the attack of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, with the fresh troops of the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines close behind, would make it possible for the 8th Marines to get some rest.

ATTACK OF 2D BATTALION 8TH MARINES

Early in the morning of the third day, Maj. "Jim" Crowe reorganized his troops in preparation for the day's attack. Three strong points of enemy resistance had to be reduced before the attack could make much progress. One was a steel pillbox to the left front, near the Burns-Philp pier. This pillbox was in Company F's zone of action. To the front of Company K (a 3d Battalion, 8th Marines Company, but operating under the direction of Maj. W. C. Chamberlin, Crowe's executive officer), was a coconut log emplacement; from it the Japanese kept machine-gun fire aimed on Company K, and most of the time had that company pretty well pinned down. The third enemy position that had to be reduced was a large bombproof shelter, inland to the south from the steel pillbox.

These three enemy positions were mutually supporting. One could not be reduced without the assaulting troops coming under the fire from the other two. The attack on this day was to be a battalion attack, starting with Company F on the left. As Company F assaulted the steel pillbox, the next company in line was to move forward, and thus the advance would be taken up across the entire front of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines.

At 0930 the mortars supporting Company K, which was on the right of Company F, got a direct hit on the top of the coconut log emplacement to the front of the company. The mortar round that hit the emplacement caused an ammunition dump to explode and this completely destroyed the enemy position. In the meantime, a medium tank maneuvered into position west of the steel pillbox and got several direct hits on that pillbox. This enabled Company F to begin to move to the east.

Now the large bombproof remained to be taken and the next attack was launched in its direction. Attached to the battalions were assault engineers from the 18th Marines. These men had the flamethrowers and demolitions. Under the covering fire of riflemen, the engineers worked their way up to the bombproof and after a hot fight that lasted for an hour, the top of the shelter was taken.

Immediately the Marines had overrun the top of the bombproof, the Japanese counterattacked in a vain effort to regain it. The enemy counterattack was broken largely through the efforts of one man, First Lt. Alexander Bonnyman, who met the charging Japanese with his flamethrower and drove back those who were not burned to death. Bonnyman lost his life in this action, but his work helped to insure the successful advance of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines.

With the failure of the counterattack, the Japanese began to evacuate the bombproof, running out both the east and south entrances. Those running out the east entrance were literally mowed down by machine gun and rifle fire, and hand grenades. The Japanese who attempted to escape from the south entrance ran right into Marine machine-gun fire and the 37-mm. cannister from the Regimental Weapons Company guns.

As the attack progressed, Companies E and G moved around the north end of the bombproof and Company K moved up on the right, stopping long enough to send engineers over to blast the south entrance of the bombproof. Then Company K advanced to make contact with Company E east of the shelter. For the time being, riflemen were left to guard the entrances to the bombproof, and shortly afterward a bulldozer was dispatched to push dirt and sand into the entrances until they were completely covered, sealing the doom of any Japanese remaining within the shelter.

The forward impetus of the attack of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, carried the companies through the buildings and over the dug-outs until a point was reached, at the east end of the airfield, where there was danger of running into the fire coming across the front at an angle from the men of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, over on the south coast. The front lines were then withdrawn about 150 yards. In the area recently overrun Japanese buildings were burned and blasted and the dug-outs were cleaned out. Crowe estimated later that nearly 100 of the enemy committed suicide in this area when it was overrun. Companies I and L, over on the east end of the triangle formed by the airfield, remained in position there for the night, although the advance of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, had carried past that point. At dusk, Company C of Jones' battalion came up to take over the front-line positions on the north shore at the east end of the airfield, and Company K was withdrawn to build a secondary defensive line slightly to the rear.

HIT BY ENEMY FIRE. This tank was put out of action on the beach.



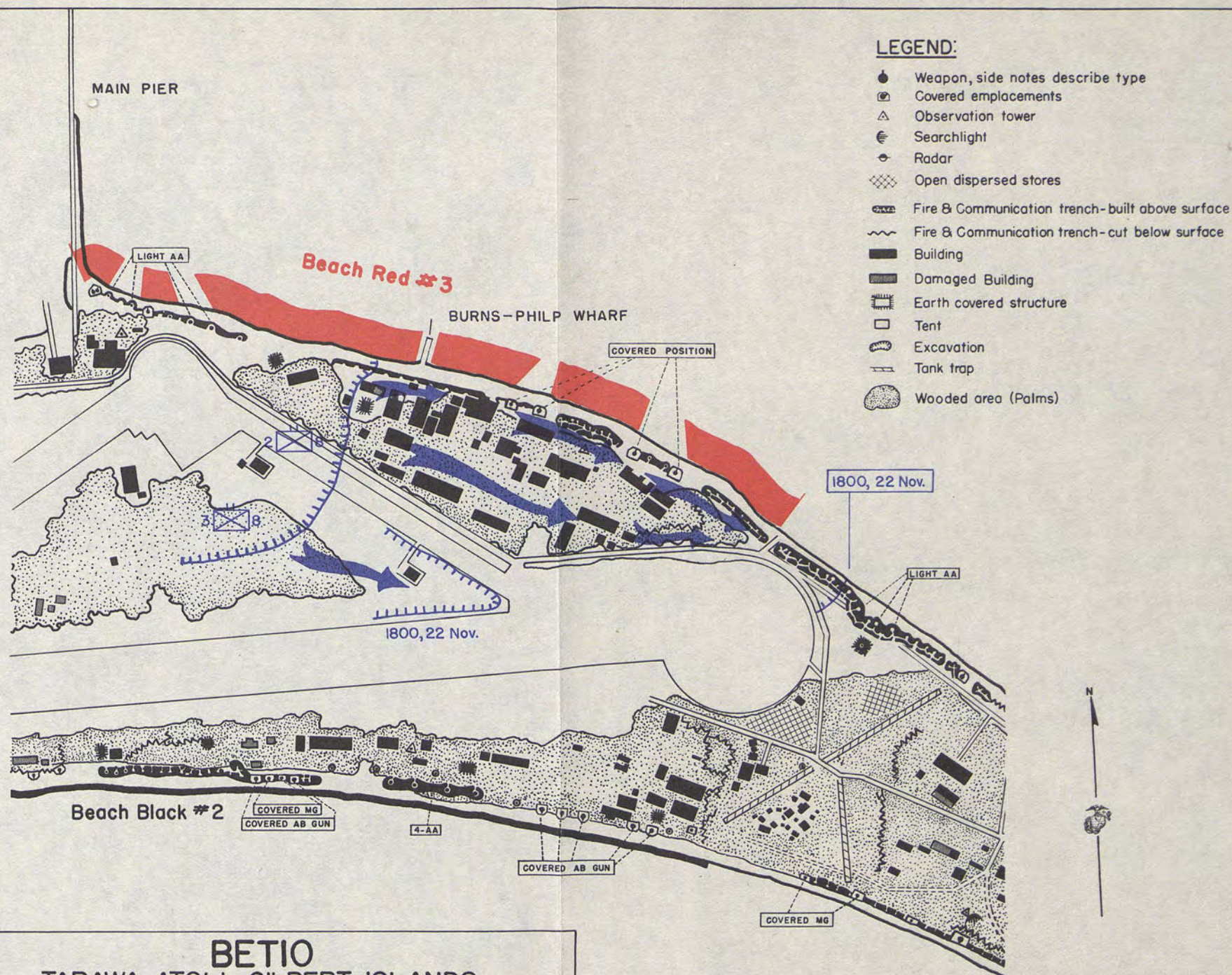
THE 3D BATTALION, 6TH MARINES, LANDS

The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines (Lt. Col. K. F. McLeod), spent the night of 21–22 November in its boats near the control vessel at the line of departure. Its orders had been changed twice during the early morning hours. First, McLeod was instructed to land his landing team on Green Beach at 0800, prepared to attack on division order. Later he received word to rendezvous off Green Beach at 0800 and to await further instructions there. By 0730 on the morning of the third day, 22 November, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, was in position off Green Beach awaiting orders from division to land.

At 0850 the orders were issued; McLeod was to land his team on the north part of Green Beach, reorganize on the beach and be prepared to attack to the east on division order. Due to difficulties caused by the reef, the 3d Battalion was delayed in landing and it was 1100 before the entire landing team was ashore. Upon arrival ashore, McLeod placed two companies in the line, with Company L on the left and Company I on the right, facing east. This temporary line reached from the shore on Beach Red 1, at a point near the westernmost of three Japanese latrines built out over the water, to the bend of the antitank ditch on the southwestern part of the island. Company K remained in reserve behind the other

ASSAULTING THE TOP of a Japanese bombproof shelter, these Marines wrest a little more ground from the enemy.





BETIO
 TARAWA ATOLL, GILBERT ISLANDS
 ATTACK OF THE 2d BN, 8th MARINES
 NOV 22, 1943

100 0 100 200 300 400 Yds.

MAP 4

TAKEN FROM 2d BN 8th MARINES
 SPECIAL ACTION REPORT.

RD 5890



CONCRETE TETRAHEDRONS and barbed wire off the west end of Betio. 6th Marines can be seen wading toward shore in distance.

two companies. The landing team remained in this position until late in the afternoon. At 1700, McLeod moved east along the south coast, following the same path taken by Jones early in the morning, until he reached a position about 600 yards to the rear of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. There he was ordered to remain in close support of Jones.

In the morning of the third day, the commanding general of the 2d Marine Division, Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith, decided to go ashore and operate from a command post there. With General Smith was Brig. Gen. J. L. Underhill, an observer from V Amphibious Corps, and Brig. Gen. Thomas E. Bourke. Also accompanying the general was a party of 10 officers and men from the division command post group. General Smith and his party went from the U. S. S. *Maryland* to Green Beach, arriving on the beach at 1155. After inspecting units in the beach area, General Smith decided that he could best operate ashore from a command post on Beach Red 2 and, by so doing, would not need to set up a complete command post ashore, since the facilities of Colonel Shoup's command post were already available. The best route to Beach Red 2, from the general's position on Green Beach, was by water via amphibian tractor. The Japanese defenders of the strong point, still holding out on the boundary be-

tween Red 1 and Red 2, fired on General Smith's tractor as it moved around toward Red 2, wounding the driver, disabling the tractor, and forcing the general and his party to transfer to another tractor to complete the trip. At 1355 General Smith arrived at Colonel Shoup's command post and joined Shoup and Edson, who briefed him on the progress of the battle at that time.

PLANS FOR THE AFTERNOON

While General Smith was en route to Beach Green, Colonel Edson called a meeting of unit commanders at Shoup's command post to issue the attack orders for the afternoon. Present were Colonel Shoup, Col. Elmer E. Hall, Maj. W. K. Jones, Lt. Col. P. M. Rixey of the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, and Maj. C. W. McCoy, commanding the 2d Tank Battalion. McCoy had succeeded to command when the battalion commander, Lt. Col. A. B. Swenceski, was wounded in the morning of the first day of action on Betio. Major Jones crossed the island from the south coast, where his battalion was attacking to the east, to attend this conference.

Edson gave his orders for the afternoon's attack verbally: The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, with all available tanks attached, was to pass through the 1st and 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, on the south coast

and attack to the east at 1330. The initial objective assigned Jones was the tank trap at the eastern edge of the air strip. Colonel Hall was directed to attack with his combat team, less Hays' battalion, to the east from the present position of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines. Hall was instructed to try to capture the ground north of the east taxiway in the vicinity of the Burns-Philp pier; if this could not be done, the area was to be encircled from his right and contained. The 8th Marines was to maintain contact on the right with the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. The 2d Marines, with the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, attached, was ordered to attack and destroy the Japanese pocket of resistance which still held out on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2. Rixey was directed to place his artillery battalion in direct support of Jones. Edson would arrange for naval gunfire and air support prior to the attack. This bombardment would cease at 1330.

AFTERNOON ATTACK OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 6TH MARINES

When Maj. W. K. Jones received word to report to Colonel Shoup's command post for attack orders for the afternoon of the third day, he left his landing team in charge of one of his officers, Maj. F. X. Beamer. The 1st Battalion, 6th, was now in contact with Kyle's battalion on the south side of the island. Reorganizing the battalion in Jones' absence, Beamer moved Company A through Company C. The advance of the morning, roughly 800 yards, had been made against heavy opposition. The men were tired and hot and their supply of water was virtually nonexistent. There had been several cases of heat prostration during the morning and Beamer made every effort to obtain water for the men before the afternoon's attack began. Since there was no readily available supply of water, only a small portion of the assault company was able to replenish its water supply before moving out.

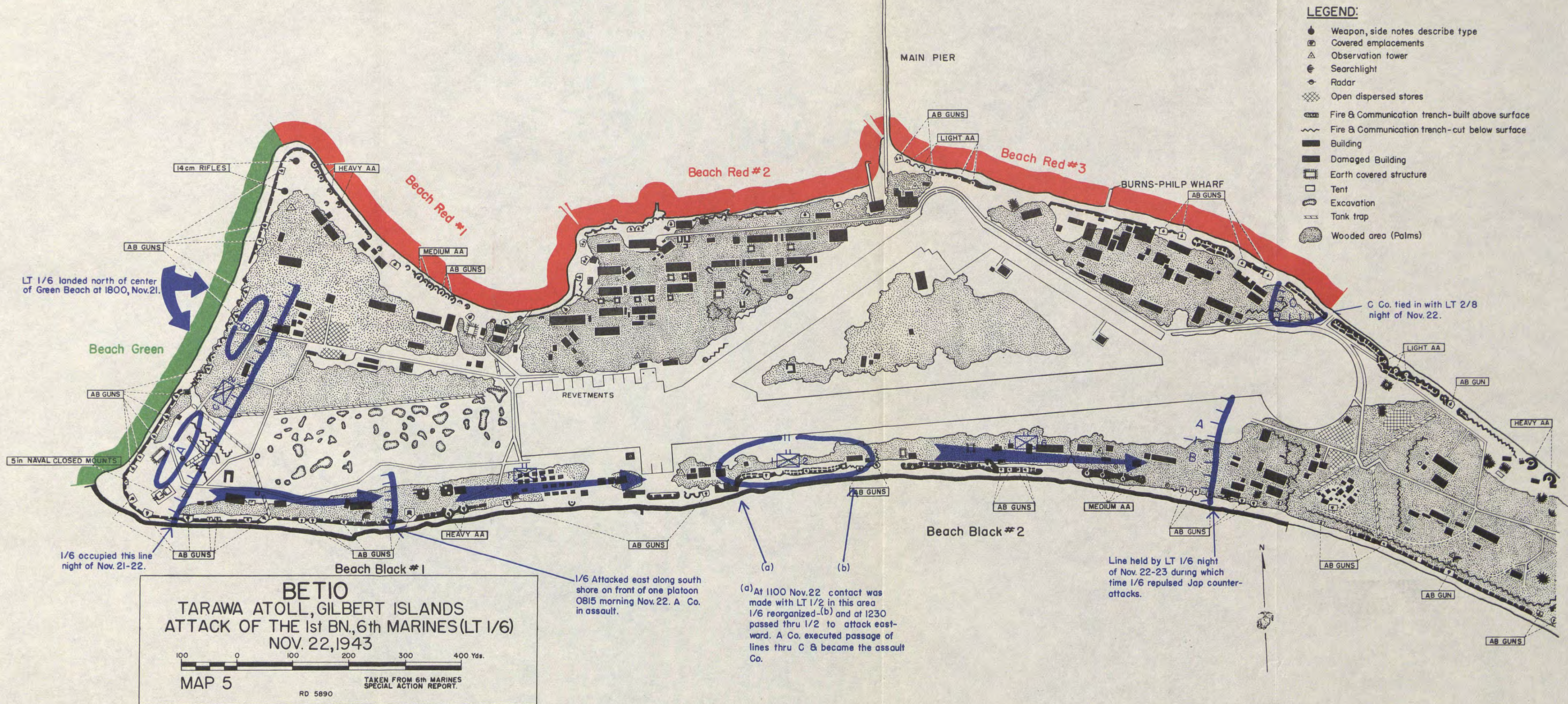
At 1230 Company A, with one medium tank and seven light tanks attached, began to pass through LT 1/2 in order to be in position to attack in compliance with Colonel Edson's orders at 1330. Seventy-five yards behind Company A was Company B in close support; in reserve and following B was Company C, the company that had led the attack through the morning. Immediately Company A attacked to the east from the positions of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines, it came under fire from

strongly organized Japanese weapons. Part of the fire came from weapons mounted in a turret-type emplacement near the beach. The light tanks were unable to destroy the emplacement with their 37-mm. guns and it was necessary to call up the medium tank before the position was finally neutralized. This one position held up the attack for nearly an hour and a half. At 1500 water was brought up and distributed to the entire battalion. Company B was issued water and salt tablets and at 1600 moved up to pass through Company A to continue the attack.

At 1530 Jones received an order from division directing that one company be sent over to relieve the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, in the sector north of the air strip. Jones selected Company C for this mission and, at 1600, after issuing water and salt, the company moved over to relieve the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, about 300 yards east of the Burns-Philp pier on the north side of the island. In the meantime, Company B passed through Company A and attacked toward the tank trap at the east end of the air strip; Company A followed about 75 yards behind the rear troops of Company B. Bitter enemy resistance slowed the attack to a halt at about 1830, and the landing team commenced to dig in for the night. Company A moved up on the left of B until it was abreast and in visual contact with Company C on the other side of the round turntable at the east end of the air strip. While his two companies on the south side of the island reorganized and consolidated their positions for the night, Jones ordered an outpost line forward about 50 yards ahead of his main line of defense. This line was withdrawn later. At dark the TBY radio of Company C failed to function and the battalion lost contact with that company. The open ground between C and A was covered by machine guns. Now Jones turned to amphibian tractors to evacuate his wounded. Over 200 of the enemy were estimated killed during the afternoon attack.

GENERAL SITUATION

As has been related before, while the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, was attacking along the south coast, making excellent gains, the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, had finally overrun the strong enemy positions in the area north of the east taxiway. Up on the western end of the island, the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, had made small but important gains





MAJ. GEN. JULIAN C. SMITH, commanding general of the 2d Marine Division (on the right); **Col. Merritt A. Edson**, chief of staff (center); and **Brig. Gen. Thomas E. Bourke**, commanding general of the 10th Marines, after the battle.

against the enemy stronghold on the Red 1-Red 2 boundary line. At sundown of this day, the third day of the action, the enemy, with the exception of the group in front of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, was compressed into the long tail of Betio east of the air strip. If the Japanese ever intended to launch a counterattack, this was the night to do it. Each night the Marines had dug in with the uneasy feeling that before morning the Japanese would stage a "ban-zai." So far, the mad, suicidal, headlong rush had not come. Jones made every preparation to repel such an attack when his companies organized their positions at dusk on 22 November.

There was little about the events of the early afternoon to cause any optimism on the part of General Smith or Colonel Edson. The progress made thus far in the day was about as good as could be expected, judging by the gains of the previous days. The slowness of the operation was maddening and yet the reduction of well-prepared and heavily fortified enemy positions required time. At 1601, General Smith sent a message to General Hermle, now on the *Maryland*, since General Smith had gone ashore, presenting the picture of the situation ashore at that time:

Situation not favorable for rapid clean-up of Betio. Heavy casualties among officers make leadership problem difficult. Still strong organized resistance areas 212, 213, 214, 237, 210, 209, 208. (These target areas were all in the vicinity of the east end of the airfield.) Many emplacements intact on eastern end of the island. Present front line approximately on the western edge of 214, 236, and 212. In addition, many Japanese strong points to westward of our front lines within our position that have not been reduced. Progress slow and extremely costly. Complete occupation will take at least 5 days more. Naval and air bombardment a great help but does not take out emplacements.

What General Smith did not know, or anyone else except the Japanese for that matter, was that the events about to transpire during the night, the third night ashore, would cast a different light on the situation and create more optimism next morning than had been felt thus far through the whole battle.

Late in the afternoon Col. Maurice G. Holmes and his command group came ashore to establish the 6th Marine's command post. A little later Holmes was called to a conference at Shoup's command post. There, General Smith, having assumed tactical command ashore, discussed the plans for operations to



PRISONERS HUDDLE ON END OF PIER as shore party personnel manhandles supplies out of water.

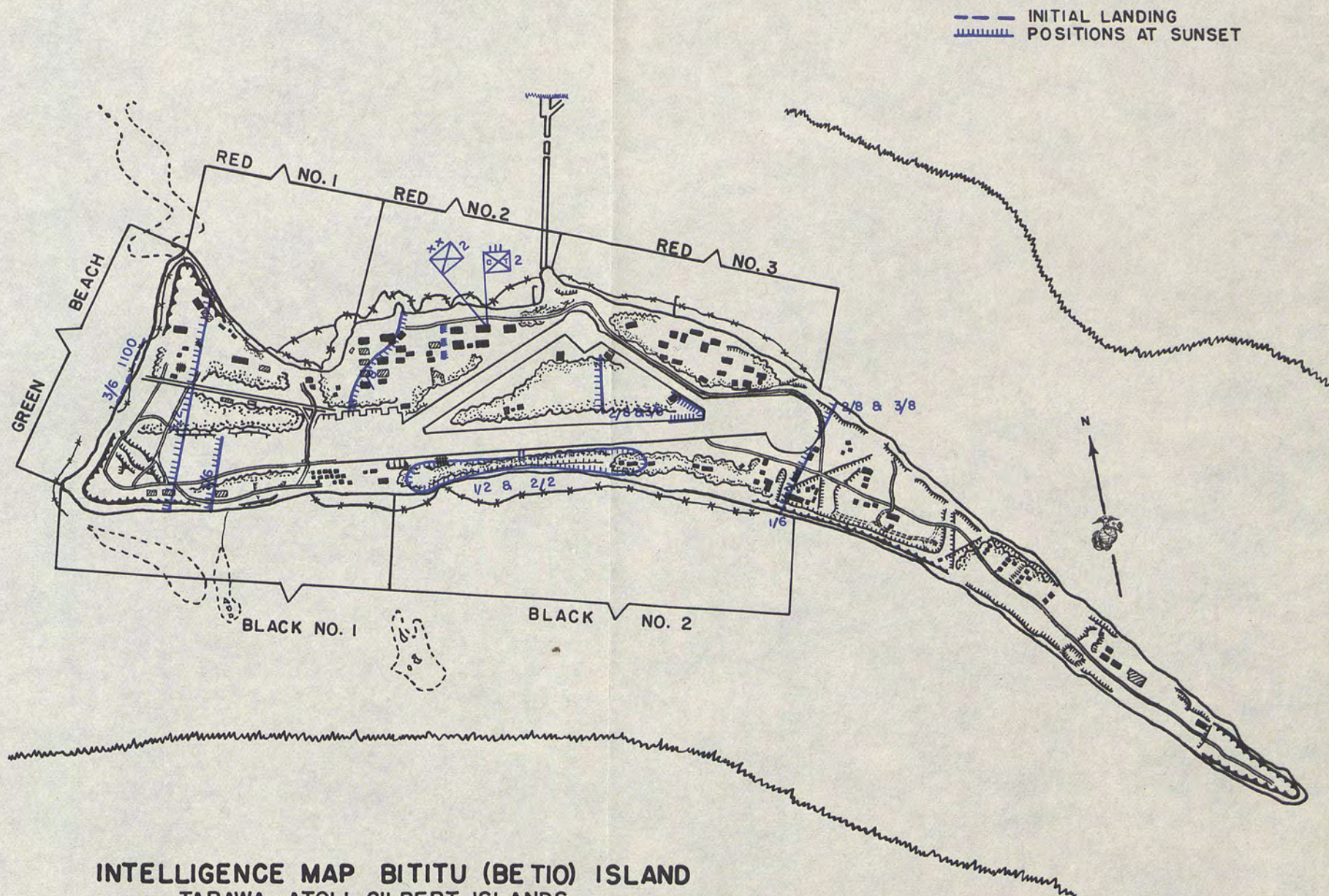
begin the following morning. Holmes learned that all elements of his regiment would revert to his control at about 2100, 22 November. The situation at the time of the division conference was as follows:

The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, was receiving a Japanese counterattack. Rixey's artillery was delivering fire into the area where the Japanese were forming up their counterattack. McLeod had been ordered to move up behind Jones to support the latter. The 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, was to be relieved of its assignment over on Bairiki and was to move over to Betio and land on Green Beach.

Holmes then received orders to continue the attack to the east on the following morning, passing the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, through the 1st Battalion in order to put fresh troops into the assault. All available tanks were to support the attack of the 3d Battalion. The 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, when ashore on Betio, would follow the assault of the 3d Battalion, prepared to support the attack. Before leaving the conference, Holmes made arrangements for artillery, naval gunfire, and air support for the attack.

THE COUNTERATTACK

While the conference was going on, the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, was busy repelling a counterattack which began at about 1930. The attacking force of Japanese was small, being about 50 men. Infiltrating through the outpost line, the enemy opened a small gap between Companies A and B. Jones had all three of his rifle companies committed and his reserve consisted of his 81-mm mortar platoon and a handful of men from Headquarters Company and Weapons Company. Jones instructed the executive officer of his weapons company to take the battalion reserve to clean up any Japanese who had infiltrated, close the gap between Companies A and B, and assist the commander of Company A in reorganizing and further consolidating the front lines. The mission was accomplished by 2030. Then Jones asked Maj. W. B. Kyle, of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, to place a company about 100 yards to the rear of the front lines in order to establish a secondary line.



Apparently the Japanese made this small show of attacking as a preliminary to a main attack in force. There are three good reasons why the main attack did not follow in quick succession: (1) The excellent artillery fire support of the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, reinforced by the fires of the 2d Battalion, 10th Marines, firing from positions on Bairiki; this formed a cross-fire which was very effective; (2) the successful elimination of the enemy from the front lines; and (3) the limited use of Marine automatic weapons. During this initial "feeling out" attack, Jones called for artillery fire to fall within 75 yards of the front lines. He hoped that the bulk of the artillery fire would land in the midst of the counter-attacking force. Actually, this was not the case, but the artillery fire served to form a screen which prevented the main body of Japanese from following up its initial infiltration. In repelling this first counterattack, the men of Companies A and B held the fire from their automatic weapons to a minimum, and the fighting consisted mainly of close-in fighting, bayonet work, and the prolific use of hand grenades.

During the 2 hours which followed this attack, the Japanese who had infiltrated into the lines and had caused a gap between the two companies were mopped up by the battalion reserve and this work also consisted of close-in fighting and bayonet engagements. As a result, the enemy was unable to discover the exact location of the front lines or the positions of the automatic weapons.

Perhaps it was the failure of their first attack to gain information which caused the enemy to attempt another counterattack at 2300. Again, about 50 of the enemy attempted to create a diversion in the sector of Company A by firing small arms, throwing grenades, calling out, and moving around. At the same time, another 50 Japanese attacked Company B. Using machine guns, 60-mm. mortars, and grenades, Company B had little difficulty repulsing the attack. This time it appeared that the Japanese were trying to secure the information about the Marine positions and strength that the first attack had failed to obtain.

PACK HOWITZER FIRING in support of advancing troops. These guns played an important part in stopping the Japanese counterattack during the last night of the battle for Betio.



Between the first and second attacks, Company I of the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, moved up to replace the troops of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, in the secondary line, 75 yards to the rear of the front lines. A medium tank brought up water, small-arms ammunition, and grenades to a dump 50 yards behind Company A. From about 500 yards east of his lines to the extreme eastern tip of the island, Jones requested that naval gunfire be placed. This was designed to disrupt enemy communications, disorganize any group bent on reinforcing the attacking forces, and to keep the enemy down within his emplacements. In the area between the zone assigned to naval gunfire and his own front lines, Jones called for, and received, continuous harassing artillery fire. The attack at 2300 on the right side of the line evidently served its purpose, for it was in this sector that the Japanese launched their heaviest, and final, attack at 0400, 23 November.

About 1 hour before the final counterattack, the enemy began to fire heavy and light machine guns into the Marine lines from positions set up in some wrecked trucks about 50 yards in front of the lines. Some of the enemy guns were destroyed by fire from Marine heavy machine guns; three enemy guns were destroyed by Marine noncommissioned officers who voluntarily crawled out in front of the lines to use hand grenades on them.

The enemy was to attack one more time. At 0400, about 300 Japanese moved forward to hit all of

Company B's front and the right front of Company A. At the same time, several of the enemy made noises to divert the attention of the men on the left (north) side of Company A's line. Lt. N. E. Milne, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, forward observer in front-line observation post with the 1st Battalion 6th Marines, called his artillery fire to within 50 yards of the front lines. By 0500, 23 November, counterattacking Japanese were repelled. In the front lines of the two companies, and along the front to a distance of 50 yards, lay the bodies of more than 200 enemy dead. Out beyond that were the patterns made by the artillery concentrations; this area was littered with the broken and battered bodies of approximately 125 Japanese, destroyed by the artillery. Firing out beyond the artillery pattern and helping to keep the enemy from moving freely, the U. S. S. *Schroeder*, and later the U. S. S. *Sigbee*, did excellent work.

NUISANCE AIR RAIDS

During the first night that Marines were ashore on Betio, the night of 20-21 November, it is reported that there was an air attack; that it had little more than nuisance value.

It will be recalled that the *Maryland* launched an observation plane at 1548 on D-day piloted by Ensign French, with Lt. Col. Jesse S. Cook, Jr., aboard as an observer for the 2d Marine Division. At about

HALF-SUBMERGED BULLDOZER starts in toward Beach Red 2.





WADING ASHORE ON GREEN BEACH, these men of the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, met no enemy fire in the morning of the third day of battle.

1830, French requested permission to be taken back aboard the ship. Permission was refused since at that time the fleet was expecting an air attack. French and Cook then flew north for a few miles and then returned toward the fleet at about 300 feet altitude. According to Colonel Cook, the fleet, apparently thinking the approach of this plane was the beginning of the air attack, opened fire. Fortunately, the gunnery was a bit off, and French landed his plane as quickly as possible, feeling that the water was safer than the air at that time. After floating all night, French brought the plane back to the *Maryland* next morning.

Just before dawn on the morning of the second day, the U. S. S. *Maryland* reported unidentified aircraft approaching. Admiral Harry Hill directed his northern picket ships to fire at random, acting as decoys. The enemy planes paid little attention to the firing of the picket ships and came on in to drop at least three sticks of bombs on the island, causing fires to blaze up momentarily, but resulting in practically no damage to the troops ashore. The planes, estimated to be eight, did not press home the attack and left the area at once.

Again on the morning of the third day, at 0340, unidentified aircraft were reported coming in from the northwest. Four enemy planes arrived to bomb the island but did not molest the ships.

These enemy air attacks were anticipated, although every effort had been made to neutralize all

airfields on closely adjacent island groups. Admiral Hill received intelligence reports on 21 November, early in the day, that the Japanese might attempt to stage large air attacks through Milli or Taroa. In addition, it was reported that the enemy was massing submarine strength in the area of Tarawa and that the expected time of arrival of the submarines would probably be on 23 November.

At noon on 22 November, the U. S. S. *Gansevoort* reported a submarine contact to the west of the transport area. An investigation of the contact failed to obtain further results. Less than an hour later the U. S. S. *Meade* reported a submarine contact in the same area. Still the enemy craft could not be definitely located, and the destroyers continued to cruise around in the area, hoping to destroy the Japanese submarine. Again at 1530, and later at 1627, contacts were made and the U. S. S. *Frazier* went out to join the other two destroyers in their grim game. After several depth charges were dropped, the enemy submarine was forced to surface. The periscope broke water between the *Meade* and the *Frazier* and as the hull appeared, the two destroyers opened fire. Not content with the results of the fire, the *Frazier* then moved directly toward the enemy craft and rammed it. Three prisoners were rescued from the submarine, which was identified as the RC-35. The *Frazier* received damage to her bow as a result of the ramming and was forced to reduce her speed in order to prevent taking in too much water.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

CHAPTER V

The Island Is Secured

THE FOURTH DAY

During the night 22–23 November, the landing team of Lt. Col. K. F. McLeod moved up in close support of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. While the 1st Battalion was repelling the Japanese counterattacks, the 3d Battalion formed a secondary line, ready to prevent a major break through the lines. Early next morning McLeod received orders from Col. M. G. Holmes, 6th Marines commander, to be prepared to relieve the 1st Battalion after daylight and continue the attack to the east at 0800. Planes from the carriers came in to bomb and strafe the eastern end of the island from 0700 to 0730. Then the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, shelled the same area until 0745, at which time naval gunfire was called in for the last 15 minutes before the attack hour. While all this preliminary bombardment was being carried out, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, moved two of its companies through the position of the 1st Battalion. On the right, facing east, was Company L; on the left, Company I. The line formed by the two companies extended from one side of Betio to the other; behind the skirmish line, Company K waited in reserve, ready to support either company.

The eastern part of the island, the 2,000-yard stretch in front of the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, yet to be taken, was a shambles. It had received almost as much attention on D-day as the western half, and had been pulverized daily on each of the three succeeding days. Still, in the midst of all the death and destruction caused by the planes, the naval gunfire, and the shells of the pack howitzers of the 10th Marines, roughly 500 Japanese held out in dugouts, blockhouses, log and dirt emplacements, and rifle

pits. Five hundred of the enemy were still alive on the eastern part of Betio, despite the terrific losses sustained in the counterattacks against Jones' battalion the night before.

At 1930, 22 November, General Smith called his regimental commanders together and at that time issued verbal orders for the next day's operations. Present at the meeting were Colonel Shoup, Colonel Edson, Colonel Hall, Colonel Holmes, General Bourke,¹ commanding general of the 10th Marines, and Major McCoy of the 2d Tank Battalion. To this group, General Smith read the following:

LT 2/6 has been ordered to move from Bairiki to the west beach of Betio tonight. CT 6 will attack at 0800 tomorrow morning to secure the southeast end of Betio. All available tanks attached. CT 2 with LT 1/8 attached, will continue mopping up operations on western end of Betio and in particular eliminate Japanese resistance in the vicinity of the boundary between Beaches Red 1 and Red 2. CT 8, less LT 1/8, preparing to move to Bairiki when boats become available. Tenth Marines in direct support of CT 6. Air bombardment on southeast end of Betio from 0700 to 0730. Naval gunfire support from 0730 to 0745. All battalion of 6th Marines will revert to the control of the 6th Marines at 0600, but necessary orders preparatory to launching attack may be issued by the commanding officer of the 6th Marines prior to that time to his battalion commanders; 10th Marines will maintain harassing fires on Japanese positions on southeast end of Betio throughout the night.

¹ There had been no replacement colonel available for the artillery regiment when Bourke was promoted to brigadier general; hence he remained in command for the Tarawa operation.

On the morning of the fourth day, Colonel Holmes was to attack with his regiment in a column of battalions. Division had hoped that the 2d Battalion would be able to move over from Bairiki in time to support the 3d, the attacking landing team. The 1st had sustained fairly heavy casualties during the counterattacks of the night before, and the day of fighting previous to that. It was planned that the 1st Battalion would remain in reserve for the 6th Marines on 23 November.

The way things turned out, however, the first elements of the 2d Battalion did not reach Betio until the island was almost secured. There had been a misunderstanding about boats to transport the team over to Betio, and to carry the 8th Marines to Bairiki. For one thing there were too few boats available, since the unloading of the transports had been carried out without due regard to the need for certain supplies ashore at a given time, and too many boats were loaded and waiting out in the water with no place to unload and no personnel ready to unload them. There had been no opportunity for the shore-party organizations of the combat teams to operate according to previous planning. The break-down in the logistical phase of the operation began when shore-party personnel attached to the landing teams were used, of necessity, to fight for the initial beach-head; further deterioration was experienced when the landing teams began to call for supplies directly from their own transports, without regard to any systematic plan for coordinating the ship-to-shore movements of the boats carrying badly needed ammunition, water, and rations.

ATTACK ON THE THIRD BATTALION, 6TH MARINES

At 0800, 23 November, McLeod's battalion moved through the positions of the 1st Battalion toward two tank-trap ditches about 150 yards to the front. Supporting the advance of the landing team were two medium tanks and seven light tanks. Men with flamethrowers were in the front lines of the advancing infantry. The tank traps were reached in a matter of only a few minutes; McLeod had planned to stop there and reorganize before continuing. With only feeble token resistance being offered thus far there was no need to halt; nor was it even necessary to pause while additional artillery fire was called in to the immediate front of the advancing troops. The infantry and tanks pushed on,

blasting out dugouts, burning positions, and another 200 yards was gained before the first enemy strong point offered resistance over in the path of Company I. Here the Japanese were emplaced in several large bombproof dugouts and pillboxes with good fields of fire covering the open ground to the immediate west, the ground between the Marines and the Japanese positions. McLeod saw that the zone of action in front of Company L offered some cover, and by pushing that company around to the south the Japanese positions could be bypassed. This was done. Company L, now past the enemy obstacle, assumed responsibility for the whole front, a width of about 200 yards. Company I was left to contain and reduce the enemy pocket of resistance. Company K moved up behind Company L and the drive to the southeast continued.

It seemed that most of the Japanese with any will to fight had been killed in the counterattacks of the night before. Most of those who remained in the path of the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, concentrated in any place that offered shelter and few attempted to resist in the same fashion as previously encountered. There were no prepared lines of defensive positions to resist the attack of Company L. The troops found that they could destroy the fortified emplacements on a piecemeal basis without worrying too much about coming under fire from what normally would be supporting positions. The tanks and flamethrowers were kept busy all through the morning. Just before the end of the island was reached, naval gunfire was called in on the extreme southeastern tip to pin down those of the enemy who still remained and to prevent any of them from trying to escape across the sand spit that led over to Bairiki. The rapid advance of Company L denied the enemy the opportunity of reorganizing as positions were overrun. Shortly after 1300 the end of the island was reached and declared secure. During the morning's attack, McLeod lost 9 men killed and 25 wounded. Fourteen prisoners were taken during the period, and 475 of the enemy were killed. The prisoners were mostly Korean laborers.

After the 3d Battalion passed through its lines to carry the attack at 0800, the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, turned to reorganization and supply. All the tanks and flamethrowers were turned over to the 3d Battalion. Since the 2d Battalion had not arrived from Bairiki, Holmes had to plan on using the 1st Battalion in case the 3d ran into difficulty. By 1945,



DIRECT HIT BY 16-INCH SHELL knocked out this gun and killed its crew.

Jones was able to report that his team was ready for action again. During the previous night and afternoon he had lost 1 officer killed and 5 wounded; 44 enlisted men were killed and 123 wounded.

ENEMY POCKET RED 1-RED 2 AREA DESTROYED

While the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, was attacking on the southeastern end of the island, the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, were compressing the pocket of enemy resistance which still held out on the boundary between Beaches Red 1 and Red 2. This Japanese strongpoint had decimated the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, on D-day. It had resisted all attempts toward its reduction since then. From the east, the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, attacked with all three of its companies in a semi-circular line. The 75-mm. self-propelled guns, flamethrowers, and a demolitions crew from Company C, 18th Marines, lent their support to the

infantry. Initially the main effort was made on the right.

Two 75-mm. self-propelled guns and a platoon of infantry under the direction of Maj. Hewitt D. Adams went on the reef and attacked the strongpoint at the junction of Beaches Red 1 and Red 2 from close range. Elimination of this pocket enabled the attack to move slowly; physical contact with the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was made on the left flank at about 1000.

Meanwhile, Maj. John Schoettel, who by now had regained control and command of his battalion (3d Battalion, 2d Marines), attacked from the west swinging the right (south) flank of his line around across the pot-hole area west of the main air strip until the revetments on the north side were reached. Here contact was made with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, and the enemy pocket was completely encircled. The reduction of the Japanese position was made from its rear. After a large concrete pillbox had been destroyed, the action was little more than a

BETIO

TARAWA ATOLL, GILBERT ISLANDS
ATTACK OF 1st BN, 8th MARINES and
3d BN, 2d MARINES

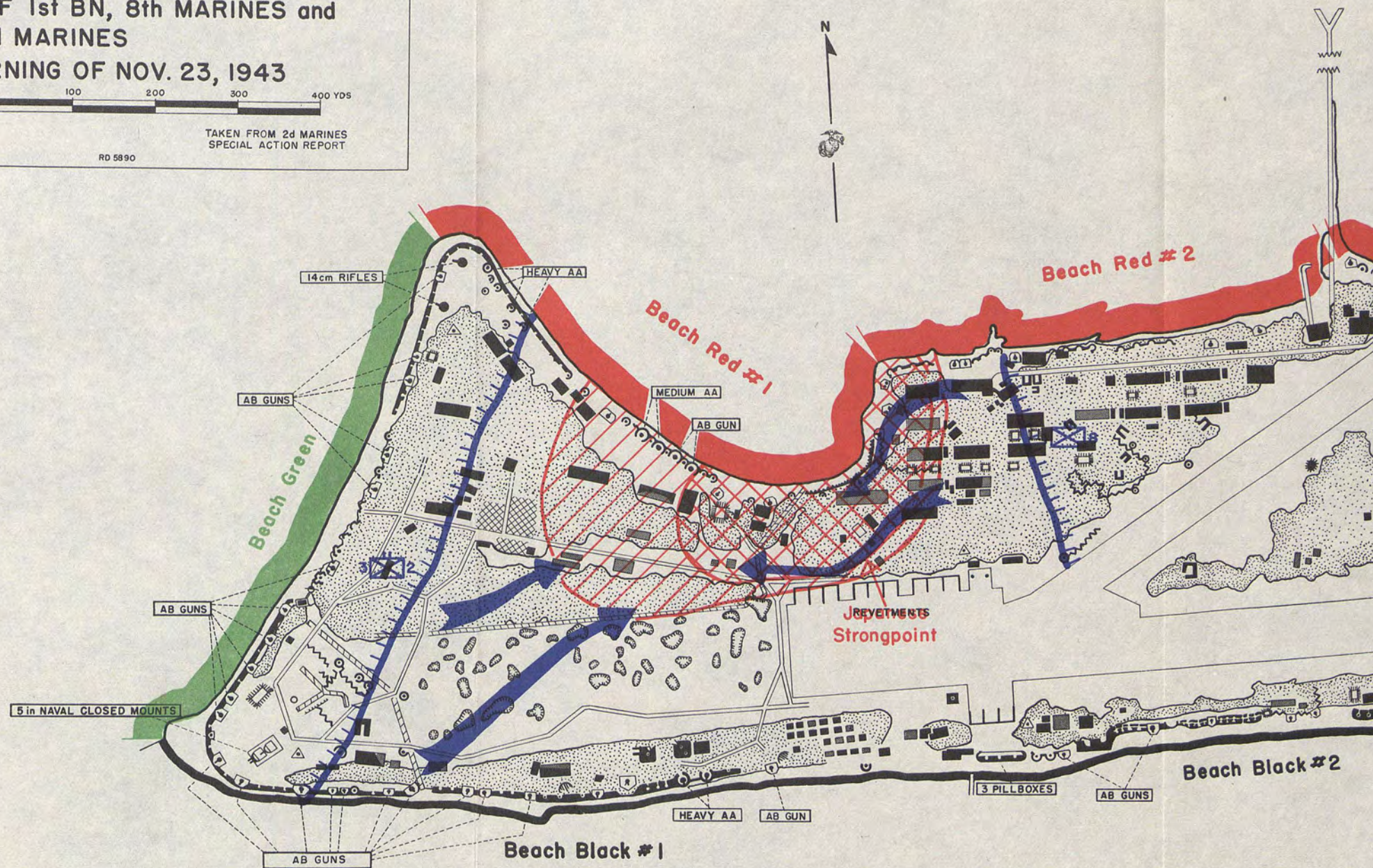
MORNING OF NOV. 23, 1943



MAP 8

TAKEN FROM 2d MARINES
SPECIAL ACTION REPORT

RD 5890



LEGEND:

- Weapon, side notes describe type
- ◻ Covered emplacements
- △ Observation tower
- ☞ Searchlight
- ⊙ Radar
- ⊞ Open dispersed stores
- Fire & Communication trench—built above surface
- - - Fire & Communication trench—cut below surface
- Building
- ▤ Damaged Building
- ▣ Earth covered structure
- Tent
- ⬮ Excavation
- ⊞ Tank trap
- ⊙ Wooded area (Palms)

mopping-up exercise. By 1300 the entire area had been overrun and the 1st Battalion, 8th, and the 3d Battalion, 2d, were in contact on the site of the heavily defended strong point. Emplacements, dugouts, and pillboxes were blasted and burned all afternoon. A few prisoners were taken.

END OF THE BATTLE

Late in the morning of the fourth day of the action on Betio, Gen. Julian C. Smith sent a message to Admiral Harry Hill, summing up the situation ashore as of 1150:

Decisive defeat heavy enemy counterattack last night destroyed bulk of hostile resistance. Expect complete annihilation of enemy on Betio this date. Strongly recommend that you and your chief of staff come ashore this date to get information about the type of hostile resistance which will be encountered in future operations.

At noon, troops were surprised to see the arrival of the first friendly aircraft to land on Betio,² a carrier-based plane, and the pilot of the plane soon was surrounded by Marines, anxious to tell him about the battle and to find out what the world at large thought of it.

At 1245 Admiral Hill and some of his officers came ashore to inspect the devastated island. In the hot sun of early afternoon the little island was quiet except for sporadic rifle fire from small patrols, which were combing captured enemy positions. Occasionally the ground would shake when a charge of TNT was set off in a pillbox or heavy emplacement. Engineer personnel with flamethrowers were still busy burning out dugouts and emplacements where it was believed that a few of the Japanese might be hiding. After 75 hours of violent writhing under the hot equatorial sun, Betio appeared almost inert. At 1330, Gen. Julian C. Smith announced that all organized resistance on Betio had ceased. This did not mean, however, that all the enemy were dead or captured. Every day for many of the succeeding days Japanese would be killed. There were still snipers hiding underground who took an occasional shot at passing Marines.

During the afternoon Col. Elmer Hall moved 8th Marines, less Hays' battalion, over to Bairiki, arriving there at 1615. In the meantime, the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, moved over to Betio from

² Engineers and Seabees had worked under fire to repair the main strip.

Bairiki and bivouacked for the night. Lieutenant Colonel Murray learned that his landing team would operate under division control and would leave next day to start a long march up the islands of the atoll. This landing team was the freshest in the division, had seen less action, and was in excellent shape for its assignment.

Before nightfall General Smith planned to have every battalion on Betio placed in position to defend the island in case the enemy attempted a counterlanding. Through the afternoon the battalions moved into their assigned positions, set up their machine guns, their antitank weapons from the regimental weapons companies, and dug their foxholes. Tanks were moved up to areas offering good fields of fire out over the water. The same held true for the half-tracks, the self-propelled 75-mm. guns. On the east side of the main pier, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, moved into position with its men deployed all the way to the southeastern tip of the island. West of the pier, covering Beaches Red 1 and Red 2, the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, prepared its positions for the night.

Across the western end of the island, on Green Beach, were the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, and 2d Battalion, 6th Marines. Then around on the south side of the island, extending about one-third the way down from the west end, was the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines. Next came the men of the 2d Marines' Regimental Weapons Company. To the east, for about 400 yards, were the men of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, reaching to connect with the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, which covered the remainder of the island, joining with the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, at the southeastern tip.

Back from the beaches, each landing team kept a part of its force as a mobile reserve, ready to move to any threatened sector. Ready to fire in any direction, the batteries of the 10th Marines stood silent after 2½ days crowded with action. It might appear that the defensive measures taken by the 2d Marine Division at the close of the fight for Betio were unnecessary. The ships of the task force still stood off shore. There were the battleships, the cruisers, carriers, and ringing them, the destroyers, now mute and still, but nonetheless ready with radar screens working continuously lest the enemy achieve some measure of surprise. It was, of course, simply sound military practice, and if any attempt were made to take away this little piece of ground so recently wrested from

the enemy—and then only after one of the bitterest fights yet seen—the division would not be caught by surprise.

All through the afternoon men were busy burying the dead, evacuating the remaining wounded, and moving supplies into dumps or distributing them to the many units ashore. The division chaplain and his assistants were in charge of interring the remains of the Marines who were killed in the terrific struggle, and funeral services went on all through the day. Each battalion landing team made every effort to retrieve its own dead, to identify them, and carry them to the burying places.

The island, though quiet and peaceful looking, was nothing but a dirty, demolished, stinking battlefield, whose residue remained to be cleaned up and straightened away. Although every effort was made all through the action to take care of the Marine dead when possible, little or nothing could be done for the enemy dead. Somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000 Japanese and Koreans were on Betio when the 2d Division arrived on 20 November. Only 146 allowed themselves to be captured. The rest lay where they had fallen and, at the close of the fourth day ashore on Betio, the air was heavy and foul to smell. This did not seem to bother many of the Marines who proceeded to eat with a gusto hard to achieve during the tension of combat. For once everyone had enough food and water. There was opportunity to dig a fairly comfortable foxhole for the night with none of the discomforts connected with being under enemy fire. The men dug their holes deep; every night had seen an air raid so far and there was every indication that this night would bring another one.

However, the night was far from quiet. At approximately 1800, a Marine threw a thermite grenade after a hold-out Japanese in what the Marine thought was a dugout. Actually this "dugout" was a Japanese 5-inch gun magazine. The grenade started the projectiles in the magazine exploding; the explosions continued all through the night, pinning Marines in their foxholes over a large part of the eastern end of the island.

Under the cover of explosion of the magazine, several Japanese, hidden in the battle debris on the eastern tail of Betio, emerged from their hiding places to strike a final blow at the Marines.

In sporadic individual engagements during the night, two enlisted Marines were bayoneted to death

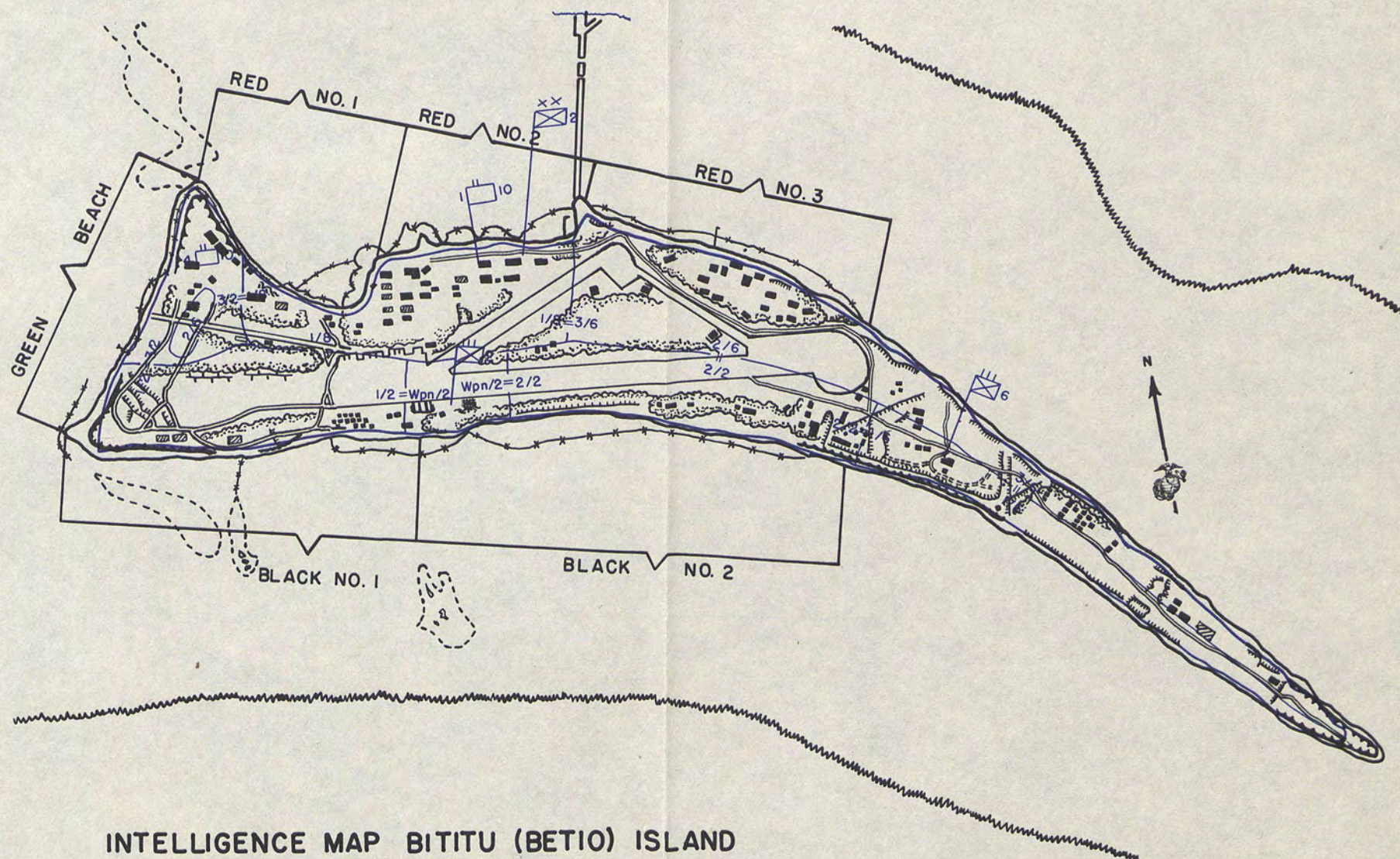
and the intelligence officer of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, was killed. Approximately 14 Japanese were killed in the center of the area occupied by the 6th Marines.

Two of the regimental combat teams of the 2d Marine Division embarked in transports and left Tarawa for the Division's new base camp at Kuremuela, Hawaii, T. H., on 24 November 1943. After spending the night of 23–24 November on Baini, Colonel Hall's regiment, the 8th Marines, loaded aboard its ships all through the morning of 24 November, and Colonel Shoup's regiment, the 2d Marines, began to reembark at 0900 that morning. Late that afternoon the ships left Tarawa.

During the same day, Maj. Gen. Holland M. Smith, Commanding General of V Amphibious Corps, arrived at Betio from Makin, by plane. In company with Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith, General H. M. Smith made a tour of the battle-wrecked island and inspected the captured fortified emplacements and gun positions so recently manned by the Japanese. The fight for Makin had been easier than that for Betio. One reinforced regimental combat team of the 27th Infantry Division, under the overall command of Maj. Gen. Ralph C. Smith, USA, landed on Makin on D-day, 20 November, and by the afternoon of 22 November, it was announced that all organized resistance on the atoll had ended. The regimental combat team, the 165th Infantry, lost 56 men killed in action and 131 wounded in action.

On 24 November 1943 a flag-raising ceremony took place on Betio. Since Tarawa had belonged to the British before it was captured by the Japanese, it was only proper that the Union Jack should be raised simultaneously with the Stars and Stripes. After a great deal of difficulty a small British flag was found and then the ceremony was held. Two battle-scarred palms served as masts. A Marine field music sounded colors on a battered bugle while the troops came to attention. First the American flag was raised, joined a moment later by the British flag to flutter in the breeze over the island so recently wrested from the enemy. The flag raising seemed to mark the official capture of the island. Assault troops then marched off to the pier to go aboard ship and leave the island. Defense troops carried on with the work of converting the island into an American base. The chaplains and their helpers went on with the work of identifying and burying the dead.

POSITIONS AT SUNSET



INTELLIGENCE MAP BITITU (BETIO) ISLAND
TARAWA ATOLL, GILBERT ISLANDS
SITUATION 1800 D+3

500 400 300 200 100 0 1000 YDS

MAP 9

TAKEN FROM 2D MAR DIV
SPECIAL ACTION REPORT

NOTE: LINES ARE GENERAL INDICATION ONLY.
GAPS WERE COVERED BY SMALL GROUPS,
AND BY FIRE. SECONDARY LINES WERE
ESTABLISHED WHERE POSSIBLE BEHIND
FRONT LINES.



UNITED STATES COLORS FLYING OVER BETIO marks the end of the battle, another step along the road to Tokyo.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

CHAPTER VI

Mission Completed

WITH the capture of Betio, three things remained to be done: (1) The capture of the rest of the islands in Tarawa atoll; (2) the capture of Apamama atoll; and (3) the capture of Abaiang, Marakei, and Maiana atolls.

The first of these was assigned to the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, commanded by Lt. Col. Raymond L. Murray. This battalion started its long march up the atoll from Buota on 24 November.

Even before that, however, some preliminary reconnaissance work had been done on the little islets east of Betio, in the area at the base of the long axis of the L-shaped atoll, by Company D, 2d Tank Battalion. This company, commanded by Capt. John R. Nelson, was the division's scout company, and while the battle raged on Betio, it was assigned the mission of reconnoitering Eita, Buota, and the little unnamed islets to the north of those two.

On 21 November the 3d Platoon landed on Eita, where it found fuel dumps, bomb and mine dumps, but no Japanese. The 2d Platoon landed on Buota, the islet that makes the bend at the elbow of the atoll, and located a Japanese position, estimated to contain 100 of the enemy, and a radio station at the corner of the bend. The 1st Platoon landed about 4 miles farther up the atoll to the northwest near Tabiteuea village, where it captured one Japanese laborer and several natives.

The 3d Battalion, 10th Marines, was sent to Eita on 23 November, and the 3d Platoon, Company D, was attached to the artillery battalion. The platoon had captured one Japanese prisoner.

Just after dark of that same day the Japanese force on Buota moved north through the positions of the 1st Platoon, Company D. Next day, the 1st and 4th Platoons scouted as far north as the island called

Ida, about halfway up the long side of the atoll. In the meantime, Nelson met the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, on Buota and guided the battalion as far north as Julia. On the following day the scouts were recalled to Eita to prepare for reconnaissance missions on the atolls adjacent to Tarawa—Abaiang, Marakei, and Maiana.

2D BATTALION, 6TH MARINES, MOPS UP THE ATOLL

As mentioned before, the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, was assigned the mission of cleaning up the rest of Tarawa atoll. This battalion had seen little action during the fight for Betio and had suffered fewer casualties than any of the other battalions. Murray's battalion embarked in boats from Betio at 0500, 24 November, and moved over to Buota to begin the trek to the north. By nightfall the battalion had advanced to Buoti,²⁰ passing through several native villages recently evacuated; no enemy force was contacted.

The march was resumed on 25 November and by the end of the day the battalion was well up the atoll. Still no contact with the enemy had been made. In the late afternoon of 26 November, the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, had reached the south end of the large island at the northwest end of Tarawa atoll—Buariki. Before bivouacking for the night, Murray sent out Company E to the northwest to maintain position as an advance covering force. Murray knew from information received from the scouts that somewhere north of him there were at least 100 Japanese; the enemy group had to be on Buariki.

This was verified when patrols from Company

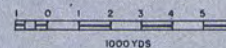
²⁰ Not to be confused with Buota, a separate island.

TARAWA ATOLL

MOVEMENTS OF PLATOONS, Co D, (SCOUTS) 2D TANK BN

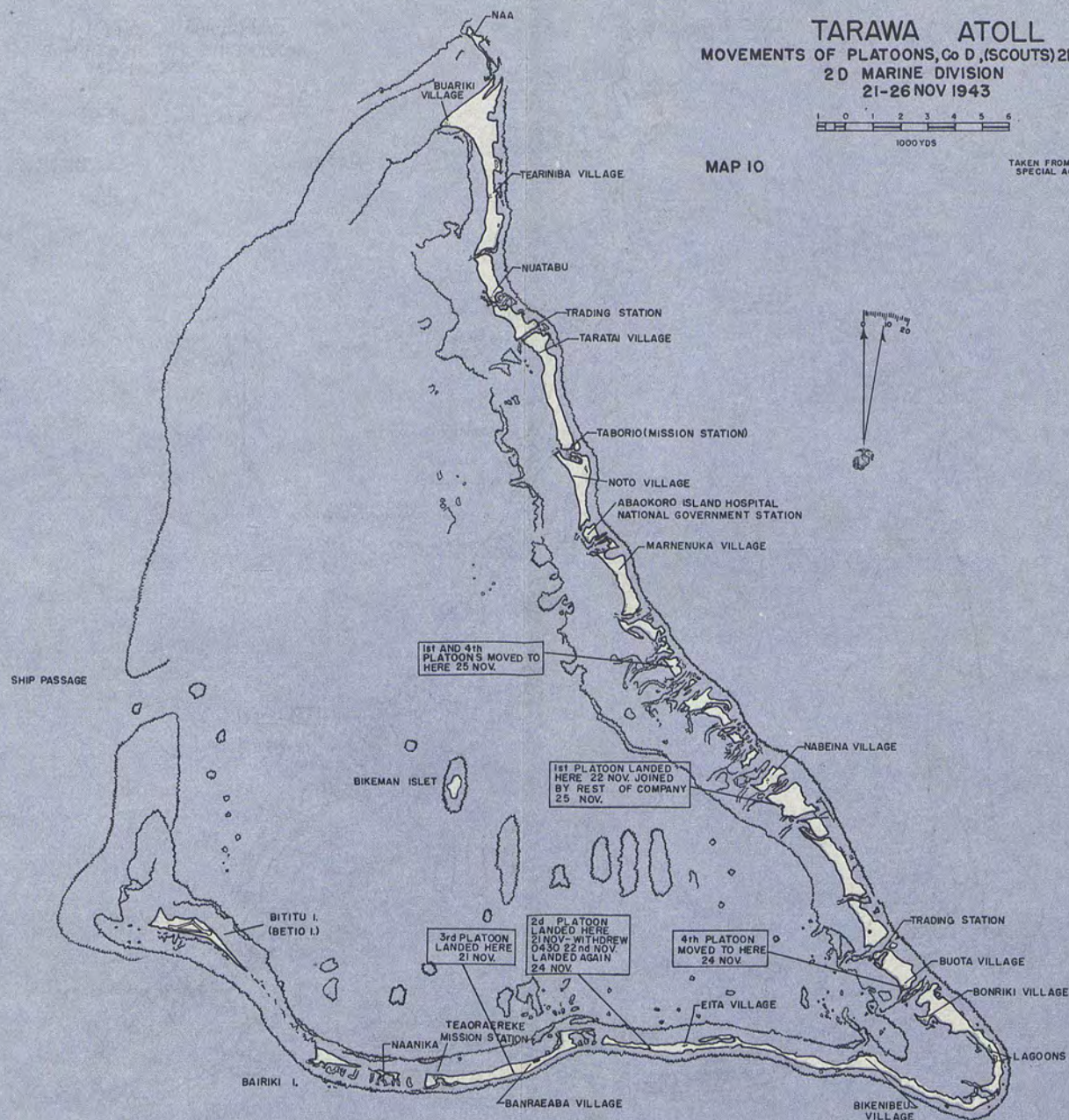
2D MARINE DIVISION

21-26 NOV 1943

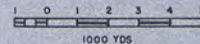


MAP 10

TAKEN FROM 2D MAR DIV
SPECIAL ACTION REPORT

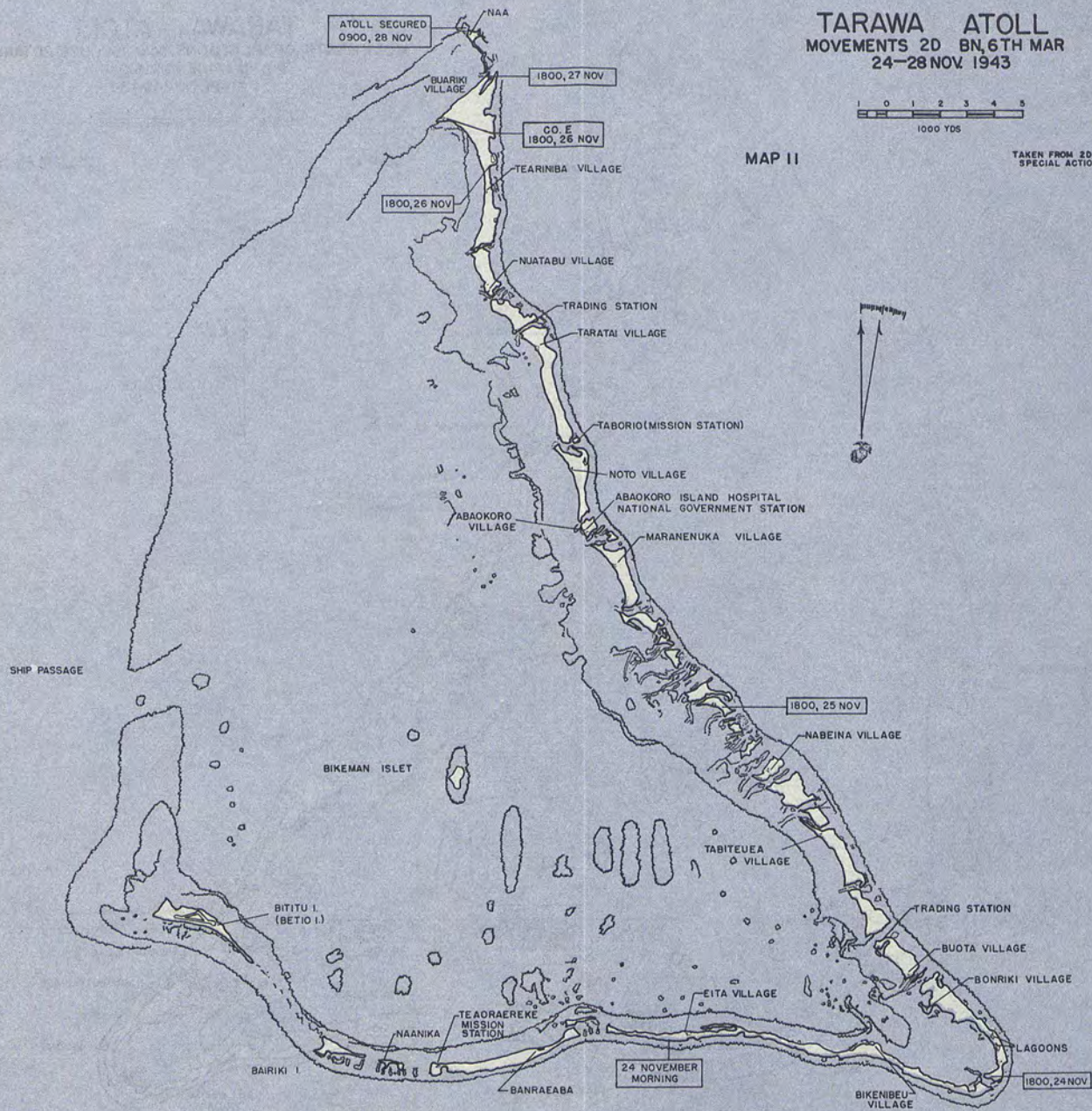


TARAWA ATOLL MOVEMENTS 2D BN, 6TH MAR 24-28 NOV 1943



MAP II

TAKEN FROM 2D MAR DIV
SPECIAL ACTION REPORT



ran into a Japanese patrol at sunset. A brief fire fight ensued, in which two Marines were wounded, and it was believed that two or three Japanese were killed. After dark, Company E's patrols returned and the company remained in its defensive position during the night. Occasional harassing enemy rifle fire was received, but the Marines held their fire and waited for daylight. There were no additional Marine casualties.

Next morning Murray advanced with two companies in assault and one in reserve, to clear the area between his position of the night before and the place where the island narrows northeast of Buariki village. Shortly after moving out the companies found the enemy position. Although the Japanese had no organized line, it was difficult to destroy them. Broken into small groups, each of which was in a pit or behind coconut logs, the enemy held their fire until the Marines were almost on top of them. Vegetation was dense and the fighting was at close range.

Company E was hit hard and paused to reorganize. Murray then moved Company F through Company E to continue the attack. In the meantime Company G was coming in on the enemy's east flank, attacking to the northwest. Murray had with him one artillery battery, Battery G, 10th Marines, but the action was at such close range as to make it impossible to use the howitzers except for one concentration which was fired when Company F passed through Company E.

After several hours of typical jungle fighting, the main enemy resistance was overcome, and Murray turned to mopping-up and patrolling. The day's action cost 3 officers killed and 1 wounded; enlisted losses amounted to 29 killed and 58 wounded. One hundred and seventy-five Japanese were killed and two Korean laborers captured.

One tiny islet remained to be taken, Naa, or Lone Tree islet, which lay a hundred yards northwest of Buariki. Early in the morning of 28 November, Murray sent troops over to Naa, which was found to contain no Japanese, and by 0800 the capture of Tarawa atoll was complete. The 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, then returned to Eita to rest and reorganize after the long march up the atoll.

APAMAMA: CORPS SCOUTS

On 22 October 1943, Maj. Gen. Holland M. Smith, commanding the V Amphibious Corps, or-

dered Capt. James L. Jones, commanding V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company, to land his company (less one platoon) on Apamama during the night 19-20 November with the mission of reconnoitering the atoll in order to determine whether there was any sizable Japanese force ashore, and to select and mark suitable beaches and channels to be used later by other forces. If any large hostile force was present on Apamama, Jones was to withdraw and avoid an engagement. Jones' company was to be lifted to Apamama on the submarine *Nautilus*.

Apamama atoll (also called Hopper atoll, Abemama, and Apemama) lies 76 miles south of Tarawa. Elliptical Apamama has its lagoon almost entirely enclosed by Abemama Island, a long island that is broken in five places so that it appears that there are six islands closely joined together. Across the southwestern side of the atoll there is a reef, through which are two passages suitable for small ships. The southwestern side of the atoll is guarded by two islands separate from Abemama, called Abatiku and Entrance Islands. To avoid confusion, the six portions of Abemama were given code names (as were the islands of Tarawa atoll). The north segment was named Steve; next Oscar, then Otto, Orson, John, and finally Joe. Entrance Island was named Nick and Abatiku was called Matt.

The whole atoll is about 12 miles long and 5 miles wide. Surrounding it, broken only by South Passage and Western Passage, is a continuous reef. Inside the lagoon there is considerable foul ground and coral heads. Coconut palms and tropical vegetation are found in abundance on all islands of the atoll.

In addition to her mission of carrying the corps scouts to Apamama, *Nautilus* had another mission to execute first. From Pearl Harbor the ship was to go to Tarawa, to cruise in that area prior to the landing on Betio in order to observe Japanese movements and positions, and to be available to rescue pilots of the attacking planes if any were shot down during the pre-D-day "softening-up" process. *Nautilus* was to leave Tarawa on 19 November in order to land the scouts on Apamama.

The submarine, with the corps scouts aboard, carried out her first mission off Betio according to plan. In the afternoon of 19 November, *Nautilus* left Betio for Apamama. A strong current held the pace of the submerged craft—at best a slow ship—to a minimum. Shortly after 1930 she surfaced and began

to make better time. A few minutes after 2100, 19 November, a destroyer from Task Force 53, now approaching Tarawa, opened fire on *Nautilus* under the impression that the submarine was an enemy craft. One direct hit with a 5-inch shell was scored on the main induction tube. Immediate emergency measures righted the ship after she had dived to a depth of about 300 feet, and several hours later she was able to surface and effect temporary repairs to the damage. All next day the ship had to remain submerged, arriving off Apamama at about 1400. After sundown a run was made to the south to provide an opportunity to charge batteries; then the submarine returned to Apamama to discharge the corps scouts in their rubber boats.

Long before dawn in the morning of 21 November, Jones' company left the submarine and headed toward John Island. A strong current caused the boats to drift off course and the company landed on Joe instead of John. Once ashore, the scouts began patrolling and had one minor brush with the enemy when a three-man patrol was encountered. One Japanese was killed. The company then moved to the next islet, Orson. Here natives reported that there were 25 Japanese on Apamama and that their positions were just across from the north end of Orson on the south end of Otto.

Attempts to cross the sandspit connecting Orson and Otto were unsuccessful; the Japanese, strongly entrenched in fortified positions, laid down a heavy volume of fire from light machine gun and rifles. Since it was now late in the day, Jones broke off the action and withdrew to plan for the next day's attack. It appeared that without mortars, it would be impossible to dislodge the Japanese from their positions.

On the morning of 24 November, Jones moved his platoons to the north end of Orson and called in 70 rounds of fire from *Nautilus* on the Japanese positions. The enemy continued to fire while the submarine was firing and Jones was unable to use rubber boats to outflank the Japanese. Late in the day a destroyer offered her services and fired a few rounds as it grew dark.

Next morning a native arrived at Jones' camp with the news that the Japanese were all dead. This information was corroborated by another native who had given reliable information before. The 1st and 3d Platoons were sent to investigate and found that the story was true. A few of the enemy had been

killed by the shelling and the rest, about 18, had committed hari-kari.

On the following morning a landing force commanded by Brig. Gen. Leo D. Hermle arrived to occupy Apamama. With the arrival of the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, Jones received orders to embark his company aboard the *Harris* and depart the atoll. The V Amphibious Corps scouts had lost few men. One man was killed in action, one wounded in action, and one was injured. The enemy loss was complete: 23 dead.

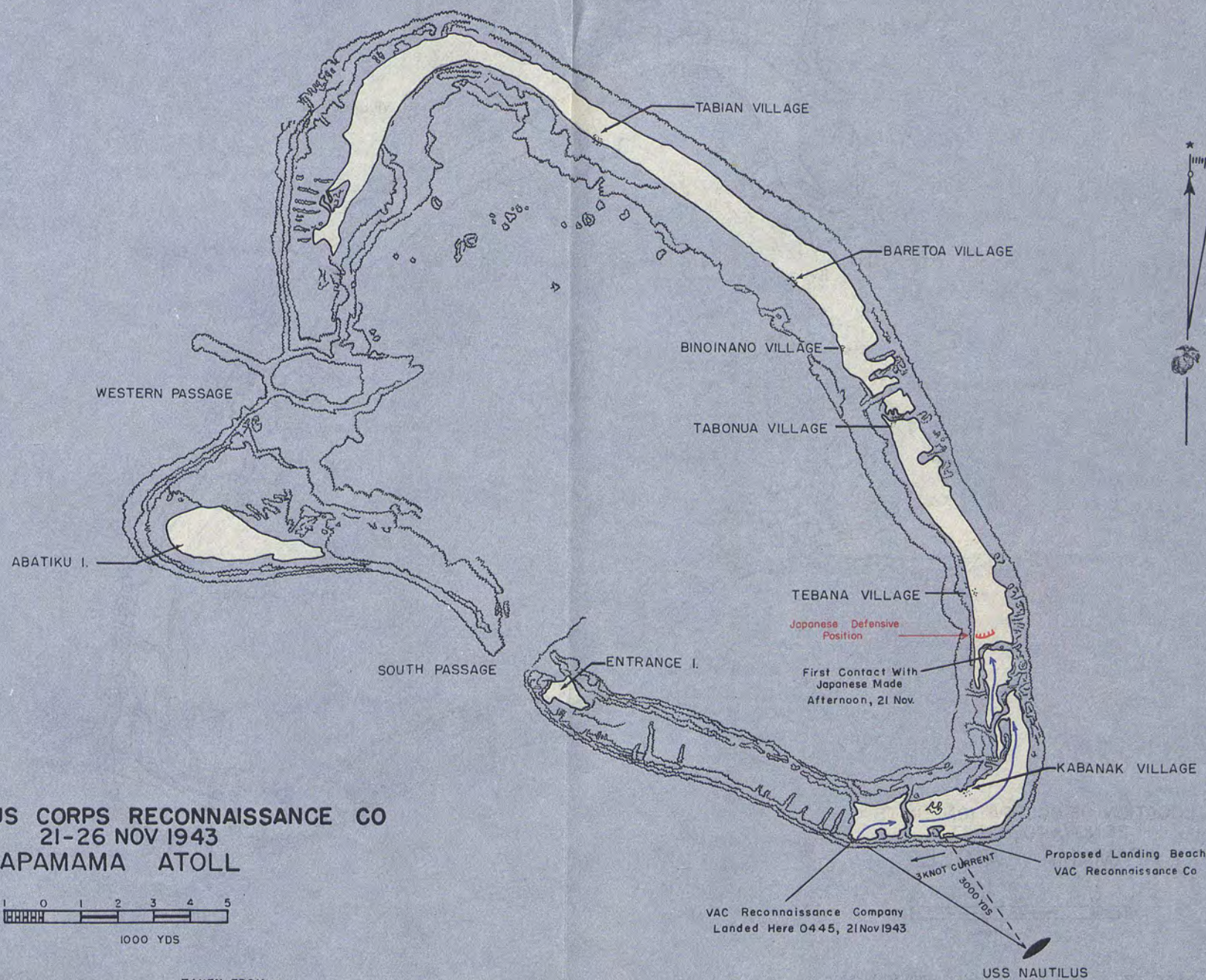
APAMAMA: 2D MARINE DIVISION

On 24 November 1943, Gen. Julian C. Smith directed Brig. Gen. Leo D. Hermle to seize and occupy Apamama atoll. Hermle was to be in charge of a landing force built around the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, commanded by Lt. Col. K. F. McLeod. Hermle was instructed that V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company had secured two islands of the atoll and that there were about 25 Japanese holding out from fortified positions. Rear Admiral Harry Hill was to provide the naval task force necessary to lift Hermle's landing force to Apamama.

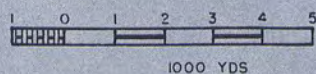
At 1500, 25 November, General Hermle, aboard the *Maryland* with Admiral Hill, and the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, on the *Harris*, left for Apamama. During the uneventful voyage to the target, Admiral Hill received word from corps scouts that all the Japanese on Apamama were dead. Next morning the force arrived at Apamama and Lieutenant Colonel McLeod sent two of his rifle companies ashore, Company I on John Island, and Company K on Steve Island.

General Hermle went ashore the morning of the same day to organize the atoll's defenses and arrange for a meeting with native chiefs, during which he would acquaint them with his plans for occupying the atoll.

On 1 December, Gen. Julian C. Smith arrived to inspect the progress of unloading supplies and equipment, and the atoll's defenses. In the meantime the 8th Defense Battalion had arrived and had emplaced its weapons. Also ashore was the air base commander. On 4 December, General Hermle received orders from Admiral Hill to pass the command of Apamama atoll to the base commander, Capt. W. P. Cogswell, USN. Hermle left the atoll that same day to rejoin the division.



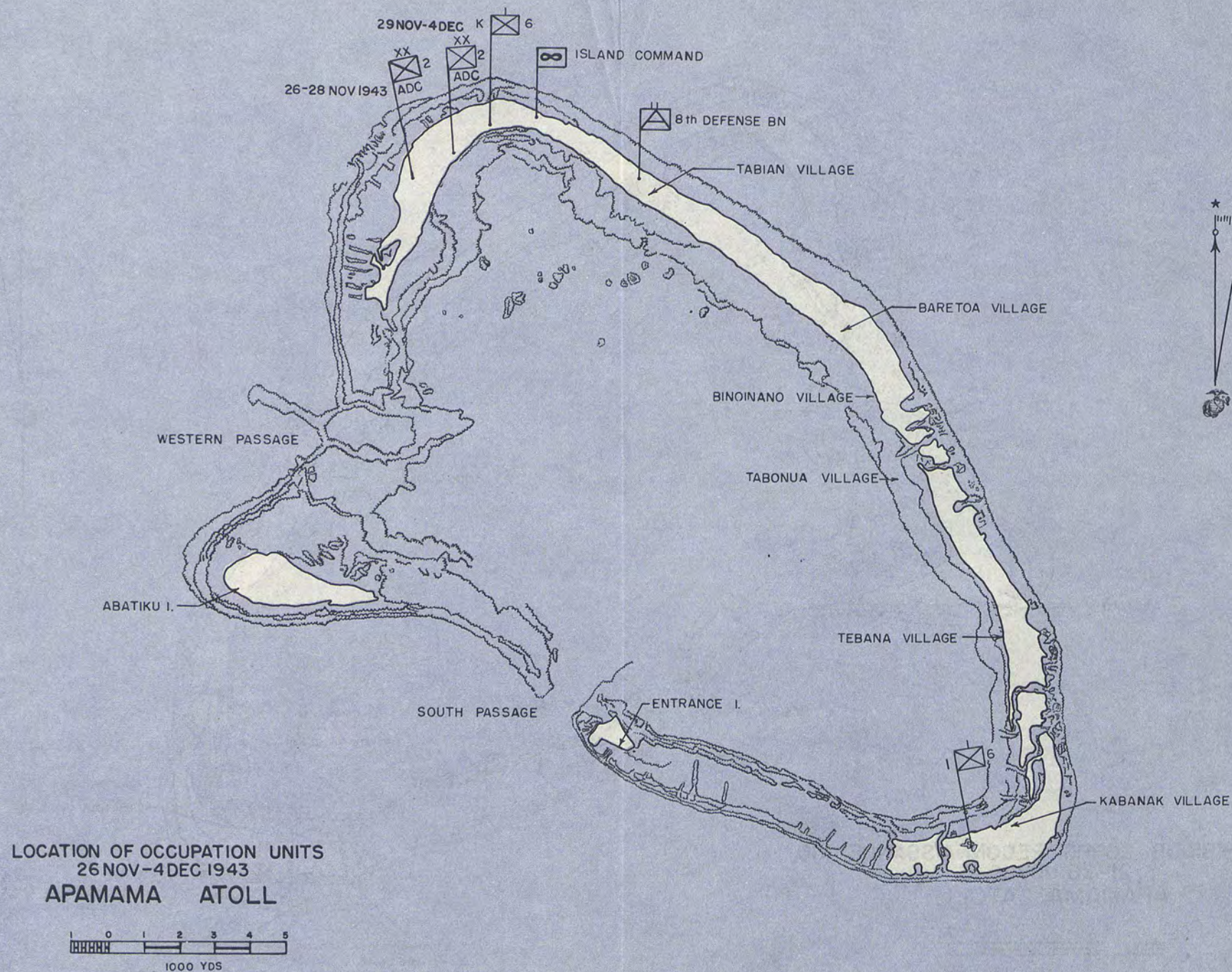
V AMPHIBIOUS CORPS RECONNAISSANCE CO
21-26 NOV 1943
APAMAMA ATOLL



MAP 12

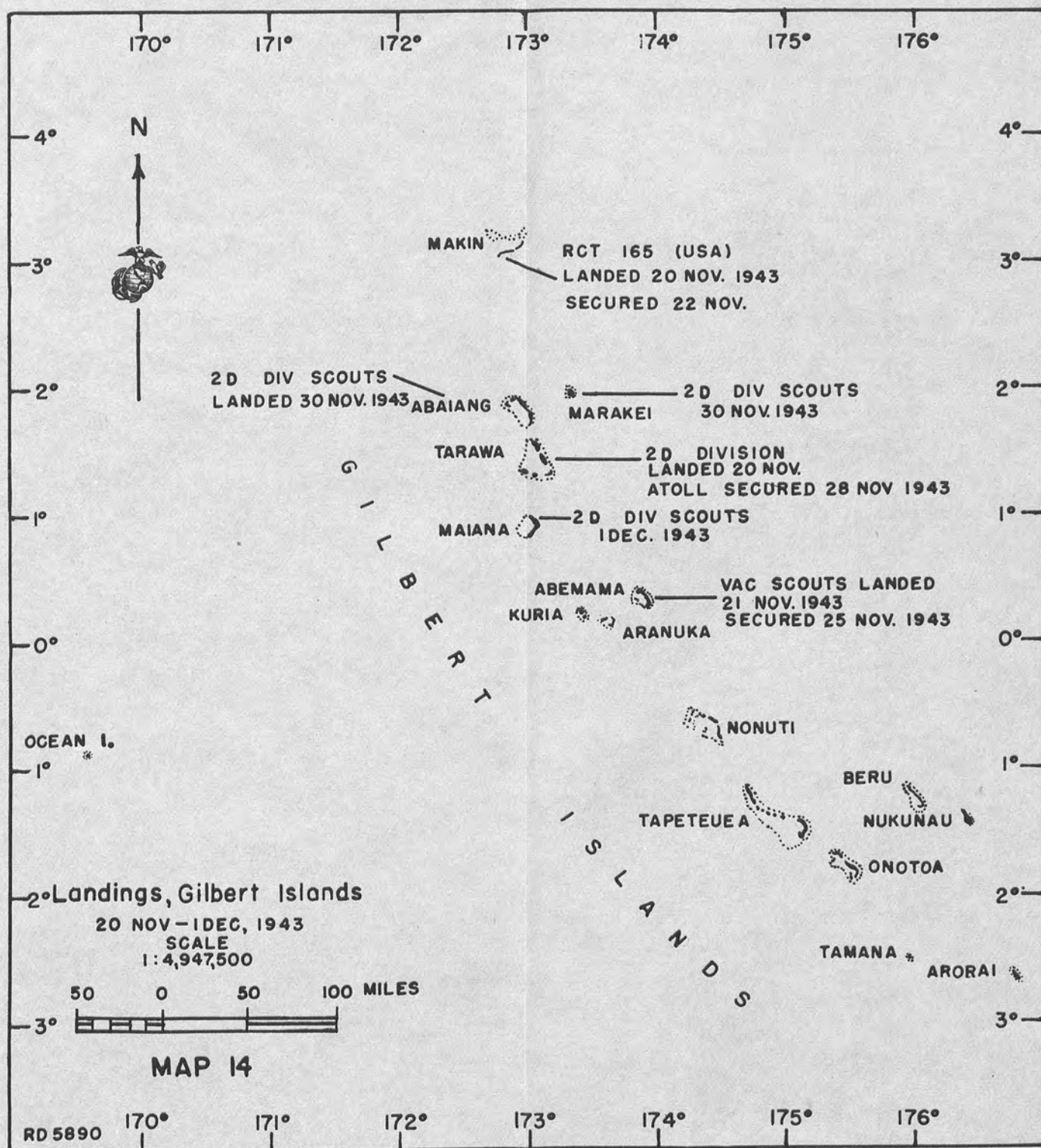
TAKEN FROM
VAC RCN CO OVERLAYS

RD 5890



MAP 13

TAKEN FROM ADC'S SPECIAL
ACTION REPORT, APAMAMA



ABAIANG, MARAKEI, AND MAIANA ATOLLS

On 29 November, Company D, 2d Tank Battalion, embarked aboard the minesweeper *Pursuit* with the mission of reconnoitering three island atolls adjacent to Tarawa—Abaiang, Marakei, and Maiana. There was the possibility that Japanese coast watchers might still be on these islands. Before dawn on 30 November, Company D landed two rubber boatloads of men above and below the village of Koinawa in Abaiang atoll. Five Japanese on the island left immediately in a native boat and last were seen sailing across the lagoon. Natives were contacted ashore and arrangements were made with them to take care of the Japanese should they return.

Next atoll to be reconnoitered was Marakei. Here the *Pursuit* was greeted by several boats filled with natives; from them came information that there were no Japanese on the atoll. To make sure, four boatloads of scouts went ashore; there were no Japanese. After leaving food and medical supplies for the natives, the *Pursuit* turned back to Abaiang to pick up the scouts who had landed there earlier in the day. Bad surf conditions had prevented taking them off sooner.

Next morning, 1 December, the scouts landed on Maiana, near the village of Bickerel. No Japanese were on Maiana and after a brief reconnaissance, the scouts returned to the *Pursuit* and were back in Tarawa lagoon by noon.

THE DIVISION LEAVES TARAWA

With the completion of the reconnaissance of Abaiang, Marakei, and Maiana atolls, and the arrival of defense battalions and other troops to garrison Tarawa and Apamama, the 2d Marine Division

prepared to leave the Gilberts. The 2d and 8th Marines had left soon after the battle on Betio and were now in the division's new base camp at Kamuela, Hawaii. During the last week in November most of the remaining units of the division, except the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, which stayed for two more months, embarked aboard ship and sailed for Hawaii. On 4 December, Gen. Julian C. Smith turned over the command of the Tarawa area to Commander, Advanced Base, Tarawa, Capt. Jackson R. Tate, USN.

The cost of capturing Tarawa raised a storm of criticism in the United States when it was learned that the casualty figure amounted to roughly 3,000 killed, wounded, or missing in action. (See appendix C for complete casualty break-down.) Too far removed from the realism of war, the American people were caught between shock and surprise; there was nothing to prepare them for the cost involved in making amphibious operations against a tenacious, fanatical foe who was willing to die to the last man for emperor and empire. For a while the hue and cry raised by the press almost obscured the facts.

Subsequent amphibious operations in the Marianas, at Peleliu, and at Iwo Jima helped to give perspective to Tarawa, but by then the bloody, violent struggle was half-forgotten. Succeeding operations did much to dim the memory of Tarawa, but none ever obscured it; nothing could ever obscure such a battle where perseverance dominated over adversity, where individual courage and collective know-how defeated a strong Japanese garrison on its own ground and in its own positions.

In the words of a contemporary national magazine:

Last week some 2,000 or 3,000 United States Marines, most of them now dead or wounded, gave the nation a name to stand beside those of Concord Bridge, the Bon Homme Richard, the Alamo, Little Big Horn, and Belleau Wood. The name was Tarawa.¹

¹ Time Magazine, 6 December 1943.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

This operation (Gilberts) is considered to have been highly successful. Island bases essential to our advance across the Pacific were captured from the enemy with the complete loss of all his defending forces.—*CinCPac Operation Report, November 1943, annex F, page 10.*

UNIQUE among all the operations in the war in the Pacific, and with implications so broad and far-reaching as to affect all subsequent amphibious operations, Tarawa was much more than a successful battle. It was, in many ways, a departure from anything that had been done before.

For the first time in history, a sea-borne assault was launched against a heavily defended coral atoll, thus beginning an operation that was assault in nature from start to finish, that never once lost its amphibious flavor, and that depended for success upon the closest control and coordination of land, sea, and air forces.

Here was no large, or even limited, land mass where the attacker had merely to seize a beachhead in order to taste the first fruits of success. At Tarawa, success could only come when the island under attack was taken in entirety, for Betio was so small as to preclude the possibility of seizing a beachhead, in the classical sense of that term.

The small foothold held by the Marines on Betio on D-day, and the day following, could scarcely be called a beachhead. It had few of the characteristics normally associated with a beachhead; there was no fairly secure area on the hostile shore in which to reorganize; where it was possible to strengthen positions by moving intact units into the threatened zones. There was no beach free from enemy fire where reinforcements could be landed safely, where supporting weapons could be brought ashore and emplaced to support the attack. There was no op-

portunity to land supplies and equipment in the conventional manner.

Until the close of the second day of the fighting entry to the island was no easier for reserve units than it had been for the initial assault waves, and in the meantime the sole vehicle capable of crossing the reef with troops was diminishing in numbers to the point of vanishing.

There was no weakly defended, or undefended beach on Betio upon which to land. There was no jungle to screen or conceal a landing or subsequent operations ashore. Neither were there any ground forms to shield the attacker. From the reef all the way to the beach the enemy denied all approaches forcing the Marines to ride their vehicles ashore—or wade in—without being able to fight back. Once ashore, the assault waves found themselves pinned down by withering enemy fire that came from carefully prepared emplacements, from almost every direction.

For two full days the defenders of Betio had all the advantages accruing to the defender. The attackers had to come to them, across fire-swept water over a coral reef that barred the progress of everything but amphibian tractors, and these were few. The defenders had the protection of underground emplacements and positions; bombs and shells had little effect upon them. The attacking Marines, on the other hand, were forced to move in the open with no protection, no cover, and no concealment. They came down fire-lanes covered by prescribed enemy guns.

Chief ally to the Japanese in this battle was the reef that fringed Betio. The reef prevented the continuous movement of troops, supplies, and equipment from ship to shore. Despite the reef, and intense and bitter resistance from the enemy, the 2d Marine Division fought and worked until it got enough men, supplies, and equipment ashore to carry the fight into the Japanese positions, and in the end annihilated all but 146 of the enemy's 4,836 men.

In just 76 hours, the 2d Marine Division had completed the capture of Betio, key island—and the only one with an airfield—in Tarawa atoll, and this, coupled with the capture of Makin by a regimental combat team of the 27th Infantry Division, gave the United States control of the entire Gilberts Islands archipelago, bases from which an attack could be launched against the highly strategic Marshalls.

Appraised in terms of the combined United States Navy, Marine, and Army forces employed in the Gilberts operation, losses in ships and personnel were relatively light. Tarawa, however, appeared extremely costly, on the basis of casualties sustained, because of two things: the casualties were sustained by one organization, the 2d Marine Division; and, they occurred within the scant space of 76 hours.

To a people hungry for war news and word of victories, the announcement of casualties in United States papers following Tarawa came as a blow. Few people were prepared for the cost involved in pressing an amphibious assault against a strongly held enemy island. The initial public reaction which followed in the wake of Tarawa tended for some time to obscure the fact that here was an important, if hard-won victory; an operation which was planned on the basis of exceptionally good intelligence information, with an unusually accurate and full estimate of the situation, and which was executed according to plan. When evaluated in terms of later operations, Tarawa finally achieved its proper perspective.

Actually, casualties to the assaulting troops at Tarawa amounted to approximately 20 percent, a figure well within the calculated amount that can be sustained in a successful amphibious assault against a strongly defended enemy island, and actually less than those sustained during corresponding periods of initial assault in several succeeding operations in which the Corps would participate.

Tarawa served two important purposes: It demonstrated clearly the soundness of our doctrines of amphibious assault; it pointed out inevitable weaknesses in technique. If Tarawa was not the finished product that many later operations were, it had a greater importance in that it paved the way for those operations.

Never before in the history of war had ships and planes been called upon to attempt the destruction of the enemy on a fortified coral atoll as a preliminary to landing troops. Betio offered a concentrated target which ordinarily would tend to multiply the effectiveness of air and surface bombardment, thus simplifying the destruction of the target.

For this to be absolutely true there would have to be a foreknowledge of the exact capabilities and limitations of air and surface bombardment as applied to a target of this precise nature, and equally important, a fully evolved technique in applying these weapons against such a target—something that could come only from actual experience.

Tarawa served to reduce to proportion the exaggerated concept of what surface and air bombardment could do to a heavily fortified, concentrated target. The results came as no surprise to the landing force.

One of the great lessons learned about naval gunfire, as used against a target such as Betio, was the need for destruction rather than neutralization. There had not been enough preliminary preparation by naval gunfire and air bombardment. Those who believed, before Tarawa, that planes and ships could destroy completely the enemy fortifications and personnel on a small coral island were quick to perceive their error.

It was concluded that the preparatory bombing and shelling to be delivered on enemy-defended islands similar to Betio would have to be increased in duration and weight, all of this with an eye toward the total destruction of accurately located weapons and fortifications.

Tarawa highlighted the necessity that timing of naval gunfire and air bombardment be made to conform with the movement of the landing craft of the first waves of assault troops. Until the landing force can get ashore and establish its own base of supporting fire, it has to rely heavily upon naval gunfire and air bombardment to render the support normally provided by organic weapons.

This is important because an amphibious assault is not a simple ferrying operation; it is a tactical movement, an integral and vital part of the attack itself. Therefore, the landing force must be landed properly and with full support during its approach to the beach, a time when its effectiveness is potential, rather than kinetic.

Once ashore, the landing force depends upon a continuous ship-to-shore movement, the life line of the amphibious assault. Normally, troops, equipment, and supplies are boated according to prearranged plans which envisage a successful landing on selected beaches. This causes a tendency toward rigidity in executing the ship-to-shore movement.

At Tarawa the reef, and the volume and accuracy of hostile fire resulted in the flow of troops and supplies (subsequent to the initial landing) being stopped short of the beach. Furthermore, the order of equipment and supplies moving toward the beach was not the order in which they were required. In this case, the loaded landing craft were committed by the forces afloat to a movement which did not conform to the tactical situation ashore.

It is difficult to change the ship-to-shore movement plan when the assault is pinned down at the beach. Then, if ever, there has to be a great flexibility to offset the inherent rigidity. Tarawa showed that better regulation and control could help to provide this flexibility; that the landing force must be able to exert control over the movement of supply and reinforcements in accordance with the situation on the beaches.

At Tarawa, the amphibian tractor—the LVT—came into its own as an assault troop carrier. In the words of Admiral Nimitz:

The ideal defensive barrier has always been the one that could not be demolished, which held up assaulting forces under the unobstructed fire of the defenders and past which it was impossible to run, crawl, dig, climb, or sail. The barrier reef fulfills these conditions to the letter, except when sufficient amphibious tanks and similar vehicles are available to the attackers.

In the field of the LVT's, the main lesson learned at Tarawa was the need for having enough of the tractors available in future operations to carry ashore not only the first three assault waves, but the reserve waves to follow; in addition to these, there needed to be spares to take the places of those tractors destroyed by enemy fire or mines, or which became

inoperative due to mechanical failures. Also recognized was the need for amphibian tanks and LC gunboats, not available in time for Tarawa.

The 2d Marine Division (which had initially realized the need for LVT's in the assault on Tarawa) had available to it in all only 125 amphibian tractors, too few to carry ashore more than the first 3 assault waves of troops, and even then many for the 3 LST's provided to transport the tractors to the target. It was necessary that the division deck-load 50 tractors on troop transports in order to bring them along for the operation.

It is interesting to speculate as to what might have happened at Tarawa had the landing force been provided with more tractors and with the shipping to launch them. Their successful use in ever-increasing numbers in later operations serves to point as a beacon toward Tarawa.

There were many other lessons learned at Tarawa. Reports submitted at the close of the operation were filled with them. Constructive criticism, comments, suggestions, and ideas provided a wealth of material that was quickly disseminated so that others might benefit.

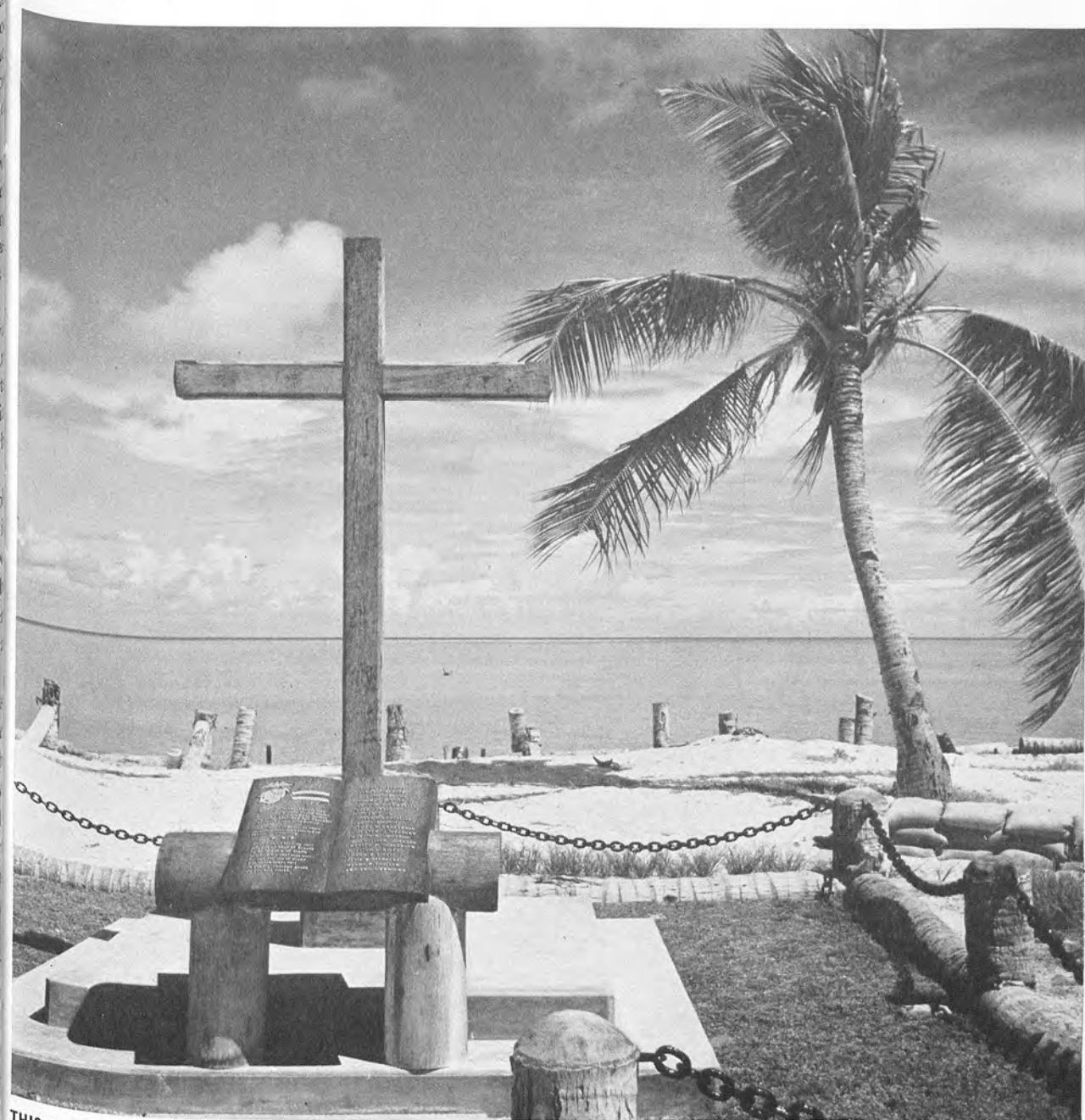
There had to be a Tarawa. This was the inevitable point at which untried doctrine was at length tried in the crucible of battle. The lessons learned at Tarawa had to be learned somewhere in the course of the war, and it now seems providential that they were learned as early and at no greater cost than was involved.

Had there been no Tarawa to point the way, the lessons would have remained unlearned until they were driven home with even greater force in the Marshalls, in the Marianas, at Peleliu, or on Iwo Jima. The last operation, which occurred months after Tarawa, parallels more closely than any other battle of the war the bitter fight at Betio, and it was there, if ever, that the experience of Tarawa sustained and facilitated victory.

Tarawa was the key to the Gilberts, which in turn was one of the keys that unlocked the Marshalls. The key to victory at Tarawa, however, in the last analysis, was the individual Marine. His disciplined fighting ability and courage came into sharper focus perhaps, than ever before in World War II. His strength, however important as an individual, found its real effectiveness in the over-all collective effort, the effort of the task force.

For Tarawa was more than a battle of individuals and their strengths and frailties; it was a battle of machines, of equipment, of plans, of ships, of sand and water and coral reefs. It was a battle of what the

Marine Corps and Navy knew and had, as opposed to what the Japanese knew and had; and in the end, it was the Japanese who were more than defeated—they were literally exterminated.



THIS SIMPLE CROSS WAS ERECTED at the western tip of Betio as a monument in memory of 2nd Division Marines who were killed in the battle for Tarawa.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

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THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

APPENDIX B

Marine Casualties¹

	Officers	Enlisted
Killed in action.....	47	
Wounded—killed.....	2	
Died of wounds.....	8	
Missing, presumed dead.....	0	
Wounded, missing dead.....	0	
Wounded in action.....	110	2,1
Combat fatigue.....	1	
Subtotal.....	168	3,1
Grand total.....	3,301	

¹Supplied by Casualty Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 5 Mar. 1947.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

Japanese Casualties

APPENDIX C

Strength of Japanese Garrison, 20 Nov. 1943.....	4,836	
Prisoners of War (Japanese) taken.....	17	
Prisoners of War (Korean laborers) taken.....	129	
Escaped.....	0	
	146	146
Total number enemy killed on Tarawa.....	4,690	
Strength of Japanese Garrison, Apamama, 20 Nov.....	23	
Enemy dead, Apamama.....	23	
		0



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

APPENDIX D

Chronology

1941

- 10 Dec----- Makin seized by Japanese landing force; Tarawa raided by Japanese landing party.

1942

- 2 Feb----- United States Naval Forces attack Japanese bases in Marshalls and Gilberts; Japanese bases, shipping, and installations damaged.
- 17 Aug----- U. S. Marines raid Makin Atoll.

1943

- January----- Airfield on Betio first observed by American planes.
- 21 Feb----- American planes fly reconnaissance mission over Tarawa.
- August----- 2d Marine Division first learns of plans for Gilberts Operation.
- 4 Sept----- V Amphibious Corps becomes a part of Fifth Amphibious Force.
- 7 Sept----- 2d Marine Division starts amphibious training with transports.
- 16 Sept----- 2d Marine Division reports for operational control to V Amphibious Corps.
- 18, 19 Sept--- U. S. Naval and Army aircraft bomb and photograph Tarawa.
- 2 Oct----- Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith and staff representatives report to V Amphibious Corps, Pearl Harbor, for conference regarding Tarawa operation.

- 12 Oct----- Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith holds conference with regimental commanders and staff at Wellington, New Zealand, to discuss Tarawa plans.
- 30 Oct----- 2d Marine Division completes loading aboard ship for Tarawa.
- 1 Nov----- 2d Marine Division leaves Wellington for Efate, New Hebrides.
- 7 Nov----- Task Force 53 assembles at Efate for rehearsal; first rehearsal exercise takes place.
- 9 Nov----- Second rehearsal exercise held.
- 13 Nov----- Southern Attack Force (Task Force 53), leaves Efate for Tarawa.
- 16-19 Nov--- Preliminary bombardment and shelling of Tarawa in progress.
- 20 Nov----- 2d Marine Division lands on Betio. 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, 2d and 3d Battalions, 2d Marines in assault. 1st Battalion, 2d Marines and 3d Battalion, 8th Marines land in reserve. Small beachhead established by sundown.
- 21 Nov----- 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, lands on Red 2. 2d Battalion, 6th Marines sent to Bairiki. 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, lands on Green Beach. Beachhead expanded slightly during day.

- 22 Nov----- 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, lands on Green Beach. 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, attacks along south side of island.
- 23 Nov----- During night 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, repels 3 vicious counterattacks. 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, attacks to clean up east end of island. Betio declared secured 1330.
- 24 Nov----- 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, mopping up rest of Tarawa. 2d and 8th Marines leave Tarawa for Hawaii. Maj. Gen. H. M. Smith arrives to inspect Betio.
- 25 Nov----- Apamama Attack Force leaves Tarawa for Apamama.
- 26 Nov----- Apamama occupied. Admiral Nimitz and Vice Admiral Spruance arrive to inspect Betio.
- 28 Nov----- Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith announces "Remaining enemy forces on Tarawa wiped out."
- 29 Nov----- 2d Division Scout Company leaves to reconnoiter Abaiang, Marakei, and Maiana Atolls.
- 4 Dec----- Command of Tarawa turned over to Advance Base Commander.

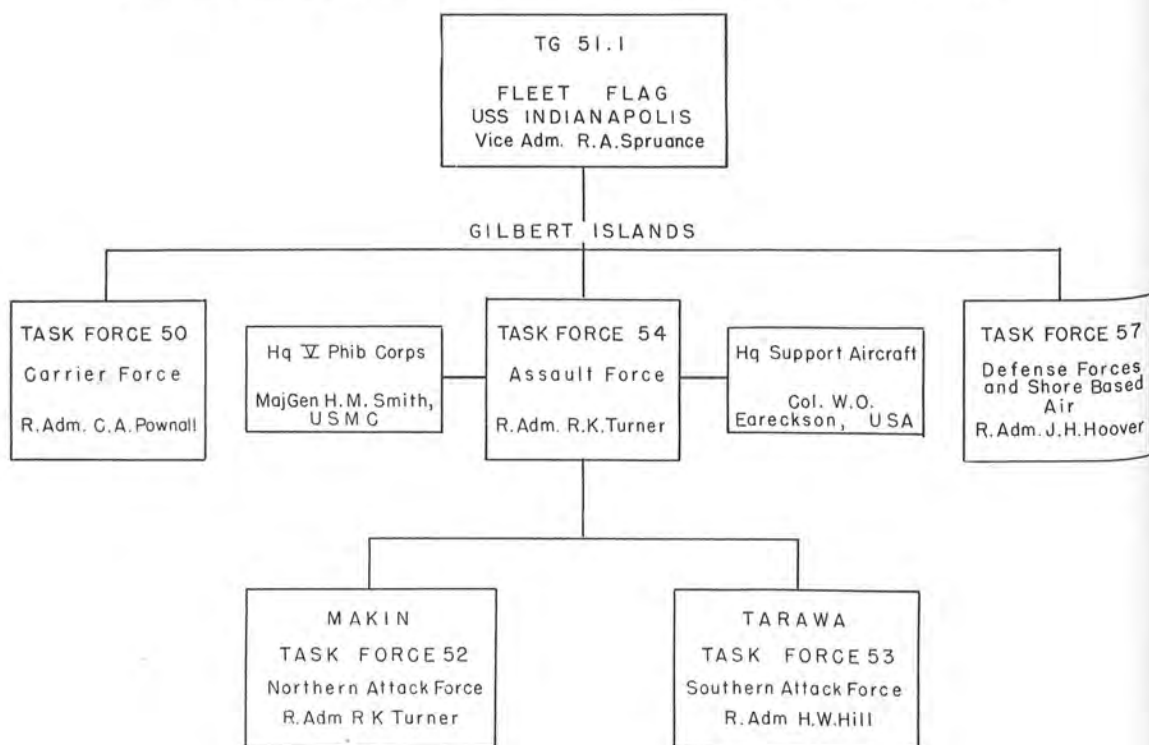


THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

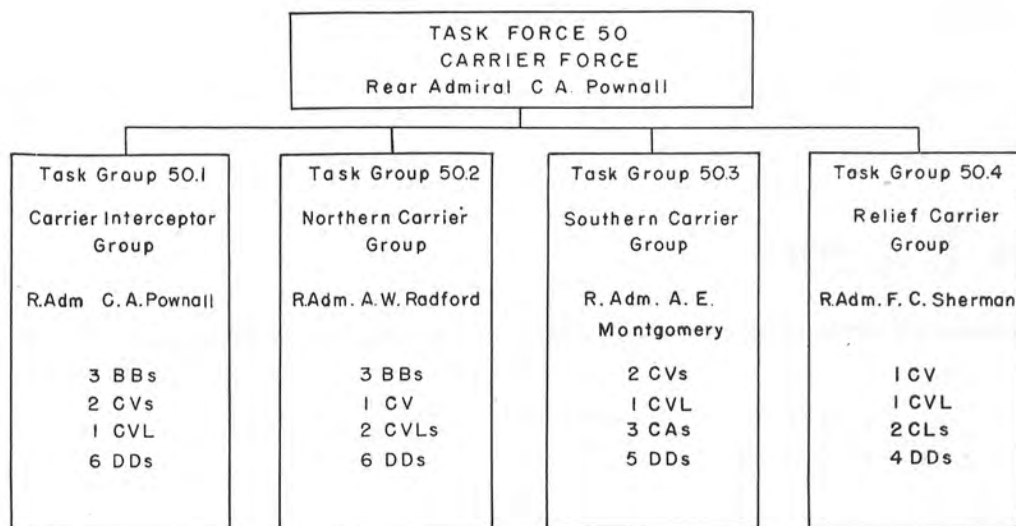
APPENDIX E

United States Task Organizations

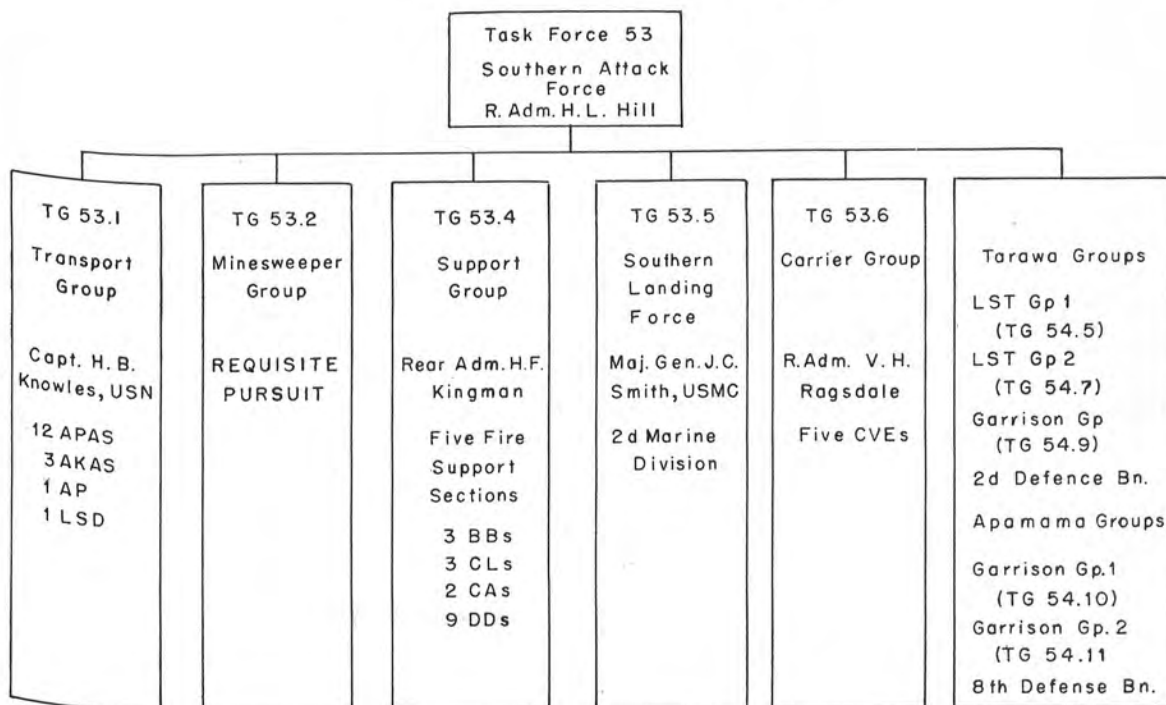
DIAGRAM, TASK ORGANIZATION, CENTRAL PACIFIC FORCE, NOVEMBER 1943



DIAGRAM, TASK FORCE 50

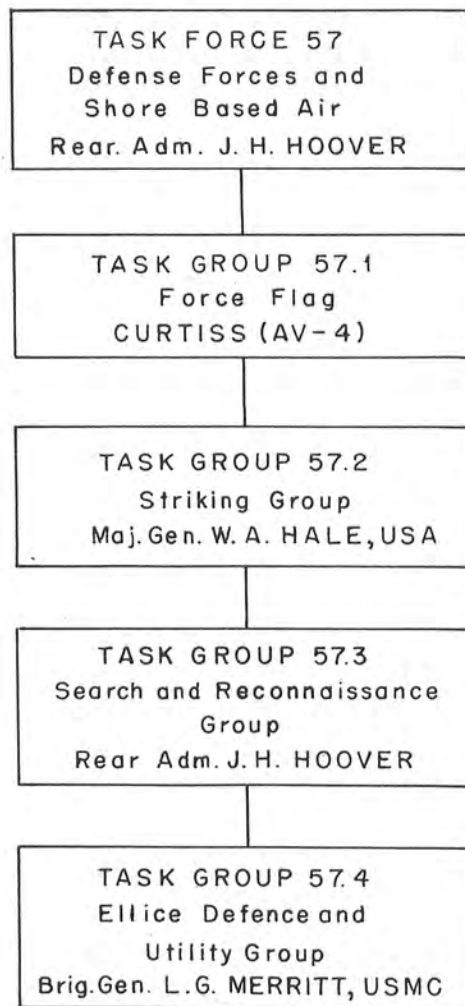


TASK ORGANIZATION, TASK FORCE 53



APPENDIX E (Continued)

DIAGRAM, TASK FORCE 57



TASK FORCE 53

TRANSPORT GROUP 4¹

Capt. H. B. Knowles, USN

TransDiv 4
 APA ZEILIN CT 2 (2d Marines)
 APA HEYWOOD LT 2/2 (2d Bn., 2d Marines)
 APA MIDDLETON LT 2/8 (2d Bn., 8th Marines)
 APA BIDDLE LT 3/2 (3d Bn., 2d Marines)
 APA LEE LT Hq/2d Marines
 AKA THUBAN LT 1/2 (1st Bn., 2d Marines)
 Detachments CT 8

TransDiv 18
 APA MONROVIA CT 8 (8th Marines)
 APA SHERIDAN LT 3/8 (3d Bn., 8th Marines)
 APA LA SALLE LT 1/8 (1st Bn., 8th Marines)
 APA DOYEN Division Troops
 AKA VIRGO Division Troops
 LSD ASHLAND² Detachments CT 8
 Medium Tanks

TransDiv 6
 APA HARRIS CT 6 (6th Marines)
 APA BELL LT 3/6 (3d Bn., 6th Marines)
 APA ORMSBY LT 2/6 (2d Bn., 6th Marines)
 APA FELAND LT Hq/6th Marines
 AKA BELLATRIX LT 1/6 (1st Bn., 6th Marines)
 Detachments CT 6

TASK GROUP 53.4

SUPPORT GROUP

Rear Adm. H. F. Kingman

Fire Support Section 1:

TENNESSEE ----- BB 43
 MOBILE ----- CL 63
 BIRMINGHAM ----- CL 62
 BAILEY ----- DD 492
 FRAZER ----- DD 607

Fire Support Section 2:

MARYLAND ----- BB 46
 SANTA FE ----- CL 60
 GANSEVOORT ----- DD 608
 MEADE ----- DD 602

Fire Support Section 3:

COLORADO ----- BB 45
 PORTLAND ----- CA 33
 ANDERSON ----- DD 411
 RUSSELL ----- DD 414

Fire Support Section 4:

RINGGOLD ----- DD 500
 DASHIELL ----- DD 659

Fire Support Section 5:

INDIANAPOLIS ----- CA 35
 SCHROEDER ----- DD 501

¹ From 2d Marine Division Special Action Report, Tarawa, p. 1.

² Joined the transport group at Vila Harbor, Efate.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

APPENDIX F

Japanese Garrison Force Organization—Tarawa, 20 November 1943





THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

Brief History Of The Gilbert Islands Before The Japanese Invasion

APPENDIX G

The first record of the discovery of the islands of the group which came to be known as the Gilberts dates back to 1765 when Commander Byron in the ship *Dolphin* discovered the island of Nikunau. In 1788 Captain Gilbert in the *Charlotte* and Captain Marshall in the *Scarborough* discovered Apamama, Kuria, Aranuka, Tarawa, Abaiang, Butaritari, and Makin. In the years that followed, many ships ran across the little islands and atolls of the Gilberts in the course of their travels in the central Pacific. Two ships of the United States Exploring Expedition, the *Peacock* and the *Flying Fish*, under the direction of Commodore Wilkes, and under the command of Captain Hudson, visited many of the Gilbert Islands. While in the Gilberts, considerable time was devoted to mapping and charting reefs and anchorages.

A British protectorate was first proclaimed over the Gilberts by Captain Davis of *H. M. S. Royalist* on 27 May 1892. In 1915 the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were proclaimed a colony of the British Empire.

The natives of the Gilberts are Micronesian, similar in many respects to the natives of the Marshalls, the Carolines, and the Marianas. At the time of the Japanese invasion they were a self-governing people, with their tribal consciousness undisturbed by the British system of colony government and administration. Loyal to the British, the Gilbertese looked with dissatisfaction upon the prospects of coming under the rule of the Japanese. During their stay in the Gilberts, the Japanese did nothing to change the opinion of the Gilbertese on this score.

The principal industry found in the Gilberts was the production of phosphate from the deposits on Ocean Island and Fanning Island. In addition, coconut palms were cultivated on some of the islands. All labor was supervised by the British and every effort was made to see that the wages and living conditions

were fair and adequate. Sanitary inspections by the British did much to improve the general living conditions on most of the islands.

Native diet prior to World War II consisted mainly of fish, coconuts, pandanus fruit, babai, chicken, and some pork. Accommodations for Europeans employed in the islands were simple. Their houses were constructed of both European and native materials and were generally of the bungalow type. There were no hotels or accommodations for tourists.

At the outbreak of the war, about 78 percent of the native population were said to be Christians. This group was divided mainly into two denominations: Congregationalists (43 percent); and Roman Catholics (35 percent). The rest of the population were largely semipagan agnostics; they did not adhere to the Christian faith, nor did they retain much of their beliefs in their own ancient gods.

Judged to be about 84 percent literate, the Gilbertese responded readily to the colony's educational efforts. All education in the islands came under the supervision of the Colonial Education Department whose aims were to educate native boys for employment in government and commercial work, and to standardize the level of education throughout the colony. The bulk of the education was provided by the missions, which maintained all the village schools and trained the native school teachers.

When war came in December 1941, the Japanese occupied Makin Atoll immediately and raided Tarawa. In February the British evacuated most of their people from Tarawa, except for missionaries who elected to remain, and coast watchers. Tarawa and Apamama were occupied in force by the Japanese in September 1942 and during the next year garrisons were built up on Betio (Tarawa Atoll), and Butaritari (Makin Atoll). Only nominal forces were placed on other islands in the Gilberts.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

APPENDIX H

Command and Staff—V Amphibious Corps and 2d Marine Division 20 November 1943

V Amphibious Corps

Commanding general— Maj. Gen. H. M. Smith.
Chief of staff— Brig. Gen. G. B. Erskine.
G-1— Lt. Col. Albert F. Metzger.
G-2— Lt. Col. St. Julien R. Marshall.
G-3— Col. Peter P. Schrider.
G-4— Col. Raymond E. Knapp.

2d Marine Division

Commanding general— Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith.
Assistant division commander— Brig. Gen. Leo D. Hermle.
Chief of staff— Col. Merritt A. Edson.
D-1— Lt. Col. C. P. Van Ness.
D-2— Lt. Col. T. J. Colley.
D-3— Lt. Col. J. P. Risely.
D-4— Lt. Col. Jesse S. Cook.

2d Marines

Commanding officer— Col. David M. Shoup.
Executive officer— Lt. Col. Dixon Goen.
R-1— Capt. James E. Herbold.
R-2— Capt. John L. Schwabe.
R-3— Maj. Thomas A. Culhane, Jr.
R-4— Capt. Vernon L. Bartram.

1st Battalion, 2d Marines

Commanding officer— Maj. Wood B. Kyle.
Executive officer— Maj. William S. Vasconcellos.
Bn-3— Capt. Harold R. Thorpe.

2d Battalion, 2d Marines

Commanding officer— Lt. Col. Herbert R. Anderson.
(KIA, 20 Nov. 1943).
Executive officer— Maj. Howard J. Rice.
Bn-3— Capt. Benjamin T. Owens.

3d Battalion, 2d Marines

Commanding officer— Maj. John F. Schoettel.
Executive officer— Maj. Samuel D. Mandeville.
Bn-3— Capt. Richard Phillippi.

6th Marines

Commanding officer— Col. Maurice G. Holmes.
Executive officer— Lt. Col. Russell Lloyd.
R-1— First Lt. P. J. Costello.
R-2— Capt. Donald Jackson.
R-3— Maj. Loren E. Haffner.
R-4— Maj. Cyril C. Sheehan.

1st Battalion, 6th Marines

Commanding officer— Maj. W. K. Jones.
Executive officer— Maj. John E. Semmes, Jr.
Bn-3— Capt. Charles H. Triplett.

2d Battalion, 6th Marines

Commanding officer— Lt. Col. Raymond L. Moore.
Executive officer— Maj. Richard C. Nutting.
Bn-3— Capt. Joseph E. Rowland.

3d Battalion, 6th Marines

Commanding officer--- Lt. Col. Kenneth F. McLeod.
Executive officer----- Maj. John E. Rentsch.
Bn-3----- Capt. William W. McKinley.

8th Marines

Commanding officer--- Col. Elmer E. Hall.
Executive officer----- Lt. Col. Paul D. Sherman.
R-1----- Capt. Cleland E. Early.
R-2----- Capt. Wilmot J. Spires.
R-3----- Maj. Hewitt D. Adams.
R-4----- Capt. Alfred E. Holland.

1st Battalion, 8th Marines

Commanding officer--- Maj. Lawrence C. Hays, Jr.
Executive officer----- Maj. Robert J. Oddy.
Bn-3----- Capt. Daniel V. McWethy,
Jr.

2d Battalion, 8th Marines

Commanding officer--- Maj. Henry P. Crowe.
Executive officer----- Maj. W. C. Chamberlin.
Bn-3----- First Lt. K. C. Fagan.

3d Battalion, 8th Marines

Commanding officer--- Maj. Robert H. Ruud.
Executive officer----- Maj. Stanley E. Larsen.
Bn-3----- Capt. Scott S. Corbett.

10th Marines

Commanding general--- Brig. Gen. T. E. Bourke.
Executive officer----- Lt. Col. Ralph E. Forsyth.
R-1----- Capt. Ralph D. Pillsbury.
R-2----- First Lt. David J. Lubin.
R-3----- Lt. Col. Marvin H. Floom.
R-4----- Capt. Marshall R. Breedlove.

1st Battalion, 10th Marines

Commanding officer--- Lt. Col. Presley M. Rixey.
Executive officer----- Maj. James E. Mills.
Bn-3----- Maj. Wendell H. Best.

2d Battalion, 10th Marines

Commanding officer--- Lt. Col. George R. E. Shell.
Executive officer----- Maj. Richard B. Church.
Bn-3----- Maj. Kenneth C. Houston.

3d Battalion, 10th Marines

Commanding officer--- Lt. Col. Manly L. Curry.
Executive officer----- Maj. Gene N. Schraeder.
Bn-3----- Maj. Earl J. Rowse.

4th Battalion, 10th Marines

Commanding officer--- Lt. Col. Kenneth A. Jorgensen.
Executive officer----- Maj. Harry N. Shea.
Bn-3----- Maj. James O. Appleyard.

5th Battalion, 10th Marines

Commanding officer--- Maj. Howard V. Hiatt.
Executive officer----- Maj. William L. Crouch.
Bn-3----- Maj. Wade H. Hitt.

18th Marines

Commanding officer--- Col. Cyril W. Martyr.
Executive officer----- Lt. Col. Ewart S. Laue.
R-1----- First Lt. Haldon E. Lindfelt.
R-2----- Maj. James F. Geary.
R-3----- Lt. Col. Kenneth P. Corson.
R-4----- Capt. Robert F. Ruan.

1st Battalion, 18th Marines

Commanding officer--- Maj. George L. H. Cooper.
Executive officer----- Maj. Joseph S. Reynaud.
Bn-3----- (1).

2d Battalion, 18th Marines

Commanding officer--- Lt. Col. Chester J. Salazar.
Executive officer----- Maj. Robert L. Smith.
Bn-3----- Capt. Jerome R. Walters.

3d Battalion, 18th Marines

Commanding officer--- Commander Lawrence E.
Tull.
Executive officer----- Lt. Comdr. Edwin E. Gibson.
Bn-3----- Lt. Robert Cleghorn.

¹ Not shown on muster rolls.

2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion

Commanding officer--- Maj. Henry C. Drewes
(KIA, 20 Nov. 1943).
Executive officer----- Capt. Henry G. Lawrence
Jr.
Bn-3----- Capt. William H. Housman

2d Tank Battalion

Commanding officer--- Lt. Col. Alexander B. Sweth
ceski (WIA, 20 Nov.
1943).
Executive officer----- Maj. Charles W. McCoy.
Bn-3----- First Lt. Edward C. Hen
nessey (KIA, 20 Nov.
1943).



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

Estimated¹ Against Actual Enemy Weapon Emplacements, Betio Island, Tarawa²

APPENDIX I

Type	Weapons by document	Weapons emplacements (actual count)	Size
Coast defense	4	4	8-inch.
	4	4	14-cm.
Antiaircraft	6	6	80-mm.
	4	4	127-mm. (twin mount, DP).
	8	8	7-cm. (75-mm. actual, DP).
	12	27	13-mm. (single mount).
Beach defense and antiboat	4	4	13-mm. (twin mount).
	6	10	75 (mountain gun, type 41).
	5	6	70-mm. (battalion gun, type 92).
	6	9	37-mm. (field gun).
	14	14	37-mm. (in light tank).
	16	31	13-mm. MG (single and twin, AA DP).
	17	7.7-mm. MG. ³

¹ From estimates made on 15 Aug. 1943.

² From study of Jap Defenses of Betio Island, Part I, JICPOA and 2d Marine Division.

³ Too many destroyed for accurate postoperation count.



THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA

APPENDIX J

Message from Major General Julian C. Smith to Officers and Men, 2nd Marine Division

Read to all hands on 19 November 1943, D-minus-1-day:

A great offensive to destroy the enemy in the central Pacific has begun. American air, sea, and land forces, of which this division is a part, initiate this offensive by seizing Japanese-held atolls in the Gilbert Islands, which will be used as bases for future operations. The task assigned to us is to capture the atolls of Tarawa and Abemama. Army units of our Fifth Amphibious Corps are simultaneously attacking Makin, 150 miles north of Tarawa.

For the past 3 days Army, Navy, and Marine Corps aircraft have been carrying out bombardment attacks on our objectives. They are neutralizing, and will continue to neutralize, other Japanese air bases adjacent to the Gilbert Islands.

Early this morning combatant ships of our Navy bombarded Tarawa. Our Navy screens our operations and will support our attack tomorrow morning with the greatest concentration of aerial bombardment and naval gunfire in the history of warfare.

It will remain with us until our objective is secured and our defenses are established. Garrison forces are already enroute to relieve us as soon as we have completed our job of clearing our objective of Japanese forces.

This division was especially chosen by the high command for the assault on Tarawa because of its battle experience and its combat efficiency. Their confidence will not be betrayed. We are the first American troops to attack a defended atoll. What we do here will set a standard for all future operations in the central Pacific area. Observers from other Marine divisions and from other branches of our armed services, as well as those of our allies, have been detailed to witness our operations. Representatives of the press are present. Our people back home are eagerly awaiting news of our victories.

I know that you are well-trained and fit for the tasks assigned to you. You will quickly overrun the Japanese forces; you will decisively defeat and destroy the treacherous enemies of our country; your success will add new laurels to the glorious tradition of our corps.

Good luck and God bless you all.

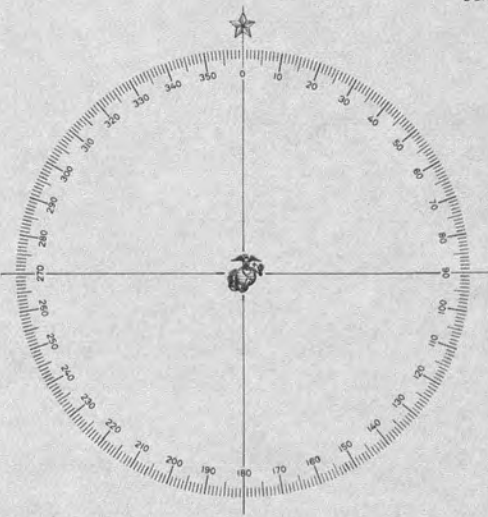
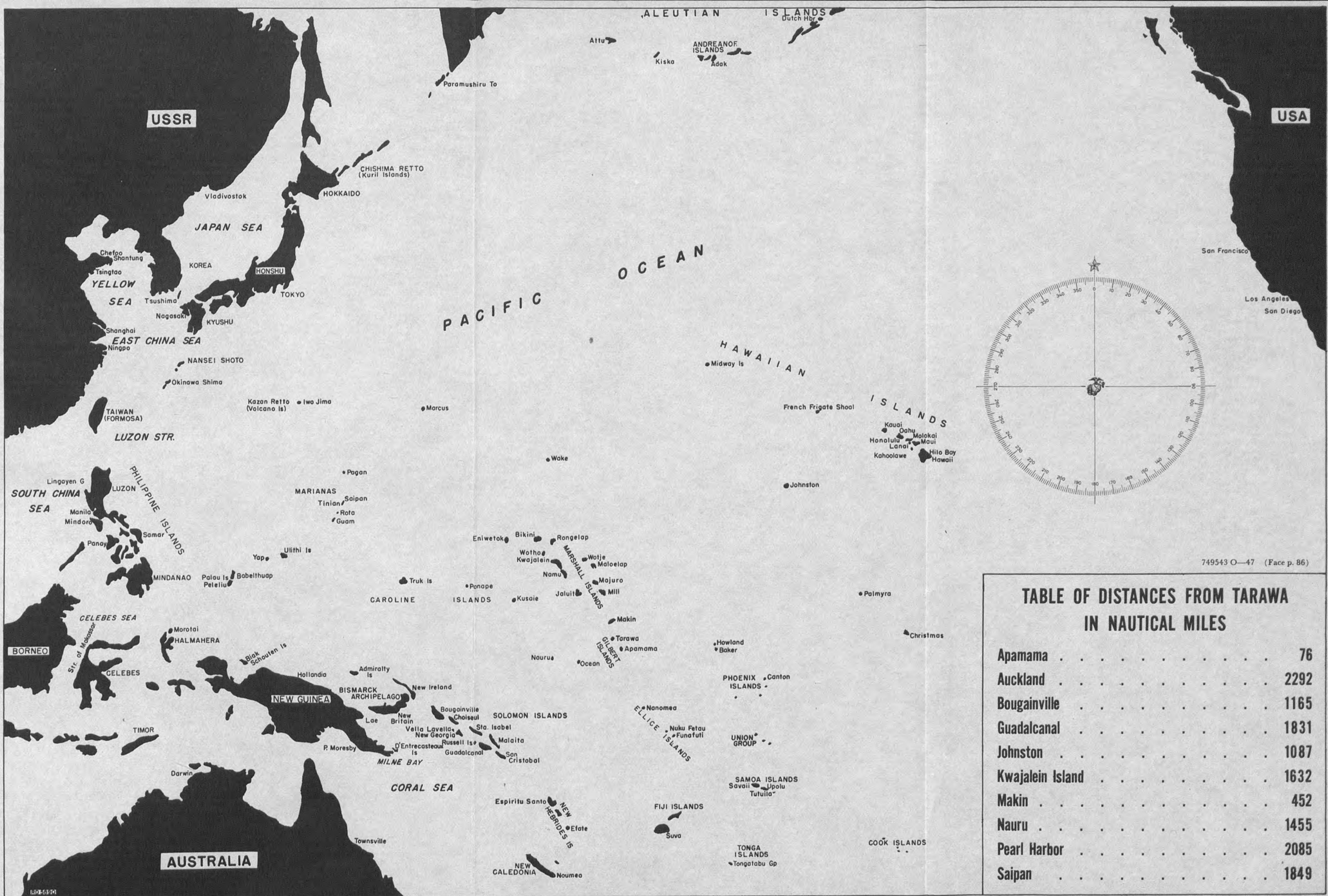


TABLE OF DISTANCES FROM TARAWA
IN NAUTICAL MILES

Apamama	76
Auckland	2292
Bougainville	1165
Guadalcanal	1831
Johnston	1087
Kwajalein Island	1632
Makin	452
Nauru	1455
Pearl Harbor	2085
Saipan	1849

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THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON

The President of the United States takes pleasure in
presenting the PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION to the

SECOND MARINE DIVISION (REINFORCED)

consisting of Division Headquarters, Special Troops (including
Company C, 1st Corps Medium Tank Battalion), Service Troops,
2nd, 6th, 8th, 10th and 18th Marine Regiments in the Battle of
Tarawa, as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For outstanding performance in combat during
the seizure and occupation of the Japanese-held Atoll of
Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, November 20 to 24, 1943. Forced
by treacherous coral reefs to disembark from their landing
craft hundreds of yards off the beach, the Second Marine
Division (Reinforced) became a highly vulnerable target
for devastating Japanese fire. Dauntlessly advancing in
spite of rapidly mounting losses, the Marines fought a
gallant battle against crushing odds, clearing the limited
beachheads of snipers and machine guns, reducing
powerfully fortified enemy positions and completely
annihilating the fanatically determined and strongly
entrenched Japanese forces. By the successful occupation
of Tarawa, the Second Marine Division (Reinforced) has
provided our forces with highly strategic and important
air and land bases from which to continue future oper-
ations against the enemy; by the valiant fighting spirit
of these men, their heroic fortitude under punishing fire
and their relentless perseverance in waging this epic
battle in the Central Pacific, they have upheld the finest
traditions of the United States Naval Service."

For the President,

James Forrestal
Acting
Secretary of the Navy

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The Battle for Larawa 000336

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