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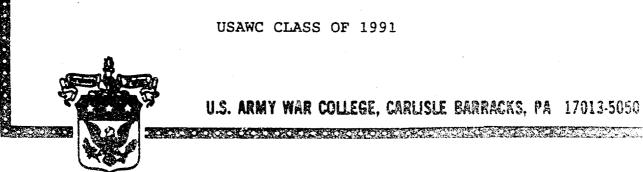
## THE OKINAWA CAMPAIGN: A CASE STUDY

BY

## LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES S. GAVITT United States Army

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THE OKINAWA CAMPAIGN: A CASE STUDY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel James S. Gavitt United States Army

Lieutenant Colonel Paul T. Mikolashek Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

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#### ABSTRACT

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On 1 April 1945, U.S. ground forces stormed ashore on the Japanese held island of Okinawa. This amphibious assault and the campaign that followed marked not only the largest campaign conducted in the Pacific conducted during World War II, but also the culmination of the lessons learned during over three years of amphibious warfare. As the final joint campaign of the war, it incorporated the principles and techniques which had proven successful during previous operations. Despite interservice differences and continued friction concerning the best means to pursue war aims, the American commanders were veterans. They understood how to synchronize the operations of joint and combined forces to achieve the greatest effect, focused toward a single objective - seizure of the island of Okinawa. This case study will examine how joint service coordination and cooperation were exercised among the U.S. ground, air, and sea forces which participated in the campaign. Conversely, an occasional comparison with Japanese deficiencies in joint operations will be drawn. With U.S. military forces being increasingly oriented toward contingency missions, the lessons of this campaign are increasingly relevant.

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#### INTRODUCTION

When U.S. forces stormed ashore on Okinawa, it marked the culmination of over three years of joint amphibious warfare in the Pacific. The American commanders and their units were veterans of previous operations throughout the Central and Southwest Pacific theaters of operations. Without exception, they had seen examples of lack of interservice unity of effort and the resulting poor synchronization of forces cost ships, aircraft, and lives. They had learned many lessons the hard way and were anxious not to repeat mistakes. From the beginning of the campaign, there was an emphasis on unity of effort among the services, clear lines of command and assignment of responsibilities, and a focus on a single set of objectives understood by all.

This case study will examine the means by which American forces achieved the high degree of synchronization of joint and combined operations seen throughout the campaign. The degree of interservice cooperation and coordination was without equal during World War II, and would be difficult to replicate today, even with current advanced communications and unified commands.

Joint service cooperation was absolutely essential during the campaign. The Japanese defenders realized that Okinawa was the last stop before an invasion of their homeland, and proved to be skilled, fanatic fighters. Their commander had a number of unwelcome surprises for the American soldiers and marines on the ground, and the Imperial Staff in Tokyo unleashed the full force of the Kamikaze on the combined American and British fleet. Yet despite the dedication and skill of the Japanese soldiers, sailors, and airmen, their senior commanders were unable to synchronize the Imperial land, sea, and air campaigns, and in the end this was to prove a decisive failing. The Americans were able to meet every challenge by massing overwhelming combat power in the form of joint resources at the critical point and time, while the Japanese response was normally committed in a uniservice, piecemeal manner.

The campaign was to take over three months and thousands of American casualties, but the conclusion was never in doubt. When Okinawa was secured, the doorway to the Japanese Home Islands was open.

#### CHAPTER 1

## STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY

Strategic Setting for the Okinawa Campaign

The Japanese Empire reached its zenith in early 1942. On 7 December 1941, the Imperial Navy attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, destroying or heavily damaging every battleship there as well as a large number of smaller ships. Luckily, the fleet's aircraft carriers were out on maneuvers that day. Japanese forces pressed the attack and rapidly seized the Philippines, Borneo, Thailand, Malaya, Indonesia, Burma, and many islands in the southern and central Pacific. They occupied most of New Guinea and threatened Australia.

Despite initial setbacks, the United States was quick to counterattack. The Battle of the Coral Sea, fought 5-7 May 1942, was a draw, with each side losing an aircraft carrier, but when the two fleets met again on 4-6 June near Midway Island, Japanese naval dominance in the Pacific was largely destroyed along with four aircraft carriers and the equivalent of an entire year's graduating classes of trained naval pilots.1 In contrast, the U.S. Fleet lost only one aircraft carrier and a relatively small percentage of combat pilots.

The ultimate strategic objective of U.S. operations in the

Pacific was, "the industrial heart of Japan, along with the southern shores of Honshu between the Tokyo plain and Shimonoseki";<sup>2</sup> the invasion of Japan and capture of its capital, generally considered the Japanese strategic center of gravity. American strategic planners intended to reach this objective through a series of island campaigns in the central and southwest Pacific, combined with subjecting the Japanese Home Islands to an unrestricted submarine blockade and, when possible, unrelenting air bombardment.

During the SEXTANT Conference in Cairo in 1943, the Allies decided the campaign in the Pacific should be conducted using a coordinated, two-prong drive. One drive would be through the island chains in the central Pacific, while the other would use the large islands of the southwest Pacific. The objective of both was to destroy Japanese forces and gain bases from which to attack Formosa, Luzon, and the Chinese coast in the spring of 1945.3

To execute the strategy, the Pacific was divided into two theaters - the Central Pacific Theater commanded by Admiral Chester Nimitz and the Southwest Pacific Theater commanded by General Douglas MacArthur. Ground combat actions commenced with an amphibious assault on the island of Guadalcanal and MacArthur's New Guinea Campaign across the north coast of that island. From there, forces assigned to the Central Pacific Theater aggressively seized (bypassing many more) key islands in the Gilbert, Marshall, Admiralty, and Marianas island chains, destroying many Japanese forces while bypassing and cutting off

many more who ended the war without ever fighting. General MacArthur's forces worked their way up the New Guinea coast and, on 20 October 1944, returned a U.S. military presence to the Philippines when they assaulted the island of Leyte. This invasion, so near the Japanese Home Islands, caused the Japanese Imperial Fleet to again confront the Americans. The result, although a near disaster, resulted in a decisive victory for the United States.

#### **Operation CAUSEWAY**

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It was time to seize a base of operations astride Japan's vital southern sea lines of communications. Formosa or Luzon were the natural choices, with the Navy preferring the former and General MacArthur advocating the latter. So long as each had a separate theater, Nimitz and MacArthur had coordinated and cooperated well, but now that it looked as if the next step to Japan would be performed by a single theater commander. A bitter : interservice.clash began to brew.4

Movement across the Pacific in both theaters had progressed beyond the best expectations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In response, in March 1944 they published the plan for Operation CAUSEWAY. This operation envisioned Admiral Nimitz conducting the main attack - an assault on Formosa. General MacArthur would capture Luzon to support the main attack if necessary. Naval

forces under Admiral Nimitz would support both amphibious assaults.5

On 23 August 1944, Admiral Nimitz submitted his draft plan. He stated that it was imperative that MacArthur's forces seize the central and northern Philippines prior to the main attack.

Admiral Nimitz selected Admiral Raymond Spruance, Commander, U.S. Fifth Fleet, to be overall commander of CAUSEWAY. Spruance had commanded the U.S. carriers at the Battle of Midway and his Fifth Fleet had gained a decisive victory over the Japanese in June 1944 during the Battle of the Philippine Sea. He had also commanded amphibious forces in the Marshalls and at Tarawa. He and his staff were highly experienced in joint operations.

Commander of the amphibious operation for CAUSEWAY was Vice-Admiral Kelly Turner, who had been Director of the War Plans Division for the Chief of Naval Operations from 1940-1942, then had commanded the amphibious forces at Guadalcanal, New Georgia, the Gilberts, the Marshalls, and most recently on Saipan. He was considered the greatest expert on amphibious operations.

The expeditionary forces consisted of Army and Marine ground and air units. They were designated Tenth Army and commanded by Lieutenant General Simon Buckner, USMA Class of 1908. General Buckner had previously served as Commanding General, Alaska Command.

#### Operation ICEBERG

Although CAUSEWAY was well on the way to implementation, many senior officers believed that an invasion of Formosa was unnecessary and too costly. LTG Millard Harmon, Army Air Force Commander, Pacific believed that a more direct route to Japan via the Bonin (Iwo Jima) and Ryukyu (Okinawa) Islands was preferable. Admiral King, Chief of Naval Operations, felt the same way. Even General Buckner believed his forces were too weak in service and support troops for a campaign on an island as large and heavily defended as Formosa.

The American Joint War Plans Committee, a group of senior U.S. military officers stationed in Washington had developed an alternative plan, consisting of three phases. In the first phase (codenamed ICEBERG), from April - June 1945, bases in the Bonin and Ryukyu Islands would be seized, followed by an invasion of the Chinese coast vicinity Hangchow. In the second phase (codenamed OLYMPIC), from July - September 1945, the beachead in China would be expanded and developed. For the third phase (codenamed CORONET), in October 1945 U.S. forces would land on Kyushu, southernmos<sup>+</sup> of the Japanese Home Islands and, on 31 December 1945, would invade the main island of Honshu vicinity the Tokyo plain.6

Eventually a compromise was reached. The planned seizure of Luzon lessened the strategic importance of Formosa. Also, strategic planners determined that operations on the coast of

China would be costly, time consuming, and would not contribute greatly to the objective of invading Japan.7

Thus, on 3 October 1944, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cancelled CAUSEWAY and replaced it with Operation ICEBERG, less the invasion of the Chinese coast. General MacArthur was directed to seize the island of Luzon on 20 December 1944, later moved forward to 20 October 1944. Admiral Nimitz was directed to seize Iwo Jima in the Bonin Islands commencing 20 January 1945,

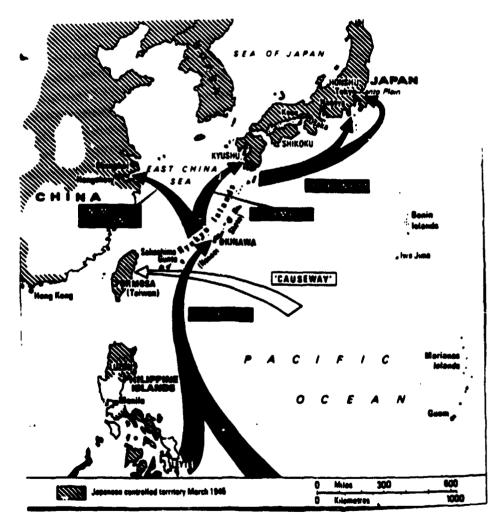
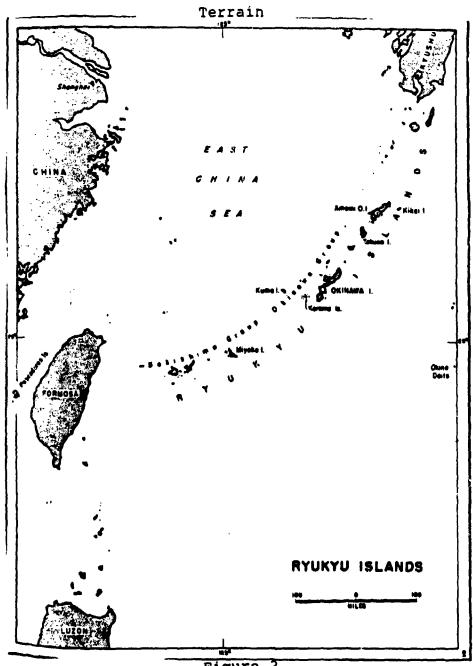


Figure 1. Projected Allied Operations9

later moved back to 15 February 1945. Following these operations, those forces previously allocated to CAUSEWAY were to seize the major objective of ICEBERG, now designated to be Okinawa.8

The start date for the Okinawa Campaign was left flexible, as landing craft and air support would have to be released from Luzon and Iwo Jima. Both Formosa and the coast of China became strategic goals, not objectives, and peripheral to the main effort.





OKINAWA - THE ISLAND AND ITS DEFENDERS

Figure 2.

Okinawa is the largest of the Ryukyus, an island group of approximately 140 islands which stretches almost 800 miles along a general line from Formosa to Kyushu, southernmost of the Japanese Home Islands. Okinawa is located in the approximate center of the island group, well within medium bomber range of Tokyo. It is 60 miles long and ranges from two to 18 miles wide, a total land area of 485 square miles.2

The northern two-thirds of the island, that portion above the Ishikawa Isthmus, is extremely rugged and mountainous. A central ridge extends the length of the northern part of the island, with east - west spurs which extend to the coast, where many of them end in cliffs at sea's edge. The Motobu Peninsula extends to the west and is also extremely rugged, consisting of two mountain chains split by a cultivated valley. The island of Ie Shima, with its airfield, sits off the tip of this peninsula. In 1945, 80% of the northern part of Okinawa was covered with pine forest. The road network (what little existed) throughout the area was poor.

South of the Ishikawa Isthmus, the remaining third of the island is generally rolling, hilly terrain, broken by terraces and a number of steep escarpments which constitute natural obstacles to an attacking force. Many large family burial tombs were built into these escarpments and, along with natural caves, were used extensively and effectively by the Japanese in their defense of the island. The largest city on Okinawa, Naha, is located on the southwest coast. The ancient Okinawan capital, Shuri, is located directly inland from Naha. The area is heavily

cultivated; however, the road network is poor and breaks down easily when subjected to motorized traffic, especially during the monsoon season.

Most of the battles of the Okinawa Campaign were fought in the southern third of the island.

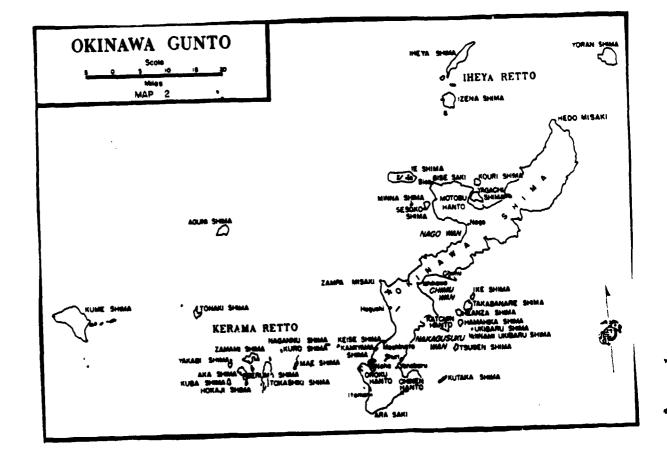
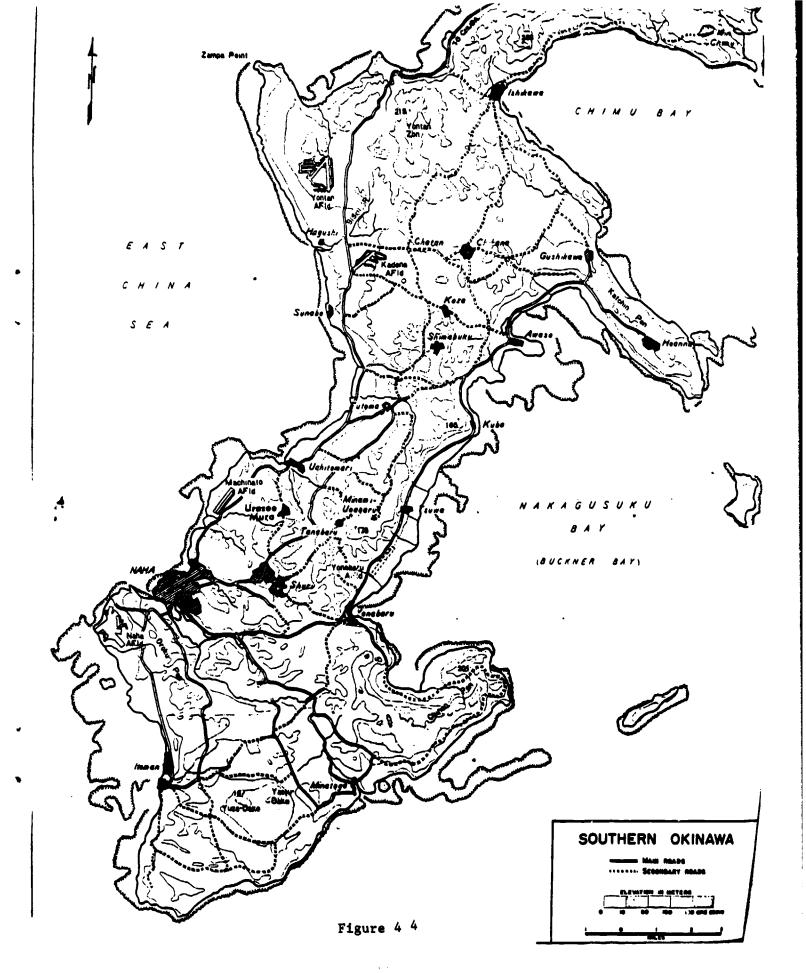


Figure 3. The Okinawa Group3



#### Weather

Between May and November, the weather patterns on the island of Okinawa are dominated by the monsoon. Throughout this period the weather is hot and humid, with frequent heavy rains which often last several days. The majority of the roads throughout the island become rapidly impassable when subjected to heavy use during the monsoon and cross country motorized maneuver is extremely limited. In general, the weather during the monsoon greatly favors the defender.

## Population

The Ryukyus originally were an independent nation with its capital at the Okinawan city of Shuri. Okinawans are ethnically similar to the Japanese but speak a different dialect. The Ryukyus were always heavily influenced by both the Chinese and Japanese, and after 1609 paid tribute to both in order to retain some degree of independence. In 1879, an emerging Japan annexed the Ryukyus, including Okinawa. As in their other colonies, the Japanese generally treated the Okinawans poorly, creating a system of, "social, political, and economic discrimination that existed in favor of the Japanese".5

Of the estimated 435,000 islanders at the time of the campaign, 75% lived on the southern third of Okinawa.6 Aside from draft age men who had been taken to serve in the Japanese

military, the effects of the war had barely touched the island; however, the great influx of Japanese military units was resented by the Okinawans, who could not understand the utility of so many units on their island when according to the Imperial Ministry of Information, Japan was winning the war.

## Japanese Forces

As late as 1939 a naval base at Naha and a small airfield on the Orku Peninsula were the sole military installations on Okinawa. In 1941, three batteries of 75mm and 120mm guns, with their compliment of approximately 600 soldiers, were stationed on Okinawa to protect the naval anchorage at Nakagusuku Bay on the east side of the island. In April 1944, in response to the successes of U.S. naval and amphibious forces in the Pacific, 32d Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Watanabe, was activated for the defense of Okinawa; however, to Japanese planners the principal use of the island was still as a base to launch air and naval strikes against any threat to the Philippine Islands.7

The strategic value of Okinawa increased dramatically with the fall of Saipan, only 1,120 nautical miles to the southeast of Okinawa and a vital link in the Japanese inner defensive belt. The ailing General Watanabe was replaced by Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima, a respected senior officer who had commanded a crack infantry unit in Burma, then was appointed Commandant of the Imperial Military Academy. He was a reserved, regal officer, revered by his soldiers and staff. General Ushijima was ably

assisted by Major General (later Lieutenant General) Isamu Cho, an ardent ultranationalist who had participated in a prewar attempt to assassinate the Japanese Prime Minister and replace him with a military leader. Such was the state of the prewar government and military that Cho's only punishment was assignment to a troop unit in Manchuria. He was hot tempered and abrupt, but an excellent choice as chief-of-staff. His dynamic temperament would be balanced by the stoicism of his commander.

The third member of the team was a holdover from General Watanabe's staff, Colonel Hiromichi Yahara. As the operations officer for 32d Army, he would establish the plan of defense for the island. Intellectual and cool, he produced superb, reasoned staff work which could bring even the hot tempered Cho over to his side.8 Colonel Yahara was the only one of the three senior officers to survive the war, and much of what we know of Japanese preparations and intentions comes from him. Despite (or perhaps because of) the vastly different personalities of these key players, they were to prove one of the most effective command teams put together by either side during the course of the war.

Although U.S. planners were, at least after the decision to implement ICEBERG was made, able to focus on Okinawa as a strategic target, the Imperial High Command was confronted with trying to decide which of a number of key locations to defend with their rapidly dwindling resources. Because of the capability of U.S. naval and air forces to isolate any specific target, wrong estimates would result in insufficiently defended key bases and in forces cut off and unable to participate in

further combat operations.9

General Ushijima first received the 9th Infantry Division, a crack veteran unit which had fought extensively in Manchuria and China; however, in December 1944 that unit was transferred to Luzon to assist in the defense of the Philippines. On its way, the 9th Division was landed on Formosa for transshipment. Due to the U.S. air and submarine threat, the division was stranded there for the remainder of the war and thus unable to participate in further combat operations. The same air and naval supremacy which prevented the 9th Division from leaving Formosa also prevented movement of the division scheduled to replace them on Okinawa.

The 44th Independent Mixed Brigade, 6000 strong, was the next unit due the 32d Army. In June 1944, it was being shipped to Okinawa when the ship carrying the entire unit was sunk by the submarine USS Sturgeon. All but 600 soldiers in the brigade died.10 To make up for the loss of the 44th Brigade, the 15th Independent Infantry Regiment was sent to Okinawa by air, where it joined the survivors of the 44th Brigade and became part of that unit. The 24th and 62d Infantry Divisions were then shipped by fast transport to Okinawa, where they joined 32d Army. The 24th Division, with a strength of about 24,000 soldiers, was a "green" unit from Manchuria, where it had been used primarily to train replacements. As a result, most of its junior soldiers were raw recruits. It was the largest subordinate formation in 32d Army. The 62d Division had two brigades of four infantry battalions each, later augmented by a fifth battalion in each

brigade.11

Because the Imperial High Command envisioned 32d Army's operations on Okinawa to be primarily defending from fixed positions, only the 27th Tank Regiment, with one light and one medium tank company, an artillery battery, and an infantry company, was allocated.12 These forces constituted the "backbone" of 32d Army's combat units.

Although short combat arms units, General Ushijima was allocated the most artillery given any Japanese army commander during the course of the war. In addition to the organic artillery and mortars of his maneuver units, the 5th Artillery Command was assigned to 32d Army. This unit consisted of two medium artillery regiments, one heavy artillery battalion, a heavy mortar regiment, and two light mortar battalions.13

5th Artillery Command

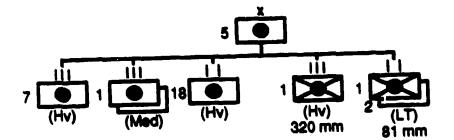


Figure 5

Although these constituted all of his allocated Army forces, General Ushijima had a number of other sources from which to draw manpower. The 19th Air Sector Command, consisting of approximately 7,000 men, had been used to maintain Okinawa's airfields. In the event of an invasion they could be used as a separate force or as replacements. The Naval Base Force, consisting of a surface escort unit, naval aviation activities, and two squadrons of suicide boats, a total force of 9000 sailors and 4000-5000 civilians, would be available for the most part. Finally, the "Home Guard" of Okinawa, the Boeltai, added between 17000 and 20000 soldiers of questionable value to the defending force, giving 32d Army a theoretical strength of approximately 100,000; 67,000 Army, 9000 Navy, and 24,000 Japanese civilians and Okinawans.14

## JAPANESE FORCES ON OKINAWA

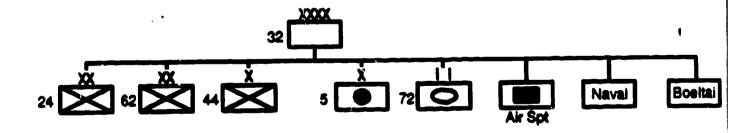


Figure 6

#### The Japanese Defensive Plan

Colonel Yahara, operations officer for 32d Army, realized that virtually everything an American invasion force would want: airfields, harbors and anchorages, and space for depots and bases, lay on the southern third of Okinawa. Naha was the only good port in the Ryukyus, Nakagusuku Bay was an excellent anchorage, and the best airfields were at Kadena and Yontan. Southern Okinawa had the only reasonably level ground on the island. Colonel Yahara told Generals Ushijima and Cho that 32d Army could probably hold out longer in the rugged northern part of the island, but that the strategic importance of the facilities in the south outweighed all tactical considerations, and the principal focus of the defense must be denial of Okinawa south of the Ishikawa Isthmus to the invading force.15

General Ushijima and his staff had studied the course of the war in the Pacific and determined that current Japanese doctrine addressing defense against amphibious operations was flawed. Accepted Japanese defensive doctrine was for the defending force to stall the invading force on the beach, then counterattack with an overwhelming reserve. However, on island after island, both beach fortifications and counterattack forces were destroyed by overwhelming American firepower, primarily from naval guns and airpower. The depleted Japanese force could then no longer conduct coherent, sustained operations inland and the course of the campaign was decided. Even though Colonel Yahara believed he knew where the Americans would land (the Hagushi

beaches - he was correct), he did not believe the 32d Army was powerful enough to defend on or near the beach. Instead, he recommended letting the Americans establish a largely unopposed beachhead, while the 32d Army awaited them inland in a virtually intact, well established defense in depth protecting southern Okinawa. There protected from the high velocity U.S. naval guns, the Japanese could fight on more advantageous terms.16 Some Japanese officers, including General Cho, questioned the wisdom of such a radical departure from doctrine. They were concerned about the lack of aggressive action in Yahara's plan, a positional defense. However, in the end General Ushijima was convinced that his best chance for success lay in Yahara's concept, and he ordered its implementation.17

Thus, the Japanese defenders of Okinawa, cut off from reinforcements and with little organic air, would mobilize virtually every able bodied man on the island. The 32d Army would give the beaches to the American soldiers and marines, and hoard their strength to fight for the critical assets on the southern part of the island, which they would do with great skill and even greater tenacity. Undoubtedly, General Ushijima had no illusions about the inevitable end of the campaign. He was a realist and knew that he must eventually lose. 32d Army was fighting for time to allow the Home Islands to prepare for the Allied invasion that must eventually follow.

While General Ushijima and the 32d Army prepared their defenses, the Japanese High Command, daunted by rapid Allied advances toward the Home Islands, was grasping for straws. Many

senior officers no longer believed Japan was capable of winning the war, and that their nation's only hope was to cause the Allies, specifically the Americans, such high casualties that they would be willing to negotiate favorable surrender terms. The most promising means of accomplishing this appeared to be massive use of suicide aircraft, called Kamikaze or "Divine Wind". These had been used on a limited basis during the fight for Leyte and had proven effective against American combat and logistic shipping. The Japanese High Command had convinced itself that the Kamikazes had been even more effective than was the fact, and that their massive use against the next major American offensive could save the Home Islands from invasion.18 In January and early February 1945, the new Japanese strategy was formulated. New armies would be raised for defense of the Home Islands from young men previously exempt from military service. Any attempt to invade the Ryukyu Islands would be met by more than four thousand aircraft, conventional and Kamikaze, launched from Formosa and Kyushu, hundreds of suicide motorboats operating from sites on Okinawa and the Kerima Islands, and a suicide raid conducted by the remaining operational combat ships of the Japanese Navy. The operation was named TEN-Go (Heavenly Operation).

It was at this point that the lack of unity of effort in the Japanese war strategy and interservice rivalry between the Imperial Army and Navy became critical. The Navy, reasoning that the only chance of success lay with TEN-Go, focused all resources on the operation. The Imperial Army's position was that the

Americans had never faced a significant part of the Japanese ground forces, and felt confident that they would be the victor in a ground campaign in the Home Islands. Thus, the Army withheld reserves of men and aircraft for what they believed would be the critical battle ahead.19

The mission of 32d Army, given to General Cho when he arrived in Tokyo to brief the Imperial General Staff on the plans for the defense of Okinawa, was to, "lure and hold the American invader within range of the suiciders, airborne and seaborne" in order to allow massive casualties to be inflicted on the amphibious force.20 Upon General Cho's return to Okinawa, General Ushijima, hearing Cho's report on his visit to the Imperial General Staff, published the following three slogans for his soldiers:

> "One plane for every warship, One boat for one ship, One man for ten of the enemy or one tank"21

The soldiers of the 32d Army were encouraged to make the Okinawa Campaign so costly in terms of material and lives for the Americans that they would abandon their stated position of "unconditional surrender" and move to the negotiating table. Their objective was to give their lives to make the campaign as long and costly as possible for the invaders, bleeding the American ground forces with a well planned and executed defense while Kamikaze air and sea forces to destroyed their shipping.

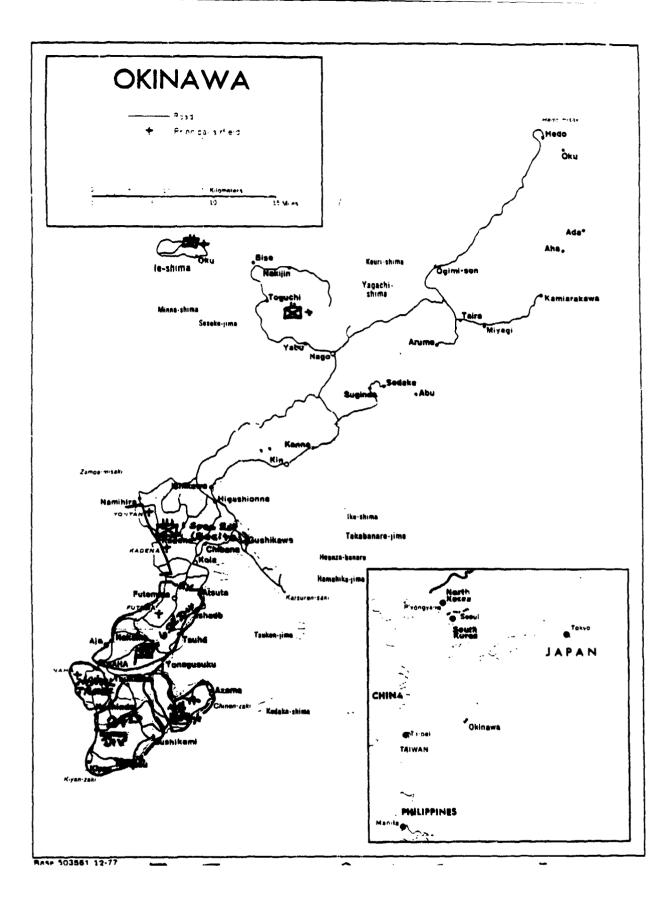


Figure 7. Japanese Plan of Island Defense

#### CHAPTER 3

#### THE CAMPAIGN PLAN

## Intelligence

Because of its last minute selection as an invasion target, operational planning and intelligence gathering in preparation for the invasion of Okinawa began late. Most intelligence before the invasion was gained by aerial photograph interpretation, an imperfect means for a number of reasons. First, the nearest Allied air base was 1200 miles from Okinawa, so that only the scarce and heavily tasked B-29 heavy bombers and, when carriers were operating in the area, carrier based aircraft, could take the photographs. Second, there was almost continuous cloud cover and haze during the months preceding the invasion, especially over the southern third of the island. Finally, the area to be photographed was far to large for the assets available.1 The USS Swordfish, a submarine specifically equipped to photograph beaches and shore fortifications, was dispatched to Okinawa 22 December 1944 to augment other sources, but was lost with all hands.<sup>2</sup> As a result, maps produced for the American invasion force contained large areas of only approximated terrain features based on captured prewar Japanese maps. The final map of the island was not published until the campaign was half over.

Initial estimates set the Japanese military strength on

Okinawa and the surrounding islands at 48,600, with the combat backbone of the force provided by two infantry divisions and a tank regiment. In January 1945, Tenth Army G-2 estimated that the Imperial General Staff could be reasonably expected to increase the garrison to between 66,000 and 87,000 by the projected D-Day (at that time 1 March 1945). In mid-February, the Army G-2 discovered that a division had been removed from Okinawa and lowered his strength figures to 39,500. In March, he again revised them upward to 56,000 with projected increases to 75,000 by 1 April 1945, the date finally set for the invasion. As it turned out, this estimate, although low when the total size of General Ushijima's force is considered, fairly accurately portrays his conventional fighting strength.

## Japanese Order of Battle

Developed by Tenth Army, March 1945<sup>3</sup>

Unit	Strength
HQ, 32d Army	125
24th Infantry Division	15-17,000
62d Infantry Division	11,500
44th Independent Mixed Bde	6,000
Unknown Independent Regiment	750
1 Med Arty Regt, 2 Mort Bns, 1 AT Bn,	
2 AT CO, AAA units	5,875
Air-Ground personnel	5-6,000
Naval Ground Troops	3,000
Total	53-56,000

From Japanese organizational norms, U.S. planners estimated 198 artillery pieces of 70mm and higher would be available to 32d Army. These would include 24 150mm howitzers, 100 antitank guns of 37 and 47mm, 37 light and 47 medium tanks, and rockets and mortars to 250mm.<sup>4</sup>

Aerial photographs of Okinawa showed four operational airfields at Naha, Yontan, Kadena, and Machinato. The airfield on the island of Ie Shima had been abandoned and partially destroyed. American planners were not worried about a potential threat from these, feeling that any Okinawa-based aircraft would be quickly neutralized by the massive air strikes that would precede the invasion; however, they did expect a significant air threat from Kyushu, 350 miles to the north.

Tenth Army tentative OPLAN 1-45, published 1 January 1945, stated that the Japanese main defenses could be expected in southern Okinawa and that the critical terrain was the Ishikawa Isthmus and the high ground immediately to the south that dominated it, and especially the Hagushi beaches and the Bishi River Valley. U.S. Intelligence believed the beaches themselves would be lightly defended with as little as a regiment in prepared positions; however, there would be a nearby mobile reserve of up to two divisions whose first mission would be to counterattack into the flank of the amphibious assault, attempting to destroy the landing force before it could consolidate on the beaches.<sup>5</sup> U.S. Intelligence believed that if the landings were successful, the Japanese main line of defense, nine to fifteen battalions, would be on the isthmus

itself and the high ground south of the beaches. The headquarters of 32d Army was believed to be vicinity Naha.<sup>6</sup>

Both the dispositions and intent of the Japanese defenders were misinterpreted. The mistaken belief by U.S. planners that the defenders of Okinawa would use conventional Japanese defensive doctrine, although a reasonable assumption in the absence of better intelligence, was to cause both consternation and casualties among the attackers and allowed the 32d Army to achieve surprise early in the campaign. Luckily for the Americans, the Japanese were unable to exploit their early advantage.

Allied intelligence estimated that 3,000 Japanese aircraft were within striking distance of Okinawa, posing a significant risk to the troops ashore and the ships supporting them.<sup>7</sup> Although the Kamikaze had been encountered before, their numbers and persistence during the campaign would prove the greatest threat to eventual U.S. victory.

## Prerequisites And Assumptions

Within the general campaign plan were three prerequisites and four assumptions concerning the operation. The major prerequisites for the campaign were that:

- The Iwo Jima Campaign would have progressed to the point that landing craft and naval/air support necessary for the Okinawa Campaign could be released.

- General MacArthur could release naval and ground forces.

- Preliminary naval and air operations would ensure air control in the area of operations prior to the invasion.<sup>8</sup>

To these prerequisites, Admiral Kelly Turner, the Amphibious Commander, added the following assumptions for consideration by his staff:

- Japanese air power would react in great strength.

- Japanese submarines would be active in the area.

- The Japanese fleet would sortie out to challenge the invasion.

- The garrison at Okinawa would be reinforced before and during the invasion.<sup>9</sup>

All of the prerequisites, except perhaps the demand for air control, were met before the invasion, and by that time virtually all Japanese aircraft in the Ryukyus had been destroyed and the air threat from Kyushu and Formosa had been severely reduced. As to the assumptions, all but the last were valid; however, only the Japanese air campaign caused the invasion force significant problems. As for reinforcing the garrison, American sea and air power were so dominant in the area of operations as to preclude even an attempt.<sup>10</sup>

#### Forces Available

The invasion of Okinawa was to be the largest amphibious operation of all time, even larger than D-Day at Normandy. Participating in the invasion were 182,000 assault troops; 548,000 soldiers, sailors, and marines total, 318 combat vessels,

and 1,139 auxiliary ships (less landing craft).11 U.S. commanders in the Pacific recognized early in the war that amphibious operations must be conducted with overwhelming combat power in order to be successful and minimize casualties. Many of the forces and assets necessary had to be released from other parts of the Central Pacific and from MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Theater; however, when all was ready, U.S. planners were convinced that they were able to mass sufficient forces, firepower, and logistical support to ensure victory.

## Command and Control

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The nature of an operation as large as the Okinawa Campaign is complex enough without the permutations to command and control structure which have handicapped joint military operations in the past.<sup>12</sup> During the course of the war, numerous amphibious operations, most of them jointly conducted by both Army and Naval forces, produced a workable doctrine which, above all else, stressed the importance of interservice cooperation, coordination, and unity of command. While the assault troops were embarked and throughout the first phase of the seaborne assault, the Amphibious Commander, a Naval officer, commanded all ground, sea, and air operations supporting the landing. Once the beachhead was firmly established, the Expeditionary Force Commander, an Army or Marine officer, assumed command of the ground campaign. His forces would include all ground based aircraft and possibly some limited seaborne assets. The "chop"

by which the Amphibious Commander relinquished command of ground forces was normally made after the Expeditionary Force Commander's command post was firmly established ashore, to include communications; however, the "chop" was always at the discretion of the Amphibious Commander.<sup>13</sup>

In the Okinawa Campaign, Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commanderin-Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas (CINCPOA), provided overall strategic direction within the Central Pacific Theater. Admiral Raymond Spruance, Commander of Fifth Fleet and Central Pacific Task Forces, was in command of the ICEBERG forces and the Okinawa Campaign. Admiral Spruance had two Carrier Striking Forces assigned for support. TF 57 was a British carrier force commanded by VAdm Sir Bernard Rawlings. TF 58 was the designation of the American Fast Carrier Striking Force commanded by VAdm Mark A. Mitscher.

The greatest part of Admiral Spruance's command was in TF 51, the Joint Expeditionary Force (Amphibious Force), commanded by VAdm Richard K. (Kelly) Turner. Admiral Turner had eight subtask forces and groups assigned:

- TG 51.1, the Western Islands Attack Group, commanded by RAdm Kiland. This initially included the 77th Infantry Division and all associated shipping and support.

- TG 51.2, the Demonstration Group, commanded by RAdm Wright. This initially included the 2d Marine Division and all associated shipping and support.

- TG 51.3, the Floating Reserve, commanded by Commodore McGovern. This initially included the 81st Infantry Division and

all associated shipping and support. This reserve could only be committed with Admiral Nimitz' approval.

- TF 52, the Amphibious Support Force, commanded by RAdm Blandy. This contained the amphibious craft supporting ICEBERG, which were allocated to task forces and groups depending on the phase of the operation. Additionally, Admiral Blandy was responsible for control of shipping in Okinawan waters.

- TF 53, the Northern Attack Force, commanded by RAdm Reifsnider. This task force was to make the main amphibious assault on the northern beach sector and consisted of III Amphibious Corps and all shipping and support.

- TF 54, the Gunfire and Covering Force, commanded by RAdm Deyo. This task force supported the landings and subsequent operations with naval gunfire support.

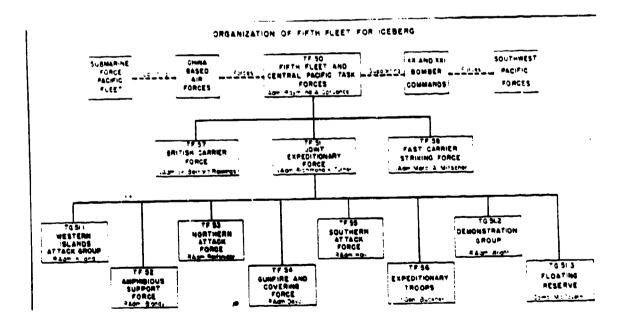


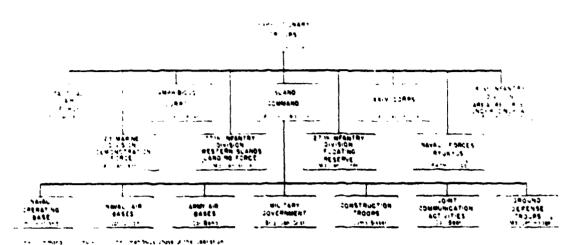
Figure 8 14

- TF 55, the Southern Attack Force, commanded by RAdm Hall. This task force was to make the main amphibious assault on the southern beach sector and consisted of XXIV Corps and all shipping and support.

- TF 56, Expeditionary Troops, commanded by LTGen Simon Buckner. This task force would consist of staff and communications troops until establishment of the beachhead. When directed to do so by Admiral Spruance, General Buckner would assume command of all forces ashore, including land based aircraft, and conduct the ground campaign. General Buckner would initially work under the command of Admiral Spruance; however, when Fifth Fleet's presence was no longer required, Admiral Spruance would be relieved of responsibility for the campaign and General Buckner would assume total responsibility for Okinawa and the surrounding 25 miles of ocean and report directly to the theater commander, Admiral Nimitz.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, General Buckner's command would include two corps headquarters, eight divisions, a tactical air force, and an Island Command to administer, develop, and protect the base of operations the island was to become, even as the fighting continued.

Thus, the command and control of the Allied force participating in the Okinawa Campaign followed established doctrine. The Navy retained total control of the amphibious operation until the beachhead was firmly established, after which command of forces ashore, no matter what the service, was given to the Expeditionary Force Commander. The lines of command were clean and responsibility for every phase of the operation fixed.

#### COMMAND STRUCTURE OF SUPERIT DNARY TROOPS FOR GEBERS



# Figure 9 16

### The Operations Plan

On 3 October 1944, the JCS gave its guidance for the next phase of the war in the Pacific. General MacArthur was to invade Luzon on 20 December 1944, after which Admiral Nimitz was to land forces on Iwo Jima, then conduct an amphibious assault on the Ryukyu Islands (it was understood this would probably be Okinawa). The Iwo Jima landing was to take place 20 January 1945, with the Ryukyu invasion occurring 1 March 1945; however, these dates were subject to the availability of troops, shipping, and landing craft.<sup>17</sup>

On 25 October 1944, Admiral Nimitz' headquarters published guidance for the conduct of ICEBERG. The campaign was to be

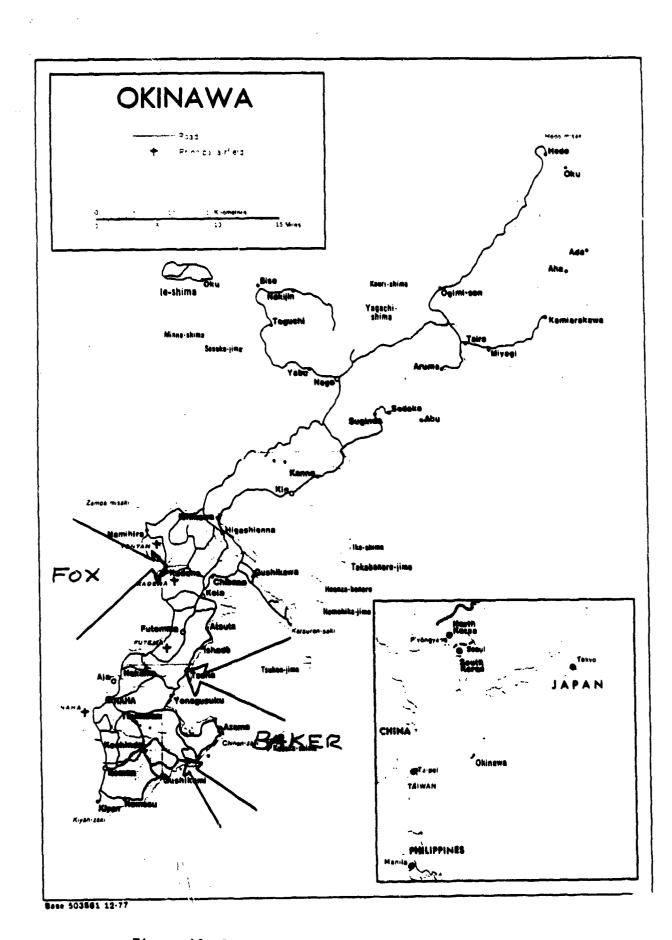
conducted it three phases:

- Phase I: Capture of southern Okinawa and nearby small islands. Commencement of base development.

- Phase II: Capture of northern Okinawa and the island of Ie Shima. Continue base development.

- Phase III: Bases exploited; capture other islands in Ryukyus as deemed necessary by Admiral Nimitz.<sup>18</sup>

Admiral Spruance's Fifth Fleet staff added little to the concept, giving the carrier task force commanders additional guidance and letting Admiral Turner, the most experienced officer in any service in amphibious operations, begin his planning. Both Admiral Turner's and General Buckner's staffs began their planning concurrently. A major problem arose almost immediately. The Tenth Army staff favored an assault on the western coast of Okinawa, vicinity Hagushi. These beaches would allow both corps to land simultaneously, each with two divisions abreast. This concept, codenamed FOX, also facilitated early seizure of Yontan and Kadina airfields, critically important for American land based aircraft.<sup>19</sup> These airfields would be vital if the fleet had to retire or perform another mission, as well as providing added air support for the land campaign. After consolidating the beachhead, the assault troops would attack eastward across the island, the Marines in the north and the Army in the south, cutting the island in two at the Ishikawa Isthmus. The ground forces would then turn south and seize the strategically important southern third of the island, including Naha and Shuri, then move north to clear the remainder of the island while base



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Figure 10. Proposed Landings; FOX vs BAKER

development commenced in the south.

Because the weather on 1 March, tentative date for the invasion, might make the Hagushi landings impossible, Tenth Army planners also formulated an alternate plan, codenamed BAKER. In the alternate plan, the amphibious assault would take place on the eastern side of Okinawa, vicinity Minatoga and Nakagusuku Bay. BAKER was not favored by Army planners because of the distance between the assault beaches and the primary initial objectives, Yontan and Kadena airfields, and because the commanding heights just west of the beaches gave the defender a tremendous advantage.<sup>20</sup>

Admiral Turner's staff, led by the Admiral himself, preferred BAKER to FOX. Admiral Turner believed that the waters off the Hagushi beaches allowed his hundreds of ships too little sea room, making them a lucrative target for Japanese warships or aircraft. He also argued that given a 1 March landing date, there was little chance that the Hagushi beaches, on the windward side of the island during that period, would be usable. Finally, Admiral Turner expected to have a large number of damaged ships and needed control of a safe anchorage for their repair and resupply of his Naval forces.<sup>21</sup>

Although Tenth Army and Fifth Fleet seemed far apart at the initial 1 November 1944 planning conference, by 6 January 1945 a successful compromise was reached which satisfied the requirements of both the Expeditionary Force and Amphibious commanders. The landings would take place on the Hagushi beaches; however, several days prior to the main landings the

Kerama Islands, twelve miles to the west of Naha, would be seized and developed as an anchorage.<sup>22</sup> Slipping the invasion date to 1 April 1945, done primarily to alleviate scheduling difficulties for resources, greatly lessened the possibility that weather would delay a landing on the western coast of Okinawa, normally a lee shore by then.<sup>23</sup>

Once approved, the concept was rapidly built into an operational plan. The carrier task forces, TF 57 and 58, would destroy shipping and aircraft in the Ryukyus and Japanese Home Islands in order to isolate Okinawa and prevent interference by Japanese air or sea power. Originally, six divisions were available for the land campaign: the Marine 1st, 2d, and 6th Divisions and the Army 7th, 96th, and 77th Divisions. A seventh, the Army 27th Division, was added as Tenth Army reserve after the decision to seize the Kerama Islands.

The Marine and Army divisions were battle tested. The 1st Marine Division had fought at Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, and the Palaus. The 2d Marine Division had fought at Saipan, while the 6th Marine Division was formed from three experienced regiments. On the Army side, the 7th, 77th, and 96th Divisions had just completed 115 days of continuous combat at Leyte. They were collectively short over a thousand riflemen due to all infantry replacements being diverted to Europe following the Battle of the Bulge. The 27th Division had seen action on Makin, Eniwetok, and Saipan.<sup>25</sup>

The final plan tasked the 77th Division to invade the Kerama Islands commencing approximately six days prior to the

main invasion. The amphibious assault on the Hagushi beaches would be made with MG Geiger's Marine III Amphibious Corps (1st and 6th Marine Divisions) to the north and MG John Hodge's Army XXIV Corps (7th and 96th Divisions) to the south. The 2d Marine Division would conduct a deception landing at Minatoga, on the southern coast of Jkinawa. The 27th Division was designated Tenth Army Reserve and the 89th Division was the reserve of CINC Central Pacific Theater.<sup>23</sup>

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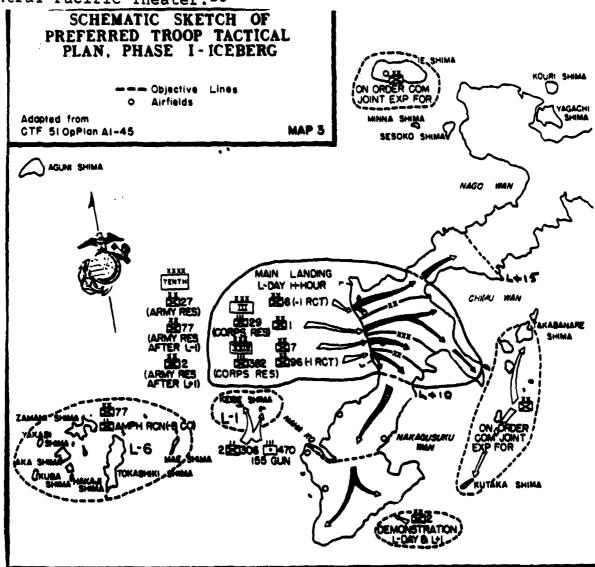


Figure 11 26

#### CHAPTER 4

#### THE INVASION

#### Softening Up the Defenders

On 10 October 1944, Okinawa received its first taste of fire. VAdm Mitscher's Fast Attack Carrier Task Force (TF 58) attacked airfields, shipping, and installations on the island. In one of the heaviest air attacks of the war in the Pacific, Naha was heavily damaged, over 100 aircraft were shot up on the ground, and most shipping in the vicinity of the island was sunk. Nearly as serious, a large amount of 32d Army's ammunition was destroyed, including almost all of its 37mm antitank rounds.<sup>1</sup>

Smaller, less devastating carrier based attacks on the island were launched 3 and 4 January and 22 January 1945. Task Force 58 then launched air strikes on Tokyo and the surrounding area on 16 and 17 February. American carrier-launched aircraft destroyed Japanese planes on dozens of airfields. Additionally, B-29 heavy bombers from the Marianas began making daily bomb runs over Okinawa. American fast carriers were repeatedly hitting Formosa and mainland China as well. By mid-February, Okinawa was effectively isolated through this air/sea campaign plus an extensive submarine blockade.

Finally, on 18 and 19 March 1945, Kyushu, southernmost of the Japanese Home Islands, was attacked by aircraft from Admiral Mitscher's fast carriers, followed by attacks on the Home Islands

Shikoku and Honshu.<sup>2</sup> The fast carrier operations had an unforeseen impact on the campaign. When they appeared off the coast of Japan, the Kamikazes of Operation TEN-Go were only partially ready for combat. The Imperial General Staff was in a quandary. If Admiral Ugaki, commander of forces on Kyushu, was allowed to launch his Kamikazes against the American carriers, many of the partially trained pilots would be lost, perhaps so many that the American center of gravity, the troop transports which the Japanese knew would be coming soon, could land their assault units unmolested. However, if the Kamikazes remained on the ground, many of their valuable aircraft would be shot up on their airfields by the unchallanged American pilots. Tokyo gave Admiral Ugaki permission to attack. One hundred and ninety-three Japanese planes were sent against the fast carriers of TF 58, including 63 Kamikazes. Of these, 161 or 83%, were lost.<sup>3</sup> These losses had a severe impact on the ability of the Japanese air arm to oppose the landings on Okinawa. TEN-Go had suffered a severe setback.

The Japanese air attacks had damaged TF 58; however, virtually any near term capacity the Japanese had to prevent the landings and reinforce the garrison on Okinawa had been destroyed. Over 400 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, and major damage was done to airfields and naval anchorages.<sup>4</sup> Their mission accomplished, the fast carriers set sail for Okinawa in order to support the landings.

#### The Kerama Landings

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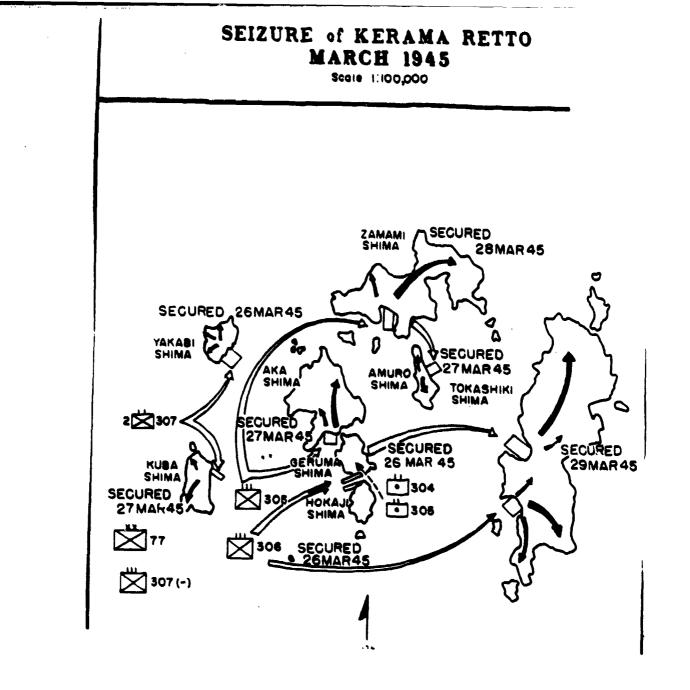
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The initial landings in the Okinawa Campaign were made 26 March 1945 on the Kerama Islands, 15 miles to the west of Naha. These islands were to be secured to provide the anchorage and "safe haven" needed for continuous and long duration naval operations. The 77th Division would conduct the operation.

General Ushijima had not anticipated an American landing on the Kerama Islands and had only stationed some 275 soldiers there, mostly members of suicide motorboat crews. Five hundred Korean laborers were also based on the islands, but were of little fighting value. Beach defenses were nonexistent.<sup>5</sup>

The landings were accomplished in accordance with standard amphibious doctrine. First, mine sweepers cleared the seas off the landing beaches. Then, Navy and Marine air and the big guns of the fleet destroyed shore defenses, airfields and anchorages, reserve positions, and thoroughly isolated the landing beaches. Underwater Demolitions Teams removed, marked, or destroyed natural and manmade obstacles on the beach approaches. Finally, on the morning of 26 March 1945, four battalion landing teams from the 77th Division, mounted in amphibian tractors, made assaults on the four main islands of the chain - Aka, Geruma, Hokaji, and Zamami. The initial landings proceeded so rapidly that General Bruce, commanding the 77th, elected to take a fifth island in the aroup that day, Yakahi.<sup>6</sup>

For the next two days, the Americans continued their assault on the Keramas against generally light resistance on the



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beaches, normally becoming heavier as the unit moved inland toward key terrain. By the evening of 29 March the Kerama Islands were under American control, including the two sheltered harbors that were the reason for the operation, Kerama Kaikyo and Aka Kaikyo. Carrier based air and naval gunfire had proven a major asset in the early defeat of the Japanese defenders and in minimizing American casualties. The 77th Division lost 31 dead and 81 wounded, while the Japanese had 530 soldiers and Korean laborers killed and over 1300 military and civilians taken prisoner.<sup>8</sup>

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The safe anchorages provided were to prove essential in refitting, supplying, and making emergency repairs to the fleet as the campaign progressed. Additionally, more than 350 suicide motorboats were destroyed or captured by the advancing ground troops before they had a chance to be used.<sup>9</sup>

## The Assault on Okinawa

The bombardment of Okinawa began 25 March 1945. Initially, shelling was limited to the southeastern beaches, site of the deception landing. Minesweepers cleared over 3,000 square miles of sea in one of the largest operations of this type ever conducted, allowing the ships of the Support Force to transition from long range area bombardment to short range, highly lethal shelling of specific targets.<sup>10</sup> Over 13,000 large caliber shells from six to 16 inches alone were fired during the seven days preceding the invasion, along with thousands of smaller projectiles. The coastal defenses, or what there were of them, were smashed, along with empty positions dug vicinity the beaches as deception measures by the Japanese. Additionally, over 3,000 rir sorties were flown by Navy and Marine aircraft, targeted at any remaining Japanese shipping and aircraft, then at ground

defenses the Navy guns could not reach. Once residual Japanese air and sea forces in the Ryukyus had been neutralized, the aircraft and big guns of the fleet would facilitate accomplishment of projected ground operations. As the date of the invasion grew nearer, air and shore bombardment operations were increasingly coordinated with Tenth Army.<sup>11</sup>

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The bombardment was not without cost to the Americans. Although the TEN-GO forces on Kyushu were still heavily disrupted from their losses suffered attacking the American fast carriers the previous week, Japanese aircraft on Formosa or at hidden airbases in the Ryukyus were able to react to the threat. Although they sank no shipping, they heavily damaged several, including Admiral Spruance's flagship, the cruiser Indianapolis. American forces also lost a destroyer and a minesweeper to mines. In return, they sank two Japanese submarines and a number of midget submarines, as well as downing a large number of Japanese aircraft.12

Beginning 29 March, Underwater Demolitions Teams, protected by naval gunfire and the night, began preparation of both the actual and demonstration beaches, marking lanes and destroying, moving, or marking obstacles.

The tremendous effort made to prepare the beaches was largely wasted, of course. The Japanese had no intention of conducting a defense at water's edge. The thousands of shells and bombs used disrupted sleep but killed few of the defenders. By the latter part of the bombardment, it was apparent that the Japanese were not returning fire and that the beaches appeared to

be lightly defended; however, the recent experience at Iwo Jima, where shore defenses had accounted for many or most of the 22,000 casualties suffered by the Marines, ensured the duration and intensity of the preparation.

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One more landing was conducted prior to the main assault on the Hagushi beaches. On 31 March, following a reconnaissance by the Fleet Marine Force Reconnaissance Battalion, the Army 420th Field Artillery Group landed its 155 mm "Long Tom" howitzers and ammunition on unoccupied Keise Shima, off the Hagushi coast, and prepared to support the amphibious landings the next day.<sup>13</sup>

During the entire bombardment the Japanese ground defenses had remained silent, under orders from General Ushijima to maintain the secrecy of their positions until after the initial landings.

The morning of 1 April 1945 (L-Day) began with the transports containing the assault troops from III Amphibious Corps and XXIV Corps moving to their assigned positions off the Hagushi beaches. Simultaneously, the 2d Marine Division, the demonstration force, appeared off Okinawa's southeastern coast. Both convoys were attacked by Kamikazes, but the only U.S. casualties were in the demonstration force, where two bomb hits killed and wounded 37 marines.<sup>14</sup>

The waves of landing craft began to make their runs on the Hagushi beaches, III Amphibious Corps to the north, XXIV Corps to the south. Over 500 aircraft from the Fifth Fleet provided cover and support for the landings. Battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and gunboats fired at possible enemy positions in front of the

assault, yet there was still little response from the Japanese defenders. The landing was virtually unopposed.15

The units spearheading the four-division assault were ashore by 0900 and rapidly consolidated and began their drive inland, surprised yet relieved at the lack of resistance. Tanks, engineers, artillery, and support units arrived rapidly and generally in the right place.

On the southeastern beaches, the 2d Marine Division conducted its demonstration at the same time as the Hagushi landings. The demonstration was conducted to confuse the Japanese and prevent timely reinforcement of the Hagushi beach defences. Four waves of landing craft were sent toward the beaches; however, prior to landing they reversed course and returned to their parent ships. The demonstration was repeated on 2 April.

By 1000 hours, the 6th Marine Division had taken Yontan Airfield and the 7th Division had taken Kadena Airfield, the primary Tenth Army initial objectives. Planners had believed that it would take three days of hard fighting to take the airfields - it had taken only a little over an hour.16 Both were taken intact and could soon be ready to accept Marine aircraft.

General Ushijima was disappointed with the ease with which the beachhead had been secured and the airfields taken. He had not intended to fight a decisive battle for either, but had ordered a delaying action from the Hagushi beaches. Responsibility for the delay belonged to the 1st Specially

Established Regiment, approximately 3,500 airfield construction and service troops and Okinawan Boetai. The ill-trained and inexperienced unit was incapable of performing the task and generally deserted or broke and ran at the first contact.17 General Ushijima was to learn from this debacle. In the future he would fill the depleted ranks of his front line regiments with these inexperienced soldiers and laborers rather than attempting to organize them as separate units.

In the first several days of the ground campaign, the Americans' greatest problem was refugee control. Many Okinawan civilians, impressed by Japanese propaganda, had to be talked out of the caves in which they were hiding. In some cases, Japanese soldiers and Okinawan civilians became intermixed, resulting in many civilian casualties.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the campaign was the number of civilian casualties which, despite the best efforts of American forces, numbered in the tens of thousands.

The speed of the American advance had left many units overextended and out of contact with their parent headquarters or the units to their flanks; however, the Japanese either could not or would not take advantage of the situation. Only the 96th Division, furthest south, had significant contact on the first day of the invasion. It hit a pillbox held by veterans of the Japanese 62d Division and took that position only after heavy fighting.<sup>19</sup> By the night of 1 April, the Americans still had no idea of the location of the main Japanese defenses or the intent of General Ushijima. Although somewhat relieved, many

wondered where and how they would meet the 32d Army.

Most of the Japanese air flown against the invasion fleet that first day had come from Formosa. The air approaches from the Chinese mainland and Formosa were covered by TF 57, the British carrier force. In countering the Japanese air strikes, the British took one hit on a destroyer, heavily damaging it, and a direct hit by a Kamikaze on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier, HMS Indefatigable. An American carrier would have been put out of action, but the armored deck on the British ship allowed it to continue to launch and land aircraft.<sup>20</sup>

For the next two days the assault inland continued rapidly. By the afternoon of 2 April the 7th Division had moved across the island and was overlooking Nakagusuku Bay on the eastern coast. By 3 April, Okinawa was cut in two and XXIV Corps was positioning to begin its attack south. Tenth Army had accomplished in three days what planners had projected taking 15 days of hard fighting. Yontan and Kadena airfields were in operation by 3 April and General Buckner's force now had ground based air support.<sup>21</sup> By 4 April Tenth Army held a section of Okinawa 15 miles long by three to ten miles wide stretching across the breadth of the island. Japanese air attacks had increased against the fleet but little resistance had been met on the ground. Where was the Japanese 32d Army?

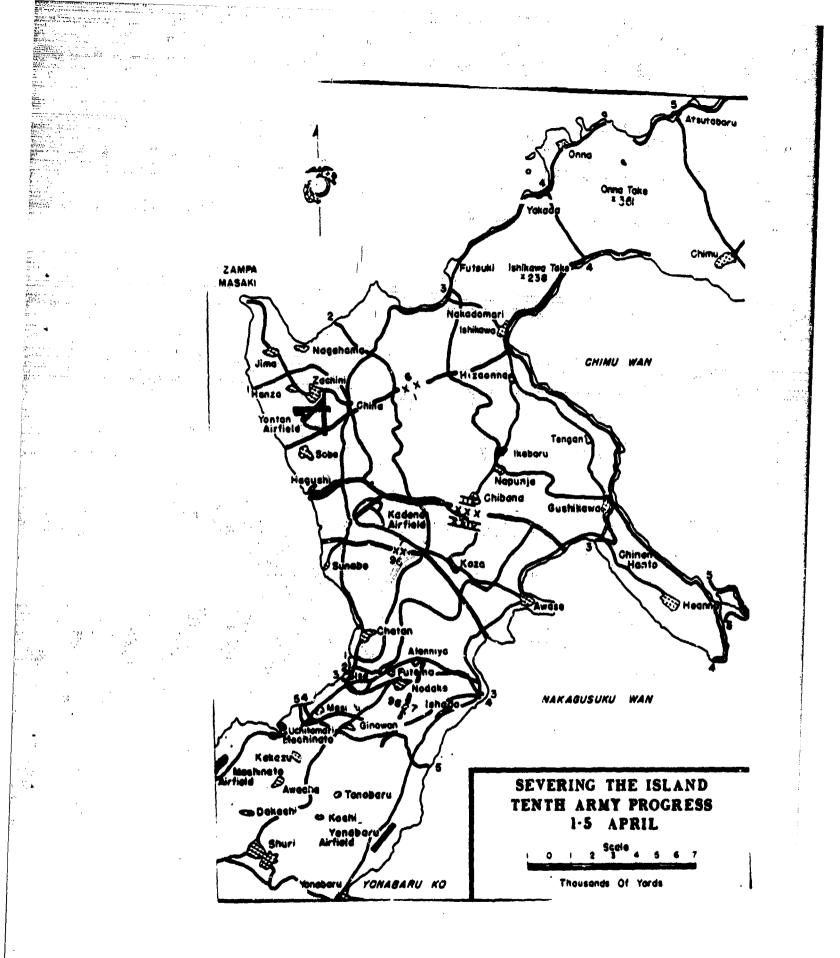


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#### CHAPTER 5

#### THE GROUND CAMPAIGN - THE PUSH TO SHURI

Consolidation of the Beachhead

By 3 April all four assault divisions (7th, 96th, 1st Marine and 6th Marine) had passed command and control ashore. Okinawa was cut in half by the American forces; the Japanese in the northern two-thirds of the island were effectively isolated. Emergency air operations were already taking place on Yontan Airfield, which would become fully operational 4 April, followed closely by Kadena.<sup>1</sup>

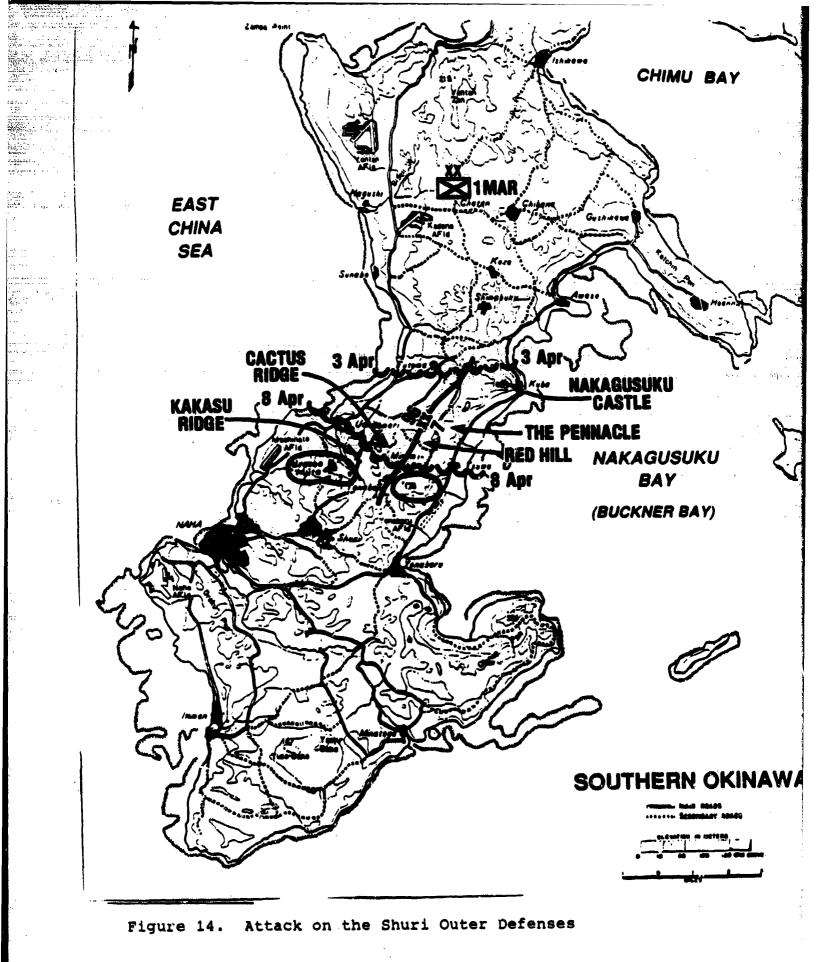
However, all was not going smoothly for the invasion force. Rapid movement had left units overextended and out of contact. The logistics tail of the forward forces was unable to keep pace with the unexpectedly rapid advance inland across rugged terrain. Priority given to debarkation of combat units further hampered the logistics effort. To overcome the backlog, floodlights were used for night unloading and movement of supplies over the beaches and a huge engineer effort went into breaching the reef off Hagushi and improving movement over the beaches themselves. By 9 April the situation was looking much better. All beach operations, except those supporting 6th Marine Division, operating far to the north, were turned over to the Island Commander, Major General Wallace.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Drive South

On 3 April, General Buckner made the critical decision to deviate from the ICEBERG plan. Because of the rapid movement of his forces and lack of Japanese resistance, he decided to allow the 6th Marine Division to continue its advance north to seize and clear the northern two-thirds of Okinawa and prevent possible Japanese reinforcements from landing there. XXIV Corps would attack south as per the original plan, and 1st Marine Division would continue its attack to the east and conduct mop up operations in the rear area. The 77th Division would remain in reserve.<sup>3</sup>

That same day, XXIV Corps began an assault on the southern third of the island with the 7th and 96th Divisions. The 7th Division encountered a Japanese force of approximately 385 dug in Japanese soldiers but were able to quickly overcome them and, by the end of the day, Tenth Army was 12 days ahead of schedule.<sup>4</sup>

Major General Hodge, XXIV Corps commander, wanted to maintain the tempo of the operation and ordered a two division attack for the morning of 4 April. The 96th Division, to the west, was to seize the Urasoe-Mura escarpment, while the 7th Division was to seize Hill 178 on the eastern side of Okinawa. Both terrain features dominated the immediate area and the planning for the attack was hasty, but General Hodge was certain that Japanese resistance would continue to crumble if the pace of operations was maintained.<sup>5</sup> Unluckily, his two divisions were



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to make frontal attacks into strongly held and well prepared Japanese positions, held by three independent infantry battalions of the 62d Division. Each battalion consisted of approximately 1200 soldiers, heavily armed with automatic weapons, mortars, and antitank guns.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, each position was supported by the concentrated power of General Ushijima's artillery. The Japanese were well dug in and camouflaged. XXIV Corps faced a tough fight.

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As the 96th Division's history so aptly puts it, "Beginning 4 April, the honeymoon was over."<sup>7</sup> Combined tank/infantry teams moved slowly up ridges leading to high ground. Casualties were high in some units, but slow progress was made. Japanese positions on the "Pinnacle" and Nakagusuku Castle, both in the 7th Division sector, were strong but could be and were outflanked. The 96th Division had no such advantage; it could not isolate and find an assailable flank on its initial objective, named "Cactus Ridge" by the soldiers. Despite artillery, air, and tank support, it took a frontal assault by American infantry to take the position on 7 April. Even then, an attempt by the 96th Division to continue its attack toward Kakazu on 7 and 8 April failed with heavy losses, despite extensive support from Marine and Navy air, artillery, and naval gunfire.<sup>8</sup>

The 7th Division, to the east, was also having difficulties. As it continued to advance toward Minami-Uebaru, it hit a major center of resistance vicinity a low, bare terrain feature the soldiers called "Red Hill". Two successive assaults,

heavily supported by tanks, failed. Finally, the hill was taken through the massive use of indirect fire and a battalion size infantry attack on the flank of the Japanese position. Battles against other Japanese outposts on 8 April were also difficult and bloody.9

By 9 April, the XXIV Corps attack had stalled against the first of two main defensive lines. The corps had suffered 1510 battle losses, mostly in the 96th Division, and still had the main Japanese defenses facing them. General Hodge decided to conduct the corps main effort in the 96th Division zone of action, against Kakazu Ridge. The initial attack on the ridge cost one regiment of the division 326 casualties, rendering several of its companies combat ineffective. The ridge was taken, but a Japanese counterattack from reverse slope positions pushed the Americans off.

On 10 April, the 96th Division conducted a deliberate attack against Kakazu Ridge, supported by air, naval gunfire, and artillery, the latter from both Army and Marine artillery battalions. Although the main effort was against Kakazu Ridge, the attack was conducted along the entire XXIV Corps front. It was a repeat of the previous day, as well as a preview to much of the remainder of the ground campaign. The Americans could take the crest of a ridge, hill, or escarpment, but preplanned Japanese artillery in concert with fresh infantry attacking from positions on the reverse slope would force the worn and attritted American force to withdraw. In the east, the 7th Division had made some progress and mopped up some bypassed enemy units;

however, by 12 April, after nearly 2900 casualties, the XXIV Corps offensive was definitely stalled all along the front.<sup>10</sup> General Hodge realized the strength of the enemy he was facing and gave the order to hold further offensive operations until reinforcements and artillery ammunition could be brought forward.

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#### 32d Army Counterattacks

Many officers on the 32d Army staff, including General Cho, had advocated a major counterattack against the invading force since 6 April. By 12 April, the condition of the American assault units, tired and understrength with no immediate reinforcements, finally convinced General Ushijima that the correct time had come to deal the Americans a severe blow. Overly optomistic reports from Tokyo stated that TEN-Go had been a tremendous success and that American morale was low and their will to fight about to break. General Cho's counterattack plan, adopted despite the objections of the Operations Officer, Colonel Yahara, was to infiltrate six infantry battalions (later scaled down to four) through the weakened XXIV Corps lines the night of 12 April. The units were to hide in caves and tombs as far north as Kadena Airfield and emerge on the morning of 13 April to attack the Tenth Army rear area, disrupting operations and cutting the vital lines of communications to the forward divisions. Simultaneously, the remainder of the forward deployed Japanese forces would attack 7th and 96th Divisions, destroying them or forcing them to retreat.<sup>11</sup>

At 1900 hours, 12 April the heaviest Japanese artillery preparation to date hit the two American divisions. Casualties were light because the American infantrymen were well dug in. In the 7th Division sector the Japanese attack was disorganized and piecemeal, and was rapidly thrown back with heavy casualties. In the 96th Division sector the attackers were better organized, but could still not penetrate the American positions, largely due to the assistance of Marine artillery, which fired concentrations within 150 yards of the American positions. Only one Japanese unit managed to slip through, and it was so misoriented that it merely hid the following day and infiltrated back into Japanese lines that night.<sup>12</sup> The Japanese learned (or relearned) a costly lesson. In their fortified reverse slope positions they could meet the Americans on equal terms; however, in open warfare the combination of American naval gunfire, air support, and artillery rapidly destroyed the continuity of their attack, then the formations themselves. The 32d Army suffered over 1500 of their best soldiers killed in the counterattack and gained nothing significant.

#### The Marines Attack North

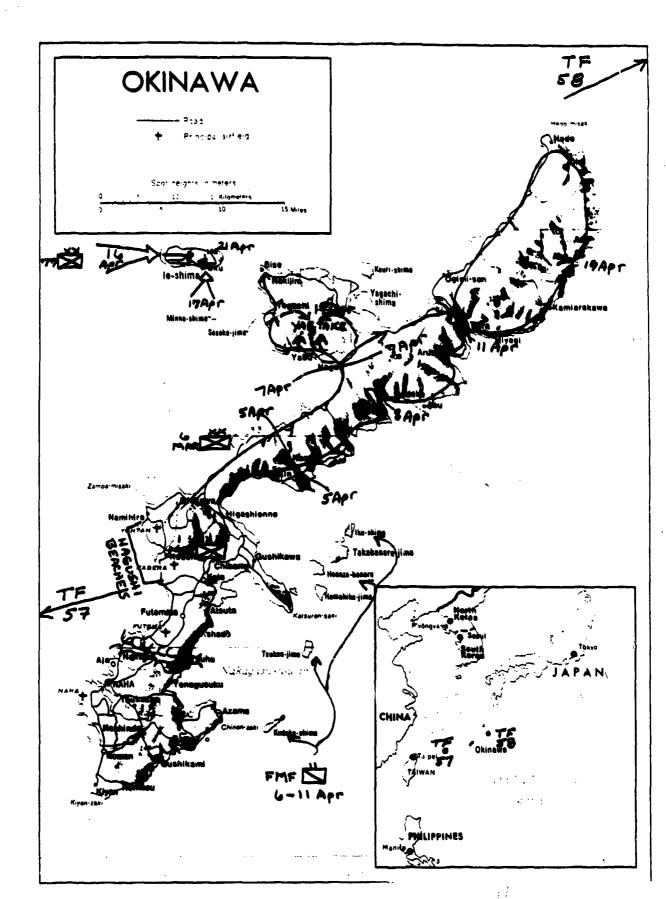
On 3 April, General Buckner modified the original ICEBERG plan in order to allow III Corps to attack north and east. However, he had not lost sight that the main battle, as well as his most critical terrain objectives, would be in the southern part of the island. Thus, he moved much of the III Amphibious

Corps artillery to XXIV Corps control. As sole commander of the Expeditionary Troops, responsible for the land campaign, his position allowed him to override service parochialism and allocate assets to the Tenth Army main effort throughout the campaign.

Between 6 and 11 April, the Fleet Marine Force Reconnaissance Battalion took the islands guarding the approaches to Nakagusuku and Chimu Bays, as the 1st Marine Division secured the remainder of the Ishikawa Isthmus and Katchin Peninsula. These actions allowed the Navy use of key anchorages and permitted continued development of Kadena and Yontan airfields and the logistics base area.

While 1st Marine Division and FMF Reconnaissance Battalion secured anchorages and rear areas, the 6th Marine Division. often riding tanks and supported by engineers and coordinated naval gunfire, moved rapidly north. They were more impeded by the difficult terrain and lack of suitable roads than by enemy resistance.<sup>13</sup> As most of III Amphibious Corps artillery was attached to XXIV Corps, in hot contact to the south, naval gunfire became critical as Japanese resistance increased near the Motobu Peninsula.<sup>14</sup> By 7 April the Marines had advanced to Nago, at the base of the Motobu Peninsula, and prepared to take the peninsula itself, pelieved to be the main Japanese bastion in the north. This belief turned out to be correct.

The Motobu Peninsula is dominated by Yas-Take, the highest mountain in the area. The Japanese had heavily fortified the mountain, improving on the tombs and caves that dotted the area.



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Figure 15. The Seizure of Northern Okinawa

From the high ground they had observation over the entire peninsula, and had sufficient medium artillery to make their defense effective.

The 6th Marine Division soon found itself subjected to accurate shelling from the heights. It took until 14 April for the Marines to gain sufficient information on the Japanese defenses and to move up enough combat power and support for an assault. The next two days were spent conducting offensive operations to seize the Japanese outposts guarding the approaches to Yae-Take. From 16 - 18 April the 6th Marine Division launched a two-pronged attack, supported by air, artillery, and naval gunfire, against the main Japanese defenses on the mountain. By 19 April, effective Japanese resistance in northern Okinawa had been crushed and the Motobu Peninsula was in American hands.<sup>15</sup>

#### Destruction of the Japanese Surface Fleet

The final major surface action of World War II was almost anticlimactic. On 6 April the giant 18 inch gun battleship Yamoto, accompanied by a single cruiser and eight destroyers, sailed from Japan with only enough fuel in her bunkers for a oneway trip to Okinawa. Its mission was to attack the American transports and other support shipping lying off the Hagushi beaches, then ground on the beach or lie offshore and fight until destroyed. Less than a day out of the Home Islands, the small task force was spotted by two American submarines, who radioed its location. The following day the naval aircraft of TF 58 fell

upon them and destroyed the Yamato and the rest of the Imperial Navy task force, less one destroyer.16

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Of key importance, throughout the action the Navy continued to cover and support the amphibious operation. There was no repeat of the Battle for Leyte Gulf, in which the bulk of the American fleet were decoyed away from the Amphibious Force, and only the selfless actions of a few escort carriers and destroyers

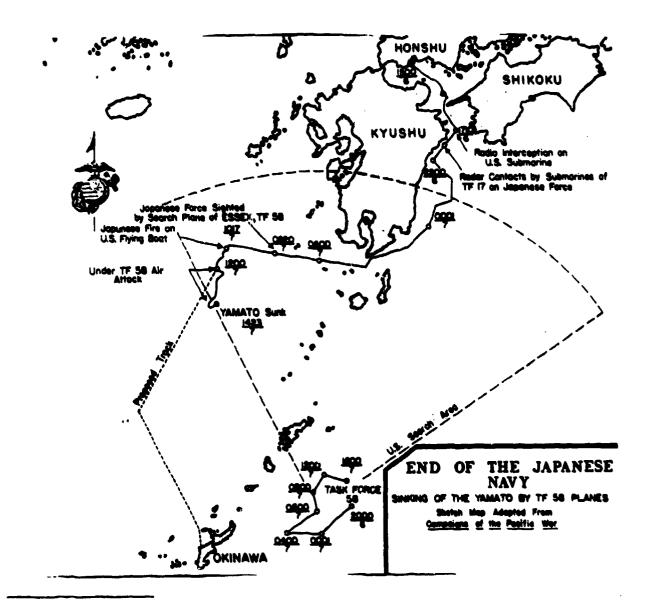


Figure 16 17

saved the Americans from a major disaster. At Okinawa, the overall command was unified and there was no question throughout the campaign that protection of the Amphibious Force had top priority.

The Capture of Ie Shima

Ie Shima is an island lying three miles off the western tip of the Motobu Peninsula. The Japanese had built an airfield on the island but, realizing it could not be defended, had abandoned it and cut a number of trenches across it prior to the invasion. This airfield that to Tenth Army's interest in the island.<sup>18</sup> Ie Shima was defended by approximately 2,000 Japanese soldiers, airfield support forces, and Okinawan conscript laborers, positioned in well fortified bunkers in the town of Ie and the high ground to the north of the town.

Although the assault on Ie Shima had originally been part of the Phase II operation (siezure of northern Okinawa and Ie Shima), when General Buckner changed the ICEBERG plan on 3 April he also ordered the 77th Division, which had been in reserve after its pre-L-Day operations, to seize the island.<sup>19</sup> As the marines continued their drive north, the 77th Division prepared to conduct an amphibious operation on the island.

The Navy had pounded the island intermittently from 25 March with naval gunfire; however, a full preparation commenced 13 April. Naval and Marine air flew 292 sorties against the

island between 13 and 15 April alone, 20

On the morning of 16 April the assault formations of the 77th Division stormed ashore, supported by naval gunfire and close air support. Japanese defenses in the area of the landing beaches were totally neutralized by the preparation, and the airfield was quickly secured. However, as the soldiers approached the town of Ie, they came under heavy fire and casualties mounted. That night, the Japanese conducted a number of counterattacks which, as usual, were broken up by the superior American firepower. On 17 April, an additional regiment was landed on the south side of Ie Shima to try to flank the defenses, but this attack soon stalled. The 77th Division was still unable to make significant progress against the Japanese bastion north of Ie.21 American attacks on 18 and 19 April were bloody failures. Finally, through a series of enveloping attacks conducted by infantry/tank/engineer teams, the Japanese positions were taken one at a time, first in the town of Ie, and finally on the high ground to the north. By the afternoon of 21 April, only mop up operations remained.

The 32d Army lost 4,700 soldiers killed during the battle, with an additional 149 taken prisoner. The 77th Division and units supporting it lost 172 killed, 902 wounded, and 46 missing, a total of 1,120 casualties. One of the dead was war correspondent Ernie Pyle, killed 18 April.<sup>21</sup> The high American casualties were due to a combination of the small geographical area and proximity of forces, which prevented the effective use of heavy fire support for much of the battle. Nonetheless, the

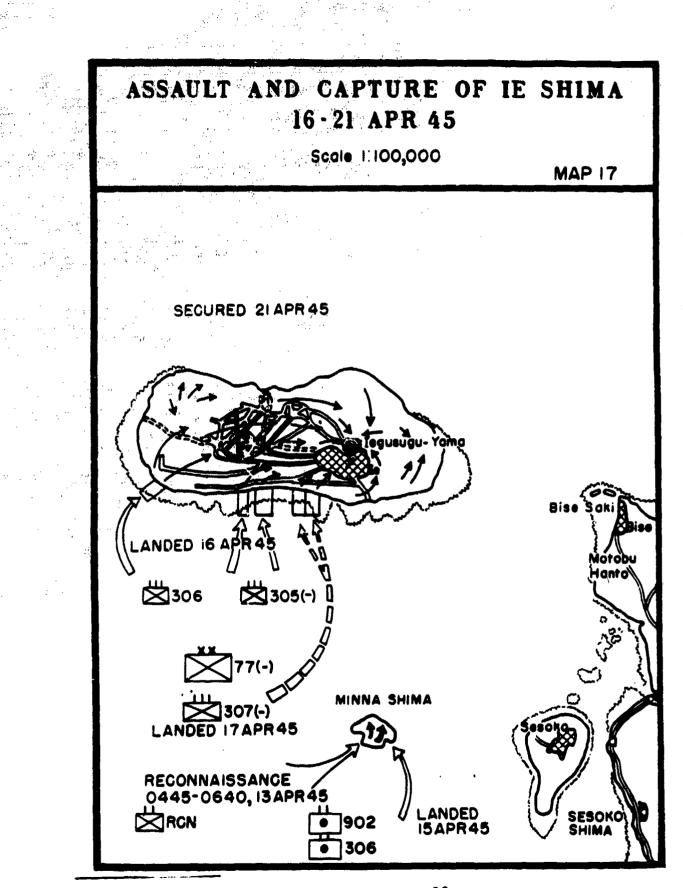


Figure 17 23

price had been paid, and by the middle of May another airfield, complete with aircraft and support, was available for operations in Okinawa and against the Japanese Home Islands.

#### Kamikaze!

Between 6 April and 22 June 1945 the TEN-Go operation launched ten massive Kamikaze flights from Kyushu, often supported by conventional fighters and bombers, to put an end to U.S. supremacy of the seas, or at least cause such massive casualties that the Allies would be willing to negotiate a peace settlement. By the end of June, the attacks sunk 26 American ships and damaged 164 (including some Allied). Additional shipping was sunk and damaged by Japanese small scale Kamikaze and conventional aircraft attacks launched from Formosa.

The first of the TEN-GO raids, launched 6 April, caused the most damage. Fourteen fighters strafed the U.S. captured runways on Okinawa, while over 100 conventional fighters and bombers attacked TF 58, the fast American carriers, to decoy away their interceptors. Then, for two days, 355 suicide and an equal number of conventional Japanese aircraft attacked the transports and other shipping offloading on the Hagushi beaches.<sup>24</sup> Two destroyers, a mine sweeper, two ammunition ships, and an LST were lost, and thirteen other ships badly damaged, some of which had to be scuttled later. The Japanese lost over 300 aircraft of all types in this effort.<sup>25</sup>

On 11-12 April came the next TEN-Go wave. Seventeen ships

were hit, of which two were sunk, including a destroyer. On 15-16 April an aircraft carrier was damaged, a destroyer sunk, and ten other ships damaged severely. As the campaign continued, the raids, although nerve shattering and often deadly to individual ships (especially destroyers manning the early warning "picket" stations), became far less effective. By 30 April the Japanese had lost over 1,100 aircraft attacking the invasion force. Additionally, the American Strategic Bomber Command was allocating over a third of its sorties to the Kyushu airfields. Finally, as the U.S. airfields on Okinawa grew and could accept more aircraft, the Tenth Army Tactical Air Force (TAF) could launch increased combat air patrols to cover the beaches and troop units and the Navy could devote more aircraft to its own defense.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the combat air patrols became such a high priority to Tenth Army TAF, which consisted primarily of Marine aircraft throughout the campaign, that ground support missions, normally a Marine air specialty, often were performed by carrier based Navy aircraft.27

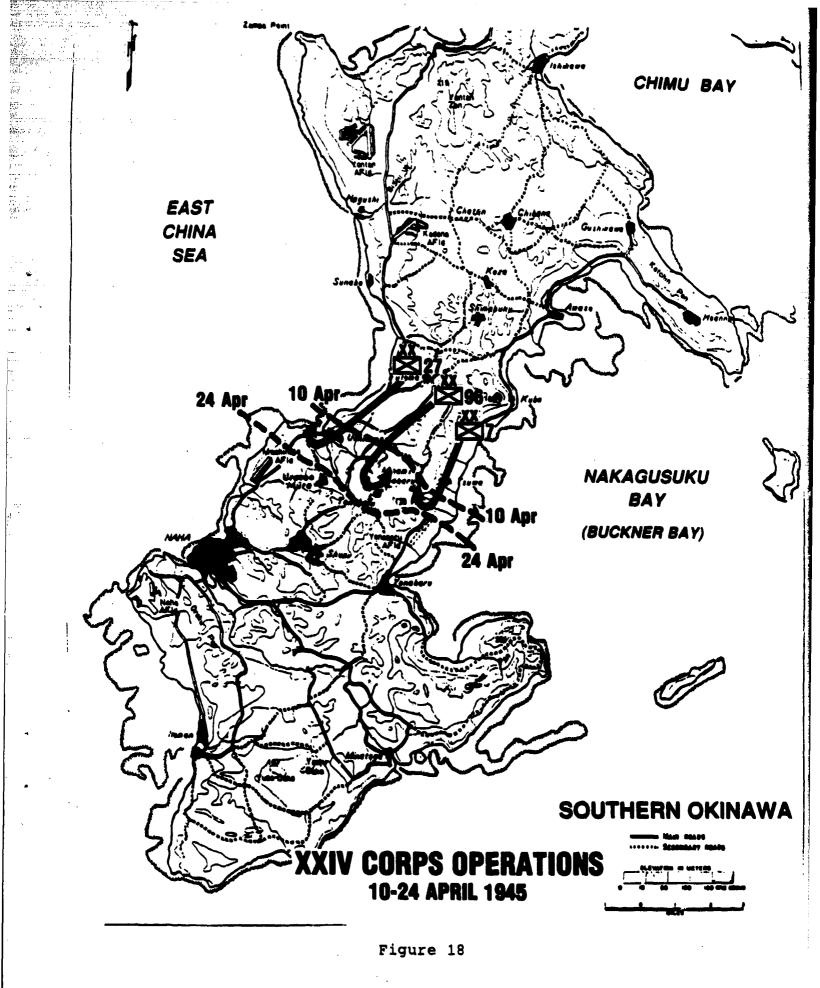
Key to the American success in the Okinawa Campaign was that despite heavy losses in ships and personnel, the fleet remained on station. That it did is a tribute to both the steadfastness of the American and British sailors and the focus of all participants in the campaign, from the Strategic Bomber Command which targeted airfields on Kyushu to the soldiers and marines ashore, toward a single set of campaign priorities and goals.

Final Assault on the Outer Shuri Defenses

After failing at his initial attempts to breach the first main line of Japanese defenses in southern Okinawa and defeating the 32d Army counteroffensive of 13-14 April, General Hodge determined that he would require greater combat power to continue his offensive. To bolster XXIV Corps' strength, General Buckner not only attached artillery from 1st Marine Division and III Amphibious Corps, but sent in the 27th Division, a fresh unit, which joined the corps on 15 April.

With the XXIV Corps attack designated the Tenth Army main effort, the massed firepower of the fleet, carrier and ground based aircraft, and multiple artillery battalions blasted the Japanese positions for four days. Over 900 air sorties, 27 battalions of artillery, six battleships, six cruisers, and nine destroyers joined in the preparation. To the soldiers preparing to assault, it seemed as if nothing could possibly survive this pounding.<sup>28</sup>

On 18 April, General Buckner moved his command post ashore, assuming command of not just the soldiers of Tenth Army, but the island itself.<sup>29</sup> The XXIV Corps attacked the morning of 19 April with three divisions abreast. By the end of the day, the newly committed 27th Division had lost almost all of its tanks in heavy fighting to take Kakazu Ridge in the western part of the corps zone of action. As had the 96th Division before, it failed to take and hold the heights. The 96th Division, now in the center, made moderate gains. The 7th Division, in the east, made



no progress that first day. The battle rapidly degenerated into a series of small unit actions in which the Americans, heavily supported by tanks, engineers, artillery and naval guns, and air attacked the Japanese strongpoints one at a time, blanketing them with indirect and direct fire, driving the defenders from the entrance to the caves with flame throwers, then sealing the survivors inside with demolitions. It was slow, expensive fighting, and between 20 and 24 April, the XXIV Corps found its fighting strength was being bled dry with no breakthrough in sight.

During this battle one of the few examples of American interservice rivalry occurred. On 21 April, Tenth Army ordered General Geiger, III Amphibious Corps commander, to attach the 1st Tank Battalion of the 1st Marine Division to the Army 27th Division, which had lost most of its tanks. General Geiger's response to this order was that rather than piecemealing his division, the entire 1st Marine Division should be committed. His views prevailed with General Buckner and the tanks were never sent. However, 1st Marine Division was designated Tenth Army reserve with the mission of having one regiment available to reinforce XXIV Corps on 12 hours notice.<sup>30</sup> General Geiger's remarks on piecemealing the 1st Marine Division were appropriate; artillery and air could be rapidly moved back and forth between units to provide support where needed. On the other hand, tanks would be difficult to disengage, and would almost certainly have taken significant losses when and if they returned to their parent division.

The night of 23-24 April General Ushijima skillfully withdrew his forces all along the outer Shuri defensive line into the second, final defensive belt. When XXIV Corps attacked on 24 April under the most intense bombardment yet, they had no trouble seizing the objectives which had held them up for two weeks.<sup>29</sup>

#### The Push to Shuri

By 24 April, General Buckner knew any hope for a quick victory had passed. All three divisions in XXIV Corps: the 27th, 96th, and 7th were tired and severely understrength. They had broken the outer defensive belt protecting Shuri, but it was obvious by this time that this was just the first of perhaps several defensive belts. General Buckner had most of the 77th Division available on Ie Shima by 21 April, less only small garrisons there and on the Kerama Islands. III Amphibious Corps, consisting of the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions, were under his direct command; however, only the 1st Marine Division was immediately available. The 6th Marine Division was securing northern Okinawa and conducting mop up operations against any remaining enemy resistance. Additionally, the 2d Marine Division, which had been used in the demonstration landings, had been returned to Saipan and was not under Tenth Army control. TO add to General Buckner's troubles, due to the severe casualties taken by V Amphibious Corps at Iwo Jima, he had been directed to keep III Amphibious Corps free from heavy commitment that would preclude them from conducting an amphibious assault on Miyako,

just north of Formosa, as part of Phase III of ICEBERG. These unrealistic restrictions on use of III Amphibious Corps were deleted on 26 April.<sup>32</sup>

At this stage of the campaign some of the Tenth Army staff and several subordinate commanders began to push for an amphibious assault on the southern coast of the island with one of the relatively fresh Marine divisions. It was hoped this would bypass the main Japanese defenses and thus force 32d Army to fight in two directions. General Buckner rejected this course of action as tactically and logistically unsupportable, which it probably was at the time.<sup>33</sup> Although apparently unknown at the time by Tenth Army, General Ushijima had not been forced to draw down his southern coast defenses yet. Thus, any landing there would have faced tough opposition from the commanding heights that had caused the planners to reject its use for the initial amphibious assault.

Before he would attempt to breach the second defensive line protecting Shuri, General Buckner wanted to mass as much combat power as possible for what would have to be a frontal assault. He intended to move 1st Marine Division into the assault line as soon as possible to assist the depleted Army units. III Amphibious Corps and 6th Marine Division would follow, with the end result of having III Amphibious Corps in the west with two divisions and XXIV Corps in the east. Until the reconfiguration of the Tenth Army could occur, XXIV Corps was to continue to attack and keep pressure on 32d Army.<sup>34</sup>

In the center of XXIV Corps, the 96th Division faced the

eastern half of the Urasoe-Mura escarpment, dominating and difficult terrain on the forward slope and a maze of interconnecting Japanese positions on the reverse. As the exhausted American infantrymen crested the escarpment, they were driven off by fire from Japanese units, protected in their reverse slope positions. Finally, using infantry/tank teams, the units of the 96th Division were able to seize the town of Maeda on 26 April, but could advance no further when faced with Japanese reinforcements sent by General Ushijima to restore the defensive line.<sup>35</sup> Once again, when the Japanese remained in their defensive positions they met the Americans on equal terms; however, when forced to counterattack, the American firepower proved overwhelming.

Seizing and holding the crest of the escarpment (or at least part of it) was the final effort for the 96th Division, which urgently needed time to refit and assimilate replacements. On 30 April, 77th Division assumed responsibility for the 96th Division zone of action. By 4 May, the 77th Division had control over the entire crest of the escarpment, and by 6 May the reverse slope was cleared, although some units of the 77th suffered heavy casualties in the process. An estimated 3,000 Japanese were killed in the battle for the Urasoe-Mura escarpment, many by the artillery, air, and naval gunfire that rained on their positions and broke up their counterattacks.<sup>36</sup> The job of the infantry/tank teams was difficult and dangerous, but would have been impossible without this focussed support.

On the west coast the 27th Division, having taken heavy

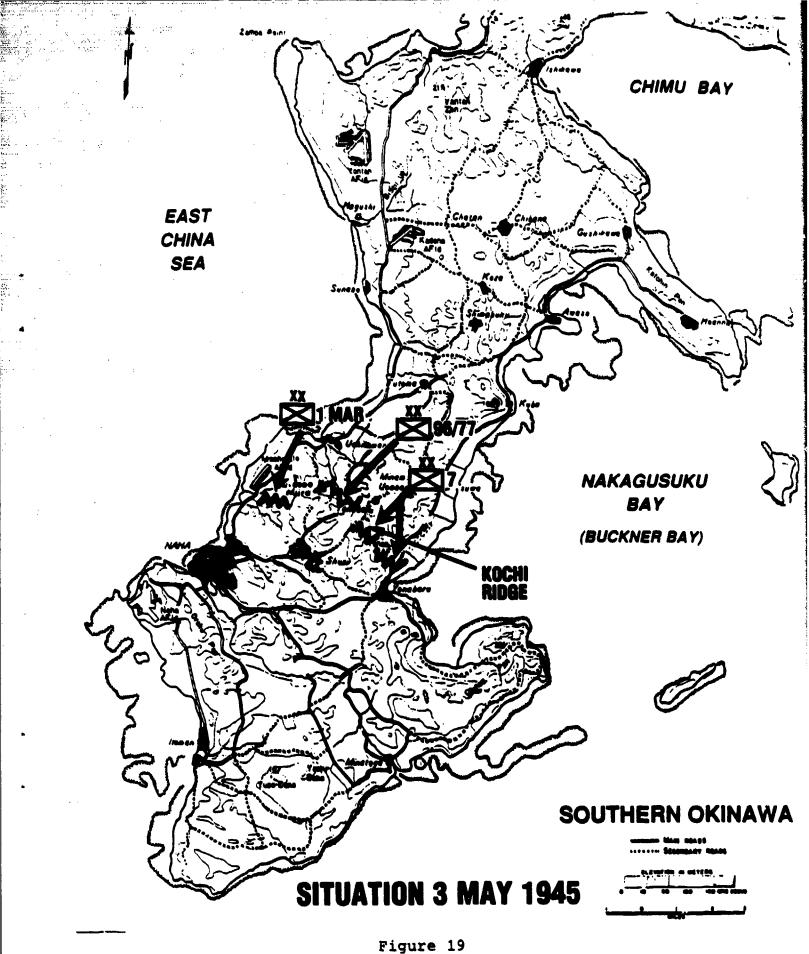
casualties and with insufficient forces remaining to secure the terrain in its zone, had made little progress. On 1 May, the 1st Marine Division, temporarily attached to XXIV Corps, assumed the 27th Division's zone of action and immediately began offensive operations. By 3 May, the Marines were also bogged down far short of the Asa River, their initial objective.<sup>37</sup>

Only one of the XXIV Corps' assault divisions had not been pulled from the line to refit. The 7th Division, on the eastern side of the corps front, had not yet suffered the losses of the other divisions; however, they now faced a fresh regiment drawn from the 32d Army reserve. Between 25 April and 2 May, the 7th Division's attack down the east coast of Okinawa met with heavy casualties and few gains. Again, the reverse slope defenses and well entrenched positions reduced the effectiveness of the U.S. firepower.

## 32d Army Counterattacks

At last light on 3 May, Kamikazes again struck the American fleet, sinking two more ships and damaging four. Simultaneously, other Japanese aircraft bombed and strafed Yontan Airfield. This marked the beginning of General Ushijima's greatest counteroffensive.

General Ushijima's intent was to get his forces to the rear of the forward divisions. He believed that the American rear area would prove lightly defended and vulnerable to ground attack. Significantly damaging the logistics area would, at a



minimum, force the Americans to redirect their attack, lengthening the campaign, and it was possible that if the attackers could neutralize the airfields as well, that the invaders could yet be defeated. General Ushijima's hopes were not entirely unwarranted. Tenth Army had an extended logistics tail, few reserves, and combat forces that had been fighting for up to a month without respite. Also, if the Americans had to rely on carrier based air exclusively again, air support for Tenth Army would have to be cut and 'the Kamikazes would become more effective.

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While a Japanese amphibious engineer regiment attempted a seaborne envelopment up both coasts, three infantry and one tank regiment were to attack in the 7th and 77th Division sectors. They were to break through the American lines and seize the area around Futema, effectively cutting the lines of communications to the forward U.S. divisions and raising havoc in the rear area. The 32d Army assault began before dawn on 4 May, supported by heavy artillery concentrations. By 0800 hours the attack was crushed. Worse from a Japanese perspective, the American artillery, often shooting across division boundaries, not only destroyed the infantry and tank assaults, but 59 Japanese artillery pieces as well. Faced with these losses, the remaining Japanese artillery was pulled back into protective caves.<sup>36</sup>

Another wave of Kamikazes struck the American fleet the morning of 4 May. This attack, combined with that of the previous night, destroyed or heavily damaged 17 American ships, including an escort carrier and a cruiser, for a cost to the

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At 0200 hours, 5 May General Ushijima launched another attack against the hard pressed 77th Division. The main attack, which was supported by the remaining Japanese tanks, was broken by American artillery; however, a portion of one infantry battalion managed to infiltrate between the 77th and 7th Divisions and take up positions at Tanabaru and on Tanabaru Ridge, a mile behind the 7th Division forward lines. Although never a great threat, it took three days to remove the enemy astride the division's lines of communications.<sup>40</sup>

By the evening of 5 May, General Ushijima realized his counteroffensive had been a costly failure. He had lost approximately 5,000 soldiers killed and almost all of his light tanks and half his mediums. The seaborne assault teams had been destroyed as they attempted to land. Much of his artillery had been destroyed. Worse, his counteroffensive had not even caused the Tenth Army to suspend offensive operations. General Ushijima, his staff, and most of his soldiers were now certain the campaign would be lost.41

## The Renewed Attack on Shuri

On 7 May, III Amphibious Corps assumed command of the 1st Marine Division zone of action. The 6th Marine Division was moved south and assumed the western coast approach toward Naha on 8 May. Both corps continued local offensive operations to seize advantageous positions from which to kick off the next major

attack, scheduled for 11 May. Several days of heavy rains had turned the battlefield and roads leading to the front into seas of mud. Despite lavish use of fire support, little ground was gained.42

32d Army had fought its last major offensive battle. The focus of operatiors now shifted to holding terrain and causing American casualties. General Ushijima would fight a defensive war of attrition exclusively, with counterattacks limited to those necessary to retake critical terrain. As he no longer had sufficient infantry to man the defenses, he began the process of integrating support troops and conscript laborers into his infantry regiments. American intelligence officers were disconcerted to find Japanese infantry units they believed had been destroyed or rendered ineffective suddenly reappear on their order of battle at or near full strength.<sup>43</sup>

Despite slow going and heavy casualties, Kochi Ridge was finally taken by the 7th Division, which was then relieved in place on 10 May by the 96th Division. As 11 May approached, the divisions of Tenth Army were still short of their attack positions for the next major offensive. Even so, the Shuri defenses had to be cracked as soon as possible. Naval losses had been heavy and even Admiral Turner, who had hung in with the ground forces at Guadalcanal and Leyte, was still anxious to complete the campaign and move his vulnerable ships to a safer haven.<sup>44</sup> Although the 32d Army counteroffensive had failed, the supporting Kamikaze attacks on the Amphibious Task Force had cost dearly. The Tenth Army attack would take place as

scheduled.

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General Buckner planned to attack with his two corps abreast, four divisions on line (from east to west, 96th Division, 77th Division, 1st Marine Division, 6th Marine Division). The 7th Division was the XXIV Corps reserve and the battered 27th Division assumed the security mission for the remainder of the island. The main attacks were to be along the east and west coasts, with a supporting attack in the center. Seeing the preparations, General Ushijima pulled most of his units from other areas and strengthened the Shuri defenses.<sup>45</sup>

The III Amphibious Corps attack was initially successful, with elements of the 6th Marine Division, heavily supported with artillery and naval gunfire, reaching the heights overlooking Naha by the evening of the first day. Despite this early success, the 6th Marine attack stalled on the high ground dubbed the Sugarloaf, as did the attack of the 1st Marine Division on Wana Ridge and Hill 55. From 12-21 May, the marines could only move slowly through the Japanese defenses. Destruction of each strongpoint was a combined arms effort in which air strikes and precision naval and artillery fires softened up the target, followed by a tank/infantry assault covered by direct fire artillery. Flame throwers, either man packed or mounted on specialized tanks, would force the Japanese from the cave entrance which was then sealed by infantry with sachel charges, followed by engineers with demolitions and bulldozers. Japanese counterattacks were ineffective, and normally rapidly destroyed. The process was slow and costly. In this battle, the 6th Marine

Division suffered almost 2,000 battle casualties, while one regiment of the 1st Marine Division had over 1,000.<sup>46</sup> As bad as the casualties were, without their ability to bring overwhelming fires on each strongpoint the marines could have never accomplished the task. Despite these efforts, on 21 May the Japanese defenses in the west remained intact.

The 77th Division, conducting the supporting attack in the center, initially had great success by conducting something that caught the Japanese defenders by surprise - a night attack by an American unit. They seized Ishimmi Ridge, then fought off Japanese counterattacks for the next three days. After that, they too could only advance by taking out one Japanese strongpoint after another, taking heavy casualties doing so. By 21 May, lead elements were approaching the outskirts of Shuri, but had still not broken through the Japanese defensive line.

The honor of breaking the Shuri defenses fell to the 96th Division, on the eastern coast. Its major objective was a 476 foot hill rising from the coastal plain which the soldiers called Conical Hill. Unlike most of the battlefield, the eastern side of Conical Hill, although heavily fortified and defended, was on a forward slope and could be reached by the flat shooting naval guns. The Japanese tactic of using reverse slope positions was not effective here. The first 96th Division attack on Conical Hill, launched 11 May, failed when the regiment conducting it attempted to take the western slope of the hill and was caught in a crossfire from Japanese positions on the protected slope. On 13 April, a lone infantry company from the division seized the

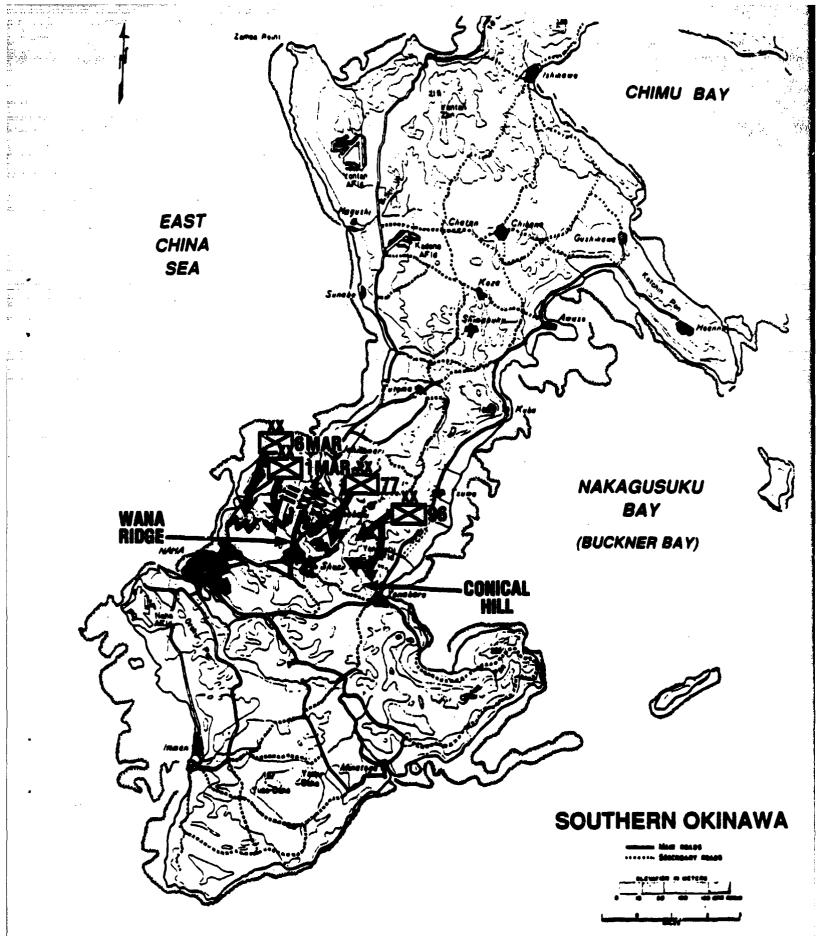
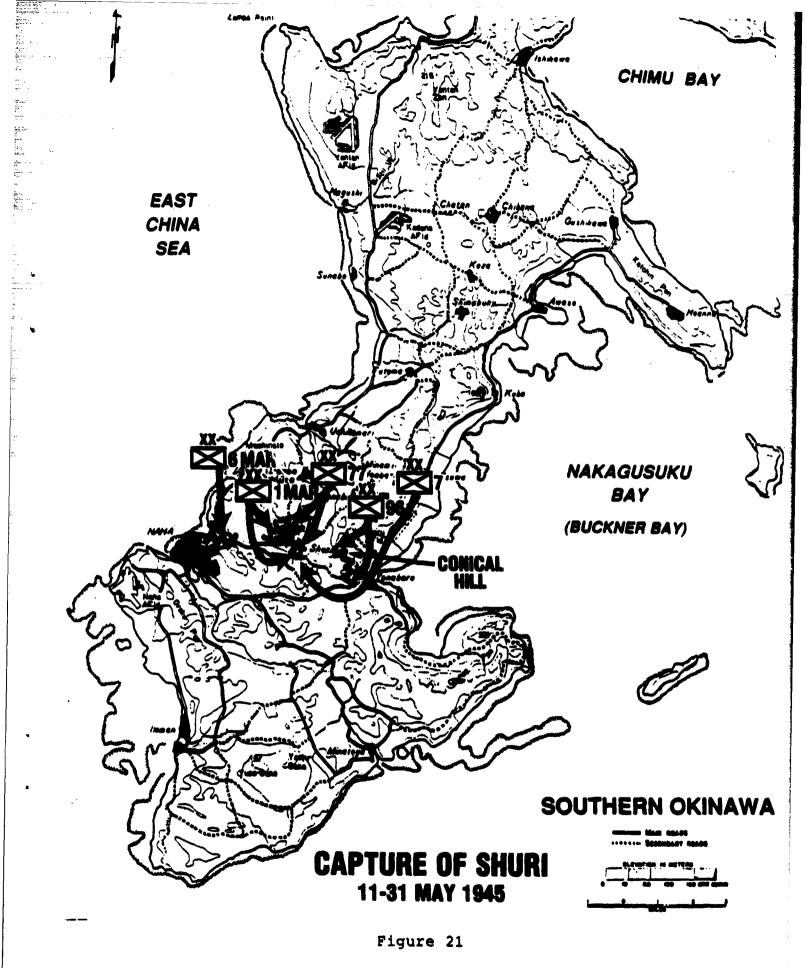


Figure 20. Attack on Shuri, 11-21 May 1945

northeast crest of the hill and held it despite repeated Japanese counterattacks. Once the first crack in the Shuri defenses appeared, troops were committed to continue the flanking movement, going south, then west, along the exposed eastern slope of the coastal hills, bypassing the main Japanese defenses. On 21 May, the break was complete and a narrow corridor led to the 32d Army rear area. The 7th Division, in reserve, was committed through the corridor toward the heart of the Japanese defenses.<sup>47</sup>

Even as the 7th Division pushed off on its end run, the rains began in earnest, turning roads and trails to mud, interrupting supplies and bogging down vital artillery, engineers, and even infantry reinforcements. Nonetheless, through nine days of continuous rain, the 7th Division continued its slow progress southwest, manhandling needed supplies and doing without tanks, air, and most of their artillery. At least partially due to the pressure the 7th Division was exerting on 32d Army, the 6th Marine Division was able to move through the now destroyed city of Naha and continue their attack to the southeast, again aimed at the rear of the Shuri defences.<sup>48</sup> The other divisions were stalled by enemy resistance and the weather, but the noose was tightening around 32d Army.



### Escape of the 32d Army

General Ushijima met with his commanders on 21 May to inform them that the Shuri defences had been breached and the 32d Army had but two choices - allow itself to be surrounded and fight to the end in Shuri or escape to the south and establish a new defensive line. After discussion with his commanders and staff, he decided to attempt to escape with the majority of his force, basing his decision upon Tokyo's directive to delay the Americans as long as possible.49

The withdrawal began 22 May. For the most part, American aerial reconnaissance during this period was limited because of the continuous rain and fog. Until 26 May the little movement spotted was believed to be civilian traffic; however on that day a break in the weather permitted reconnaissance aircraft to identify Japanese military convoys moving south. Fighter aircraft and naval gunfire were brought to bear with great effect. However, American intelligence misread Japanese intentions and informed General Buckner that these were worn out units moving to the rear to refit. It was not until 30 May, when American forces began to overrun abandoned Japanese positions, that the truth became apparent to Tenth Army. Not only had 32d Army escaped, but Tenth Army had no idea where it had gone.<sup>50</sup>

## TEN-Go, the Ground Phase

Despite high attrition and continued attention by the

B-29's of the Strategic Air Force, Kamikaze attacks continued. From 11-14 May they badly damaged two American carriers, forcing Admiral Mitscher to change flagships twice, sank one destroyer and badly damaged three more.<sup>51</sup>

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By the last part of May, the Imperial General Staff in Tokyo knew that 32d Army no longer possessed sufficient strength to threaten the Yontan and Kadena Airfields, yet it was important for the success of Japanese air operations against the American fleet that ground based air strength be reduced. On 24 May, twelve Japanese aircraft took off from Kyushu with 120 raiders aboard. Their mission was to crash land on Yontan and Kadena Airfields and do as much damage to the aircraft and support there as possible before being killed. Four of the aircraft had mechanical problems and had to return. Of the remaining eight, all but one were shot down. The lone remaining aircraft crash landed on Yontan and the surviving raiders managed to destroy seven aircraft and damage twenty. There is some speculation that much of the damage was caused by defensive fires put down by the confused American airmen and ground crews. Attacks by conventional Japanese air and Kamikazes that day sank a destroyer and damaged two others. On 27 May a night raid damaged a destroyer and the following day sank one and damaged another. Being on a picket destroyer off Okinawa was beginning to look like a suicide mission to the American sailors.<sup>52</sup>

#### CHAPTER 6

## DESTRUCTION OF AN ARMY

The Cost of Shuri

By 31 May, the Shuri defenses were in American hands. The effects of American firepower were evident and devastating. Shuri itself was totally destroyed by over 200,000 rounds of artillery and untold bombs, mortars, and other explosives. Even Shuri Castle, ancient throne of the Ryukyus, had its 20 foot thick walls almost totally demolished.<sup>1</sup> After 61 days of combat Japanese casualties amounted to approximately 62,500 dead and 465 captured. American casualties were also high, 5309 dead, 23,909 wounded, and 346 missing, almost three divisions worth of soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

On 17 May, Admiral Nimitz replaced Admiral Kelly Turner, the Amphibious Commander, with Vice Admiral Harry Hill. Ten Days later, he replaced Admiral Spruance with Admiral "Bull" Halsey.<sup>3</sup> These two key commanders and their staffs were now free to plan the invasion of Japan.

On 31 May, General Buckner declared the Shuri defenses secure and that only mop up operations remained in the rest of Okinawa. Although the final outcome of the battle had been decided with the failure of the 32d Army counteroffensive and subsequent fall of Shuri, he underestimated the effectiveness of

General Ushijima's withdrawal. Three weeks of hard fighting remained.

## The Push South

The rains continued, causing a logistics nightmare. Roads were washed out, cross country movement was impossible even with tracked vehicles, and supply depots were thigh deep in mud. Landing craft were used to ferry supplies and equipment down the coast as supply points were opened in southern Okinawa. Ammunition and critical supplies were kept offshore until needed, then carried ashore by landing craft. Once ashore, almost everything had to be man packed to the forward units. Emergency supplies for both Army and Marine units were air dropped by the Air Delivery Section of III Amphibious Corps, which used torpedo bombers rather than C-47's to make drops because of the bombers' greater accuracy. Likewise, interservice cooperation was evident in crossleveling stocks of critical items between the services, especially replacement tanks, POL, and ammunition.<sup>4</sup>

As American forces pushed south, the rain continued to hamper operations. Luckily for Tenth Army, the Japanese rear guard was largely ineffective. By 3 June the Chinen Peninsula was in American hands; however, as the two American corps approached the Yuza-Dake escarpment, the largest in southern Okinawa, Japanese resistance began to increase.<sup>5</sup> The next battle was at hand.

#### Japanese Interservice Problems

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The TEN-Go operation was losing steam. The Imperial Navy was having difficulty fielding aircraft and pilots, and the Army refused to expend more planes and pilots on the operation, wanting to save them for defense of the Home Islands. No central authority overrode either service, which went their separate ways. The bad weather in early June prevented planned attacks and gave the American fleet some respite, but did not stop the American B-29's and Army Air Force P-47 Thunderbolts and Marine Corsairs operating from le Shima from hammering airfields on Kyushu. Admiral Halsey, now in overall command of ICEBERG forces, believed that the shore based aircraft on Okinawa and Ie Shima, combined with the Amphibious Force's limited carrier based planes, were sufficient protection against Japanese air attacks. He therefore moved the American fast attack carriers, which had been stationed off the northern coast of Okinawa, to positions from which his planes could attack the Japanese bases on Kyushu.6

Beginning 3 June, the Kamikaze attacks began anew; however, they were far smaller and less skillful than those of the previous two months. On 3 June, none of the Japanese aircraft survived long enough to attack the American fleet. On 6 June, an American minelayer was damaged. On 7 June, an American destroyer was attacked, but survived undamaged. Of the estimated 1,270 Japanese aircraft still on Kyushu, 700 needed repair and most of

the 570 still flying had to be reserved for defense of the airfields.<sup>7</sup>

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General Ushijima also had his problems. As 32d Army moved into and prepared their new defensive line, he found that some 2,000 Naval troops had disobeyed his orders and returned to their positions on the Oroku Peninsula rather than joining the general withdrawal to the south. Besides highlighting the rift that existed between the Imperial Navy and Army throughout the war, the defense of the Oroku Peninsula, although it lasted ten days and tied up most of the 6th Marine Division, was uncoordinated with the 32d Army campaign plan and had little effect on Tenth Army operations. By 12 June the Japanese forces on the peninsula were destroyed.

## Destruction of the 32d Army

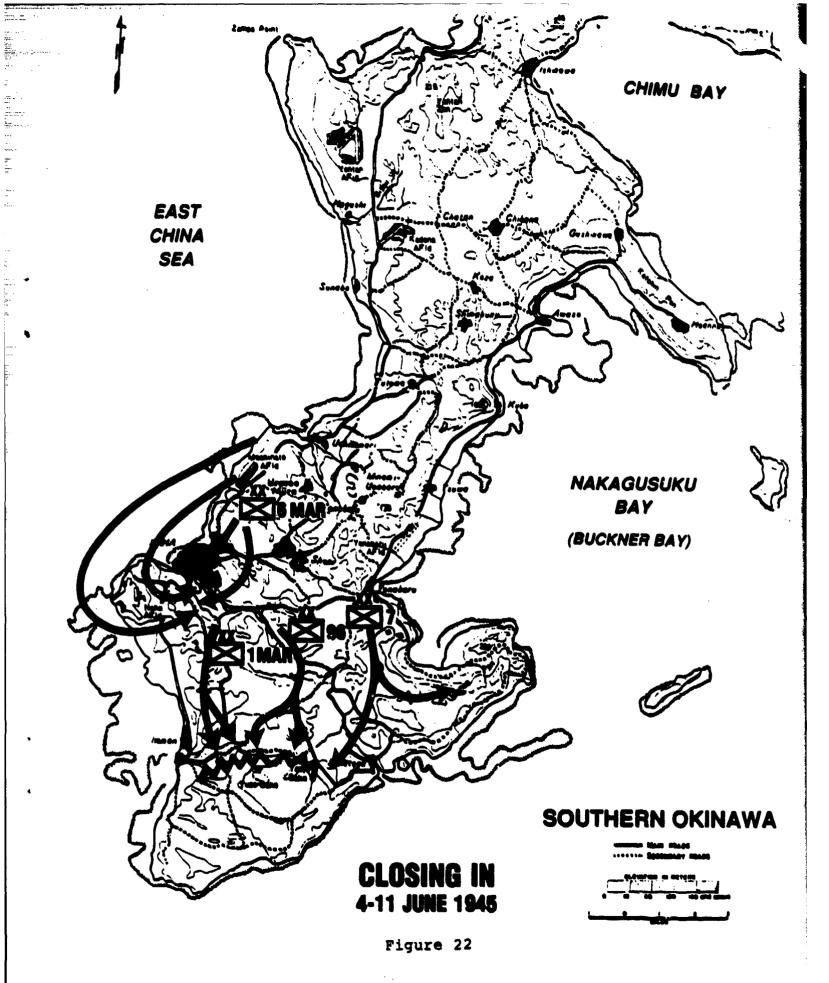
From 4-6 June, the American fast attack carriers and their escorts rode out a typhoon, which did considerable damage. Immediately after, TF 58, the American carriers, and TF 57, the British carriers which had been defending the Amphibious Force from Formosa-launched air attacks, were released from these missions and broke station. The escort carriers of Admiral Hill's command and ground based Army and Marine aircraft of Tenth Army TAF would fight the remainder of the campaign unsupported. Gradually, Admiral Nimitz was pulling resources from the Okinawa Campaign and pooling them for the next great effort - invasion of the Japanese Home Islands.

Meanwhile, the XXIV Corps' 7th and 96th Divisions and the 1st Marine Division of III Amphibious Corps faced a final Japanese defensive line, firmly entrenched on the Yuza-Dake escarpment. 32d Army still had a strength of approximately 31,000, but only about 20% were survivors of the original combat units. The remainder were rear area troops or Okinawan conscripts. Even so, most of the senior leadership was still alive, and in many cases personally leading small units. This, combined with the discipline and traditions of the Imperial Army, as well as the natural strength of the position, made this final phase far more than a mop up operation.<sup>8</sup>

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The Tenth Army assault began 9 June with a heavy preparation followed by a three division attack. As usual, despite heavy artillery, naval gunfire, and air support, resistance was determined. Finally, the 7th Division, in the east, broke through the defenses around Hill 95 and the Hangusuku-Nakaza valley, and threatened to envelop the entire Japanese defensive line. Between 12 and 14 June, General Ushijima threw all his remaining reserves against the penetration, only to have them destroyed by American fire support before they could counterattack. When he attempted to reposition what remained of the 62d Division, their deployment was so disrupted by American supporting fires that few, if any soldiers made it to their new defensive positions.<sup>9</sup>

The 96th Division, in the center, moved through the 7th Division zone of action to flank its objectives, driving the defenders from the escarpment by 17 June. By 18 June, the



remaining soldiers of 32d Army were compressed into two pockets of resistance; one on Hill 89 near Mabuni and one in the town of Medeera. General Ushijima had lost control of his forces by this time. His Army could now only die with honor.

On 18 June, General Buckner, observing a Marine assault, was killed by shrapnel from a Japanese antitank gun. In his message to Admiral Nimitz, the Tenth Army Chief-of-Staff wrote that General Buckner's wishes were that General Geiger, III Amphibious Corps commander, would succeed him in command. Admiral Nimitz concurred and Geiger, now promoted to lieutenant general, became Commanding General, Tenth Army.<sup>10</sup>

Despite General Buckner's death, the 32d Army's fate was sealed. On 18 June, the pocket of resistance at Medeera was bypassed and surrounded. On 19 June, General Ushijima sent a last message to those units he could still contact, congratulating them for their efforts and calling on them to fight to the end. He ordered most of his staff to attempt to infiltrate to northern Okinawa and form guerrilla bands. Even so, many Japanese soldiers, seeing that the battle was lost, began to surrender, heeding the increasingly effective American psychological warfare campaign.

On 21 June all enemy resistance ended in the III Amphibious Corps zone of action and the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions (the 6th Marine Division had rejoined for the final push south on 17 June) secured their final objectives that night. That same day, XXIV Corps destroyed the final pockets of resistance in their zone, near Makabe and Hill 89, General Ushijima's final

headquarters. On 22 June, General Geiger announced the successful completion of the campaign with a flag raising ceremony, and that same day, General Ushijima and his Chief-of-Staff, General Cho, committed suicide and were buried at the foot of Hill 89.<sup>11</sup>

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On 25 June, Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo announced completion of its operations on Okinawa and reprioritized all assets for the defense of the Japanese Home Islands; however, individual Japanese soldiers and small units continued to present a danger for the American rear areas. Upon assuming command from General Geiger on 23 June, General Stilwell commenced a seven day sweep north with his divisions on line. The mop up operations netted another 9,000 dead Japanese and 3,800 prisoners. On 2 July 1945 he declared the campaign officially completed.<sup>12</sup>

#### Wrap up

The Okinawa Campaign lasted three months. The cost for both sides had been heavy. Total U.S. losses (ground, air and sea) were 12,274 dead, 36,707 wounded, and over 26,000 nonbattle casualties. Japanese dead can only be approximated, but the best estimate is that 75,000 Japanese soldiers, 20,000 Boetai (Okinawan conscripts), and 60,000 Okinawan civilians were killed. An additional 10,000 Japanese soldiers and 8,000 Boetai were captured.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Japanese aircraft, primarily Kamikaze, sank 16 destroyers and 22 other ships, and damaged 368

ships of all sizes. The Navy losses of 4,900 killed and 4,824 wounded were the greatest incurred in any U.S. naval campaign. The Japanese lost approximately 1,600 aircraft defending Okinawa, as well as most of their remaining operational fleet.

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During the course of the campaign, President Roosevelt died and Germany surrendered. President Truman and the Allies could now focus their tremandous warmaking potential against Japan. On 18 June, President Truman approved Operation OLYMPIC, the invasion of the Japanese Home Islands. Because of the high U.S. casualties suffered at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the President required a casualty estimate from the Joint Chiefs prior to making his decision on OLYMPIC. General Marshall and Admiral King assured him that seizure of Kyushu would cost no more than 31,000 American casualties.<sup>14</sup>

Actually, post war analysis of a "worse case" scenario for an assault on Kyushu projected 90 American ships sunk, 900 damaged, and 21,000 sailors killed. The estimates for ground casualties were as high as 22,000 killed and 100,000 wounded. The next phase, the assault on the Kanto Plain and Tokyo, would have probably been much worse. Japanese casualties, civilian and military, were projected to be as high as 20 million.15

On 6 August 1945, a B-29 dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, followed three days later when another B-29 dropped a plutonium bomb on the port city Nagasaki. On 9 August, Soviet tanks invaded Manchuria. On 15 August 1945, the war ended for Japan. Okinawa would be the final American ground campaign of World War II.

#### CHAPTER 7

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#### CONCLUSIONS

The Okinawa Campaign demonstrated the validity of the joint amphibious doctrine developed by the Marine Corps in the interwar years and modified and expanded by both the Army and Navy during the hard-fought war in the Pacific. Key to the success of the campaign was the role that interservice cooperation and unity of command played, enabling senior commanders to mass and synchronize joint and combined forces in such manner to achieve overwhelming combat power at the critical time and place, focused at achieving a single set of operational goals, whether to take Conical Hill or to defend the fleet from Kamikaze attack.

Command relationships, although never adequately delineated at the strategic level (Nimitz vs MacArthur and their relationship with the Joint Chiefs), were clearly understood between those commanders actually fighting the campaign. The lines of command and assignment of responsibilities were major improvements over the often ambiguous structure of many previous operations. Almost certainly the lessons of Guadalcanal and Leyte Gulf, where the lack of unity of effort between the Army and Navy had brought the campaign to the brink of disaster, were in the minds of Admiral Nimitz and his senior commanders. Admiral Spruance was totally responsible for the campaign and had command of all air (less B-29s), land and sea forces participating. His subordinates understood his intent and

focused on correct execution of the objectives of the campaign plan. In fact, the only major interservice conflict of the campaign occured between the Navy and the 20th Army Air Force, which controlled the B-29's. General LeMay, commander of 20th Air Force, wanted to increase firebombing Japanese cities at the expense of the Japanese airfields and facilities in Kyushu. This was quickly squelched by Admiral King, the Chief of Naval Operations himself, who threatened to withdraw the fleet from Okinawan waters. General Marshall stepped in and 20th Air Force continued to attack Japanese airfields and the fleet remained in support of the ground troops on Okinawa.<sup>1</sup>

> Although the landings were superb amphibious operations, they were largely unopposed. It was the ground campaign that followed that tested the metule of the American force. From the beginning, naval gunfire provided support to Army and Marine units alike in accordance with need and priority. Likewise, for much of the campaign Marine aviation provided the only ground based air support for Army and Marine units, and Tenth Army TAC (commanded by a marine) allocated these very necessary assets in accordance with General Buckner's guidance. Carrier based ground support aircraft were also sub-allocated by Tenth Army.

When III Amphibious Corps advanced north early in the campaign, much of the Marine artillery was attached to XXIV Corps, the Tenth Army main effort. In fact, throughout the campaign, Army and Marine artillery were used interchangeably, supporting those units with the greatest need and highest priority. Throughout the campaign, the artillery from all six

divisions remained in action, even when their parent unit was withdrawn from the line.<sup>2</sup>

. . Tenth Army reserved the right to assign target and unit priorities, allocating and/or moving assets to where they would have the most beneficial effect on the ground campaign. This was an innovation and in its after action report, Tenth Army recommended the system be used in all future joint operations.<sup>3</sup> The ability of the Tenth Army to allocate assets centrally allowed Army units to get needed Marine air support, and III Amphibious Corps to get the flamethrower tanks and heavy 8" howitzer support it needed to attack and destroy dug in positions. In the logistics field, Tenth Army was able to use III Corps' Air Delivery Section to air drop vital supplies to both Army and Marine units.

In the area of command and control, Tenth Army commanded III Amphibious Corps as certainly as it commanded XXIV Corps. 1st Marine Division was attached to XXIV Corps for several days early in the campaign. Boundary coordination and changes and cross-boundary operations were carried out effectively throughout the campaign. When General Buckner was killed, General Geiger, a marine, took his place.

Despite the lack of officially sanctioned joint doctrine or command structure, differing views on strategy in the Pacific, and interservice rivalry, a unified sense of purpose and committment to a single operational direction prevailed throughout the campaign. The American commanders had learned hard and often bloody lessons, and were more than willing to

overlook personal animosities and service parochialism when mission accomplishment could be expedited and lives saved.

William Manchester, who fought throughout World War II as a Marine infantryman (and was badly wounded at Okinawa), writes that of all the campaigns he fought in as a member of 1st Marine Division, Okinawa was the toughest, with over 300,000 soldiers and countless civilians jammed into a narrow piece of terrain "the distance between Capitol Hill and Arlington National Cemetery".4

As military professionals we must look at the joint nature of this campaign as a source of inspiration. What was it besides extensive combat experience that allowed the services to cooperate so fully, and can that same spirit of cooperation be duplicated today? The unwillingness of the Navy to place its combat ships under the overall command of a unified commander from another service, the separation of the Marine and Army ground commanders within a theater, as well as our apparent inability to bring USAF and Navy combat aircraft under a single command, all bode ill. In some ways, these symptoms are similar to those that plagued the Imperial military force during World War II and which, in the end, greatly lessened any chance Japan may have had for winning. The peacetime interservice competition for missions and dollars will not automatically disappear when the first bullet is fired, and will present major obstacles to a unified, focused effort in support of a campaign plan. The quality of the joint operations during the Okinawa Campaign were at least partially the result of over three years of learning

from past mistakes. It is doubtful if future warfare will be so forgiving.

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## ENDNOTES

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