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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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ESTIMATING ENEMY CAPABILITIES AND INTENTIONS:
THE SWORD CUTS BOTH WAYS

by

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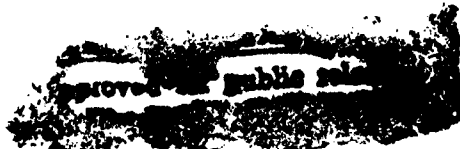
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Abstract of
**ESTIMATING ENEMY CAPABILITIES AND INTENTIONS:
 THE SWORD CUTS BOTH WAYS**

This paper presents the planned U.S. invasion of Japan (1945) as a case study demonstrating the importance of the "estimate of enemy capabilities" to the operational planning process.

In the final months prior to the Japanese surrender in August 1945, the Allies were alarmed to note Japanese reinforcement of the planned invasion sites. The Japanese had correctly assessed their enemy's capabilities and intentions, and significantly complicated the final stages of Allied invasion planning. Had the invasion been executed, the Japanese strategy of exploiting American "war weariness" might have succeeded.

The lesson is equally applicable to today's operational planners: the enemy is estimating your capabilities and intentions - if he is correct in his assessment, he can counter, disrupt, or seriously complicate your mission.

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ESTIMATING ENEMY CAPABILITIES AND INTENTIONS:
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Capabilities and Intentions. Operational planners must recognize that their same planning and estimate process is being repeated in the enemy's camp. If the enemy can accurately assess your capabilities and intentions, he can counter, disrupt, or seriously complicate your mission. Modern U.S. history provides an interesting case study of this dilemma.

In the early months of 1945, Allied victory in the Pacific appeared imminent, and General MacArthur's Pacific theater staff was busy planning the final offensive of the war. This campaign, codenamed DOWNFALL, was designed to achieve decisive victory against Japan within eighteen months.¹ It would be the "greatest amphibious operation in history" - an invasion of the Japanese mainland.²

At the same time, though, the Japanese Imperial General Staff was planning its decisive campaign of the war - a grand defensive battle to be fought on the Japanese home islands. *Through an exceptional intelligence estimate of U.S. capabilities and intentions, the Imperial General Staff would significantly complicate the final planning stages of DOWNFALL.*

DOWNFALL, and its Japanese counterpart, KETSU, provide an interesting case study in the operational planning and estimate

process. In the pages that follow, I will use this case study to illustrate the significant impact of an accurate assessment of "enemy capabilities and intentions."

The Planning Process. Operational commanders are required to translate assigned missions into actions that can be accomplished by their subordinates.³ This task is accomplished through a phased planning process.

The first phase (and the emphasis of this paper) is development of the "commander's estimate of the situation." During this phase, the commander analyzes alternative courses of action, and selects the best one to accomplish the mission.⁴ In preparing their supporting analysis, staff planners must weigh and examine all factors affecting the military situation. Every possible friendly and enemy course of action must be considered, tested, and evaluated against a host of variables. The selected course of action then becomes the basis for all further operational planning.

A central element of the commander's estimate is the staff "intelligence estimate of enemy capabilities and intentions." This study provides an assessment of the enemy's capability to defend, reinforce, attack or withdraw, as well as specific information on his strength, composition, force disposition, and vulnerabilities. The "intelligence estimate" derives all courses of action of which the enemy is physically capable, and which, if adopted, would affect accomplishment of the commander's mission.⁵

This estimate is a critical part of our operational planning process - but it's not unique to the American process.

CHAPTER II

SITUATION AND MISSION

The Military Situation, 1945. Although the U.S. was fighting a two-theater war, the European campaign was rapidly winding down. Soon, the Allies would focus all their energy on the Pacific theater, and some 30-40 divisions from Europe would be rearmed, reorganized and prepared for redeployment to the Pacific.¹

In the Pacific theater, Japan was reeling from a series of devastating strategic defeats. Their loss of the Philippines in February was followed by Iwo Jima in March and Okinawa in June. By May, U.S. aircraft had established clear air superiority over the heart of Japan, and long-range bombers (B-29s) were pounding cities and factories on the Japanese mainland.² Allied air and submarine attacks had effectively severed Japan from its resources in the Indies, and the Imperial Navy was virtually driven from the sea by the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Japan was clearly a defeated nation - but not in the eyes of her military leaders. Although her industry had been crippled by air bombardment and naval blockade, Japan was far from unconditional surrender.* Her army still numbered over 5,000,000 troops (with 2,000,000 in the home islands)³, and these same

* The Japanese equated such surrender with national extinction. For a nation that had never accepted defeat in its recorded history, such a "loss of face" [at this point] was unacceptable.

forces had demonstrated time and again that they could inflict heavy losses on the Allies, even when the outlook was hopeless.*

Against this backdrop, U.S. and Japanese planners reviewed options to achieve their respective strategic objectives.

Japanese Objectives. Faced with a series of decisive defeats and a decreasing war potential, Japan was forced to conduct a strategic reappraisal. By mid-January 1945, Japan's Imperial General Headquarters concluded that the final campaign of the war would be waged on the Japanese mainland, and that a new and comprehensive defense policy was required.⁴ An immediate and in-depth fortification of Japan's defensive perimeter was initiated.⁵ Resistance within this defensive perimeter (Iwo Jima, Okinawa, the Philippines) would be maintained as long as possible to delay the Allied advance. In the meantime, military and civilian forces in the homeland would complete preparations for the final decisive battle.

Japan's Imperial Headquarters reasoned that if they could inflict unacceptable losses to U.S. forces early in the invasion, and at the same time convince the American people of the determined resistance of the Japanese Army and civilian population, the United States would seek war termination on grounds more favorable to the Japanese than unconditional surrender.⁶

* This same cultural fanaticism spirited Japanese Kamikaze pilots in the last months of the war.

This, then, was the Japanese strategic objective - to negotiate a favorable war termination (and it appears that the Japanese presupposed their own defeat). Their plan did, however, reflect correct assessment of two key points: 1) Allied forces would soon reach an overwhelming numerical superiority which could not be defeated, even by fanatical resistance; and 2) with ultimate victory in sight, and following a long and costly war, America's national will was a potential "center of gravity" that could be exploited. The Japanese were gambling heavily on American "war weariness".

U.S. Objectives. In December 1941, the Allies had adopted the strategy of "Germany first."⁷ This provided that, while the overall war objective was the "unconditional surrender" of both AXIS powers, the European campaign would receive primary emphasis, and the Pacific War against Japan would receive "only the minimum of force necessary . . ."⁸ In 1944, the unbroken series of victories and accelerating advances of Allied forces in both Europe and the Pacific necessitated a reappraisal of this strategy.⁹

The objective of the Pacific War remained constant: to achieve the unconditional surrender of Japan. Theater planners identified three principal courses of action to achieve this aim:

- 1) The Allies could encircle Japan by further Allied expansion to the westward, at the same time deploying maximum air power preparatory to attacks on either Kyushu or Honshu in succession, or Honshu only;
- 2) [The Allies could] . . . isolate Japan completely by seizing bases to the West and endeavoring to bomb her

into submission without actually landing in force on the Homeland beaches;

- 3) [The Allies could] . . . attack Kyushu directly and install air forces to cover a decisive assault against the principal island of Honshu.¹⁰

Though the staff planners concluded that a sea and air blockade, combined with intensive air bombardment, would lower the Japanese "will to resist," it could not guarantee the unconditional surrender of Japan.¹¹ An invasion of the Japanese mainland would be required; and in January 1945, the Combined Chiefs provided an outline of their concept of operations:

- a. Following the Okinawa operation, to seize additional positions to intensify the blockade and air bombardment of Japan in order to create a situation favorable to:
- b. An assault on Kyushu for the purpose of further reducing Japanese capabilities by containing and destroying major enemy forces and further intensifying the blockade and air bombardment in order to establish a tactical condition favorable to:
- c. The decisive invasion of the industrial heart of Japan through the Tokyo Plain.¹²

With this outline, the U.S. plan had a defined mission, objective, and concept of operations - the DOWNFALL campaign was born.

CHAPTER III

ESTIMATES, PLANS, OUTCOME

Japanese Estimate of the Enemy Situation. As part of their January 1945 strategic reappraisal, the Japanese Imperial Headquarters concluded that the Allied strategy would follow four general concepts: 1) the isolation of Japan from continental and Southern resource areas; 2) the destruction of vital Japanese industries; 3) the elimination of Japanese air, land and naval forces as threats to an amphibious invasion; and 4) extension of the effective range of U.S. aircraft to the heart of Japan.¹ The General Staff reasoned that, in order to effect this plan, the Allies would have to strengthen existing bases and capture additional territory closer to the Japanese mainland.²

Remarkably, this estimate closely paralleled the Allied plan.

While there were differing opinions of impending Allied operations, the planners at Imperial Headquarters developed two general enemy courses of action: 1) the Allies would initiate a long-range blockade and strategic air bombardment campaign to destroy Japan's combat potential; or 2) the Allies would bring the war to a decisive stage by an immediate amphibious invasion of the Japanese islands.³

Imperial Headquarters concluded that the Allies would seek a quick end to the war by an all-out invasion coupled by intensive sea and air operations.⁴ Amphibious assaults were expected against southern Kyushu as early as the Fall of 1945, and

decisive operations on the Kanto Plain (Honshu) were anticipated in the Spring of 1946. *The Japanese Imperial staff's estimate was correct.*

The Japanese further reasoned that intended targets on Kyushu would include the port facilities at Kagoshima and Ariake Bay as well as the special-attack bases on the Tosa Plain. In addition, planners anticipated a diversionary feint at Hokkaido to cover the main landing operations (again, a correct assessment).⁵ As time passed, the increasing number of U.S. air raids against targets in southern Kyushu provided additional support for the Japanese supposition that this was the intended landing area for the invasion force.

By April 1945, Germany was on the verge of defeat, and the Japanese staff recognized that an additional reservoir of troops and supplies would be forthcoming.⁶ They estimated that by the Fall, the U.S. could mount a total of 30 divisions for their offensive, and that by the Spring of 1946, 50 divisions could be available. Plans for combatting the impending invasion had to be accelerated - on 8 April, the KETSU operation plan was issued.

The U.S. Estimate of the Enemy Situation. General MacArthur's staff prepared a comprehensive intelligence estimate which concentrated on enemy force disposition and capabilities in the projected invasion areas (figure 1). This estimate was continuously updated with current intelligence.⁷

The initial U.S. intelligence estimate placed enemy strength on Kyushu at six divisions, forecasting a potentially larger

deployment which would increase Japanese strength to ten divisions. The staff noted that "although the Japanese obviously regard the Tokyo Plain as the ultimate decisive battle ground, it is apparent that Kyushu is considered a critical sector . . ." in their plan.⁸

Under the strategic defense plan set forth by Imperial Headquarters, Japan began a rapid reinforcement of their positions on Kyushu and Honshu. General MacArthur's staff observed that the forecasted (potentially larger) deployment had occurred as predicted, ". . . and the end is not in sight. This threatening development . . . calls for special air missions. If this deployment is not checked, it may grow to a point where we attack on a ratio of one (1) to one (1) which is not the receipt for victory . . ."⁹

In their 29 July (updated) estimate of the enemy situation, the General Headquarters staff concluded that "*the rate and probable continuity of Japanese reinforcements into the Kyushu area are changing the tactical and strategic situation sharply . . . We are engaged in a race against time by which the ratio of attack effort vis-a-vis defense capability is perilously balanced (figure 2).*"¹⁰

"THE JAPANESE HAVE CORRECTLY ESTIMATED SOUTHERN KYUSHU AS A PROBABLE INVASION OBJECTIVE, AND HAVE HASTENED THEIR PREPARATIONS TO DEFEND IT."

AFFAC G-2 estimate of 29 July 1945

These staff observations highlight several key points:

- 1) The estimate of a potentially larger Japanese deployment to

Kyushu was correct - the U.S. had a high-quality intelligence estimate; 2) the Japanese were reinforcing at the precise locations (in Kyushu and Honshu) that threatened U.S. forces - *the Japanese also had a high-quality intelligence estimate*; and 3) the rate of Japanese reinforcement, combined with the location, posed a formidable threat to the U.S. invasion. *The Japanese strategy of defensive reinforcement was significantly complicating U.S. plans for DOWNFALL.*

In their 30 June intelligence update, General MacArthur's staff assessed (correctly) that the Japanese leaders recognized their desperate situation, but would continue to fight in the hope of securing favorable surrender terms.¹¹ Message traffic subsequently intercepted and decoded indicated that the Japanese had (by then) accepted defeat and were desperately looking for acceptable terms of surrender - but the Allies would prove inflexible.¹²

The Japanese Defense Plan (KETSU). When the Japanese strategic reinforcement policy was first implemented in April 1945, the four main islands together had only 11 first-line divisions (including one armored division) and three brigades available for ground defense. By July 1945, Japanese ground forces had been reinforced to a strength of 30 line-combat divisions, 24 coastal combat divisions, 23 mixed brigades, two armored divisions, seven tank brigades and three infantry brigades.¹³ The strong resistance offered by Japanese forces on Okinawa had already bought precious time, and the defensive

preparations for the invasion were scheduled for completion by November.¹⁴

Since the initial Allied landing was expected at southern Kyushu, the Japanese planned to attack the main body of the invasion force in the open ocean and coastal landing areas.¹⁵ Reconnaissance aircraft would patrol day and night along a 600 mile radius from the mainland. Once the full-scale invasion was in progress, 10,500 planes, mostly Kamikaze aircraft, would be launched from secret airfields (protected against Allied bombing raids) against the warships and troop transports in the invasion area.¹⁶ These aircraft would be joined in the attack by the remaining Japanese naval strength (19 destroyers and 34 submarines).

The total reinforced ground strength on Honshu would consist of 18 infantry divisions, seven independent mixed brigades, two armored divisions, and three tank brigades. This entire Japanese force would be sent at the enemy head-on in an attempt to prevent the Allies from gaining a foothold: if Japan could not prevent the Allies from landing heavy equipment and supplies, its last hope of a successful defense of Honshu would be lost.

Operation KETSU was a desperate plan; but, because of the critical military situation and the Japanese political will to continue the war, Imperial Headquarters was left with few alternative courses of action. As it was, KETSU contained elements of success: it successfully threatened the Allied invasion plan, and it offered the potential to inflict heavy

casualties on the Allies. KETSU just might have achieved its strategic objective - a negotiated surrender.

The U.S. Invasion Plan (DOWNFALL). In May 1945, the Joint Chiefs assigned General MacArthur overall responsibility for the planning and conduct of DOWNFALL. Through this assignment, the Joint Chiefs effected a much needed consolidation of the Southwest Pacific Area and the Pacific Operating Area (formerly separate theaters of operation). Admiral Nimitz and General Arnold, as supporting component commanders, would formulate and carry out the naval, amphibious, and air support operations.¹⁷

The DOWNFALL invasion (figure 3) would consist of two major operations: OLYMPIC (the preliminary assault on the island of Kyushu) and CORONET (the follow-on landing on the island of Honshu). Operation OLYMPIC was tentatively scheduled for 1 November 1945. CORONET would take place four months later on 1 March 1946.

When the overall plans for the DOWNFALL campaign were drawn up in April 1945, staff planners necessarily made assumptions regarding both Allied and enemy capabilities.* These assumptions, derived primarily from the staff intelligence estimate, emphasized the preconditions for Allied success (i.e., air/sea superiority) and highlighted the enemy capabilities which had to be countered (i.e., a fanatically hostile population).¹⁸

* The AFPAC Headquarters Strategic plan of 25 May 1945 listed six friendly and ten hostile force assumptions.

OLYMPIC and CORONET would be preceded by the heaviest naval and air force neutralization bombardments ever conducted by Pacific theater forces (figures 4 and 5). In the ten days preceding the OLYMPIC landing, the massed bombing power of all available land and carrier-based planes would reduce the enemy's defenses, destroy the remains of the Japanese Air Force, isolate the objective area, and cover the preliminary naval bombardment and mine-sweeping operations.

On 1 November, three U.S. corps (766,700 assault troops) would effect simultaneous amphibious landings on southern Kyushu (figure 6).¹⁹ Their objectives would be to secure areas suitable for the immediate construction of air bases and to seize Kagoshima and Ariake Bays for use as ports and Naval operations bases.²⁰ A fourth U.S. corps would present a diversionary threat from the main landings and serve as reinforcement, if required.* Follow-on reinforcements could be provided from the United States at the rate of three divisions per month after the first 30 days of the operation.²¹

Following attainment of the OLYMPIC objectives, U.S. forces would consolidate and prepare for the final phase of the campaign. In the fifteen days prior to the CORONET landing, air attacks would be intensified and coordinated with naval

* The U.S. objectives at Kagoshima and Ariake Bays as well as this precise diversionary feint were anticipated by the Japanese staff, and are noted above in "Japanese Estimate of the Enemy Situation".

bombardment. Land-based aircraft, now staged from Kyushu, together with fighters and bombers from Okinawa, would range over the entire Japanese mainland and Asiatic coast, striking selected targets. Concurrently, Allied forces in the China and Southeast Asia theaters would conduct neutralizing air and ground attacks on the Asiatic mainland.

On 1 March 1946, the amphibious landing for CORONET would be conducted by the First and Eighth American armies (figure 7). Their objectives would be the seizure of Tokyo, Yokohama, and the surrounding areas. Combat operations would be continued and expanded until organized resistance in the Japanese Archipelago had been crushed.²² If required, additional reinforcements from the United States would be provided at the rate of four divisions per month following the first 90 days of the operation.²³

Had DOWNFALL been executed, its military success was virtually guaranteed; however, the potential for staggering casualties (in view of the Japanese reinforcement) posed a critical concern for Allied planners. Was there merit in Japan's plan of strategic defense?

DOWNFALL - Overcome by Events. In June 1945, the Allies began the pre-invasion air and naval offensive for Operation OLYMPIC. By July, the Allies were flying over 1,200 bombing sorties per week, and Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet had steamed into coastal waters to perform naval bombardment.

On 15 July, the Allies launched the largest carrier strike in history (over 1500 U.S. and British aircraft) against the

Tokyo area.²⁴ On 16 July (coincidentally, the first day of the Potsdam Conference), the U.S. successfully tested the atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico.*

On 27 July, the Allies issued the "Potsdam Declaration," which outlined the terms for unconditional surrender and urged Japan to capitulate or face ". . . the inevitable and complete destruction of the Japanese armed forces and . . . the utter devastation of the Japanese homeland."²⁵ When Japan rejected the ultimatum, the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August, respectively. On 8 August, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and sent troops against the Japanese Army in Manchuria.

At this point, Japan was surrounded and under attack on all sides. Incredibly, the Japanese still resisted surrender until Honshu was raided by 800 B-29s on 14 August." On the following

* By the end of 1944, a list of possible targets had been selected, and it became necessary to inform certain commanders in the Pacific about the project. At this stage in the development of the atomic bomb, however, it was still uncertain *when* the bomb would be ready, or *if* it would work. For these reasons, and because of the secrecy of the project, the possibility of an atomic weapon was not considered by the strategic planners. Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Command Decisions, (New York: Harbrace, Court and Company, 1959), p. 390.

" Prior to this attack, the Japanese had endured the firebombing of five major cities (including Tokyo) and the subsequent atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In total, Allied bombing killed over 250,000 Japanese, leaving over 9,000,000 homeless - yet, the Japanese still refused to surrender. David Eggen Berger, Encyclopedia of Battles, (New York: Dover Publications, 1985), p.207.

day, Japan accepted unconditional surrender - the DOWNFALL
campaign had been overcome by events.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This study of the DOWNFALL campaign illustrates that the Japanese were able to use an accurate intelligence "estimate of enemy capabilities" to their advantage. This estimate proved to be crucial to Japan's development of a defense strategy, and it led the Japanese to reinforce precisely those positions most threatened by the pending Allied invasion.

One can only speculate on DOWNFALL's outcome if the Allies had not dropped the atom bomb, or if the Japanese had not surrendered when they did. We will never know how many casualties the Allies might have suffered, or if the invasion could have been executed as planned.*

Regardless, the Japanese reinforcement *did* impact the U.S. planning for DOWNFALL. Perhaps with their knowledge of the developing situation, the Joint Chiefs would have pushed for reassessment of the political decision regarding the "unconditional" surrender of Japan. Japan might have realized its goal of a negotiated settlement to the war!

Speculation aside, the events leading up to the DOWNFALL campaign highlight the importance of the estimate process to operational planning. In particular, two points are reinforced

* The Joint Chiefs expected casualties in OLYMPIC alone to fall between 31,000 and 41,000 troops. Department of Defense, The Entry of the Soviet Union into the War Against Japan: Military Plans 1941-1945, (GPO: 1955), p. 81.

by this case study: 1) *The United States does not hold a monopoly on either the "estimate" process or on quality intelligence; and* 2) *A correct assessment of enemy capabilities and intentions can be used to achieve a potential "strategic" advantage.*

Your enemy is likely to pursue his cause with the same fervor as you. Modern operational planners must not forget that "the sword cuts both ways."

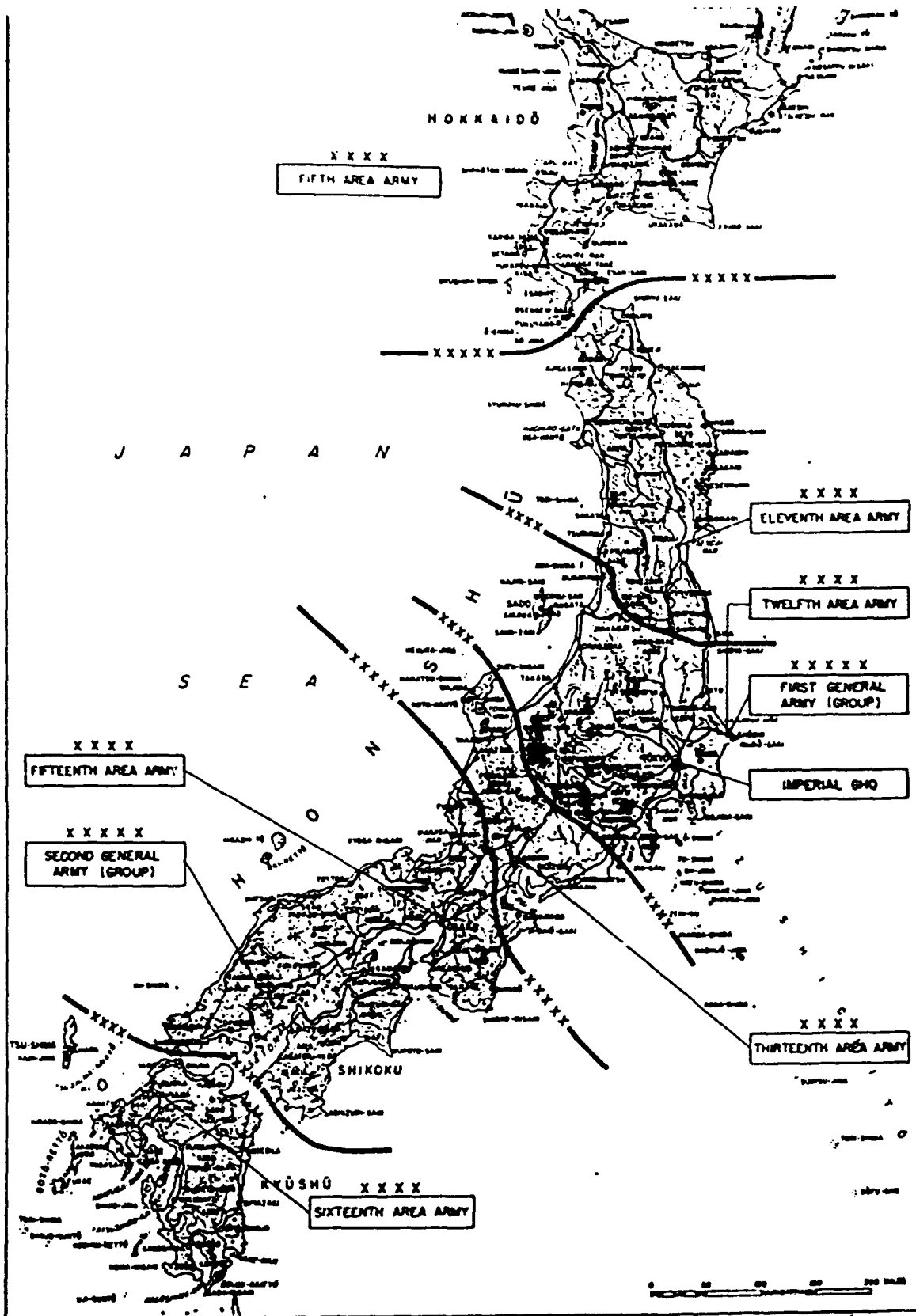


Figure 1

Disposition of Japanese Army Ground Forces in the Homeland, April 1945

Source: GHQ, Southwest Pacific Area, Allied Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, (Tokyo: 1945), p. 400.

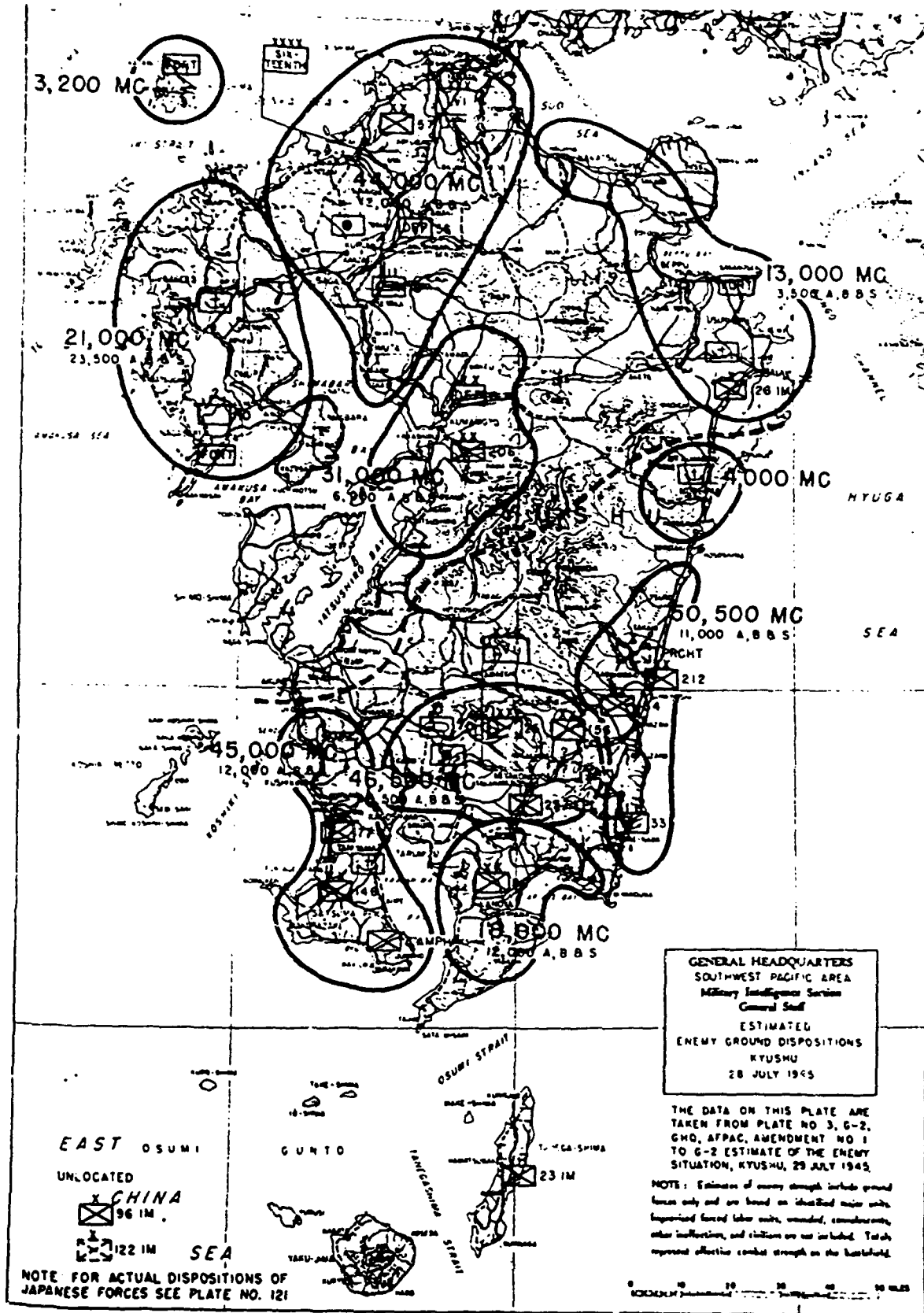


Figure 2

Estimated Enemy Ground Dispositions on Kyushu, 28 July 1945

Source: GHQ, Southwest Pacific Area, Allied Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, (Tokyo: 1945), p. 412.

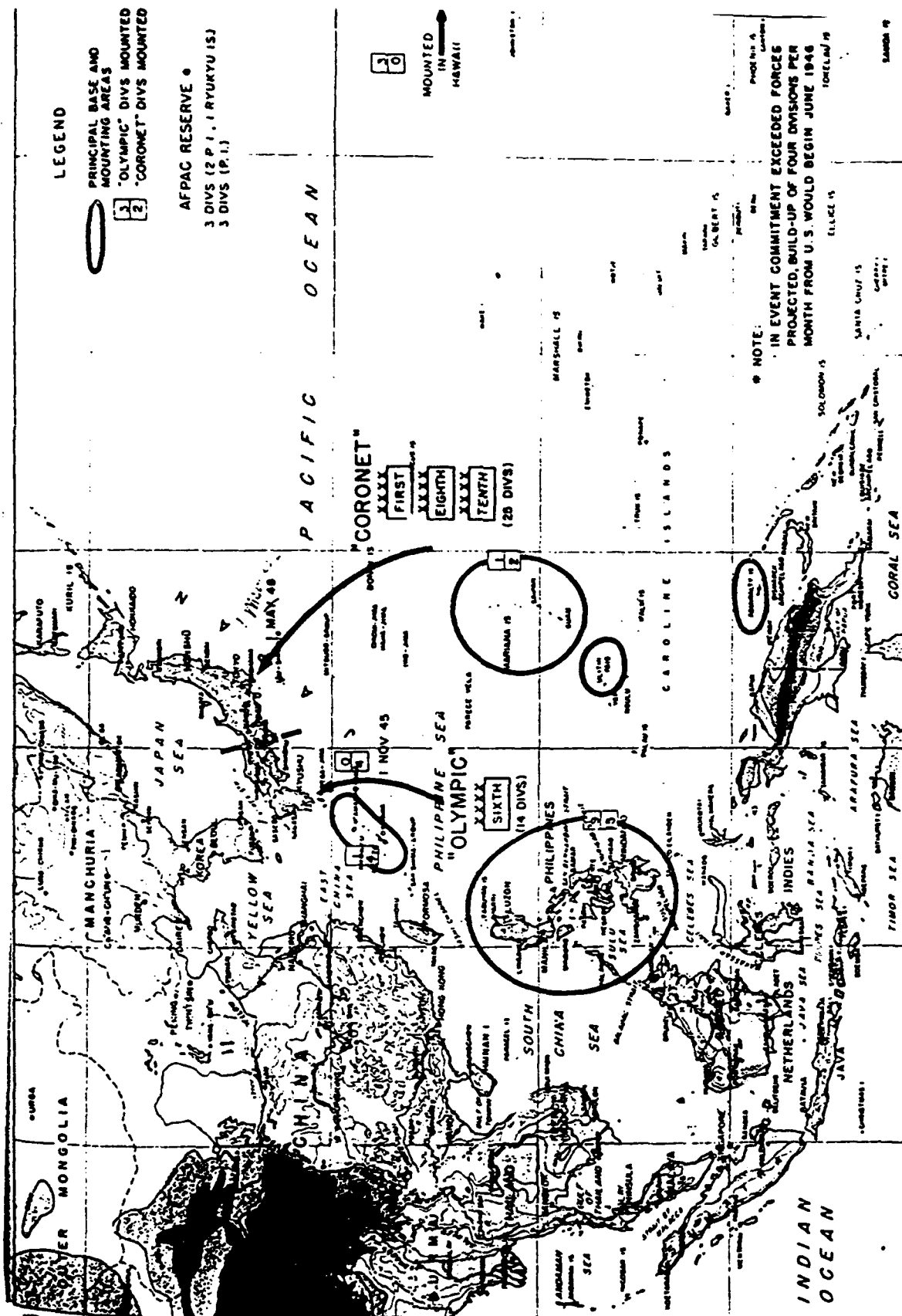


Figure 3

"Downfall" Plan for the Invasion of Japan, 28 May 1945

Source: GHQ, Southwest Pacific Area, Allied Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, (Tokyo: 1945), p. 392.

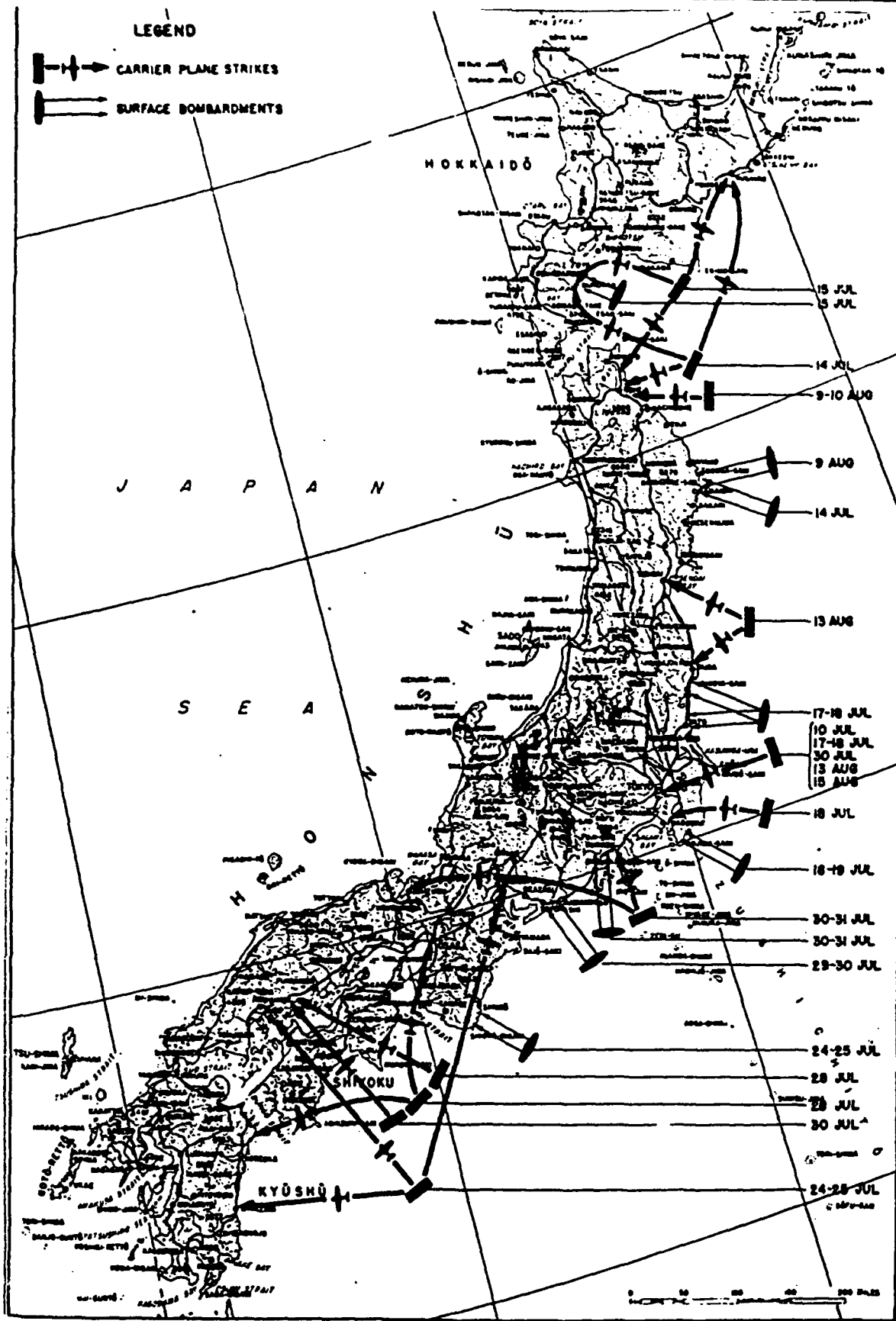


Figure 4

Third Fleet Pre-Invasion Operations Against Japan

Source: GHQ, Southwest Pacific Area, Allied Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, (Tokyo: 1945), p. 430.

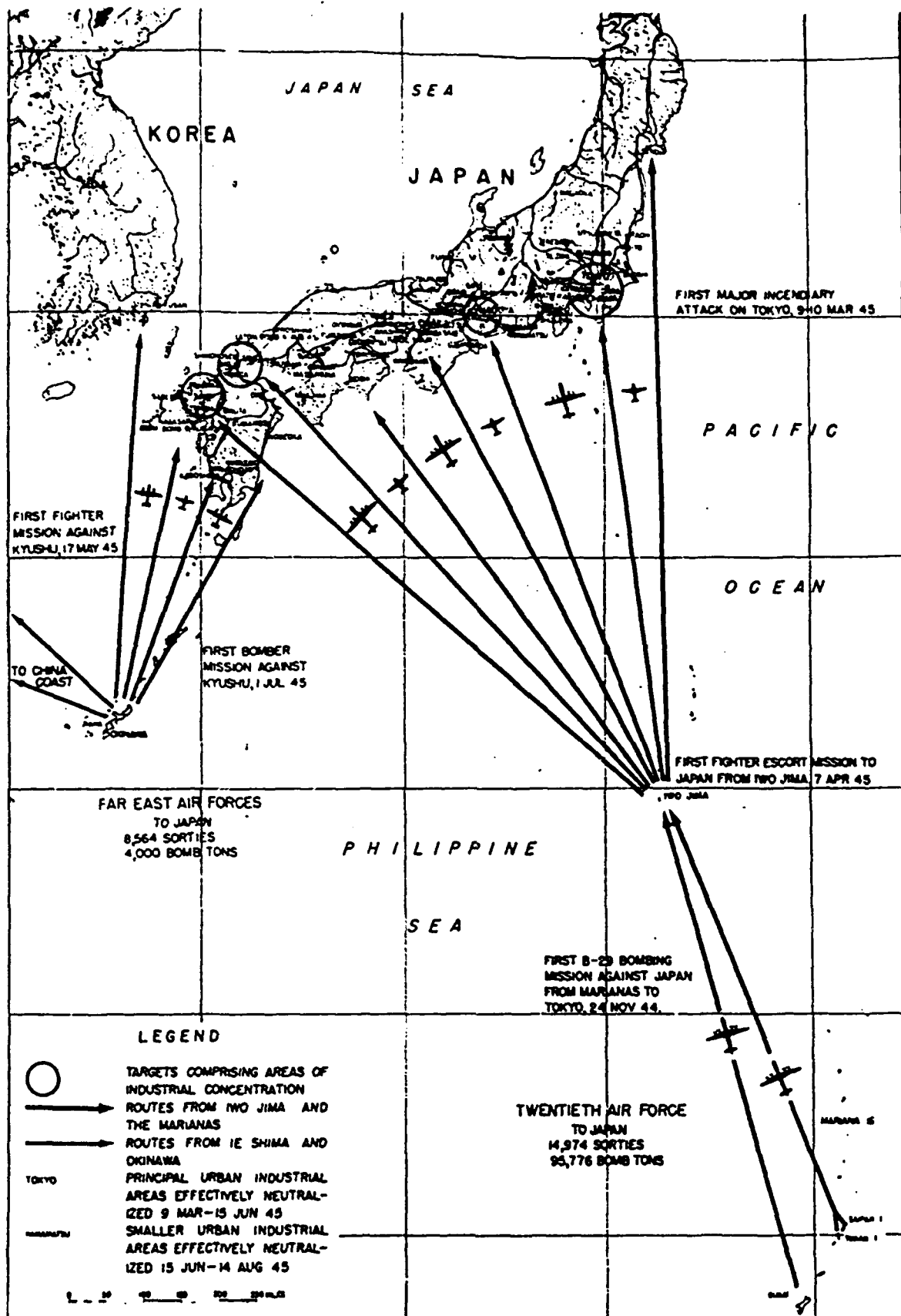


Figure 5

Aerial Bombardment of Japan

Source: GHQ, Southwest Pacific Area, Allied Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, (Tokyo: 1945), p. 439.

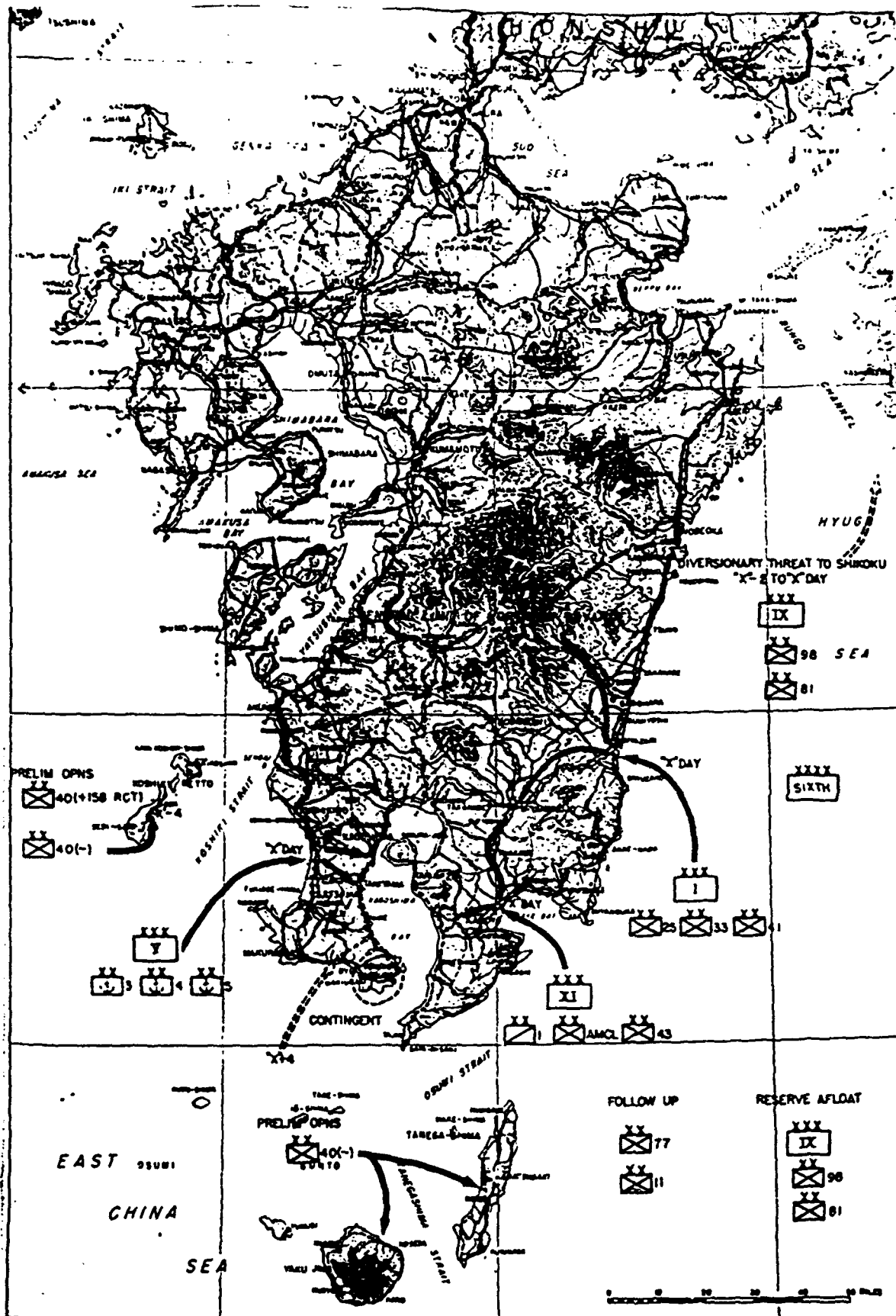


Figure 6

"Olympic," the Invasion of Kyushu

Source: GHQ, Southwest Pacific Area, Allied Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, (Tokyo: 1945), p. 409.

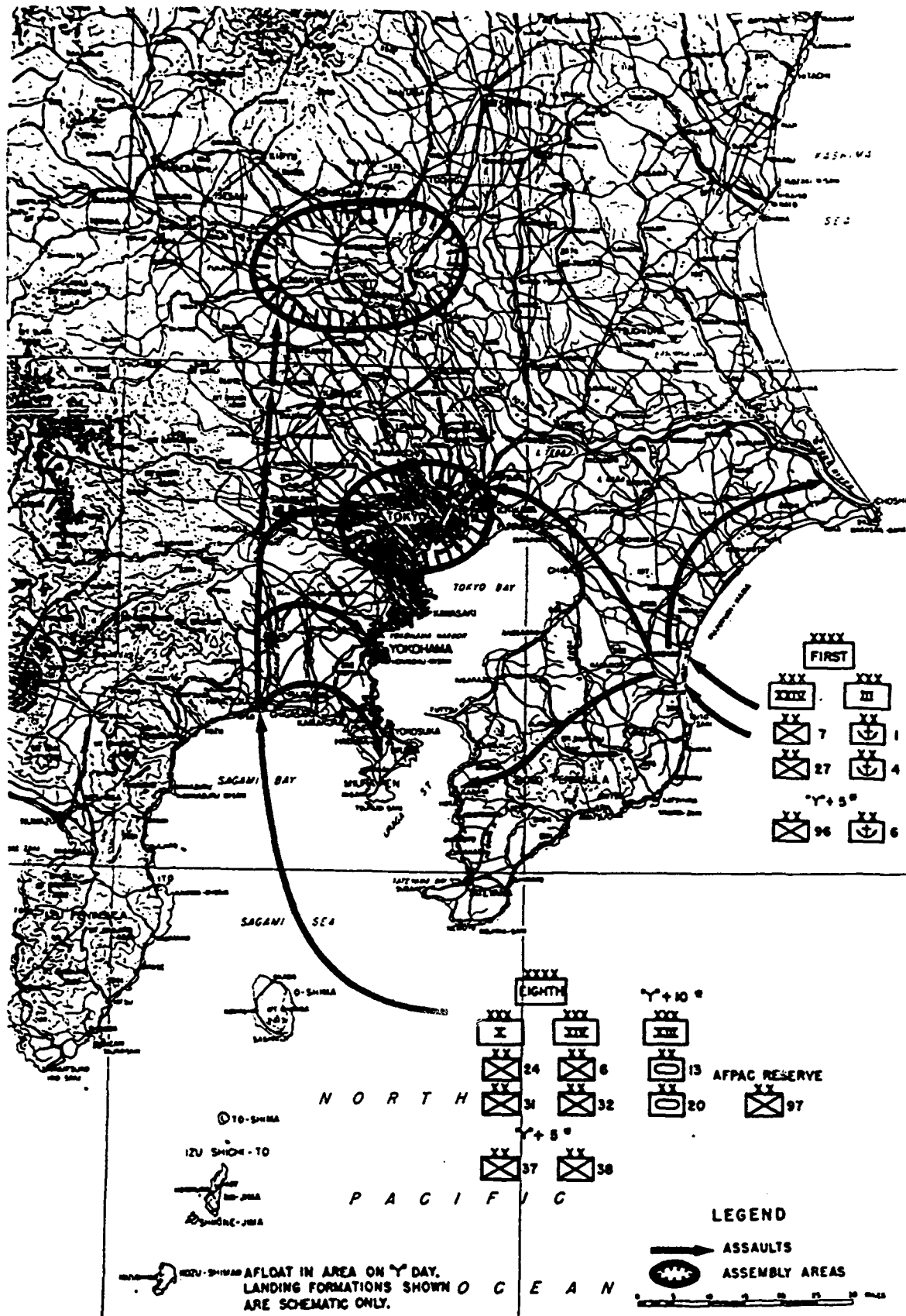


Figure 7

"Coronet," the Invasion of Honshu

Source: GHQ, Southwest Pacific Area, Allied Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, (Tokyo: 1945), p. 424.

NOTES

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