

## CHAPTER 8

# Operation Tearaway & Tattersalls: The Battle for The Northern Mariana Islands

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### Introduction

World War II had a profound effect on people throughout the Pacific basin. Before the war the Central Pacific islands, including the Marianas, served as staging areas for the expansion of the Japanese Empire to the south and as major forward naval operating bases. Submarine operations and long-range air patrols were a continual feature of Japanese military operations in their Mandated Territory after 1935. The Imperial Japanese Army, Japanese naval air forces and their fortifications increased steadily as the war progressed and occupied most of the islands.

While under Japanese civil administration, the mandated islands experienced economic growth. But for many islanders, particularly the indigenous populations, the shift to Japanese military rule often resulted in harsh treatment. The beginning of hostilities in WWII did not make their lives any easier. They suffered from shortages of food and other necessities as the US was increasingly able to cut off resupply by Japanese merchant ships. Bombing raids, pre-invasion salvos aimed at reducing Japanese defensive strength, and finally troop assaults, resulted in the wholesale destruction of villages, support facilities and the islanders' economic base.

The physical remains of the war—the ships, planes, men and materiel—are a part of the archaeology of the islands. World War II, perhaps more than any other historical event in the broader history of Micronesia and the Mariana Islands, forever changed how the islanders see themselves and their pivotal role in global events. In order to fully understand the past and the present historical significance of these remains, a discussion of the critical role played by the Mariana Islands in World War II is necessary.

Operation *Forager* was America's plan to capture the Mariana Islands from Japan, specifically Saipan, Tinian and Guam. The other Mariana Islands, including well-populated Rota, Aguiguan, and Pagan were bypassed. The first target was the Japanese military stronghold on Saipan (Operation *Tearaway*). Because of their proximity, Saipan and Tinian (Operation *Tattersalls*) were considered a single unit.

## Planning the Pacific War

The invasion and capture of the Northern Mariana Islands was not a foregone conclusion among America's military leadership on December 8, 1941. Indeed, it took two years before the United States Navy recovered from the Pearl Harbor disaster and was prepared for an advance against the Japanese-held islands of the Central Pacific (Figure 8.1).

On December 20, 1941, President Roosevelt appointed Admiral Ernest J. King to become Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet (Figure 8.2) (King 1953:143). King was clearly the right man for the navy's top job at that time; his experience commanding carrier fleets in both the Atlantic and Pacific was critical to the coming task. King, together with Captain John H. Towers (*Saratoga*), Captain John H. Hoover (*Lexington*), and Rear Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr. (*Enterprise* and *Yorktown*), began developing the carrier fleet tactics they believed were going to be necessary to win the war in the Pacific, when and if it began (King 1953:72).

By the beginning of 1943 a new American battle fleet was slipping out of American shipyards and Admiral King was anxious to expand his offensive in the Pacific. He began pressing for a Central Pacific campaign. General Douglas MacArthur of the Southwest Pacific command, US Army, however, was adamant that the advance toward Japan be a single northward advance under his command. At the *Symbol* conference in Casablanca, Morocco, held in January 1943, the Combined British-American Chiefs of Staff agreed to a framework proposed by King that would create a second line of advance toward the Philippines through the Central Pacific. It proposed an initial offensive against the Marshall Islands, followed by Truk Lagoon in the Eastern Caroline Islands (Hoffman 1950:14).

King stated that the Marianas were the key to the Pacific because of their strategic location. With American bases in the Marianas, the US Navy could cut off the flow of oil and newly manufactured Japanese aircraft passing through the Marianas to Japan's southern bases. On February 9, 1943, he invited Admiral Chester A. Nimitz (Commander in Chief Pacific Ocean Areas) to consider seizing the Gilbert Islands as a first step. However, in light of operations already scheduled in the Solomon Islands, Nimitz felt there were not enough ships or men available to undertake another distant operation (Morrison 1963:295). King let it ride.

At the *Trident* conference held in Washington, DC on May 12, 1943, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff presented a memorandum titled, *Strategic Plan for the Defeat of Japan*, which included a submarine blockade of Japan to stop the flow of oil from the East Indies; sustained aerial bombardment of Japan by B-29s to be based in China and the Marianas, once captured; and finally the invasion of Japan's home islands. All Allied forces could then converge on the Luzon-Formosa-China area, from which the final defeat of Japan would be launched (Costello 1982:409; Potter 1976:241).

On May 21, King presented the American plan for *Operations in the Pacific and Far East* to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. *Plan Orange*, developed before the war, called for a drive through the Central Pacific, including the recapture of Guam, in order to recapture the Philippines. His

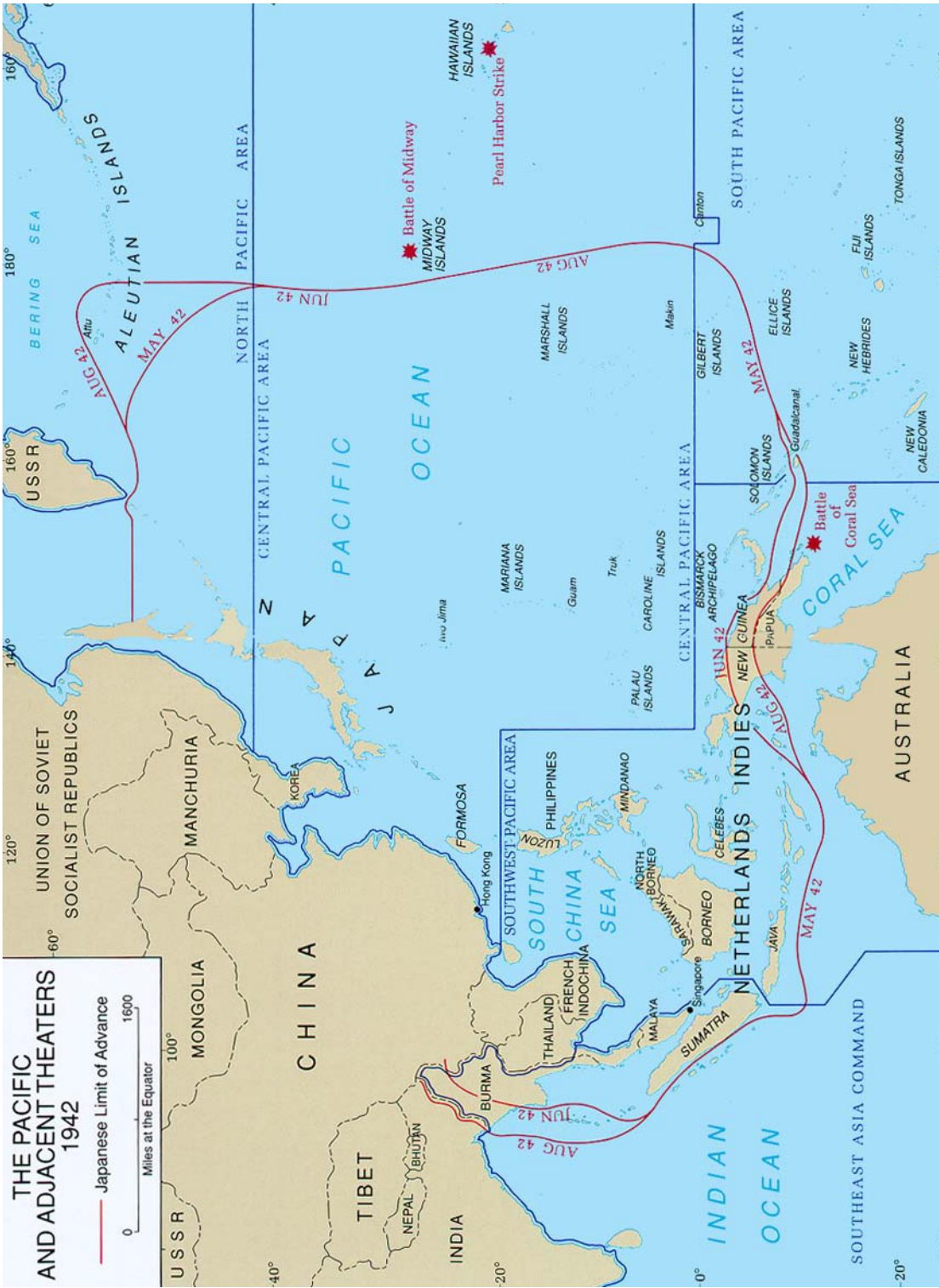


Figure 8.1. Japanese mandated territories and limit of advance in the Central Pacific as of 1942.



**Figure 8.2.** (Left to right) Admiral Chester W. Nimitz; Admiral Ernest J. King; Vice Admiral Raymond A. Spruance. US Navy, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

point was that in order to defeat Japan all efforts must be made to sever the Japanese lines of communications to their Southern Resource Area (Buell 1980:316). He reiterated, “the Marianas are the key to the Pacific.”

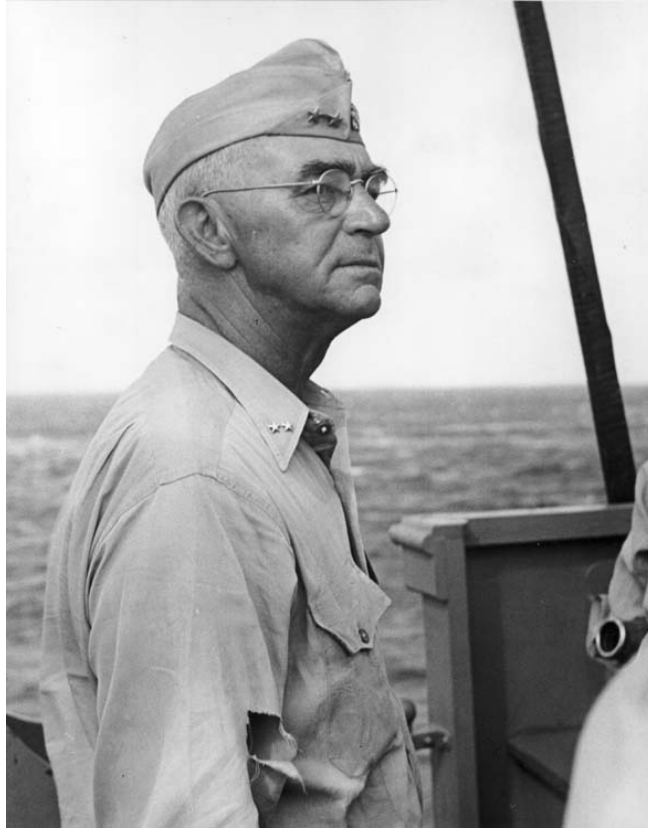
In 1943 King met with his Pacific commanders in San Francisco from July 30 to August 1 to discuss the proposed offensive against the Marshall Islands. Vice Admiral Raymond A. Spruance was now ready to capture the more lightly defended Japanese-held Gilbert Islands. Once captured, Spruance argued, new airbases built in the Gilberts could then support the Marshalls operation with long-range bombers (Potter 1976:245).

On August 23, 1943, at the official *Quadrant* conference with the American-British Combined Chiefs of Staff, a consensus was reached on Central Pacific operations. The Gilbert Islands were officially identified as the first target in the Central Pacific campaign, followed by the Marshall Islands. The Combined Chiefs of Staff also approved the Marianas as a possibly “necessary or desirable” campaign, but omitted it from the final orders (Hoffman 1950:15). However, critical raids on Truk Lagoon, the Palaus and the Marianas were approved (King 1953:280).

### **Prelude to the Central Pacific Campaign**

Operation *Galvanic*, the invasion of the Gilbert Islands, fell on the shoulders of Vice Admiral Spruance. On August 24, 1943, Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner (Figure 8.3) was officially





**Figure 8.3.** Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, commander Fifth Amphibious Force, the largest amphibious force assembled in the Pacific, aboard his flagship *Rocky Mount*. US Navy, Navy Historical Archives.

given command of the Fifth Amphibious Force as the fighting arm of Spruance's Fifth Fleet. The force included all transports, cargo vessels, landing and beaching craft, and Landing Ship Dock (LSDs) used to land the troops, as well as the destroyers, escort carriers, cruisers, and old battleships assigned to provide close fire support for them before, during and after landing (Potter 1960:315).

The American planners were preparing to take the offensive in the Central Pacific, while the Japanese were just beginning to consider the never before considered concept of being on the defensive. In September 1943, the Japanese national defensive perimeter stretched from Burma across Malaya, to the East Indies, New Guinea, the Carolines, the Marianas and north to the Kurile Islands (refer to Figure 8.1). Bases forward of this line, such as the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, were to hold out for six months, then withdraw if necessary. Aircraft based on these islands were to attack the advancing American fleet and sink as many ships as possible, before retiring to the Marianas (Denfeld 1997:12).

In preparation, Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo and Captain Mitsuo Fuchida, senior staff officer, 1st Imperial Air Fleet, traveled to inspect air defense needs of the Marianas. Recognizing they

needed many more aircraft to face the growing American juggernaut, Fuchida recommended that ten new airfields be constructed on Pagan, Saipan, Tinian, Rota and Guam (Denfeld 1997:12).

Operation *Galvanic* was successful; it was also costly. The battleship *Maryland*, commanded by Rear Admiral Harry Hill, began landings on Tarawa on November 20. Unfortunately, their landing coincided with what is locally known as a “dodging tide,” a long-lasting low tide that prevented landing craft from crossing the reef to the shore. As a result, the men had to wade through waist-deep water under heavy fire.

About 4,700 Japanese and Koreans died. Of the 18,300 Marines and naval personnel involved in the battle for Tarawa, 990 Marines died before the atoll was declared secured on November 23, 1943. An additional 2,296 were wounded (Potter 1976:260). A total of 687 US Navy personnel also lost their lives, 644 of them when the escort carrier USS *Liscome Bay* was torpedoed and sank.

As a result of the lesson at Tarawa, recommendations were made for more photoreconnaissance, more amphibious tracked vehicles (AMTRACS and AMTANKS) more LCI gunboats, more bombardment vessels, more ammunition, and more aerial bombing, based on the assumption that the Marshall Islands were even more heavily defended than the Gilberts (Potter 1976:262).

On November 23, 1943, Admiral King met with General Henry H. “Hap” Arnold, Chief of Staff, US Army Air Forces, to convince him that Nimitz could capture the Marianas and that the Marianas were the best forward base for his new B-29 Superfortresses. The islands were well within range of Japan and, once captured, the Marianas’ bases were safe from counter-attack, unlike bases in China. With the success of Operation *Galvanic*, the neutralization of Bougainville, along with Arnold’s support and King’s advocacy, the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed to the American *Overall Plan for the Defeat of Japan* (van der Vat 1991:294).

They decidedly noted that “operations in the Central Pacific promise a more rapid advance to Japan and her vital lines of communication” (Costello 1982:445; Hoffman 1950:18). Moreover, an invasion of the Marianas was “more likely to precipitate a decisive engagement with the Japanese Fleet” (Hoffman 1950:18). Therefore, the Combined Chiefs of Staff final directive stated:

The advance along the New Guinea-Netherlands-East Indies-Philippines axis will proceed concurrently with operations for the recapture of the Mandate Islands. A strategic bombing force will be established in Guam, Tinian and Saipan for the strategic bombing of Japan proper (Costello 1982:445; Morison 1963:306).

The Marianas operation was tentatively scheduled for October 1, 1944 (Hoffman 1950:18).

For the first time since the war began, the Marianas were an identified target for capture and development. The die was cast. It was more and more apparent that the clash over control of the

Pacific would occur in the Marianas. The Chamorros and their islands — nearly exterminated by the Spanish, partitioned by the Americans, and bulldozed by the Japanese for sugar cane plantations — would now serve as a battleground for Americans and Japanese.

### The Central Pacific Campaign Plan

Admiral Nimitz' plans for the Central Pacific Campaign (Operation *Granite*) (King 1953:327) called for an assault on Kwajalein Atoll (code-named *Flintlock*) in the Marshall Islands on January 31, 1944, followed by the capture of Eniwetok (Operation *Catchpole*) around May 1, and then Truk on August 15. The Marianas (Operation *Forager*) were scheduled for invasion in mid-November (Dyer 1969:855; Hoffman 1950:18).

On the night of January 22, 1944, the mighty Fifth Fleet, now referred to as The Big Blue Fleet, with over 375 ships carrying 53,000 assault troops and 31,000 garrison troops, sailed for the Marshall Islands and its second amphibious operation: *Flintlock*. At least some of the requests Spruance made after Tawara were filled. Under the command of Rear Admiral Mark A. Mitscher, Task Force 58 was now 6 fleet carriers with 700 aircraft, 6 light carriers, 8 fast battleships, 6 cruisers and 36 destroyers (Figure 8.4). To enhance intelligence for subsequent island campaigns, the Seabees who landed on Tarawa dissected Japanese defensive structures there and created replicas that were used for training in Hawai'i (Edwin Foster, pers. comm. April 29, 2009).



**Figure 8.4.** US Fifth Fleet at sea under the command of Admiral Mark A. Mitscher. US Navy, NARA.

While Spruance was at sea with the Fifth Fleet, Nimitz and his Pacific Fleet staff met at Pearl Harbor to hash out Operation *Granite* and its immediate components *Flintlock* and *Catchpole* (Costello 1982:449). After viewing the carnage at Tarawa, they asked — what was going to be the cost for capturing mountainous Saipan and 35-mile-long Guam? They now suggested the Marianas be bypassed. The only reason for taking the Marianas was for the B-29 bases. Moreover, there were no natural harbors in the Marianas large enough to house major fleet operations (Potter 1976:280).

King agreed that big bombers were a useful corollary to the capture of the Marianas. However, the main reason for capturing the Marianas was to cut off the flow of troop reinforcements, essential supplies and new aircraft that the Japanese were sending south through the Marianas to reinforce their southern bases, as well as to stop the flow of oil and other Southeast Asian natural resources from reaching factories in Japan. Furthermore, he reminded Nimitz and his subordinates that the Combined Chiefs of Staff had already given the order to capture the Marianas.

Taking heed of the lessons learned on Tarawa, Admiral Spruance ordered a much larger pre-invasion bombardment for the landings in the Marshall Islands. On January 31, 1944, Rear Admiral Harry Hill began landing the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on Majuro, capturing it by 0950. On February 1, 1944, the Japanese defenders on Kwajalein were rained on by 36,000 naval and artillery shells in addition to a massive aerial attack by Major General Willis Hale's 7<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force land-based B-24s.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division rode ashore in armed and armored amtracs, assaulting the twin islands of Roi and Namur in Kwajalein Atoll. On February 1944, Spruance declared that all effective resistance had ceased (Potter 1976:274), although the Japanese were not cleared from all the atoll's islets until November 7. Of the 8,675 personnel defending Kwajalein, 7,870 Japanese and Koreans were killed, along with an estimated 200 Marshallese. Out of the 41,000 American troops committed to the campaign, 372 Marines and GIs died (Morison 1963:312). *Flintlock* was far more successful and far less costly than *Galvanic*.

Because Spruance was not forced to use his reserves, orders authorizing him to proceed with Operation *Catchpole* arrived immediately. He recognized that the Japanese base at Truk Lagoon could pose a problem. Since the summer of 1942, Truk was home to the Japanese Combined Fleet (King 1953:326). Because it threatened the flank of *Catchpole* and because it might induce the decisive naval battle he wanted, Spruance immediately left Majuro with his battle fleet and Rear Admiral Mitscher's carrier task force, hoping to catch Admiral Mineichi Koga, (Figure 8.5) Commander-in-Chief Japanese Imperial Combined Fleet, napping at Truk.

Before leaving Murderer's Row (the line of carriers anchored in Majuro Lagoon) for Truk Lagoon, Spruance agreed that the landings on Eniwetok should be conducted simultaneously with his raid on Truk. Spruance knew that if he neutralized Truk at the same time as Eniwetok was captured, Nimitz could advance the 1,000-mile-jump to the Marianas by four months,





**Figure 8.5.** Admiral Mineichi Koga became Commander-in-Chief Japanese Imperial Combined Fleet after Yamamoto was killed. He designed *Operation Z*, predecessor to *Operation A-Go*. NARA.

preventing the Japanese there from digging in (Potter 1976:279). Thousands of American lives could be saved.

If Mitscher had enough planes left after the raid on Truk, he was to immediately raid the Marianas, while Spruance returned to Eniwetok. The primary purpose for the raid on the Marianas was not just to sink ships and shoot down planes, but to take photographs. There were no American flights over the Mariana Islands after December 1941 and no one really knew what the Japanese had done there since they left the League of Nations in 1935.

Spruance sailed for Truk confidently, escorted by Essex-class carriers, new battleships bearing 16-inch guns, and a host of cruisers, destroyers and submarines. The 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet far outgunned the Japanese Imperial Fleet that had only two light cruisers and eight destroyers to defend the lagoon (Dull 1978:299-300; Dyer 1969:872; Potter 1960:338; 1976:277). Unfortunately, the surprise attack was ruined when a Marine Corps PB4-Y1 flying from Bougainville was spotted while snooping on February 4, 1944. In fact, Admiral Koga was already alarmed by the fall of Kwajalein and began withdrawing the Japanese Imperial Combined Fleet from Truk to Palau on February 10.

When Mitscher's three carrier groups dived in for the attack on Truk Lagoon on February 17, they found some 50 merchant ships still in the lagoon and 365 planes on the ground. Warships,

including 2 light cruisers and 4 destroyers, 19 cargo vessels, 5 tankers, and more than 250 planes were destroyed. The raid isolated 30,000 Japanese troops and cut off Eniwetok from long-range air support and supply, effectively neutralizing Truk (King 1953:327; Morison 1963:314).

On the same day February 17, 1944, Admirals Hill and Turner landed the 22nd Marine Regiment at Engebi in the Marshalls. Resistance was light and the island was declared secure within six hours. Captured documents suggested that the defenses on Eniwetok Island might also be light. However, a shortened bombardment met with strong resistance and it was not until February 21 that the island was secured.

Rear Admiral Dick Conolly said of Operations *Catchpole* and *Flintlock*:

The Marshalls really cracked the Japanese shell. It broke the crust of their defenses on a scale that could be exploited at once. It gave them no time adequately to fortify their inner defense line that ran through the Marianas (Morison 1963:317).

On February 18, 1944, Spruance directed Marc Mitscher to proceed with the raid on the Marianas. Mitscher complemented to a “T” the Spruance-Turner-Smith team. Without a wasted moment, Spruance, Turner and Smith began preparations for the invasion and capture of the Marianas—a one-thousand-mile advance from Pearl Harbor, against islands with ten times the number of Japanese troops defending a hundred times more land area. The logistical problems were mindboggling.

Following the loss of the Gilberts and Marshalls, and the disastrous raid on Truk, General Tojo relieved Admiral Nagumo as Navy Chief of Staff (Costello 1982:452-3). He also sacked Army Chief of Staff General Sugiyama, assuming the position himself. He was now Prime Minister of Japan, War Minister and Army Chief of Staff. This began Japan’s military dictatorship.

Fortunately for the Allies, Tojo then proceeded to make the most serious error of his war. Coming at a time when the United States was already threatening his Imperial forces from both the south and the east, on land, at sea, and in the air, Tojo’s decision to open a third front—an offensive in the China-Burma area—proved to be one too many. It pulled needed supplies and troops away from the defense of the Marianas.

### **First Raid on the Marianas**

Having completed their mission at Truk, Task Force 58 sailed north to the Marianas, with Mitscher and his naval aviators hoping to find juicy targets waiting for them. Meanwhile, Vice Admiral Kakuji Kakuta arrived at Ushi Aerodrome on northern Tinian as commanding officer of the 1st Naval Air Division. He received 150 bombers from Japan and dispersed them to airbases throughout the Pacific. As Mitscher approached Saipan and Tinian on the afternoon of February 22, one of Kakuta’s patrol planes spotted Task Force 58. Kakuta dutifully launched 9 reconnaissance planes and 27 bombers with orders to sink the American carriers. No American ships were hit. No Japanese bombers returned.

At sunrise on February 23, 1944, Mitscher's carrier groups launched their general attack against Japanese airbases and strategic installations on Pagan, Saipan, Tinian, Rota and Guam (Figure 8.6 and 8.7). Their mission was to destroy Japanese air power in the Marianas, disrupt Japanese lines of communication and gain photographic intelligence. As they left the decks of their carriers, the American pilots still didn't even know where the Japanese airports were located. It did not take them long to find out, however, as Kakuta managed to get another 47 bombers and 27 fighters into the air. Once again, the now veteran Hellcat pilots shot them down, one after the other.

The Americans caught a host of Japanese aircraft on the ground at Orote Air Field, Apra Harbor, Guam, Sinapalo on northern Rota, Ushi on Tinian, Aslito Airfield on Saipan, and the base on Pagan. Before the raid was over, 168 Japanese aircraft were destroyed on the ground and in the air (Figure 8.8) (Morison 1968:155).

Most importantly, Mitscher's naval aviators obtained photographs for Nimitz' planners at Pearl (Potter 1976:278). Film shot during the raid revealed new airfields under construction and gave the planners oblique photos of possible landing beaches (Figure 8.9).

Kakuta requested more planes from Iwo Jima, but his request was promptly refused.

Meanwhile Nimitz's submarines were wreaking havoc beneath the Pacific. Heretofore, the submarine was used primarily as the "ears" of the fleet, listening for enemy vessels as the fleet advanced, lifeguarding the fleet and its flyers, performing special intelligence gathering missions, or patrolling Japan's shipping lanes hoping to intercept a target. In the Marianas raid, however, just like the raid on Truk, Nimitz ordered Rear Admiral Charles A. Lockwood, his new commander of Submarine Forces, Pacific, to station wolf packs at every back door out of the Marianas.

Like bird hunters flushing quail, when Mitscher's carriers came steaming into the Marianas; every Japanese ship in the area was spooked into running. The submarine *Tang*, sitting patiently some sixty miles off Saipan, sank five ships between February 22 and 25 (Holmes 1966:304).

Nimitz knew that his Japanese counterpart was likely to intensify efforts to reinforce the Marianas. So Lockwood was ordered to remain in Mariana waters after the raid and lay in wait for Japanese ships bringing troops and supplies south to Saipan, Tinian and Guam. Lockwood organized wolf packs of submarines that were directed by radio contacts to intercept Japanese convoys. Just five days after Mitscher's task force disengaged the Marianas, USS *Trout* torpedoed the Japanese transport *Sakito Maru*. Many others faced the same fate.

Japanese resupply ships that did make it through the gauntlet of American submarines to Saipan or Tinian were unloaded, then reloaded with Japanese businessmen and high ranking government officials and their families, taking advantage of the opportunity to book passage back to Japan. For many, their exodus was to end in tragedy. On March 3, the Japanese cargo



**Figure 8.6.** Pagan Island air strikes on February 23, 1944. The reason for such a large Japanese Army garrison and air base on Pagan is still unknown. The intent of the strike was to prevent any aircraft there from interfering with either the invasion of Saipan or the Battle of the Philippine Sea. US Navy, NARA.



**Figure 8.7.** US Naval aviators score near misses on Japanese shipping caught at Saipan during the raid of February 23, 1944. The Japanese seaplane base at Tanapag is in the background, left. US Navy, NARA,



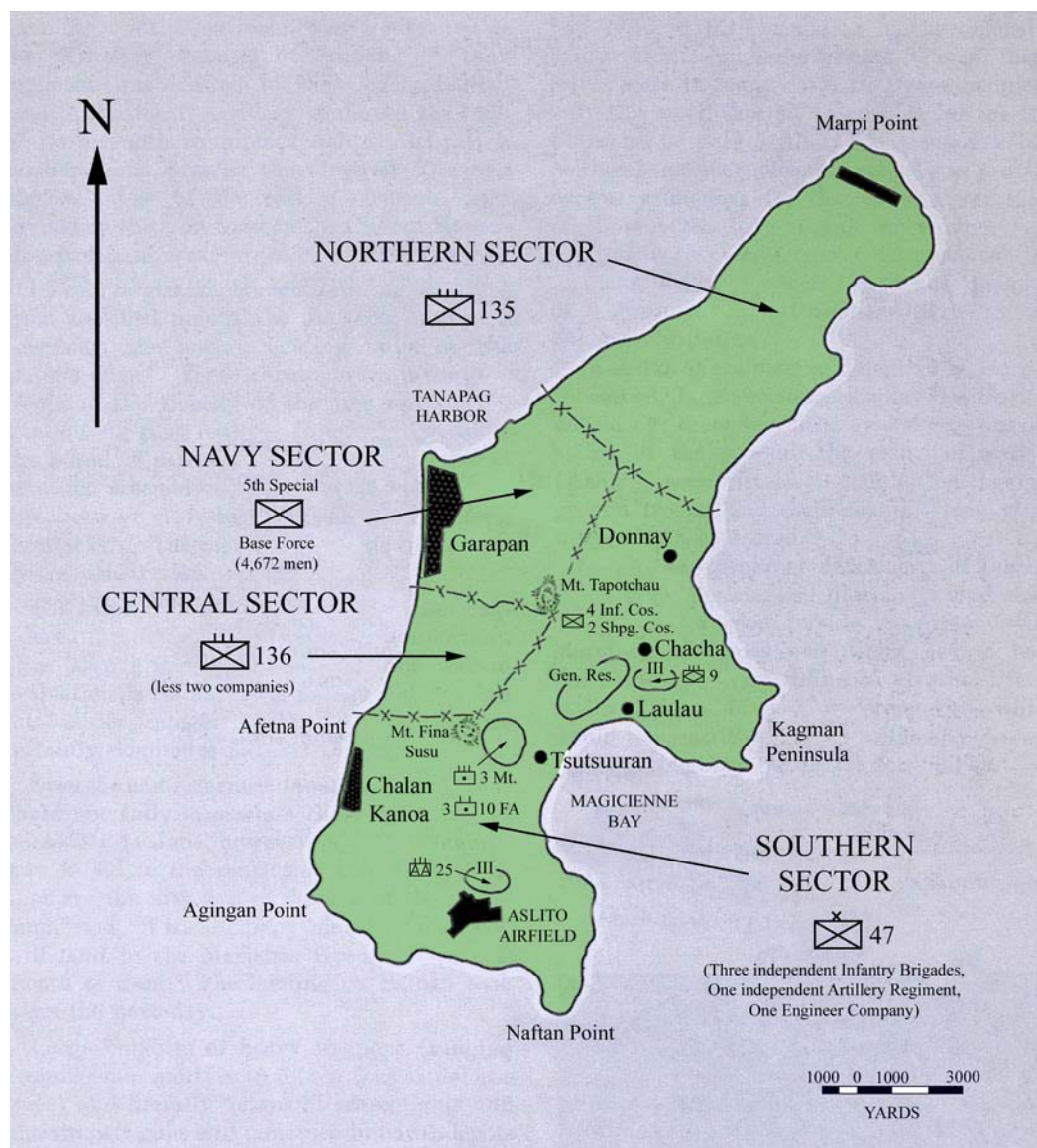


**Figure 8.8.** Japanese plane shot down by the Navy on Guam at the beginning of the campaign for the Marianas. Admiral Ozawa was depending on aircraft from Guam and other air bases in the area to support him in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Mitscher's Combat Air Patrols eliminated the problem. US Navy, NARA.

ship *Amerika Maru* carrying 1,700 civilians from Saipan was torpedoed and sank three days out of Saipan (Toland 1970:552).

After the ambush and death of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto on April 18, 1943 (Davis 1969; Glines 1990), he was replaced by Admiral Soemu Toyoda as commander of the Japanese Imperial Navy. Toyoda gave Admiral Mineichi Koga command of the Imperial Fleet. Koga developed a plan to destroy the American fleet and save Japan. Koga's "Z plan" was to draw the American fleet into Japanese waters where land-based bombers could help equalize the odds against the much larger American fleet. Recognizing the superior organization in the Fifth Fleet, with carrier task forces as its striking arm, Koga reorganized the emperor's fleet, *Nihon Kaigun*, along similar lines.

The First Mobile Fleet was organized as three task groups, each with three aircraft carriers. Division One included *Taiho* (Great Phoenix) at 34,600 tons, the largest of all Japanese carriers, the 20,000-ton Pearl Harbor veterans *Zuikaku* (Auspicious Crane) and *Shokaku* (Flying Crane). Division Two was the 26,900-ton sisters *Junyo* (Wandering Falcon) and *Hiyo* (Happy Falcon). Also in the group was the 16,700 light carrier *Ryuho* (Dragon Phoenix). Division Three included the battleship *Hyuga*, and the 14,000-ton light carriers *Zuiho*, *Chitose* and *Chiyoda* (Tillman



**Figure 8.9.** Japanese defense sectors based on February 1944 aerial reconnaissance. Map design by James W. Hunter III, Ships of Discovery.

2005:29). Admiral Matome Ugaki was commander of the newly organized First Battleship Division, the vanguard of the Mobile Fleet (Denfeld 1997:64).

Koga's reorganization plan included a new defensive headquarters on Saipan, which he gave to Admiral Chuichi Nagumo (Figure 8.10). Under Nagumo, Saipan became "... the naval and military heart and brain of Japanese defense strategy" (Morison 1968:339). He established four area headquarters: 1) Central Pacific Fleet, (Navy) under his command 2) Thirty-first Army, commanded by Lt. General Hideyoshi Obata and headquartered on Guam; 3) Fifth Base Force, commanded by Rear Admiral Tsutjimura; and 4) Northern Mariana Defense Force, on Saipan commanded by Lt. General Yoshitsugu Saito.

The total Japanese army strength on Saipan was estimated at 22,702 (Hoffman 1950:11). They had ample food and ammunition and morale was high (Karig 1948:221). But planners did not



**Figure 8.10.** Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, commander Japanese Defensive Headquarters, Saipan. He led the Imperial Japanese Combined Fleet during the Pearl Harbor raid, lost to Spruance in the Battle of Midway and was finally assigned to Saipan. Caught on Saipan during the battle, Nagumo was bombarded by some of the ships he sank at Pearl Harbor. NARA.

count on Admiral Nagumo's 55<sup>th</sup> Naval Guard Force (*Maizuru Keibitai*) and the 1<sup>st</sup> Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force, a total of 6,690 naval officers and men, including 800 Japanese Marines. Combined, the Japanese army and navy forces on Saipan reached approximately 29,662 men (Hoffman 1950:11). Army historians later tallied 31,629 total Japanese troops on Saipan by the time the Americans landed (Dyer 1969:898).

On March 8, 1944, Admiral Koga, aboard his flagship *Musashi* at Palau, issued orders to begin preparations for *Operation Z*. Based on observations of the American advances, he expected the engagement to occur somewhere in the region of the Marianas, New Guinea or Palau Islands (Tillman 2005:36).

At the same time that Koga was preparing for *Operation Z*, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff met on March 2, 1944 to discuss their plans for the war in the Pacific and agreed that "Our first major objective in the war against Japan will be the vital Luzon-Formosa-China coast area." While MacArthur continued his advance north, they gave priority in military resources to Nimitz, because they thought Nimitz' route might produce quicker results (Dyer 1969:857). To provide for unity of command, they gave Admiral Turner command of all amphibious craft, the Amphibious Training Command, and all the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps units assigned to those amphibious forces (Dyer 1969:161).

The raid on Truk Lagoon and the American sledgehammer that fell on the Marshall Islands cracked the shell of Japanese the outer defensive perimeter, opening the door for the 1,200 mile leap from the Marshalls to the Marianas—now the cornerstone to Tojo's last defensive line. Because of work already done by Spruance, Turner and Smith, within a week Nimitz sent his preliminary plans for *Operation Forager* to his various commanding officers to begin final planning (Smith 1987:142).

On March 12, 1944, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that Nimitz and General MacArthur were to support each other's advance toward the Philippines-Formosa-China triangle. MacArthur was to continue the reduction on Kavieng and Rabaul, New Britain, through air power alone and was ordered to invade Hollandia, New Guinea, on April 22 (Tillman 2005:32). Nimitz, meanwhile, was ordered to by-pass Truk and to provide air cover for MacArthur's Hollandia invasion. He was also to "institute and intensify" aerial bombardment of the Carolines and conduct carrier attacks against Marianas and Palau. Admiral Nimitz was to invade the Marianas on June 15 and build air bases for B-29 Superfortresses on Saipan, Tinian and Guam (Forrestel 1966:117; Holmes 1966:304; King 1953:328; Morison 1963:324; 1968:157).

Timing his raid on Palau to correspond with MacArthur's invasion of Hollandia, and once again hoping to catch Admiral Koga napping, Spruance embarked on *New Jersey* in Majuro Atoll on March 22, 1944, leading a battle fleet that included three carrier groups under Mitscher. Unfortunately, on the 26<sup>th</sup>, a snooping American reconnaissance plane from the South Pacific was again spotted by Admiral Koga's forces and he ordered a further withdrawal, this time to Tawi-Tawi, southernmost of the Philippine Islands.



Koga left Palau by plane for a conference on Davao on March 31. His Kawanishi Flying Boat disappeared into a storm and was never found. However, his *Operation Z* plans were recovered by Filipino guerrillas and were forwarded to Nimitz, who had them translated. By the time the American fleet sailed out to meet the Japanese fleet in the Philippine Sea, each of his captains had a copy of the enemy plans in their hands (Potter 1976:296; Tillman 2005:36).

When Mitscher's carrier planes arrived over Palau, the majority of the 1<sup>st</sup> Mobile Fleet was gone. Still, Mitscher reported after the raid that they sank 29 auxiliary ships at Palau Lagoon, damaged another 17, destroyed 160 planes and probably shot down another 29 (Potter 1976:292). The raid effectively removed Palau as a concern for either MacArthur's invasion of Hollandia or Spruance's attack on the Marianas (Forrestel 1966:121).

The Japanese redrew their inner defensive line. Now it ran along a line from the Dutch Indies, to West Dutch New Guinea, the Palaus and the Marianas, and was designed to protect their southern oil supply lines to the Japanese home islands (Dull 1978:302).

During the 26 years since the close of WWI, the Japanese developed Saipan into a major commercial transportation and communication hub. The South Seas Development Company managed sugar cane plantations around the islands and operated mills that produced 1,200 tons of crude sugar daily during the harvest season. A nearby distillery produced synthetic Scotch whiskey, port wine and other alcoholic beverages from the cane's molasses byproduct (Hoffman 1950:7). Garapan was a modern business center; hotels and geisha houses catered to visiting honeymooners and businessmen. Moreover, the Japanese made Saipan the cornerstone of the empire's inner defensive perimeter. The Japanese entrenched on Saipan knew that the Marianas were Japan's last major bastion. "As long as the Marianas were held, long-range destruction of Japan from the air would be impossible" (Wood 2007:40).

*Forager* proposed to cut Japan's jugular vein by capturing the Marianas.

### **Operation *Forager***

In Operation *Forager*, the Joint Chiefs of Staff identified four primary purposes for the capture of the Marianas:

- 1) Sever Japan's primary line of communications to and from its southern possessions. This would prevent the Japanese from using airbases in Saipan, Tinian and Guam to ferry aircraft against other American objectives and would cut the flow of oil and rice from the south to Japan's home islands;
- 2) Cause the Japanese navy to come out of hiding for a decisive naval engagement;
- 3) Allow development of Guam's Apra Harbor into an advanced naval operating base with a ship repair facility, docks for submarine tenders, and munitions storage facilities; and
- 4) Build bases on all three islands for the Army Air Forces' new B-29 long-range heavy bombers.

One purpose not listed was the liberation of the Chamorro-Americans on Guam. The Marianas contained large indigenous and multi-national populations. Nimitz and Spruance

were well aware that the Guam Chamorros were loyal Americans, some of whom were actually serving in the Fifth Fleet. However, no one knew what reception the Marines might receive from the locals on the northern islands of Saipan and Tinian. In the years since coming under Japanese administration many of them had become just as “Japanized” as the Chamorros on Guam had become “Americanized.”

The original plan for Operation *Forager* called for a simultaneous invasion of all three islands. However, because of its size, Guam was treated separately from the Saipan-Tinian group. To accomplish this task, Spruance’s plan broke the total Joint Expeditionary Force into two pieces: the Northern Attack Force responsible for the capture of Saipan-Tinian, and the Southern Attack Force responsible for the capture of Guam.

US Marine Corps Lieutenant General Holland Smith (Figure 8.11) took command of all troops. Rear Admiral Marc A. Mitscher retained command of the fast carrier forces. Vice Admiral John H. Hoover, who covered both *Galvanic* and *Flintlock* with his land-based aircraft, took command of Forward Area Central Pacific, which controlled all the Army Air Force’s land-based aircraft in the area, as well as the Seabees. Rear Admiral Lockwood maintained command of the



**Figure 8.11.** Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, seen here at the end of combat on Tinian Island, was the commander of the US Army and Marine Corps forces for Operation Forager. US Navy, NARA.

submarine forces. Vice Admiral William L. Calhoun, commanding officer of the Service Force Pacific Fleet, who successfully fueled Spruance's ships and fed the troops in both *Galvanic* and *Flintlock*, was to supply a much larger fleet, much farther from a supply base, for a much longer period of time than ever before. In all, Spruance commanded a fleet of 535 ships and auxiliaries. Admiral Turner was responsible for transporting, landing and supporting 127,000 troops – 71,000 for Saipan and 56,500 for Guam (Dyer 1969:874; Blair 1976:643).

The Joint Army and Navy planning groups, following the guidelines established by Nimitz, laid out the needs for their respective services on Saipan, Tinian and Guam. One team was responsible for planning the invasion and development of Saipan, Operation *Tearaway*. As the key to Japan's inner defensive perimeter, Saipan planning was given priority. Saipan's planned B-29 base, only large enough to hold one wing of Superfortresses, was to be built by the 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Army Engineering Brigade, which included both Army Engineers and US Navy Seabees. Tinian became Operation *Tattersalls*. Admiral Ben Moreel, creator of the Navy Construction Battalions known as the Seabees, placed Captain Paul J. Halloran in charge of the 6<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Brigade and charged him with constructing two gigantic airfields on Tinian. By the end of the war, he and his brigade had constructed the world's largest operating air base on Tinian.

To secure an update on Japanese strength on Saipan and Tinian, Nimitz dispatched another raid to the Marianas. This time, however, the mission was flown by land-based aircraft rather than carrier-borne. On April 18, 1944, Navy PB4Ys based at newly constructed Henderson Field, Guadalcanal flew over the Marianas (Morison 1968:164). Along with photos taken during the February raid, these were used to make gridded charts. As a result, Army Air Force mission, gunnery officers aboard the Northern Attack Force had photographs in hand during the invasions of Saipan and Tinian.

Japan depended on fifty-nine-year-old Admiral Soemu Toyoda (Figure 8.12), appointed to replace Admiral Koga to destroy the American fleet and defend Saipan. He issued his Operation *A-Go* plan, not significantly different from Koga's *Z* plan. Toyoda's new *A-Go* plan still called for drawing the American fleet into Japanese controlled waters, where a decisive naval engagement could be fought under "favorable" conditions — covered by Japanese land-based bombers (Forrestel 1966:131; Karig 1948:221).

Toyoda set Operation *A-Go* in motion on May 10, 1944. Because the Japanese Navy did not have enough refined fuel on hand at the time (Dull 1978:303), Toyoda ordered the Mobile Fleet to gather at Tawi-Tawi, the southern-most of the Philippine islands, where they could load up with nearby supplies of unrefined but burnable Borneo crude oil (Dull 1978: 303). Commander Lowell Stone, captain of the submarine *Lapon*, spotted three carriers, five cruisers, and many destroyers west of Borneo and reported their position to Pearl Harbor on May 13, 1944 (Blair 1976:625). The following day, Thomas W. Hogan, captain of *Bonefish*, cruising in the same area, put torpedoes into a Japanese freighter and the destroyer *Inazuma*, sinking the latter (Blair 1976:625). On the 15<sup>th</sup>, Hogan went back into Tawi-Tawi and found six carriers, half a dozen battleships, eight cruisers, and many destroyers at anchor (Tillman 2005:49). By May 16, Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa's entire Mobile Fleet was assembled in Tawi-Tawi — nine carriers,



**Figure 8.12.** Admiral Soemu Toyoda, Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Japanese Combined Fleet. Toyoda replaced Koga, whose aircraft disappeared over Davao in late March. Toyoda directed the Battle of the Philippine Sea from Tokyo. NARA.

five battleships, thirteen cruisers, and twenty-plus destroyers — each filled to the brim with volatile Borneo crude (Tillman 2005:39).

Nimitz ordered Admiral Lockwood to keep Ozawa's carriers penned in. With Hogan and others sinking ships just outside the harbor, the Japanese were forced to remain safely inside. With the Japanese carriers unable to sortie, their air commanders could not give their new pilots an opportunity to practice, which they desperately needed. Nimitz was pleased to learn that among the carriers in Ozawa's fleet were *Shokako* and *Zuikaku*, last of the Pearl Harbor raiders.

As a basic part of *A-Go*, 540 planes of the Japanese First Air Fleet were distributed among crucial airfields from Chichi Jima south through the Marianas to the Dutch East Indies; Japan's island air bases serving as intermediate bases for Ozawa's carrier-borne aircraft. After making their initial attack, the carrier planes were to land at Guam or Rota, refuel and rearm, and then attack the American fleet again on their way back to their carrier.

To counter the American submarine threat, the Japanese Grand Escort Headquarters introduced the use of large convoys with escort carriers to protect their cargo ships reinforcing the Marianas. It was to no avail. On May 10, 1944, the submarine *Silversides* intercepted a Japanese convoy



headed for the Marianas and in one day sank the freighter *Okinawa Maru*, the transport *Mikage Maru No. 18* and the converted gunboat *Choan Maru II*. On the 29<sup>th</sup> *Silversides* intercepted another convoy and sank the gasoline carrying *Shoken Maru* and *Horaisan Maru*.

At about the same time, the Japanese Convoy No. 3530 was intercepted on its way to the Marianas. The seven ships in the convoy were loaded with 7,000 soldiers, their tanks and other equipment. On May 29, 1944, a submarine wolf-pack consisting of *Shark II*, *Pintado*, and *Pilotfish*, began tailing the convoy. On June 4, “Blair’s Blasters” sank five of the seven ships in the convoy. Although Japanese escort ships picked up most of the survivors, they arrived on Saipan without their equipment or food. The two *Marus* that survived were the last to reach Saipan. On June 5, *Harder* sank the destroyers *Minazuki* and *Hayanami* (Dull 1978: 304) and three days later the destroyer *Tanikaze* in the Sibutu Passage near Tawi-Tawi (Holmes 1966:334-335).

The Joint Chiefs of Staff decision to proceed with a two-pronged approach toward Japan paid big dividends for Nimitz when MacArthur invaded Biak Island on May 27, 900 miles southeast of the Philippines in Northwest New Guinea. Admiral Toyoda concluded that the Americans decided to make Biak their next objective, which, in fact, it was. The Japanese had long-range bomber airfields there. Toyoda recognized that if the Americans captured Biak, Operation *A-Go* was in jeopardy. He needed Biak’s land-based bombers to attack the American fleet. In response, he quickly devised Operation *Kon*, his plan for the reinforcement of Biak. This, he hoped, would make the American fleet come out to fight for it. If they did, he could initiate *A-Go* at a location of his own choosing (Denfeld 1997:64).

The opposing fleets were preparing for the battle both knew was imminent.

On the morning of the June 6, 1944, while Allied troops were landing in Normandy, Admiral Ozawa again sent out search planes to discover the whereabouts of Task Force 58. Long range snoopers found Spruance’s fleet early that morning still safely snuggled up in Majuro Lagoon, now known as Murderers Row because of the fifteen aircraft carriers that lazed at anchor (Karig 1948:222; Tillman 2005:15).

In preparation for his anticipated meeting with Ozawa, Mitscher divided his command into four fast carrier task groups. Fourteen of the carriers were commissioned after 1941. Four of them—*Hornet*, *Wasp*, *Bataan*, and *San Jacinto*—were launched less than six months previously and their crews were inexperienced (Tillman 2005:16). The fleet included: *Hornet*, *Yorktown*, *Belleau Wood*, *Bataan*, *Bunker Hill*, *Wasp*, *Monterey*, *Cabot*, *Lexington*, *Enterprise* (The Big E); *Princeton* (Sweet Pea); *San Jacinto*, *Essex*, *Langley* and *Cowpens* (Mighty Moo.) Their primary responsibility was to establish air superiority over the Marianas before the battle fleet and transport troops arrived. Traveling with these flattops was their protective screen: 4 heavy cruisers, 13 light cruisers, and 53 destroyers. The Battle Line under Vice Admiral Willis A “Ching” Lee contained 7 battlegroups, 4 cruisers, and 15 destroyers. Most of these ships were new; built after the Pearl Harbor attack.

On June 6, Spruance and the entire Fifth Fleet of 111 battle-gray warships steamed out of the Majuro Atoll channel, destination Marianas (Tillman 2005:50). In overall command of *Forager*, Spruance wielded more firepower “than any seagoing admiral in history” and the fleet at Saipan was larger than the combined fleet at Normandy (Holmes 1966:33; Tillman 2005:17; Brooks 2005:299).

Meanwhile, Toyoda was having trouble getting his reinforcements through to Biak. On June 10, he ordered the massive battleship *Yamato*, to join up with Ozawa’s flagship *Musashi* to augment the cruisers and destroyers escorting reinforcements for the defense of Biak. Toyoda was quite certain that this force was sufficient to bring through his reinforcements. He hoped to use the battle for Biak to draw out the American fleet and put *A-Go* into effect in waters near Biak. To support the possibility of *A-Go*, Toyoda ordered one hundred of the Japanese land-based planes in the Marianas to move southwest in support of *Kon*, leaving behind only 172 planes in defense of the Marianas. He was elated at the thought of facing the American fleet in a decisive battle deep in his own waters.

### **Operation *Tearaway*: The Invasion of Saipan**

According to Phase I of Operation *Tearaway*, the invasion of Saipan began with a June 12, 1944 pre-emptive, carrier-borne air attack at dawn on Saipan, Tinian, Rota, Guam and Pagan by Mitscher’s Task Force 58. His primary mission was to gain absolute air superiority before the battle fleet and the amphibious forces arrived. Secondly, he was to take new photographs, cut communications and destroy ships in the vicinity.

Unfortunately, the task force was detected by Japanese snoopers while still some 200 miles east of the islands. Although the intruders were shot down, they undoubtedly reported their sightings. Mitscher urgently radioed Nimitz, requesting permission to launch the attack, which was quickly given (Forrestel 1966:126; Morison 1968:174). At 1300 on June 11, Mitscher gracefully turned all four carrier groups, fifteen carriers with attending ships, into the fourteen-knot northeasterly trade winds and ordered their captains to launch their planes (Figure 8.13). Hundreds of courageous young men scrambled into opened cockpits, psyched up for the first major naval air engagement in the campaign for the Marianas. They knew they were either flying into history or eternity.

Shortly, hundreds of F6F Pratt & Whitney engines roared to life, their three-bladed propellers a blur. In all, 208 fighters and eight torpedo-bombers flew missions that afternoon, catching and killing 36 Japanese aircraft (Tillman, 2005:55).

Fifty-eight Hellcats guided by two Avengers from USS *Enterprise* attacked Saipan that day. Each of four divisions was assigned to a particular grid sector on the maps that were created from the photographs taken by Mitscher’s strike force back in February and the bomber attack in April. Ninety-minutes after takeoff, they hit Japanese aircraft on Marpi Point Airfield, Aslito (Figure 8.14) and a dirt strip at Chalan Kanoa. After strafing planes on the ground, the Hellcats took on any Japanese Zekes, aka Mitsubishi Zeros (A6Ms) (Okumiya 1956), Kawanishi flying boats, or any other aircraft they found in the air. The American pilots claimed 98 kills, the



**Figure 8.13.** P-47s launching from the deck of the escort carrier USS *Natoma Bay*, in support of the battle for Saipan, June 1944. US Navy, NARA.

Japanese admitted to 22 (Tillman 2005:62). That night, planes from other carriers flew Combat Air Patrol, “capping” Guam and keeping the Japanese on the ground.

As the American air fleet arrived at Saipan on the afternoon of June 11, they caught the Japanese ship *Bokuyo Maru* in Tanapag Harbor and sank it. The *Keiyo Maru* was damaged so badly it was eventually beached (Figure 8.15). Meanwhile, a Japanese convoy of 12 *Marus*, a torpedo boat, along with nine patrol craft and sub-chasers were already at sea and running for Japan. Admiral Harrill’s task force intercepted the convoy about 160 miles NNW of Saipan, and sent all but one of the *Marus* to the bottom. Thousands of Japanese civilians went down with them (Morison 1968:175).

In his Tokyo office, Admiral Toyoda received word of the June 11, 1944, American carrier air attack on the Marianas. He quickly realized that the main attack was coming at the Marianas, not Biak. At 1830 hours on June 12, Toyoda ordered Admiral Ugaki to turn his battle fleet north from the Moluccas with the battleships *Yamato* and *Musashi*, the world’s two largest, as well as the battleships *Myoko*, *Haguro*, *Noshiro* and five destroyers. Ugaki was to join up with Ozawa’s Mobile Fleet. Ozawa was reassured by Admiral Kakuta, commanding officer of the First Naval Air Division on Tinian, that he could depend on the support of 500 land-based planes operating from the Jimas, Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Truk and Palau. If he could get in the



**Figure 8.14.** Aslito Airfield, Saipan, was one of the top targets for American pilots from Mitscher's carriers on the first day of the campaign for the Marianas, June 11, 1944. NARA.

**Figure 8.15.** Japanese shipping was a primary target for plots when Mitscher's Fifth Fleet approached the Marianas. These ships were caught in Tanapag Lagoon, Saipan on June 11, 1944. This photo was taken toward the end of the battle. NARA.





first strike against Spruance's 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet near the Marianas, then with the support of Kakuta's land-based bombers he might pull victory from the jaws of defeat.

The following day Ozawa gave the order "Prepare for *A-Go* decisive operation" and left Tawi-Tawi with the Mobile Fleet (Tillman 2005:65). The submarine *Redfin* spied the Japanese fleet and notified Pearl Harbor that six carriers, four battleships, eight cruisers, and numerous other ships had left Tawi-Tawi (Costello 1982:475; Holmes 1966:336; Forrestel 1966:132; Potter 1976:298). Nimitz and Spruance now knew the Japanese fleet was on the move.

Mitscher's carrier pilots claimed 22 more kills on June 12, 1944. With air superiority established, the primary targets became shipping and military installations. Incendiary bombs were dropped on the windward side of Saipan's sugarcane fields to clear fields of fire for the Marines. Shipping was destroyed and anticipated strong points bombed.

On June 13, 1944, several Japanese snoopers, navy Betty and army Helen bombers, were shot down by the carrier Combat Air patrol. The Japanese antiaircraft gunners on Saipan and Tinian were also scoring kills against VT-16. Lieutenant Commander Robert H. Isely and Lieutenant Commander Bill Martin were shot down on Saipan that day. Martin survived. Aslito Airfield was later be renamed Isley Field, in honor of the young naval aviator. The misspelling of his name is due to an error in the newspaper report that made him famous.

Several Americans shot down that day were rescued by various craft, including one by the submarine *Stingray*. Hellcat pilot Ensign Donald C. Brandt grabbed the submarine's periscope for a ride safely out to sea. Amazingly, Brandt rode the periscope for 57 minutes before he could be picked up (Tillman 2005:68).

Also on June 13, Vice Admiral "Ching" Lee joined the bombardment of Saipan and Tinian with his seven new battleships (Potter 1960:348). For seven hours the heavy cruisers sporting 5-in and 8-in guns, along with the big battleships with their 14-in, and 16-in shells, largest in the American naval arsenal, poured heavy fire into the western shoreline of Saipan, leveling the towns of Chalan Kanoa (Figure 8.16) and Garapan, while also paying particular attention to the identified defensive positions on the Fina Sisu Ridge and Mt. Tapotchao (Morison 1968:179).

On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the "old" battleships, originally damaged at Pearl Harbor, as well as 11 more cruisers and 26 destroyers arrived off Saipan and unleashed on Japanese coastal defenses (Table 8.1). "The din robbed us totally of all sense of hearing," wrote Japanese soldier Maashi Ito in reference to the bombardment. "It wasn't the same as a boom or a roar that splits the ears: it was more like being imprisoned inside a huge metal drum that was incessantly and insufferably being beaten with a thousand iron hammers." Another Japanese soldier recalled the "extreme intensity of those flashes and boiling clouds of smoke...the area I was in was pitted like the craters of the Moon. We just clung to the earth in our shallow trenches....half buried" (Russell 1994). The objective was to destroy every building that might serve as a hiding place for a



**Figure 8.16.** The near total destruction of Chalan Kanoa after the pre-invasion bombardment in June 1944. At center right is the smoke stack from the Sugarcane factory. The pier at center was called “Sugar Dock.” The 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division landed to the south of it, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division to the south. US Navy, NARA.

Japanese rifleman (Figure 8.17). Admiral Nagumo, ashore on Saipan, now found himself on the receiving end of gunfire from the same ships he sank at Pearl Harbor.

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, other crucial preliminary actions took place along the coast of Saipan. Early that morning, two 96-man Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT), actually specially trained Seabees (Edwin Foster 2009 pers. comm.) began their mission to demolish reefs, enemy mines (if any), and place light metal landing buoys parallel to the reef to help guide in landing craft along the Red, Green, Blue, and Yellow beaches (Figure 8.18). This effort was largely successful. Although these buoys likely sank in place, it is “highly unlikely [they] have survived the 65 years in the highly corrosive salt water environment” (John Scott, February 2009 pers. comm.).

Simultaneously, a mock demonstration was held off the northwestern coast (the Scarlet and Black beaches) in an attempt to trick the Japanese into thinking that the invasion was to occur there (Figure 8.19). Another was held in the early morning hours of June 15, D-Day. The Japanese detected the UDTs during their reconnaissance and determined that the southern beaches would be the location of the invasion. However, they stopped short of removing troops from here or the other beaches. Japanese commanders later wired Tokyo to report that they had repelled an invasion in this area (Rottman 2004a:46).

**Table 8.1. Ships and Other Craft Used in the Invasion of Saipan**

Type	Name	Number
Destroyers		26
Fast Battleships		7
Cruisers		11
LCVP	Landing Craft, Vehicle Personnel	Unknown*
DUKWs	Amphibious Truck	100
LCTs	Landing Craft, Tank	68
LSTs	Landing Ship, Tank	46
LCC	Landing Craft, Control	Unknown*
LCM	Landing Craft, Mechanized	Unknown*
LCI(G)	Landing Craft, Infantry (gun)	24
	Total	110

*Redfin's* sighting of the Japanese fleet and interpretation of Japanese radio traffic indicated that the Marianas were being reinforced with more Japanese aircraft from Iwo Jima. Because Ozawa's fleet was not expected in the Marianas' waters for several days, Mitscher was able to detach the new *Yorktown*, the "Fighting Lady," with two carrier task groups to neutralize the airfields on Iwo Jima and Chichi Jima. Those two carrier groups were refueled that day by the oilers *Cimarron*, *Sabine*, and *Kaskaskia* for the 700-mile run north. USS *Cimarron* was the first of eight T-3 oilers constructed solely for the purpose of pumping Bunker C-type fuel to other ships while at sea. It was probably the most unglamorous, yet arguably the most essential element in the fleet (Tillman 2005:72).

The detachments' air fleet was brought up to full strength by replacement aircraft delivered by the escort carrier *Cophaee* while the other two groups continued to steam off the western shoreline of the Marianas in support of the invasion forces. To neutralize airbases at Truk, Woleai, Palau, and Yap, land-based bombers were sent to disrupt the Japanese-held airfields. Land-based planes were demolished in the air or on the ground before the Japanese Combined Fleet ever arrived in the area (Morison 1963:336).

Spruance ordered Turner to begin landing the V Amphibious Corps (VAC), which included the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions, with their attached 18<sup>th</sup> and 121<sup>st</sup> Naval Construction Battalions, the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Army), and the XXIV Corps Artillery (Army), on June 15, as planned. US military planners considered landing points on all sides of Saipan. On the eastern side of the island, an area designated Brown Beach on the Kagman Peninsula was considered but rejected because it was well-defended and would offer a poor exit. Three other beaches, Purple Beach on Magicienne Bay and White Beach 1 and 2 near Cape Obyan on the southern reach of the



**Figure 8.17.** Preinvasion salvos light the sky over Saipan on June 11-14, 1944, as seen from the deck of an aircraft carrier. A Hellcat prepares for takeoff on the left. US Navy, NARA.



**Figure 8.18.** Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT) blowing obstacles off the Saipan invasion beaches on D-Day minus 1, June 14, 1944. US Navy, NARA.



island, were kept as alternates. At Tanapag Harbor were the well defended Scarlet Beaches 1 and 2 and, to the north of this area were Black Beaches 1 and 2, which offered insufficient space for the large unit landing that was planned (refer to Figure 8.16) (Rottman 2004a).

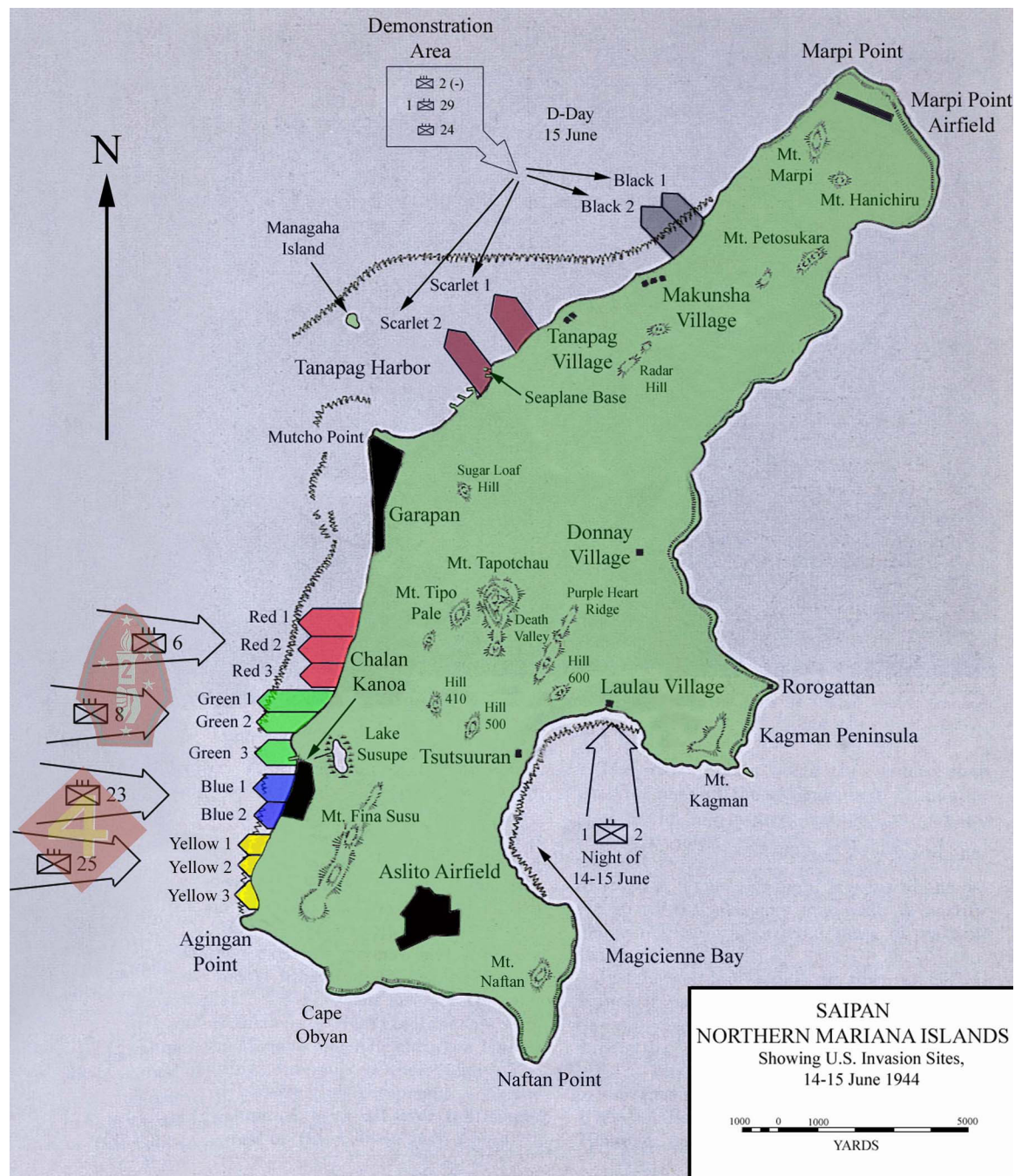
The lower western side of Saipan was chosen as the primary invasion area (Figure 8.20). Stretching approximately four miles and divided into several zones, this long sandy beach area was most favorable because its size would allow two Marine divisions to land simultaneously. A landing here would also allow the immediate capture of the airstrip at Chalan Kanoa and place direct pressure on nearby Aslito Airfield. Once secure, these air strips could be used to support the penetration northward and across Saipan. Afetna Point divided the landing beaches. To the north were Red Beaches 1, 2, and 3 and Green Beaches 1 and 2, while to the south were Green Beach 3, Blue Beaches 1 and 2, and Yellow Beaches 1, 2 and 3 (Rottman 2004).

Favorable as the lower western side of Saipan was for the American invasion, certain limitations remained. Because of its distance from the northern sector of the island, beaches in this area (Scarlet 1 and 2 and Black 1 and 2) (refer to Figure 8.19) had to be captured in order to facilitate the off-loading of supplies from landing craft. Another problem at the beaches on the lower western side of Saipan was the extensive coral reef that abutted the shore (seen in Figure 8.20). These reefs had to be negotiated with the largest use to date of amphibian tractors, also known as amtracs or Landing Vehicle, Tracked (LVTs) and amphibian tanks, also known as Landing Vehicle, Tracked, Armored (LVT(A) (Figure 8.21).

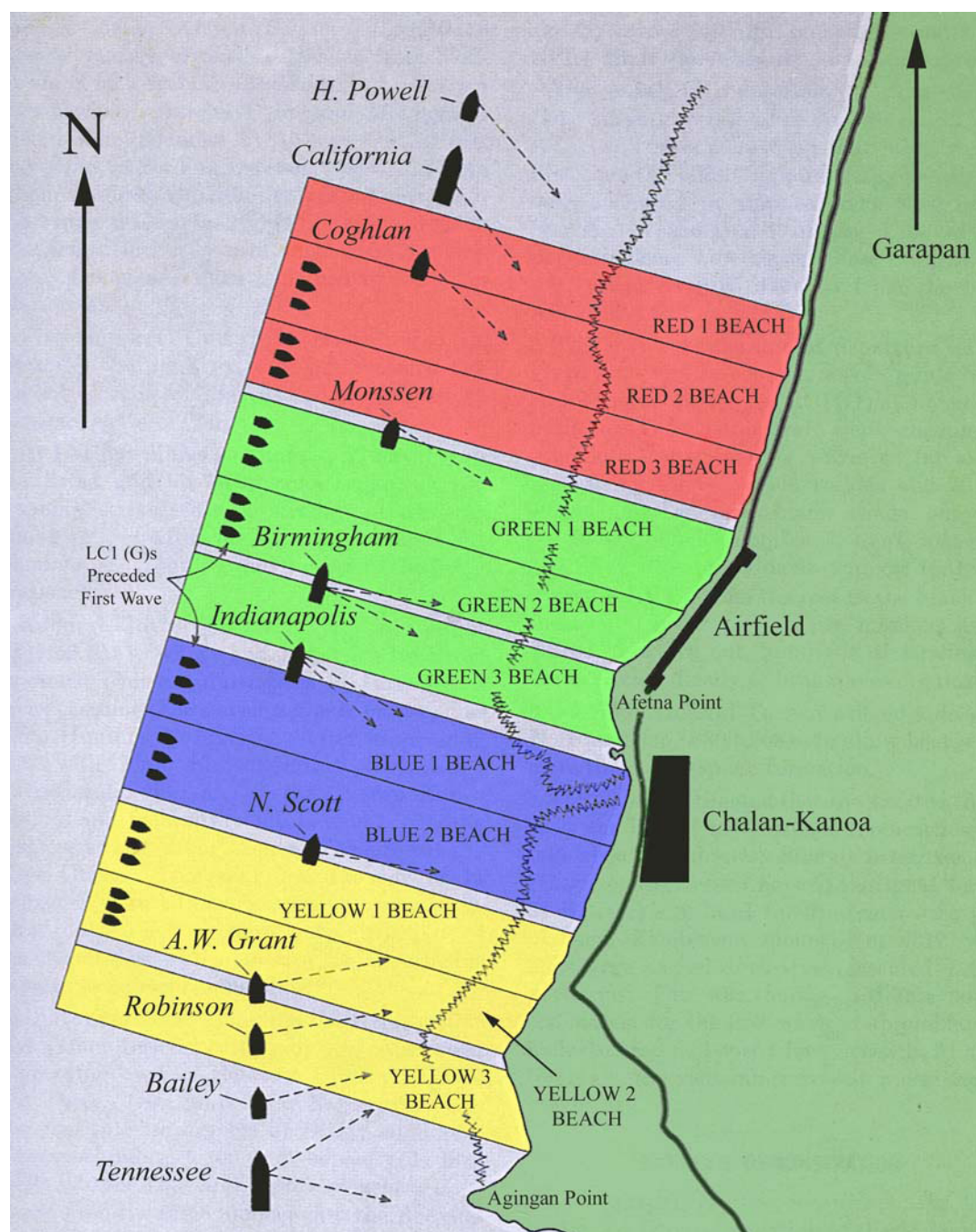
Both the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division had three amtrac battalions apiece, plus one amphibian tank battalion for the initial shore assault. This amounted to approximately 1,400 amtracs. Once ashore, the amtracs had to push forward from the beach, a tactic that was equally unprecedented and also potentially dangerous because amtracs, with their thin armor and low ground clearance, were not designed for cross-country movement (Table 8.2)

**Table 8.2. Amphibious Tracked Vehicles Used in the Invasion of Saipan**

Type	Name	Number
Destroyers		26
Fast Battleships		7
Cruisers		11
LCVP	Landing Craft, Vehicle Personnel	Unknown*
DUKWs	Amphibious Truck	100
LCTs	Landing Craft, Tank	68
LSTs	Landing Ship, Tank	46
LCC	Landing Craft, Control	Unknown*
LCM	Landing Craft, Mechanized	Unknown*
LCI(G)	Landing Craft, Infantry (gun)	24
	Total	110



**Figure 8.19.** Saipan invasion beaches plan for June 14-15, 1944. Map design by James W. Hunter III, Ships of Discovery.



**Figure 8.20.** Primary invasion beaches for Saipan showing the fire support provided by the Fifth Fleet. Specially-equipped landing craft called gunboats (LCI-G) preceded the first wave





**Figure 8.21.** The armored Landing Vehicle Tracked (LVT) was over 26 ft long and could travel at speeds of 5.2 knots on the water and 25 mph on land. Various new models reached their full potential on Saipan, following their experimental use in the Marshall Islands. US Navy, NARA.

As the Northern Landing Troops arrived off Saipan just before dawn, the island was already burning from naval and air bombardment (Smith 1987:147). The Japanese air fleet was so decimated that only 13 planes were shot down that day by the American pilots covering the landing. Nimitz later reported, “Control of the air had been affected by the original fighter sweep on 11 June.” As a result, Admiral Turner enjoyed complete air superiority throughout the Marianas campaign.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Air Attack Force (*Kushu Butai*) did manage to launch 11 Jills of Air Group 551 against a piece of the American convoy. They claimed they sank four transports and a cruiser, as well as torpedoing a battleship. However, it must have been against another navy, because there was no such damage done to the Fifth Fleet that day (Tillman 2005:82).

On the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>, Admiral Chuichi Nagumo and General Saito saw the US Pacific Fleet covering the ocean surrounding Saipan with a sheet of deadly steel. Nagumo wired Tokyo for help, yet maintained his confidence that he could hold the Marianas until Admiral Ozawa arrived with the Mobile Fleet.

Vice Admiral Turner’s War Diary for that day described the weather as “Partly cloudy—a few scattered squalls around midday, winds southeasterly 10-15 knots. Light to moderate southeast swells” (Dyer 1969:902). Early that morning, nearly 300 UDT personnel were again sent to the reef on high speed launches. Under covering fire from support ships, they swam over the reef and into the lagoon and made a foot-by-foot daylight reconnaissance of the landing area. They checked the water depth, making sure that the amphibious tractors would have no problem crossing the barrier reef and approaching the beach (Dyer 1969:901-2).



At 0542 on June 15, 1944, Turner gave the order, “Land the Landing Forces” (Morison, 1968:190). The enormous American amphibian force was assembled for the invasion. Marines climbed down boarding nets from troop ships and jumped into their Higgins Boats or into landing ships and boarded amphibious tractors. Sixty-four LSTs each loaded with amtracs full of Marines were aligned 4,000 yards off the eight identified landing beaches. They opened their giant maws. Amtracs and DUKWs began splashing out of the hefty Landing Ship, Tank (LST) vessels. Landing Ship, Dock (LSD) vessels launched their Landing Craft, Mechanized (LCM) vessels also fully manned with Marines. At 0813, Landing Control Officer Commodore P. S. Theiss sent the first wave of troop-laden amphibious tractors on their run to the beach (Figure 8.22). The phalanx of 600 amtracs (Costello 1982:477) headed toward the beach, preceded by twenty-four gunboats mounting 40-mm guns, and LCI-Rs with rockets. Twelve amtracs landed on each beach in the first wave, supported by 18 armored amtracs. The 72 square mile island, with its 1,554-foot-high Mt. Tapotchau towering above the landing beaches, must have looked terribly large to the men who previously landed only on the low-lying atolls of the Gilbert and Marshall Islands (Dyer 1969:905; Karig 1948:230).

When they were within 1,250 yards of the beach, the fire support ships with the fleet opened fire over their heads and directly onto the beach. As they crossed the barrier reef, planes from the carriers swooped down along the beach, strafing and firing rockets.

The Japanese generally held their fire until the amtracs reached the lip of the coral reef whereupon they rained artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire upon the Marines. The ocean swells grew as heavy as the smoke from naval gunfire, making it difficult for the amtracs to find their correct beaches. Numerous amtracs were destroyed or rendered inoperable as a result. Dozens of Marines lost their lives when amtracs were overturned in the rough surf (Crowl 1960; Rottman 2004). By 0844, the first wave of amtracs crawled up on the beach and Marine boots hit the beach (Figure 8.23). The same Marines that landed first at Guadalcanal and then Tarawa now tasted Saipan sand (Dyer 1969:905; Morison 1968:192; Potter 1976:297).

Despite intense Japanese defensive fire, 8,000 Marines were ashore within 20 minutes along a four-mile front, centered on Sugar Dock in Chalan Kanoa (Blue Beaches 1 and 2) (Costello 1982:477; Karig 1948:231; Morison 1963:328). Within eight minutes troops began fighting for the unfinished Japanese airstrip just inshore from the landing beaches. Eight LSTs filled with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions artillery landed right behind their troops. Two more LSTs landed the XXIV Corps Artillery with their 155-mm howitzers and rifled guns. Despite congestion on the beach, the Corps artillery quickly took assigned positions and began firing.

Seabee John Ratomski, the Shore Party Commander for Combat Team 23, described the ride to shore in *PC-581*, the control boat for Blue Beaches:

During the trip . . . the preliminary bombardment began and the air strikes were being made. . . . We saw two planes shot down over Saipan on the way in. “H” hour was set for 0830 and after a 10 minute delay the first wave flag was run up on *PC-581* and



**Figure 8.22.** Amtracs and Higgins Boats congregate off Saipan in preparation for landing. The landing beaches are smoking from naval gunfire and close air support (Russell 1994).



**Figure 8.23.** Marines and amtracs landing on Blue Beach, Saipan, June 15, 1944. Although this scene may look peaceful, bullets were flying just above the sandy berm. USMC photo, NARA.

the assault began. The assault waves went in perfect formation and timing. . . . we watched the first wave hit the beach and it seemed that they were receiving fire from shore, although it did not seem very effective. The first wave landed and shortly . . . the fire from shore became intense on the following waves and some LVT's were hit. About this time shells hit the bow [of our boat], going through the craft without exploding. The control boat began to skirt around to keep from being bracketed. . . and [we saw] that heavy artillery and mortar fire was being encountered on the beach. . . Fifteen LCVPs loaded with ammunition and water, forming a floating dump also came alongside. . . Communication from the shore during these hours was very spotty and no clear picture of developments ashore was possible. At about 1000 I received a message from Blue Beach 2 and noted that the LVTs were available to transfer men from the LCVP over the reef. . . . At about 1100 word was received from Blue Beach 1 and it was possible for LCVPs to come in the channel in front of the sugar mill and reach the pier at the north end of Blue Beach 1. By 1230 the main part of the shore party had been sent ashore. LCVPs were going through the channel on Blue 1 in single file . . . and landed on a Jap pier on Blue Beach 1. . . The shore party was well dug in and had their machine guns set up and had communications with Blue Beach 2. At 1730 I [came] under heavy fire by the enemy. . . Prisoners were now coming in and a stockade was erected on Blue Beach 1. All during the night the enemy continued shelling the beach and our front lines. . . . Casualties suffered by the 121<sup>st</sup> Naval Construction Battalion were 5 killed and 11 wounded. Prisoners held during the night were approximately 250 (Ratomski pers. comm., June 15, 2009).

The beach was chaotic and crowded, especially in the northern Red and Green Beaches (refer to Figure 8.20). Because of the heavy swell encountered, the American landing in this area was several hundred yards north of where it was intended to be. In all areas, Japanese fire was very heavy and came from trenches and "spiderholes" along the immediate shoreline as well as the high ground beyond (Figure 8.24). The overland amtrac charge, a calculated risk, proved disastrous. The flimsy amtracs became stranded in marshy areas, craters, and other obstructions on the ground. Casualties for the Marines mounted. Many chose to abandon their armored machines in favor of walking or crawling. Problems increased as the morning wore on. At the Northern beaches, two 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division command posts were destroyed, killing battalion commanders and key staff. In the south, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division indecisively struggled against Japanese tanks for hours.

As desperate Marines crawled and fought for their lives on the now bloody beaches north and south of Sugar Dock, battleship after battleship fired multiple broadsides of either armor-piercing or high-explosive 16-in shells over their heads to knock out the Japanese bunkers beyond. They were the largest ship's gun ammunition in the US Navy at that time, four-and-one-half-feet long and weighing up to 2,700 pounds. To the Marines on the beach, a broadside of four 16-inch shells sounded like a freight-train as it screamed overhead then crashed into the hillside, shaking the earth beneath them.



**Figure 8.24.** Congestion on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division Red and Green Beaches was a problem. An abandoned and damaged amtrac is visible in the top right of the photo (Crowl 1960).

According to Marine Rick Spooner, who landed with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, the smoke screen that had been laid down to protect them also confused their boat driver and they landed far to the north of their prescribed landing area. As they hit the beach, it was littered with dead and pieces of dead (Figure 8.25). The new guys were terrified, trying to link up with their units and get off the beach. The beach, Spooner remembers, “. . . had the stench of fresh meat, the smell of death” (Major Rick Spooner 2009 pers. comm.).

In testimony to the determination of the Japanese defenders, of the 20,000 men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions who landed on the 15<sup>th</sup>, ten percent were killed (Potter 1960:349). Accurate Japanese mortar and artillery fire were able to hold the Marines back from achieving their day-one objective until the third day of battle.

One of the most dangerous jobs in the landing force belonged to a small group of Seabees with the 302<sup>nd</sup> Special Pontoon Detachment. Fuel and ammunition barges were carried on the side of some of the hundreds of cargo ships that rode with the fleet to the invasion beach. Once anchored offshore, the ship's crew lowered the barges and tied them along-side, the Seabees on deck then downloaded a variety of cargo onto the barges. When properly loaded, the 302<sup>nd</sup> Seabees drove them to shore, unloaded their cargo under fire in sweltering 80+ degree heat with the help of the Seabee shore battalion, then headed back to their mother ship for another load. A run to shore and back meant dodging Japanese artillery shells. Their most common





**Figure 8.25.** Marines carrying 30 cal carbines coming ashore on Saipan under withering fire from the Japanese defenders. US Navy, NARA.

sizes were 75-mm, 100-mm and 120-mm high-explosive and variants for armor piercing or illumination (John Scott February 2009, pers. comm.).

Some of the barges became floating gas stations. Carrying a deckful of 50-gallon drums of high octane gas, they served as mobile refueling stations for amphibious tractors or for whoever needed a tank full of gas. Other barges became floating bombs, carrying bullets, bombs and mortar shells to the beach. Each barge averaged three trips a day for the fifty-four days of battle—with only three nights ashore (Huie 1999:115).

On the evening of D-Day, Seabees were ordered to construct floating causeways from pontoons that were held within the Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs). Throughout the night, the Seabees maneuvered the various pieces through the channel and assembled them at the Chalan Kanoa beachhead. By daybreak supplies were being unloaded from landing craft directly onto pontoon causeways. While vital to the continued success of the American operation on Saipan, unloading supplies and ammunition from barges on the beachhead became monotonous as combat moved further inland. This “grueling mission of moving ammunition and other supplies to the beach... became a routine of eating bland c-rations and sleeping on the barge for a boring 54 days of blazing sun or miserable rain,” remembered one Seabee who served at Saipan. “The Coxswain often grumbled: it is noble to suffer. We [the Seabees] were granted the undistinguished title, ‘Bastards of the Beaches’” (Moore 2002) (Figures 8. 26 and 8.27).



**Figure 8.26.** Unloading supplies on the Blue Beaches at Chalan Kanoa (Crowl 1960). After unloading cargo, landing craft awaited wounded who needed transportation to hospital ships off shore.



**Figure 8.27.** Pontoon barge and causeway at Chalan Kanoa erected by Seabees under fire. These pontoon causeways allowed LCTs to unload their tracked vehicles easily against rugged coral abutments. NARA.

The US Navy did not get by without damage that day. A battery of guns from Tinian hit the battleship USS *Tennessee*, wrecking a 5-inch gun and killing eight men (Karig 1948:231).

By dark, the 14<sup>th</sup> Marines with their artillery and most of the 10<sup>th</sup> Marines artillery were also on the beach, attempting to get inland and dug in for the next day's advance, expanding its front north along the beach and driving directly inland toward Aslito Airfield. By nightfall "the Marines' positions were good, but the enemy's were much better" (Morison 1968:199). The Japanese launched several counter-attacks that night, but all were repulsed.

According to Lieutenant General Holland Smith, USMC:

Our landing was the most advanced mechanical demonstration we had ever made in the Pacific. We had 800 amphibious vehicles (LVTs)—troop-carrying tractors, tanks armed with 75 mm howitzers and 37 mm guns, and the new LVT (4)s, a model with a back-dropping ramp that unloaded our artillery directly ashore. In addition, we had a battalion of Army DUKW's (Smith 1987:149).

As if the landings on Saipan were not a big enough misery for the Japanese leadership in Tokyo, the US Army Air Forces launched the first B-29 Superfortress strike from China against Japan that day.

Prime Minister Hideki Tojo wired Saito on Saipan encouraging him to defend the island. Saito responded, perhaps cynically: "I have received your honorable Imperial words. By becoming the bulwark of the Pacific, with 10,000 Pacific deaths, we hope to requite the imperial favor" (Brooks 2005:197; Hoyt 1980:195).

The Marines' first night on Saipan was miserable, if not horrific. The stench of death hung thick in the air everywhere. Japanese infiltrators crawled toward Marine foxholes. Starshells lit up the battlefield, casting eerie shadows. Shellfire poured over their heads in both directions as the Japanese maintained a steady rain of mortar fire from the high ground above the beachhead. The Japanese used two kinds—the 50-mm "Knee Mortar" that doesn't have fins and the larger 81-mm/90-mm that had fins on the back (pers. comm. John Scott). In the hands of experienced men this weapon was deadly. Many an MIA resulted from a direct mortar hit. At the same time, US naval gunfire support teams and the Marine Corps gun crews conducted counter-battery fire with vigor.

At 0300, in the early morning hours of the 16<sup>th</sup>, a Japanese bugler announced the long-awaited counterattack. General Saito threw half of his tank force against the thinly stretched Marine lines. Again the Japanese counterattack was repulsed, but again the Marines took heavy casualties. As weary, frightened Marines awaited their first dawn on Saipan, they began to realize it was going to be a long, hard uphill battle.



## Operation A-Go, the Naval Battle that Never Was, and the Great Mariana's Turkey Shoot

Admiral Toyoda knew about the impending invasion of Saipan since June 11. On the June 12, he gave the order to prepare for *A-Go*. At 0855 on June 15, as the first Marines hit the beach on Saipan, Toyoda advised Admiral Ozawa that they would sail to face the American Navy. "The Combined Fleet will attack the enemy in the Marianas area," he said, "and annihilate the invasion force. Activate *A-Go* Operation for decisive battle" (Morison 1968:221). Ozawa (Figure 8.28) forwarded Toyoda's message to his own commanders, who quickly headed into the Philippine Sea (Hoyt 2000:385).

Ozawa did not leave undetected. The submarine *Flying Fish* spotted the Japanese Mobile Fleet leaving the San Bernardino Strait, separating Samar from Luzon in the Philippines, as it headed toward the Marianas (Dull 1978: 304; Potter 1960:350; Tillman 2005:83). The captain of the submarine counted three flattops, three battle wagons and numerous escorts (Tillman 2005:83). That same day, the submarine *Seahorse*, spotted another Japanese force further south



**Figure 8.28.** Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa, Commander Japanese Mobile Fleet, 1944. Admiral Ozawa was convinced he could deal a significant blow to the American Pacific Fleet, if he received strong support from land-based bombers in the Marianas, Truk and Palau. NARA.



on a northerly course out of the Surigao Strait, also in the Philippines. It was Ugaki with the giant 18-inch guns of *Musashi* and *Yamato* leading his battle force. The Americans had nothing comparable to these behemoths.

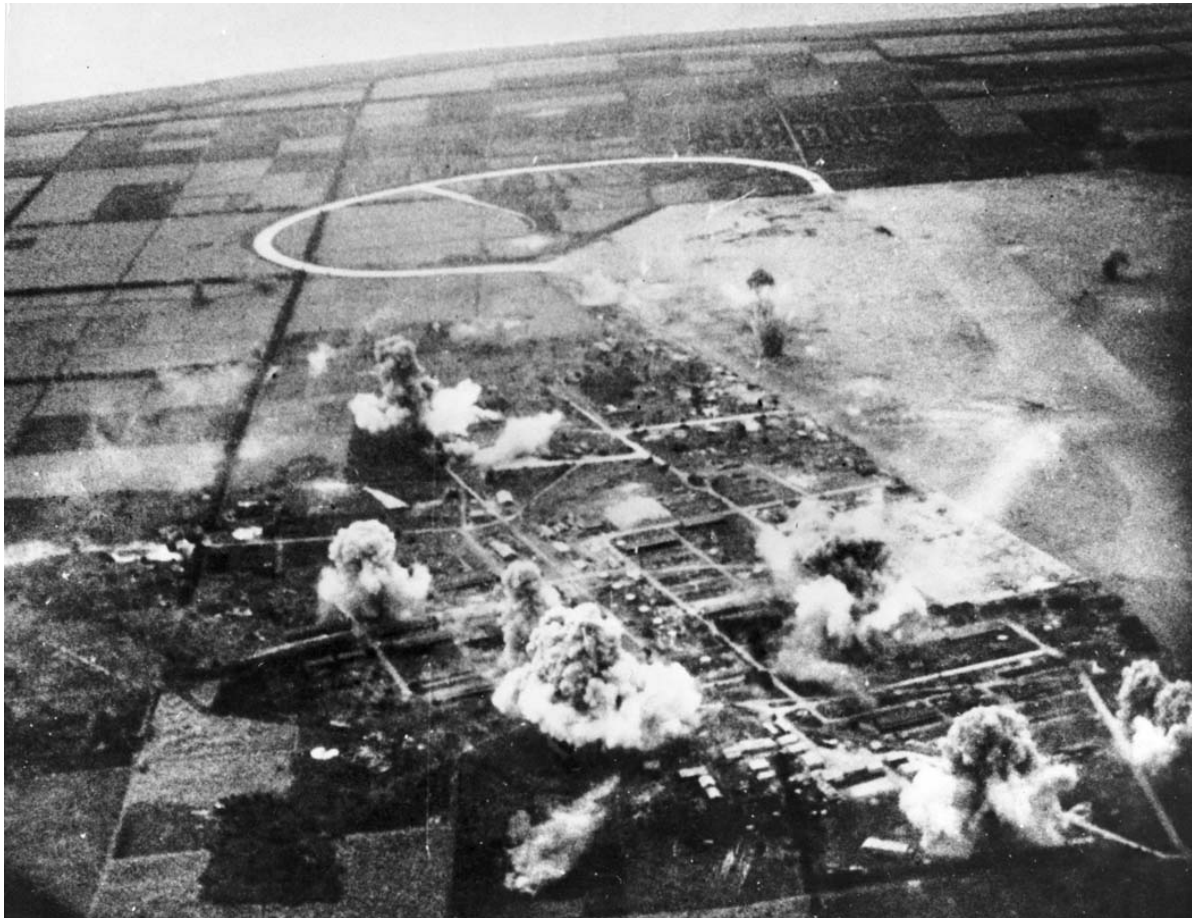
Informed that the Japanese fleet was enroute to the Marianas, Spruance postponed the invasion of Guam. That decision cost many Marine lives when the battle for Guam finally came. The Japanese were preparing their defenses expecting the Marines to land at Tumon Bay on the western side of Guam. The preinvasion bombardment, however, revealed to them that the main landings would come instead at Asan and Agat, farther to the south. The Marines and GIs landing on those beaches would now face far more heavily fortified defenses in both sectors. The weeks between the preinvasion bombardment and the recapture of Guam were also a nightmare for the Chamorros on Guam. Supposedly to keep them away from the battle front, they were rounded up and marched to stockades established in the southwestern and southern sections of the island where their treatment was brutal (Farrell 1984).

Spruance and Turner made several other decisions on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Spruance had the responsibility to meet the Japanese fleet and attempt to destroy it if possible, but his primary responsibility was the invasion of Saipan. The first decision was for Turner to continue with his invasion on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The Southern Attack force as well as all other ships not needed for unloading troops and supplies or for ship-to-shore bombardment in support of the troops on shore were redeployed to safer quarters on the east side of the island. The 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was to land immediately. Spruance and Turner were confident the troops had sufficient supplies already on the beach to hold off any counterattack Saito might launch until the pending naval engagement was concluded.

Second, Spruance took five heavy, three light cruisers and 13 destroyers from Turner's fire-support groups and added them to Admiral Lee's Battle Line, now composed of seven new battleships, thirteen cruisers, and twenty-six destroyers. Spruance sent this vanguard force southwest, toward the enemy, to maximum communications distance (Dull 1978:302; Karig 1948:234).

Third, he formed the old battleships into a defensive line some 25 miles to the west of Saipan, just in case Ugaki's great battle-cruiser fleet attempted an end run against the landing forces (Dyer 1969:913). Finally, Spruance ordered Mitscher's carrier task force off Iwo Jima to refuel and rendezvous with him 120 miles due west of Tinian to meet Ozawa's force. Only the escort carriers remained behind to support the invasion forces. The carriers still in the southern Marianas were to focus on neutralizing the airfields on Rota, Tinian (Figure 8.29) and Guam. With those decisions made, Spruance left Saipan aboard *Indianapolis* to rejoin Task Force 58, as it prepared to face Ozawa and the Imperial Mobile Fleet.

Meanwhile in the Philippine Sea, Imperial Fleet oilers linked up with Ugaki's battleships to refuel before he moved on to rendezvous with Ozawa's fleet (Tillman 2005:86). USS *Cavalla* spotted the First Mobile Fleet some six hundred miles west of Guam (Tillman, 2005:89).



**Figure 8.29.** As with all Japanese air bases in the area, planes from Task Force 58 bombed and strafed Ushi Airfield, Tinian, on June 12, 1944. Here, bombs are seen falling on the Japanese First Naval Air Division headquarters base, disrupting General Kakuta's ability to launch aircraft against the invading American fleet. US Navy, NARA.

Meanwhile, Admiral Kakuta continued sending snoopers aircraft from various bases to find and report on Task Force 58. Each sortie cost him planes as the American carrier air patrols shot them down one after the other. Hellcats from the escort carriers around the Marianas scored 23 kills out of 31 claims (Tillman, 2005:98). One Japanese plane did make it through the screen, putting a bomb through the aft elevator of escort carrier *Fanshaw Bay* south of Saipan. The damage was sufficient to force it to retire to Pearl Harbor for repairs. At ten the evening of June 17, *Cavalla* sighted Ugaki's fleet some 350 miles northeast of Samar (Tillman 2005:90).

The two Japanese fleets were still 420 miles apart, both vectoring on Saipan and sending up a variety of long-range reconnaissance planes. Mitscher's carriers were now stretched across 425 miles of ocean, each flying a combat air patrol looking for intruders. The fleet's airmen encountered and shot down several Bettys, Kates and Jake floatplanes that were spying on the fleet.

The two largest fleets ever assembled were headed toward each other for what both commanding officers hoped would be the fleet engagement that decided the fate of the war. Ozawa was clearly aware that the odds were against him. The Combined Japanese Mobile Fleet numbered nine carriers with 430 planes, 5 battleships, 13 cruisers and 28 destroyers. The Americans, on the other hand, were now able to bring to bear 15 carriers with 819 planes, 7 battleships, 21 cruisers and 69 destroyers, all itching to avenge Pearl Harbor (Forrestel 1966:136; Morison, 1968:233). Ozawa's only hope was support from Kakuta's land-based bombers.

As dawn broke on Sunday morning June 18, Ozawa was confident of victory. He knew that Spruance, in command of the Fifth Fleet, would protect the invasion of Saipan first and foremost. Ozawa's Zeros had 210 miles more range than the American Hellcats (Dull 1978:304), and his carriers would be sailing into the prevailing wind. This meant he could launch his attack planes on the run, then linger just out of range of the American aircraft and safely await the outcome. Kakuta also assured Ozawa of support from 500 long-range land-based bombers and fighters, armed, fueled and ready to fly from surrounding Pacific island bases. With Ozawa's fleet guarding the western gate, the American fleet would be trapped like ducks on a pond when the Japanese naval air forces arrived from all directions like flies on honey.

A lucky Japanese pilot got a clear sighting of Task Force 58 on the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 180 miles west-northwest of Guam. An hour later another Japanese scout reported on the American fleet in greater detail. With his aircraft having significantly greater range than the American Hellcats, Ozawa decided to maintain his advantage over the Americans by keeping them out of range. He pulled back knowing that Spruance would cling close to the Marianas. Ozawa would choose the moment of battle, deciding to maneuver the Mobile Fleet into position to strike the first blow early in the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>.

Mitscher had a different idea. Before daybreak on June 18, he was advised of the previous night's *Cavalla* sighting. Mitscher estimated that Ozawa's fleet would be about 600 miles west of Saipan by dawn. He suggested to Spruance that they "come to a westerly course at 0130 in order to commence treatment of the enemy at 0500" (Potter 1960:352). However, Admiral "Ching" Lee, who fought a night engagement with the Japanese Navy before, advised Spruance that a night fight with the Japanese fleet with new untrained-crews operating new guns on new ships was a bad idea (Tillman 2005:92). Spruance took Lee's advice and turned down Mitscher's suggestion. Although Spruance didn't know it, his chance to face the enemy fleet in decisive action had just vanished. Right or wrong, Spruance's decision not to pursue the Japanese fleet aggressively that night would cast an indelible shadow over his otherwise untarnished war record.

Spruance established a defensive wall against the waves of Japanese planes he expected Ozawa to throw at him, lining up the four groups of carriers about 12 miles apart on a north-south line, perpendicular to the traditional easterly winds. He then deployed Lee's Battle Line forward in front of the line of carrier groups (Forrestel 1966:142; Morison 1963:338). Leading the fleet of carriers, the battle wagons, cruisers and destroyers formed a dense anti-aircraft cross-fire designed to prevent enemy planes from reaching the carrier fleet.

Preceding the Battle Line, underwater, silently searching for the enemy fleet was a picket line of 25 submarines (Dull 1978:311).

Ozawa made a crucial error that day. Somehow believing he was progressing undetected, he radioed Kakuta at Tinian and requested coordinated land-based air strikes in support of the Mobile Fleet's carriers the next morning (Dull 1978:305; Tillman, 2005:99). Of course, American listening posts picked it up and triangulated an approximate location, which was forwarded to Spruance. Ozawa's early morning strike would not come as a surprise.-

Spruance lay in wait for Ozawa near the Marianas. He would protect the invasion forces from a flanking attack and then overwhelm Ozawa with superior air and ship firepower when he arrived. He was confident his fleet could absorb whatever punishment Ozawa could throw at them, and then he would counter-punch.

As Sunday the 18th became Monday the 19th, both fleet commanders decided on their course of action for the day. All hands were aware that battle was eminent. Many sailors and pilots, Japanese and American, would be checking into Davy Jones' Locker on the morrow.

In the early morning hours of June 19, the two opposing fleets were charging toward the zone of anticipated conflict. By 0600 Spruance was about 230 miles west-southwest of Guam, heading southwest by west (Dull 1978: 305). Ozawa was about 300 miles farther southwest, outside the range of Mitscher's aircraft, but with the US fleet within range of his unarmored Zeroes. Unfortunately, Guam had only about 50 planes left instead of the 500 Kakuta claimed. He would not release them from their bases at Truk, Yap, and the Palaus (Dull 1978:305).

Taking the initiative, Ozawa launched his first strike into a brisk northeasterly trade wind at about 0800. At 0910 the submarine *Albacore* slipped through Ozawa's destroyer screen and fatally torpedoed the heavy carrier *Taiho* (Dull: 1978:308). By 1000 the US fleet spotted the incoming Japanese planes (Hoyt 2000:391). The aerial melee began when the Hellcats met the Zekes about 60 miles in front of Lee's battle fleet. Of the first 69 planes Ozawa launched, only four made it through the Battle Line. Thanks to the Hellcats, not one Zeke made it to Mitscher's carriers. As more waves of Japanese planes arrived, they too were shot down. At 1220 *Cavalla* got lucky again and put four torpedoes into the heavy carrier *Shokaku*, which blew up and sank at 1510 (Dull 1978:308).

Although Ozawa was not aware of it, by 1500 on June 19, 330 of his 430 carrier planes together with 16 of his 43 float planes were lost (Morison 1968:320). He did not discover the truth until his carrier commanders reported the full extent of the losses the following day. Amazingly, Kakuta told him that his land-based planes sank a number of American carriers, that a good number of his carrier based planes had safely landed on Guam, and that hundreds of other planes were being called into the fight. Regardless of Kakuta's claims, Ozawa knew that he was already defeated and turned to the northwest with the remaining 102 aircraft to prepare for the following day's engagement (Dull 1978:308). This lopsided aerial battle became known as "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot."



For some reason, Spruance did not undertake a search on the night of June 19 for the wounded Japanese fleet and had no idea where they were the following morning. Ozawa, after receiving an actual report from his commanding officers and accepting the futility of the situation and now not wanting to risk his fleet, regrouped the Mobile Fleet by noon on June 20, and turned for home waters at 16 knots. Ozawa's hopes for a safe exit were dashed when Mitscher's aviators caught up with them and launched a late afternoon attack.

Ozawa resolutely launched his remaining planes — including 40 Zeke's and 28 fighter-bombers. As soon as the final plane lifted off, he bent on 24 knots on a beeline for Okinawa. On day two of the battle, the Japanese lost 65 more carrier planes (Morison 1968:321) and the fleet lost badly needed oilers, tankers and the carrier *Hiyo*. Ozawa's flagship *Zuikaku* was severely damaged. At 2030, with Ozawa about 300 miles from Okinawa and Spruance 400 miles astern, some 675 miles from Saipan, Spruance called off the chase and ordered the fleet to return to Saipan (Forrestel 1966:145). To their credit, Ozawa's flyers would shoot down 20 American planes that evening in defense of their fleet (Tillman, 2005:219). But Operation *A-Go* had failed.

One way or the other, what portended to be the greatest naval battle in history never materialized. Although the Mobile Fleet was emasculated of its air arm, many of its ships fought well in the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October. *Zuikaku* and the giant battleship *Musashi* were not sunk until October 24, 1944. *Musashi*'s sister ship, *Yamato*, also bearing giant 18-inch guns, was not sunk until April 1945. Despite the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet's failure to destroy the Japanese Mobile Fleet in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, historian Barrett Tillman contends that "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot" in the Battle of the Philippine Sea remains by far the biggest day of aerial combat in American history" (Tillman 2005:5).

### **Operation Tearaway: Securing Saipan**

On June 21, three days after leaving Saipan to defend his invasion forces from the advancing Imperial Japanese Mobile Fleet, Admiral Spruance returned to anchor *Indianapolis* off Chalan Kanoa. He immediately met with Admiral Turner aboard his flagship, *Rocky Mount*, to get an update on the battle for Saipan (Forrestel 1966:147). Spruance was not surprised to learn that because of the far greater number of defenders on Saipan than expected, perhaps as many as 32,000, the operation was in a shambles and the overall approach was being rewritten by the moment. Spruance recognized that the battle was going to take much longer than expected. It was time to make adjustments.

The situation on Saipan was so serious that the 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Marine Brigade, originally scheduled for the recapture of Guam, was ordered to remain standing by off Saipan for a possible landing. Recognizing that he would now not have enough men to secure Guam, Spruance sent for the cavalry. He wired Nimitz urgently requesting that the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, still in Hawai'i, be shipped to Guam as soon as possible. He could not set the landing date for Guam until the 77<sup>th</sup> was on hand (Dyer 1969:916; Forrestel 1966:148).

Carrier strikes against Saipan and the other northern islands continued from June 15 through 18. Planes from TF 58 carriers that remained behind sank the auxiliary submarine chasers *Cha 54*

and *Cha 56* on June 15 and 17, respectively, at Rota, and the guard boat *Marudia Maru* on June 17 near Saipan. On June 18, the destroyer *Phelps*, with a contingent of landing craft gunboats (LCI-G) and amphibian tractors (LVT-A) fought between 25 and 30 Japanese landing barges running southward-bound out of Garapan and sank 13 of them ([www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/USN-Chron/USN-Chron-1944.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/USN-Chron/USN-Chron-1944.html)).

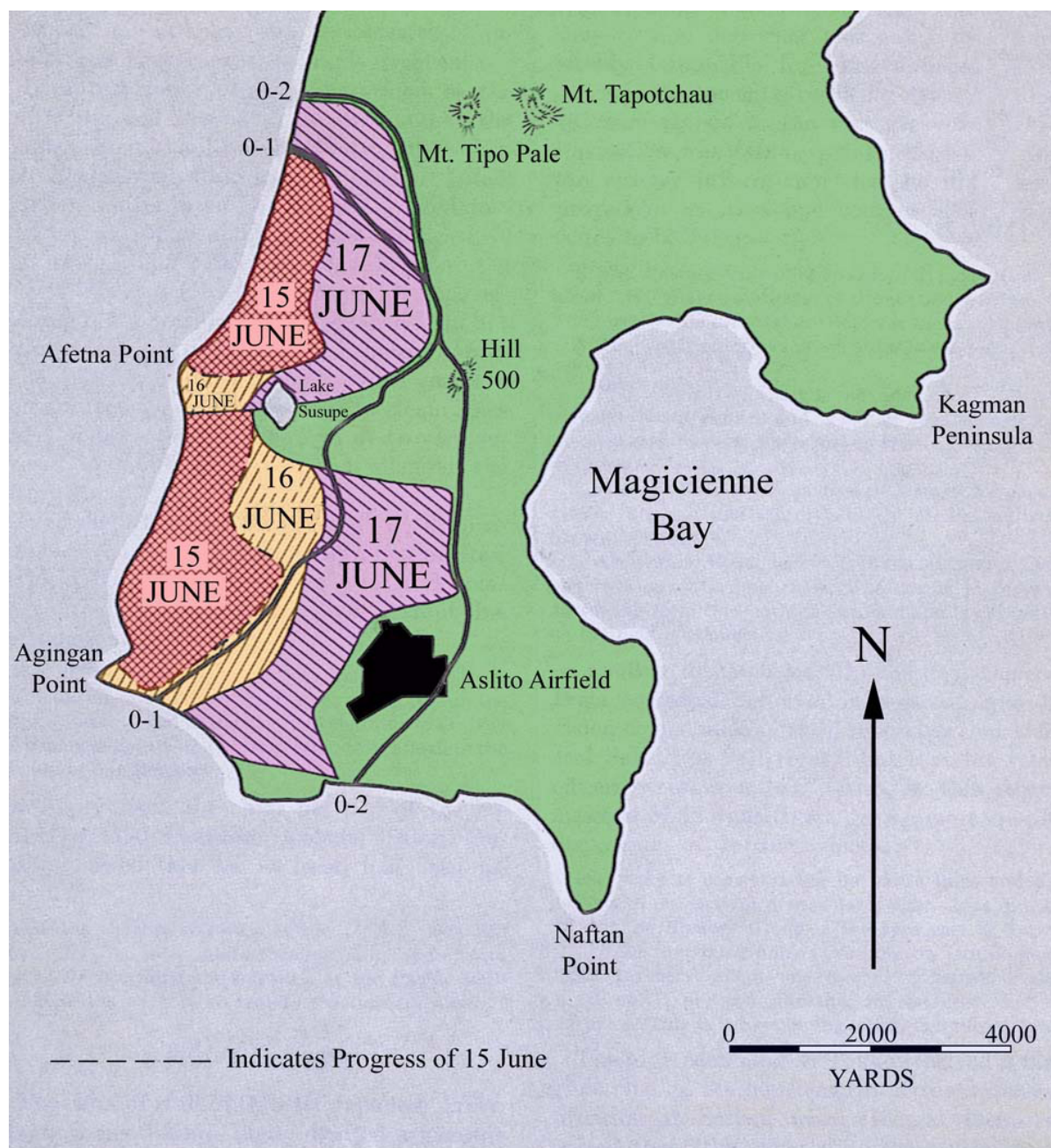
The news on Saipan was not all bad. By “Dog Day plus Three,” June 17, 1944, (Figure 8.30) nearly 50,000 US troops were landed on Saipan’s western beaches, along with a large amount of artillery (Dyer 1969:910). With tanks and artillery ashore, the Marines were able to overcome the fierce Japanese resistance at Chalan Kanoa. Elements of the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division captured Aslito Airfield, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division reached the east coast on the 18<sup>th</sup>. As the two Marine divisions began to pivot for the drive to the north, Army Engineers repaired the 3,600-foot-long runway (Hoffman 1950:4) at Aslito Airfield so that aerial medical evacuations could begin and US Army Air Force fighters could land.

The 318<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force, was loaded aboard the escort carriers *Natoma Bay* and *Manila Bay* at Pearl, along with their flight and ground crews, for the long ride to the Marianas. Along with other ships in Task Force 58 not needed for the invasion, they stood by about 60 miles east of Saipan. The first of their technicians had landed on Saipan the night of June 18, and dug in.

Four days later, the 804<sup>th</sup> Aviation Engineers landed. They quickly deployed their heavy equipment and then bulldozed a road from the beach to the edge of the captured Japanese airfield now called Isley Field. By the time Spruance returned to Saipan, it was operational. That afternoon Captain Harry E. McAfee, commanding officer of the 318<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group and pilot of a P-47 Thunderbolt, was catapulted from the deck of the escort carrier *Natoma Bay*. The rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron landed on Saipan the following day. No sooner were they on the ground, than they were called upon to help knock out Japanese pockets of resistance all over the island (Howard 1946:222). Not all the planes from the 73<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Squadron were able to join them until the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

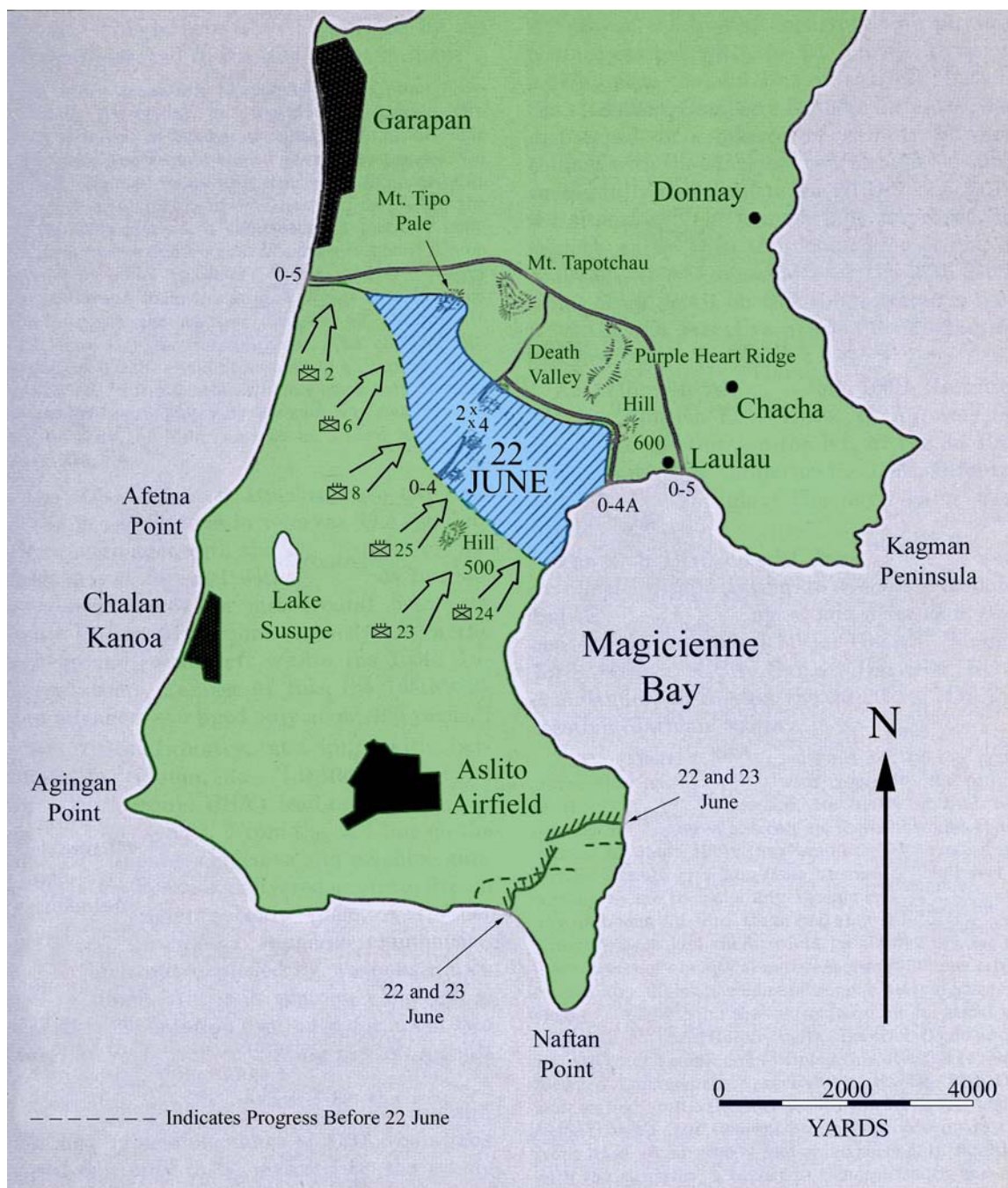
The first Army pilot lost in the Marianas campaign was Lieutenant Wayne F. Kobler. He was making a low level strike on Tinian’s Gurguan Point when a Japanese soldier set off a buried 500-pound bomb directly beneath him, enveloping his plane. The second airstrip on Saipan was named Kobler Field in his honor (Howard 1946:228).

On June 22, the battle for Saipan began anew. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division cut across the island to the eastern shoreline, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division secured the western coastline north of Chalan Kanoa to the base of Tapotchao (Figure 8.31). The 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions now formed a continuous line from Chalan Kanoa to Magicienne Bay, and prepared to advance north. Knowing that the battered 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division’s lines were thin, General Holland Smith, USMC, ordered the 27<sup>th</sup> Army Infantry Division to enter the front lines between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions on June 22<sup>nd</sup> at a place called Death Valley (Dyer 1969:916).



**Figure 8.30.** Saipan progress line June 15-17, 1944. Note that the first day's objective was not achieved until June 17<sup>th</sup>. There were twice as many Japanese troops on the island as expected. Map design by James W. Hunter III, Ships of Discovery.





**Figure 8.31.** Saipan progress line as of June 22, 1944. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions have now cut the island in half. Because the front was widening, General Holland Smith, USMC, decided to insert the 27<sup>th</sup> Army Infantry Division between the two Marine divisions, directly into Death Valley. There the Japanese prepared a defense in depth for their commanding general's headquarters. Map design by James W. Hunter III, Ships of Discovery.



Meanwhile, the 29<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division fought their way up the cave-pocked north face of 1,554-foot Mt. Tapotchau, finally subduing it on June 27. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division overran Kagman Peninsula the same day and the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry division finally got a foothold on “Purple Heart Ridge.” After ten hard days, the Americans gained the high ground. From then on they could fight downhill.

By then, about eighty percent of the Japanese forces had been eliminated from Saipan. Yet it took another twelve days of bloody cave-to-cave fighting and a last banzai (*Gyokusasi*) before the island was declared secured. Pockets of dedicated Japanese soldiers, determined to keep the cost of Saipan soil expensive, stopped the advancing Marines in occasional intense battles. Spruance later pleaded, “We simply didn’t have enough troops [at Saipan], and the reason we didn’t have enough troops was that we didn’t have enough ships to bring them in” (Dyer 1969:917). They were tied up at Normandy.

By this time, General Saito was aware of the Japanese losses in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. The Imperial Fleet would not be visiting Saipan. Under constant pursuit by American air power, Saito lamented to Tokyo, “There is no hope of victory in places where we do not have control of the air.”

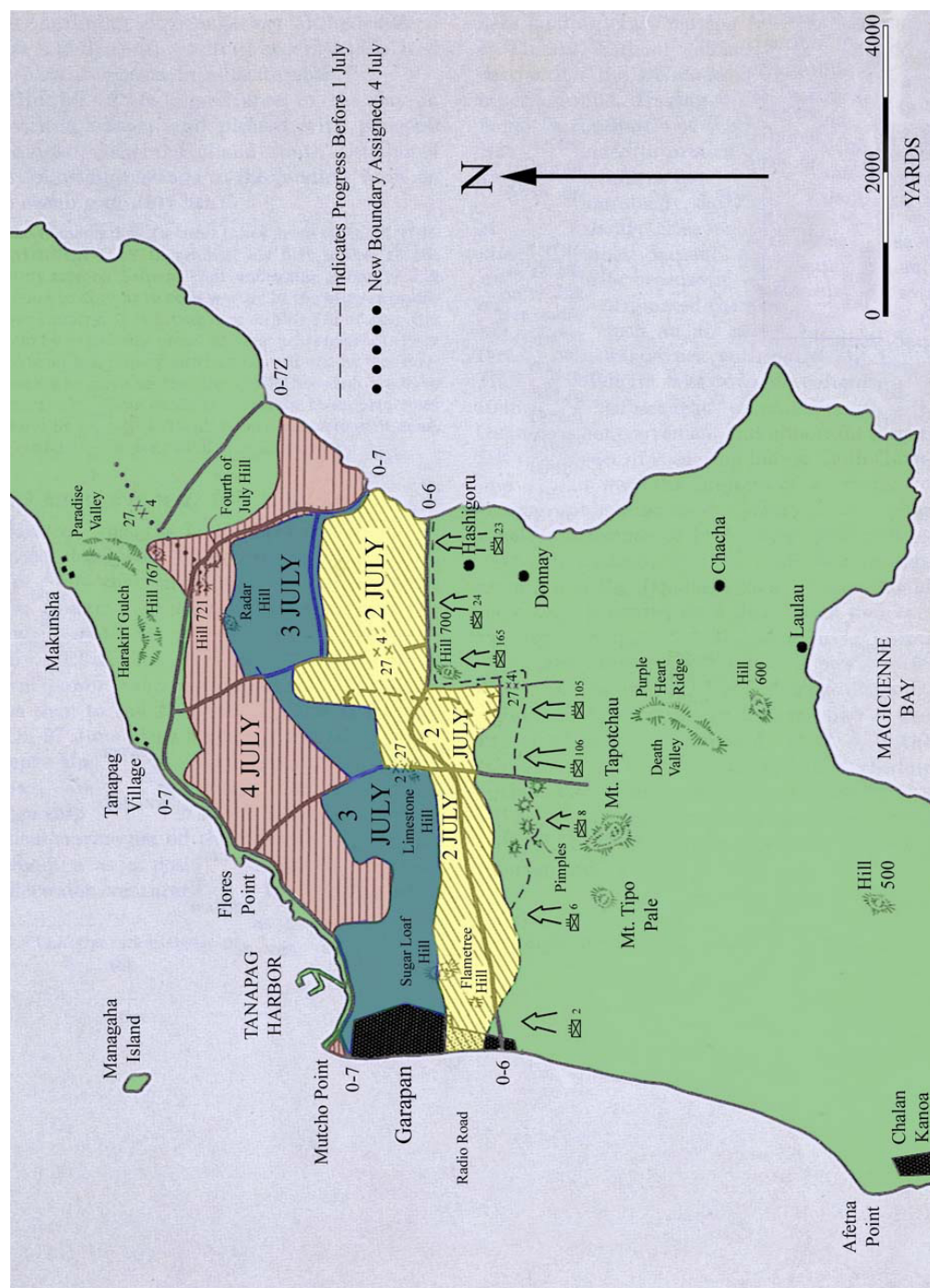
As the Marines and GIs worked their way toward Marpi Point, tough mini-wars were fought at places like “Flame Tree Hill,” “The Pimples,” and “Fourth of July Hill.” The capitol town of Garapan was captured on July 4, as was Tanapag (Figure 8.32).

On July 7, came the final banzai. More than 3,000 Japanese, many brandishing nothing more than sharpened sticks, charged the American lines determined to die honorably, and they did. Their bodies lined the coastal plain along Tanapag Harbor the next morning. Those who survived—sailors, soldiers and civilians—wandered aimlessly toward the thick jungle shrouding Mt. Tapotchau, “Coffee Hill” to the Japanese (Spennemann 2007:128). Now, the jungle was littered with corpses. Trees were blown down and great holes dug in the earth by the giant shells from the American ships off shore. Artillery fire from the Marines and the US Army 33<sup>rd</sup> Coast Artillery Battery in the south and the Japanese still in the north continued to scream overhead in both directions.

Roland Fronheise with the 33<sup>rd</sup> wrote about the battle:

We were known as an eight-ball outfit and not good enough for the job. In those days practically nobody wore a shirt so you couldn’t tell who was Marine and who was Army, but half-ton Army prime mover trucks fetched our guns, and used them to beat back the Japanese attack. There was a sense of urgency in the outfit that day like I have never seen before. It was mass confusion. Nobody knew what the hell was going on.

When they brought the guns back one of the truck drivers told me that at one point the Japanese had pushed the Marines back under the guns, and that they had to cut



**Figure 8.32.** Saipan progress July 1–4, 1944. After capturing Mt. Tapotchau, the combined American Marine Corps and Army troops were fighting downhill. The western coast line is flatlands with sandy beaches. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division faced hand-to-hand fighting in the streets of Garapan. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division faced the rugged coral eastern cliff line. Map design by James W. Hunter III, Ships of Discovery.

the fuses to beyond the safety point to stop the banzai charge. The artillery men had intensive infantry training. At that point they took up small arms and helped fight off the banzai charge (Petty 2002:147-148).

After the battle, American patrols swept the mountain side, or attempted to, killing Japanese soldiers and sailors who still wore uniforms, and any civilians who did not surrender immediately. Great efforts were made to persuade both soldiers and civilians to surrender peacefully. Fortunately, most of the civilians quickly surrendered and were taken to the civil affairs camp in the rear where they were given food and water.

The pressure on the other northern islands did not let up while Saipan was being secured. TF58 aircraft were looking for targets of opportunity everywhere. Aircraft from the escort carrier *White Plains* torpedoed the Japanese cargo ship *Shoun Maru* at Rota and the Japanese guardboat *Kompira Maru* at Tinian on June 21, *No 1 Kompira Maru* the following day, and on June 23 the guardboat *Haruta Maru* was sunk at Pagan. On July 8 and 10, aircraft sank a small fleet of Japanese guardboats off Saipan: *No 11 Ebisu Maru*, *No 3 Fukeui Maru*, *No 1 Hosei Maru*, *Kofuku Maru*, *No 1 Kofuku Maru*, *No 3 Kofuku Maru*, *No 3 Sachitaka Maru*, and *Hiroshi Maru*.

The Marines raised an American flag over Marpi air strip at the northern end of Saipan at 1615 on July 9, 1944, and declared organized resistance over (Karig 1948:259). Saipan was officially declared secure at Holland Smith's headquarters in Chalan Kanoa at 10:00 a.m. (Hoyt 2000: 404; Morison 1968:338). The cost of capturing Saipan had been high. Of the total 67,451 Americans in the invasion, Spruance estimated the total casualties at 15,053: 2,359 dead, 11,481 wounded and 1,213 missing, most of whom were dead (Dyer 1969:918).

The Japanese garrison of 29,000 was nearly annihilated, with 24,000 bodies counted (Forrestel 1978:151). Only 1,780 soldiers, half of them Koreans, surrendered. Almost 22,000 Japanese civilians—two out of three—perished needlessly (Toland 2003:519). Marines watched in horror as hundreds of Japanese civilians, mostly Okinawans, began committing suicide on the northern cliffs by cutting their own throats or exploding hand grenades. Many leapt to their deaths from Saipan's rugged northern cliff lines. Many of those who would not jump were shot by Japanese soldiers in order to save them from the dishonor of capture.

Some 14,500 civilians also gave themselves up, including over 3,000 indigenous Chamorros and Carolinians. An initial internment camp was established on the Chalan Kanoa Air Strip. Thousands of starving terrified men, women and children—Chamorro, Carolinian, Japanese, Okinawan, Korean—were eventually corralled in barbed-wire stockades with less than adequate housing, medical facilities, food and clothing (Richard 1957(I):435).

Some nationalistic stragglers joined up with Captain Sakae Oba to set up camp on rugged Mt. Tapotchau. Joined by about a hundred armed men, they fought a guerrilla war that killed quite a number of Marines and GIs throughout the war. The Marines finally decided to just put the entire mountain off limits and patrolled the base to prevent Oba's men from infiltrating

the American camps at night. Oba and his remaining men did not hand over their arms until December 1945 (Jones 1986; Mohri 2006:65).

On July 10, 1944, Tokyo began preparing the Japanese public for the loss of Saipan. They already announced their navy's defeat in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, giving the Americans supremacy of the seas. The breach in Japan's inner line of defense at the Marianas meant that the Americans were now able to bring the war to the Japanese home islands.

As a result of the Japanese imperial forces failure to hold Saipan, and after failing to create a new cabinet for himself, Prime Minister-Army Minister-War Minister General Hideki Tojo—the man most responsible for leading Japan into war with the United States—was forced to resign on July 18 (King 1953:351; Toland 2003:527).

General Kuniaki Koiso succeeded Tojo as Prime Minister. Knowing that the Marianas could not be reinforced now that the Japanese carrier fleet was weakened, Japanese Imperial Headquarters ordered their remaining troops in the Marianas to defend the islands honorably.

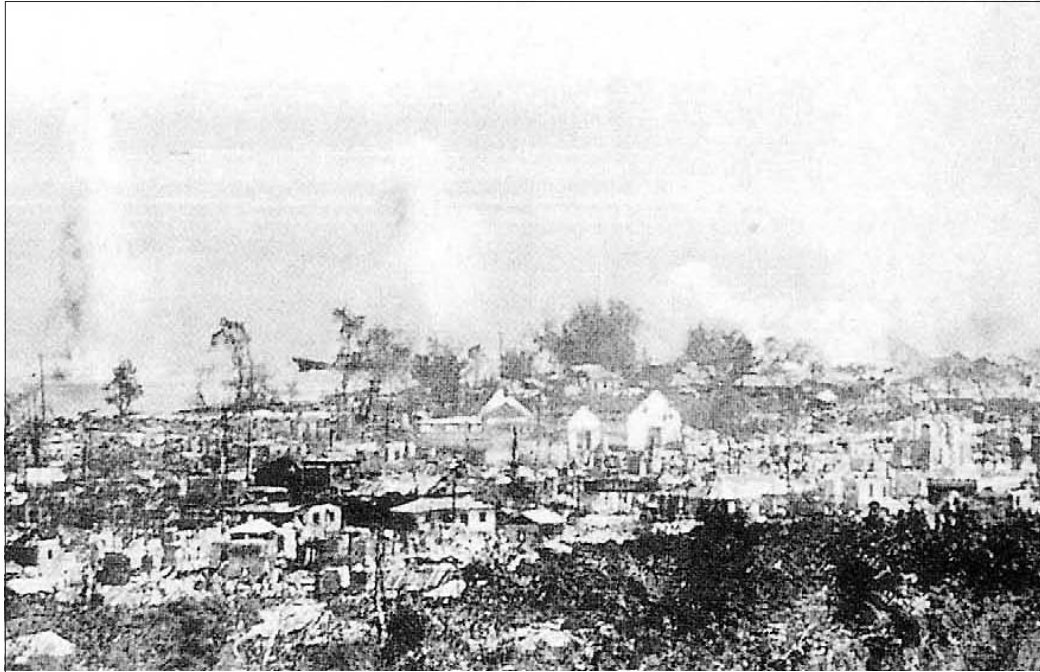
Operation *Tearaway* was nearly complete. Saipan was invaded and successfully captured. A garrison force was established with anti-aircraft guns and the 318<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group to defend the island from Japanese aircraft. As the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions prepared themselves for the invasion of Tinian, Seabees began cleaning up the mess, continuing to develop the airport, building emergency structures, providing for potable water and sanitation to protect the troops from disease. Half-buried bodies were reburied. In the next phase of *Tearaway*, Army Air Force Engineers and battalions of Seabees began developing Saipan into a forward operating base capable of supporting a full wing of B-29 Superfortresses, about 180 planes, along with B-24 Liberator bombers from the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force and navy search and rescue aircraft.

The five weeks of air and naval bombardment had reduced Garapan, often considered one of the most beautiful cities in the Japanese Pacific, to rubble (Figure 8.33). Clearing away the ruins of Garapan, center of government for the northern Marianas, began. Gone were the ancient Garapan Catholic Church (1856), the German District Administration Building (1901), the Japanese Bell Tower (1922), and all the businesses and homes that made Garapan the business center of the Marianas by 1944. All was bulldozed and unceremoniously covered with coral (Figure 8.34) (Russell 1983:95).

Hundreds of Chamorros and Carolinians were killed or mortally wounded. The survivors lived in a barbed wire stockade, their homes and lives destroyed. The Okinawan, Korean, and Japanese civilians who survived the ordeal were held in a different camp, initially with insufficient food or water so US troops shared their water, food, and cigarettes with the POWs. A separate stockade was constructed by Seabees for the Japanese prisoners of war. They were soon put to work on manual labor details by Army Major General Sanderford Jarman, now Saipan Garrison Force Commander, within the rules of the Geneva Convention.

At the southern end of Saipan, nearly 200 Marine Corps and Army field pieces were lined up hub-to-hub. They had already begun softening up targets in northern Tinian in support of the





**Figure 8.33.** Garapan was nearly leveled after the intensive bombing in June 1944.



**Figure 8.34.** The landings on narrow White Beach 1, Tinian, were well managed by Seabees and the Beachmaster. Dozers opened the area and created roads for the tanks and other heavy tracked vehicles, seen here moving toward Ushi Airfield. US Navy, NARA.

landing there. The line of 155-mm howitzer batteries firing in succession was an impressive site and reassuring to the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions, who had only two weeks to prepare for that battle.

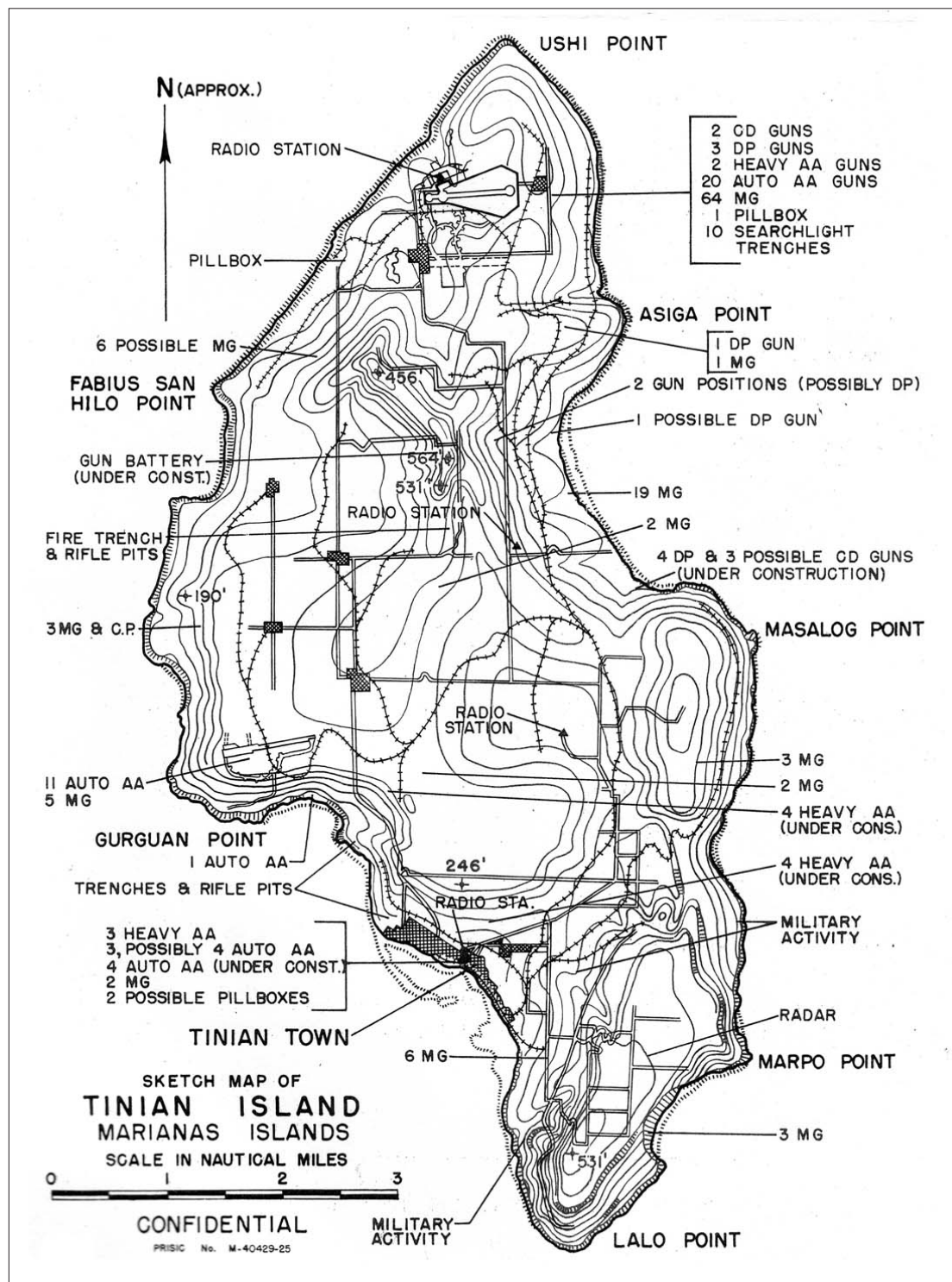
### **Operation *Tattersalls*: The Invasion and Capture of Tinian**

The Japanese fleet was no longer a threat to the Marianas invasion and with reinforcements on the way from Hawai'i, the eventual capture of Tinian and Guam were now assured. Because the Marines had suffered heavy losses on Saipan, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions were given two weeks to rest before the invasion of Tinian. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division had "sustained 5,981 casualties killed, wounded, and missing, representing 27.6 per cent of the Division's strength. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division had also taken a battering (Proehl, 1946:69).

As stipulated in the basic plan for *Tattersalls*, the plan to capture and develop Tinian Island, Vice Admiral Turner retained overall control of Northern Troops and Landing Forces. He now turned his attention to a review of the original Operation *Tattersalls* plan, which had been devised using only the aerial photographs of the islands taken during the February and April raids (Figure 8.35). The only secondary sources of information about Tinian were brief clips in travelogues written before the 1936 closure of the Japanese Mandated islands to outside visitors (Price 1944).

Serious planning for the Tinian invasion did not begin until June 11, 1944, the day Mitscher unleashed his naval aviators against the Japanese-held Marianas (Morison 1968:353). During debriefing, after returning from those early strikes on Tinian, pilots who attacked Tinian reported a variety of defensive installations, which were marked on maps. Before long the planners had detailed information on most every trouble spot on the island. Because the island was so flat and covered primarily with fields of tall green cane, only the cliffines along the fringing reef and interior plateaus presented real problems. This was rainy season. The vines were healthy. The caves would be covered with dense overgrowth, hiding machine-gun nests or field guns.

Turner gave command of the Tinian landing to Rear Admiral Harry Hill, his second in command, after Saipan was secured. Holland Smith, likewise, gave troop command to Brigadier General Harry Schmidt, USMC. To interdict the strong points on Tinian, the 318<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group would be flying close in air-support from Isley Field in their P-47 Thunderbolts, also known as "Jugs," as would be Grumman F6F Hellcats from the carriers that remained behind to support the Tinian invasion. Tiny little Piper Cubs, flown by pilots with more bravery than common sense dictated, flew close in spotter missions. General Schmidt also ordered 8,500 pounds of napalm from Pearl Harbor and had his support services men pump it into jettison-capable fuel tanks, which were then attached to Thunderbolts. To make sure his Marines did not face hidden enfilading fire as they climbed out of their amtracs into 10-foot-tall cane, Schmidt ordered his new napalm "bombs" to be dropped all along the landing area on the morning of the invasion, burning the cane and overgrowth and incinerating or suffocating defenders in caves and bunkers. This would be the first time that napalm would be used as an organic weapon in support of a landing force (Figure 8.36).



**Figure 8.35.** Photographs taken by naval aviators over Tinian in February and April 1944, helped cartographers at Pearl Harbor create this map of Tinian. As the island was captured, Seabees began reconstructing the airfields and roads built by the Japanese. US Navy, NARA.





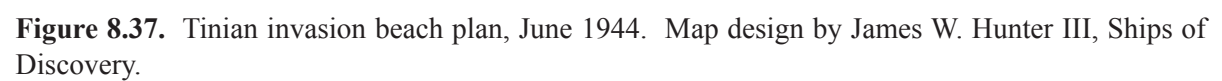
**Figure 8.36.** Napalm was used for the first time as an organic offensive weapon on Tinian. Here, a P-47 from Saipan drops a load of napalm along the northern landing beaches. Ushi Airfield, later called North Field, can be seen in the distance. US Navy, NARA.

The XXIV Corps Artillery at Saipan's Agingan Point mounted eight battalions of US Marine Corps 105-mm howitzers, three of 155-mm howitzers and two of 155-mm Long Tom guns, about 194 cannon in all (Morison 1968:356). They began a systematic bombardment of the northern half of Tinian on June 20. This was in addition to continuing air strikes and naval bombardment.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force also flew missions in support of the Tinian invasion from various Pacific bases with their long-range B-24 bombers to neutralize Japanese air bases on Iwo Jima, Chichi Jima, Haha Jima, Truk, Yap and Woleai. As a result, not a single Japanese airplane was seen over the central Marianas during the week of July 20-27 (Morison 1968:354).

According to Admiral Turner's original plan, there was to be a shore-to-shore invasion from Saipan to Tinian Town on Sanhalom Bay. The 2,800 yards of beachfront there was more than satisfactory for landing two marine divisions (Figure 8.37).





Japanese military planners also realized that Sanhalom Bay was an ideal landing beach and decided that an American assault on Tinian was most likely to occur there along the southwest of the island (known to the US military as Red Beach 1, Red Beach 2, Green Beach 1, Green Beach 2, Blue Beach, and Orange Beach). The Japanese considered Asiga Bay (Yellow Beach) on the opposite side of the island as the second most likely location of an American assault. Defenses were strengthened accordingly. Troops, mines, and artillery batteries were placed along Sanhalom Bay and pillboxes installed on Asiga Bay. Japanese plans considered the possibility of a landing on the northwestern side of Tinian (White Beach 1 and White Beach 2) as minimal. Believing an attack could come from either side of Tinian; the Japanese faced the difficult task of organizing defenses that could remain strongly in position yet move to the east or west if needed. The complete lack of coordination between the Japanese Imperial Navy and the Japanese Imperial Army presented further difficulties (Rottman 2004b).

The Americans did, in fact, investigate the possibility of landing on two beaches at Asiga along Tinian's northeastern shoreline; one about 350 yards long and the other 200. UDT teams swam into Asiga on the nights of July 11 and 12. Outside the fringing reef they found anchored mines. On the 100-yard wide reef flat they found deep potholes and coral heads that would pose serious hazards for amtracs (Dyer 1969:955). The trade winds blew directly on shore, creating a following sea. Crossing the fringing reef with a full load of armed Marines could be dicey for the landing craft drivers. And, when the intrepid UDT divers crawled right up on the beach, they found barbed wire and concrete reinforced bunkers that would restrict the Marine's advance and give the Japanese enfilading fire from both ends of the potential landing beaches. The ridgeline a few hundred yards inland would provide the Japanese with excellent artillery fire. The Japanese were there, waiting for the Marines.

The UDT report on White Beaches I and II on the northwestern coastline was much more favorable. They were only lightly defended. The problem was they were quite narrow; one was only 60-yards wide and the other just 160. On the other hand, the beaches were in the lee of the trade winds and protected from the ocean by a fringing coral reef that stretched about 75 yards from shore (Figure 8.38 and 8.39).

Admiral Hill, General Schmidt and General Smith all liked the idea of a surprise landing at the White beaches. Turner was adamant that the landing take place at Tinian Town, as planned. He considered the White Beaches far too narrow to get a sufficient number of amphibious tanks and tracked vehicles ashore quickly enough to secure the beachhead from an immediate counter-attack. Whereas 96 amtracs had been able to land abreast at Chalan Kanoa, only 8 or at most 16 would be able to land at the White beaches on Tinian, a handful of men against who knows what. Turner was most concerned that a single salvo of zeroed in artillery fire from the Mt. Lasso-Mt. Maga ridgeline might knock out enough amtracs to blockade the beach, preventing succeeding amtracs with more men, tanks and artillery from getting ashore. A Japanese counter-attack in this event would be catastrophic.

Most problematic was the six- to eight-foot cliffline that separated White Beach I from White Beach II. If that obstacle could be overcome, then the landing might be possible. To the



**Figure 8.38.** Oblique view of White Beach 2, Tinian. Ushi Airfield, the first objective of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division on Tinian, can be seen at the upper left. NARA Photo, Record Group 127.



**Figure 8.39.** Oblique view of White Beach 1, Tinian. White 1 was much smaller than White 2, to the south. At upper right is the Japanese farming village of Hagoi. At upper left is the fringe of Ushi Air Field. The plantations are young, green sugarcane. US Navy, NARA.



**Figure 8.40.** Doodlebug with ramp heading for the beach at Tinian, July 24, 1944. A portable ramp is attached to the top of this LVT. When it reaches the coral abutment, Seabees will jump out and attach the forward edge of the ramp to the coral cliff line. The amtrac then backs out, leaving the steel I-bars and the ramp behind. Tanks and other heavy equipment can then climb the ramp onto flat ground. US Navy, NARA.

rescue came the ingenious, industrious Seabees. Capt. Halloran, commanding officer 6<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Brigade, gave a sketch of a ramp to Chief Carpenter's Mate Leslie G. Smith, 121<sup>st</sup> Seabees, who completed a set of plans for the contraption (Huie 1945:72). Using scrap from the ruins of the Saipan sugar factory, a group from the 121<sup>st</sup> Naval Construction Battalion improvised a ramp they could carry on top of an amphibious tractor in such a way that when the amtrac reached the cliffline, the front end of the ramp could be latched down to the top of the cliff. Then the tractor could back out from under it, letting the tail end drop in the water at about 30 degrees. Heavy equipment such as bulldozers and tanks could then climb up the ramp, over the cliff and drive inland. The "Doodlebug," (Figure 8.40) as the Seabees called it, solved the question of how to get enough heavy equipment onto the beachhead quickly enough to meet whatever resistance the Japanese might be able to put up.

Then there was the question of preventing a counter-attack at the beach. Their solution was to fake a landing at Tinian Town, followed by a dash across the Saipan Channel to the two White beaches before the Japanese could react. The plan was to have the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division load into their troopships at Saipan. The 2<sup>nd</sup> division task force would slowly cruise down the western coastline toward Tinian Town, just as Turner planned and just as the Japanese expected. Hopefully, Japanese observers on Mt. Lasso would see the fleet moving past the



White Beaches and pull whatever troops they had in the White Beach area south to meet the Marines on the Tinian Town beachfront. Meanwhile, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division would load up directly into their amphibious tractors on the Chalan Kanoa invasion beaches, near Sugar Dock, early in the morning of invasion day and scoot across the channel while the Tinian Town task force was blasting away at Tinian Town, then land directly on the White Beaches. It was the only true shore-to-shore invasion of the Pacific War.

To ensure there would be no bottleneck at the beach due to damaged vehicles, the Seabees would have to get enough bulldozers ashore quickly enough to keep the beach clear of carnage, open roads and expand the assembly areas. The Beach Master would have to be adept at keeping people and equipment moving inshore, preventing a logjam that would hold up succeeding waves. The first Marines to land had to move to their O-1 line, the first day's objective, quickly and establish a defensive perimeter that could hold until the rest of the troops, tanks and assault weapons were ashore, sometime the following morning.

In conference with Admiral Spruance, Admiral Turner finally agreed to the White Beach Plan on July 12, 1944. Hill was officially ordered to capture, occupy and defend Tinian. The same ships, under the same leadership, carrying the same Marines, with the same Seabees, that successfully captured Saipan, would invade Tinian.

To ensure that Rear Admiral Hill had the three days of good weather he needed to complete the landing, Spruance established an air weather patrol extending 1,000 miles to the westward. Since storm swells traveled at about 400 miles a day, this gave Hill at least two and half days warning. For back up, Spruance also ordered a squadron of C-47 cargo planes to stand by at Eniwetok for emergency air supply, if needed (Forrestel 1966:152).

With the final decisions made for the invasion of Tinian and the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division expected to arrive on Guam soon, Spruance and Turner sailed south for the liberation of Guam (Lodge 1954; Farrell 1984). The invasion of Guam was now set for July 21. Invasion day for Tinian, was set for July 24 (Forrestel 1966:151).

In final preparation for the Tinian landing, Hill cranked up the naval bombardment on July 22 and 23. For the 14,000 or so civilians who remained on Tinian—Japanese, Okinawan and Korean—caught under a hail of fire from the US Navy's big guns, the carrier-borne air strikes, the 7<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force and the Army and Marine Corps artillery, there was no place to hide. The February and April air raids had shattered their lives, but the preinvasion naval bombardment was something else. Naval shells the size of small cars came slamming into Tinian Town, pulverizing businesses, government offices, shrines and school houses (Figures 8.41). Every building or house that could hide a Japanese machine gun was a target. Those civilians who anticipated the American invasion following the February and April raids created hiding places in water cisterns or natural caves. Others huddled under whatever protection they could find. Many died or were wounded by the bombardment.

Vice Admiral Kakuji Kakuta was still officially in command of the Japanese First Naval Air Division at Ushi Air Field. Of the 9,000 men in uniform on Tinian, he theoretically commanded

half of them. He had just received a shipment of captured British 6-inch guns and emplaced them in caves above Tinian Town and Sanhalom Bay, as well as the leeward points along Tinian's rugged coastline. He also had primary responsibility for the defense of the airfield. Although his men were poorly trained for infantry duty, they were quite eager to fight the Marines.

The 4,500 Imperial Army troops on Tinian were commanded by Colonel Kiyochi Ogata of the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 29<sup>th</sup> Division. At Ogata's disposal were twelve 75-mm mountain artillery guns, 6 anti-tank guns and 12 light tanks. As suspected, Ogata had stationed most of his troops in defense of a landing at either Tinian Town or Asiga, although the White Beach area was not totally ignored. He stationed his mobile reserve—one battalion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry, one of the 135<sup>th</sup>, and a dozen light tanks—on the southern edge of the Mount Lasso-Mount Maga ridgeline, the high ground above White Beach, just as Turner had feared. Ogata ordered his officers: "Be prepared to destroy the enemy at the beach, but be prepared to shift two-thirds of your force elsewhere" (Morison 1968:358).

On D-Day -1 (minus 1), July 23, the battleships *Tennessee* and *California* focused their fire on Tinian Town, convincing Col. Ogata that the Marines were landing there, as expected. In between naval broadsides, aircraft from *Essex*, *Langley*, *Gambier Bay* and *Kitkun Bay* hammered away at southern Tinian. The 318<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group flew eighteen sorties loaded with napalm. Meanwhile, the XXIV Artillery continued pounding away at identified targets on the northern half of the island. "By nightfall 23 July, the island no longer presented its former pleasant appearance of rural opulence. . . . Tinian Town was a shambles" (Morison 1968:360).

Meanwhile, the two regiments of Marines from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division destined for the fake landing on Tinian Town embarked on their LSTs and troopships at anchor off Saipan (Figure 8.42).

As hoped, the Japanese commanders on Tinian had observed the task force carrying the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division as it slowly sailed down the west coast of Tinian in the middle of the night, lights ablaze, headed for Tinian Town, as expected. Ogata had been given plenty of time to bring his mobile battalion from the northern sector to Tinian's southern shoreline and were prepared to defend the invasion at the beachhead, as planned. The feint was working.

At 0530, daybreak, on July 24, 1944, the 2nd Marine Division and its naval support forces arrived off Tinian Town and began crawling down boarding nets and dropping into Higgins boats. They slowly circled up near their ship about four miles off Tinian Town, and then formed a line of attack. At 0730 the feint toward shore began (refer to Figure 8.37).

The USS Navy paid dearly to save Marine lives with the fake landing at Tinian Town. According to the deck log of the destroyer USS *Norman Scott* (DD 690) (Figure 8.43), they left Saipan late on the evening of July 23 to begin their firing assignments on Tinian:

Steaming singly off the Northeastern shore of Tinian. . . Delivering harassing fire on enemy installations and firing ten two gun salvos each hour. Darkened ship.



**Figure 8.41.** Ruins of Tinian Town following the July 22-23 bombardment. US Navy, NARA.



**Figure 8.42.** Marines in LVTs en route to Tinian. US Navy, NARA.



**Figure 8.43.** The USS *Norman Scott* at Tinian just before it was hit. The destroyer was moving in to draw fire away from USS *Colorado*, in the background. Painting by Wayne Scarpaci; photo <http://www.navsource.org/archives/05/690.htm>.

0100 (July 24) ceased firing. 0320 ship went to general quarters. 0333 Resumed harassing fire . . .

0440 changed speed to 25 knots, steering various courses to pass through Saipan Channel and to join Task Unit 52.17.3 off the Southwestern shore of Tinian. 0515 began screening to seaward of USS *Cleveland* (CL 55). 0635 ship went to general quarters. Proceeding on various courses and speeds to vicinity of Tinian Town to carry out 40mm firing assignment. Ship is lying to about 2000 yards from beach. 0702 commenced firing main battery at enemy machine gun emplacements on the beach which were observed to be firing at friendly aircraft. 0730 Shore batteries on Tinian Island hit the USS *Colorado* (BB 45) starting large fires. 0740 Shore batteries on Southwestern side of Tinian Island hit the ship (*Norman Scott*) with six or seven shells of six inch, possibly eight inch caliber. The Commanding Officer (Commander Seymour Owns), Executive Officer (Lt. Tulley) and Navigator were put out of action. Lt. (jg) (Will C.) Jumper took command and ordered all engines ahead at best speed. Lt. (jg) J. P. Harlow USNR took command and commenced maneuvering the ship to westward. . . . At the present time the ship is on fire in vicinity of number 5 main battery gun and handling room. Extent of damage to ship unknown. 0735 Lieutenant Hope Strong, Jr., USN, relieved Lt. (jg) J. P. Harlow, USNR and took command of the ship. Ship is now apparently out of range of the shore batteries. USS *Cleveland*



is covering retirement of the ship. Main battery guns are firing counter battery fire in local control (Tinian Invasion Deck Log, USS *Norman Scott* DD 690, July 24, 1944).

The Japanese Naval Guard Force on Tinian was ready to fight. According to first person accounts, Commander Seymour Owens, captain of the *Norman Scott*, was on the wing of the bridge with Lt. John Harlow when a battery of three six-in guns hidden in caves to the south of Tinian Town hit the battleship *Colorado* twenty-two times in fifteen minutes (Dyer 1969:960). In order to draw fire away from *Colorado*, Owens moved *Norman Scott* close to shore, where he could zero in on the Japanese shore batteries. Harlow climbed up to the fire control center to direct a salvo of 5-in on the Japanese guns, but the Japanese were faster. Within fifteen seconds, they hit *Norman Scott* with six of their 6-in shells, one of them killing Commander Owens instantly. *Scott* lost power and went dead in the water, drifting toward shore. The nearby cruiser USS *Cleveland* maneuvered between *Norman Scott* and shore, which was then very close in, all its 5-in and 6-in guns blazing, silencing the Japanese shore guns at least temporarily. The heavy cruiser *Indianapolis* replaced *Colorado* and joined the fight. Despite fires and wounded everywhere aboard *Norman Scott*, the crew was able to restore power to the ship and withdraw sufficiently to care for their wounded. Both *Norman Scott* and *Colorado* retired to Saipan.

*Indianapolis* and the destroyer *Remey* joined *Cleveland* in the gun duel with Tinian's Naval Guard Force. However, the Japanese gun emplacement was not completely knocked out of action until the battleship *Tennessee* slammed 70 rounds of 14-in and 150 rounds of 5-in shells into their cave.

A total of 19 officers and men on *Norman Scott* were killed in action, 28 were wounded and evacuated from the ship. Another 33 officers and men were wounded in action, but remained aboard (Wayne VanDer Voort January 2009 pers. comm.).

As these events were unfolding, the true invasion began to the northwest at the White Beaches. The invasion force (Table 8.3) with elements from the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division boarded amtracs and Higgins Boats and left Tanapag Harbor (Saipan) the evening before. Shortly before they landed, air strikes were called in and 150mm "Long Tom" guns on Saipan opened up on the beaches. Admiral Hill's napalm bombs scorched the beach all along the landing area, the gel running into trenches and foxholes hiding the Japanese. The ocean current along the reef was so strong and the dust and smoke so thick on White Beach 2 that P-47s had to fly pathfinder missions to guide the amtracs toward the landing beaches.

Delays getting ashore that morning were considerable. A rainstorm prevented the underwater demolition team from destroying coral boulders at White Beach 2, so the armed vessels in the vicinity (battleships, cruisers, and destroyers) were directed to shell them. The first wave of 24 amtracs, 8 on White Beach 1 and 16 on White Beach 2, landed at 0750 (refer to Figure 8.37). Succeeding waves of Marines landed every four to ten minutes. Until ramps were ordered, Marines of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division had to climb a small cliff in some places in order to make the beach

**Table 8.3. US Landing Craft and Transports Used in Invasion of Tinian**

Type	Number
Landing ship, dock (LSD )	2
Landing ship, tank (LST )	37
Landing craft, infantry (LCI)	31
Landing craft, tank (LCT)	20
Landing craft, mechanized (LCM)	92
Landing craft, personnel (LCVP)	100
Pontoon barges	14
Troop transports	10

(Figure 8.44). Because of these delays, Japanese forces had extra time to reorganize along the White Beaches (Rottman 2004).

By 0820 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment was ashore, having suffered only four officers and seven enlisted men killed by small arms fire and a gun on Mt. Lasso that had not yet been silenced (Morison, 1968:363). The first tanks rolled up the Doodlebug ramps within an hour. Behind them came the 75-mm half-tracks.

At 1030 the Seabees began bringing their bulldozers ashore, cutting roads and enlarging the assembly areas. The ramps were abandoned, having served their purpose. The first Army DUKWs carrying Marines landed at 1315, unloading their troops 300 yards inland. The 302<sup>nd</sup> Seabee Pontoon Detachment began installing the two 300-foot pontoon causeways they had towed from Saipan. Now ships could pull alongside to unload trucks filled with cargo. Another group of Seabees began assembling a water distillation plant.

As the morning of July 24<sup>th</sup> became the afternoon, resistance on White Beach 1 was fairly light. Crevasses and caves in the vicinity nevertheless harassed the Marine battalion as it came ashore. By 4 pm, the Marines won control of White Beach 1 and pushed 1,400 yards inland. The going was rougher at White Beach 2 where two Marine battalions endured booby traps, mines, Japanese mortars, and artillery fire in addition to enemy infantry. Near the end of the afternoon, flame tanks were landed here and at White Beach 1, and only then was communication established between the two beaches.

By 1749, 15,614 Marines of a total 42,000 troops landed on Tinian and had crossed White beaches (Figure 8.45). Before dark, four dozen Sherman tanks were landed, along with 75-mm pack howitzers and many bulldozers. The Seabees also landed Cherry Picker cranes and unloaded small mountains of cargo (Dyer 1969:961). Barbed wire was stretched in front of

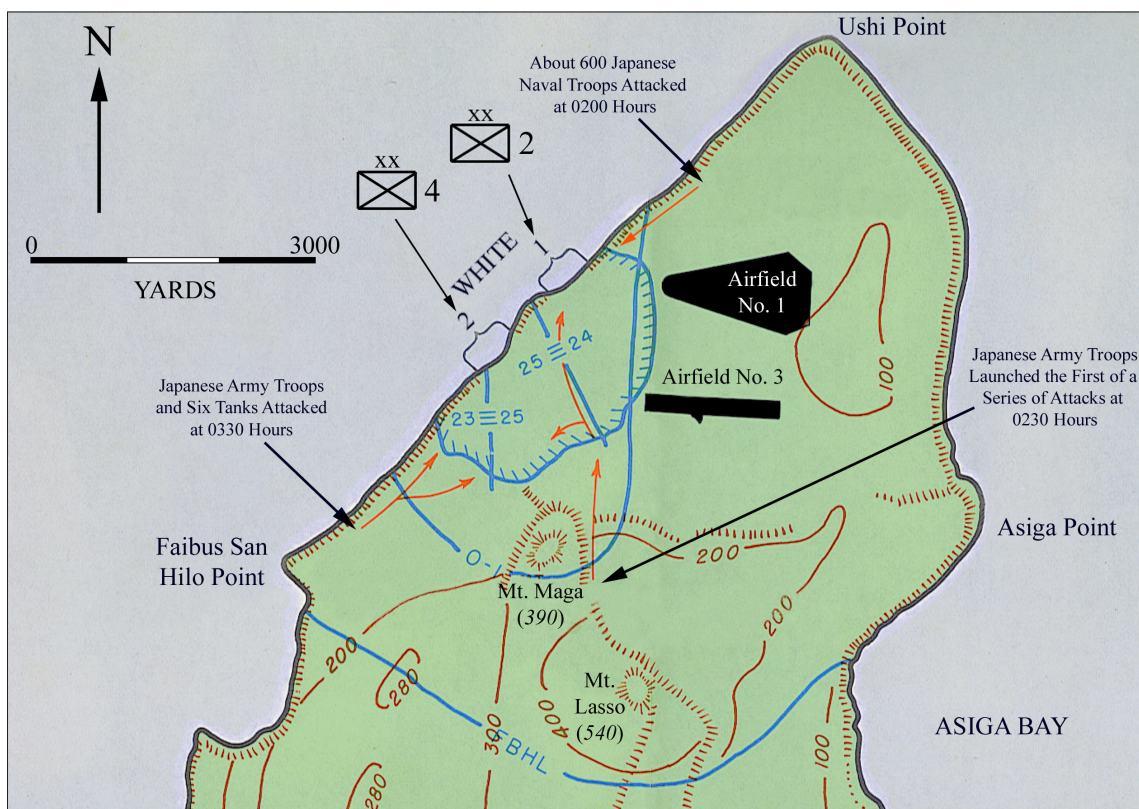


**Figure 8.44.** Marines move up the cliff at White Beach on the morning of July 24. US Navy, NARA.



**Figure 8.45.** Marines and amtracs coming ashore at White Beach, July 24, 1944. US Navy, NARA.





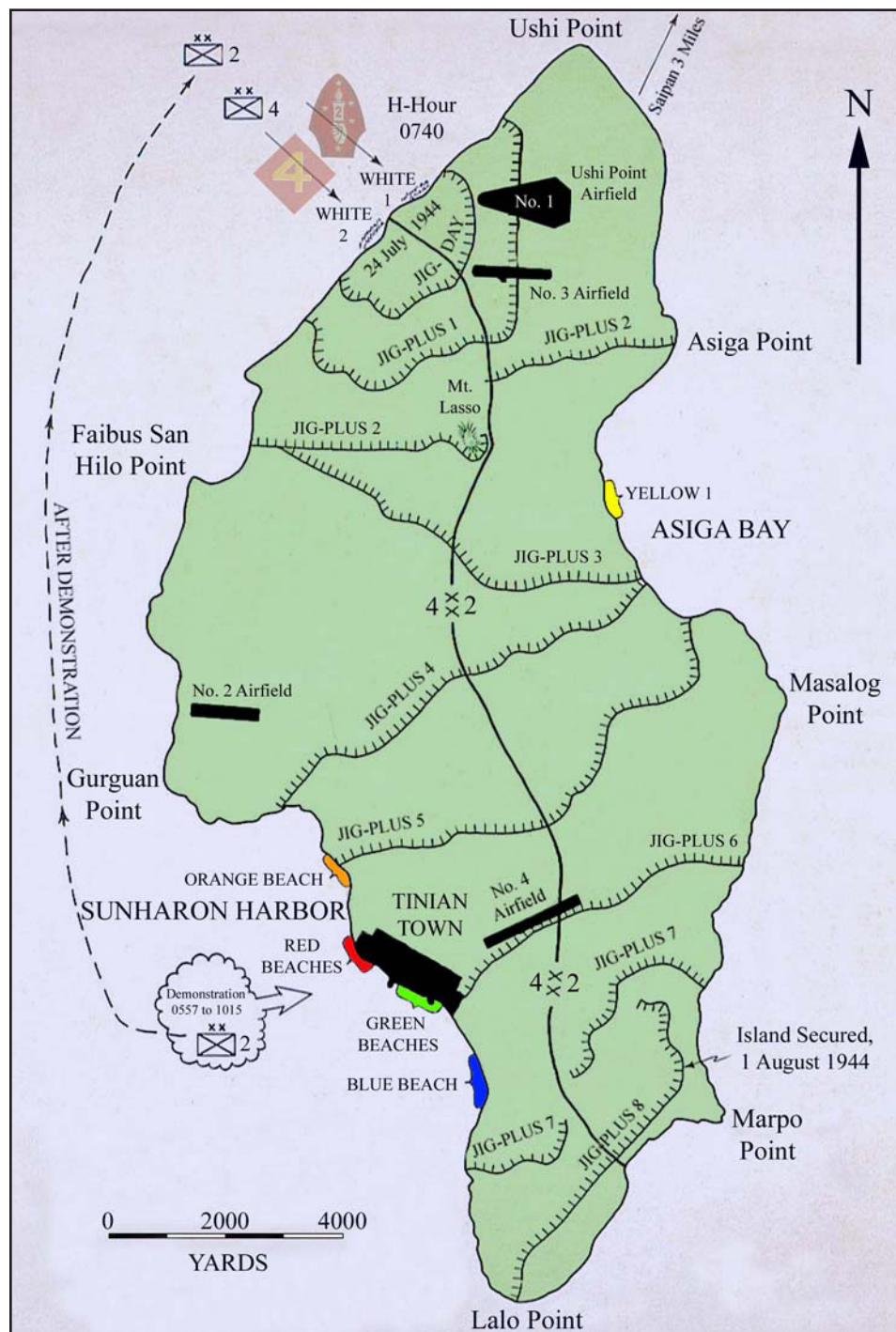
**Figure 8.46.** Tinian progress July 24, 1944. at White Beaches 1 and 2. Map design by James W. Hunter III, Ships of Discovery.

the forward line and a combat outpost was established some 400 yards south along the road to Tinian Town (Figure 8.46).

The Marines lost only 15 dead on the White Beaches that day, most from two amtracs that had been blown up by mines on White Beach II. Counting naval personnel, the Americans had suffered 77 men killed in action, 470 wounded. The landing had been a resounding success: it was a complete surprise to the Japanese. Rear Admiral Hill's plan had been fully vindicated.

That night, just as they had done at Saipan, the Japanese counter attacked. The 135<sup>th</sup> Infantry attacked the US 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 24<sup>th</sup> Marines, 4th Marine Division on its northern flank at about 0200. Company A was reduced to 30 Marines before the attack was repulsed just before dawn; 476 Japanese were counted dead the next morning in this area (Morison 1968:365). In the center of the Marine beachhead, the Japanese 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry, penetrated between the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Marines at about 0230. This attack was also repulsed and 500 dead Japanese were counted in and around the Marine perimeter in the morning. Along the southern perimeter, five Japanese light tanks coming up the road toward the American combat outpost were knocked out with bazookas and the accompanying infantry with rifles. In the morning, another 267 Japanese dead were counted in this sector. The counterattack had cost the Japanese





**Figure 8.47.** Tinian Progress JIG Plus 1 through 8, July 25-31, 1944. Map design by James W. Hunter III, Ships of Discovery.

one seventh of their strength, 1,250 men, while causing only 100 American casualties. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division overran Ushi Air Field on July 26 (Figure 8.47).

Elements of the 121<sup>st</sup> Seabees landed on White beach at 0830 on the 27<sup>th</sup> with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, several of them driving Doodlebugs (Huie 1945:75) and immediately began repairing the Japanese runway. Lt. Hines, Warrant Officer Singer and 50 men were already at work on the field, which was covered with shrapnel and numerous bomb and shell holes. A strip 150 ft wide and 2,500 ft long was repaired by 1700 and security guards were set up to prevent looting. At 0705 on July 28, a P-47 fighter became the first American plane to land on Tinian. By that evening, the entire 4,700 ft of runway had been repaired and they began work on road repairs.

Rear Admiral Hill had asked for three days of clear weather, and that was all he got. On July 28, 1944, just four days after the landing, a typhoon passed by the Marianas.

According to Marine Rick Spooner:

As the Marines dared to glance into the violence roaring across the earth, diverse objects could be seen flying at great speed. Corrugated roofs of buildings appeared from nowhere and sailed along with uprooted trees. From somewhere a steel 55 gallon drum appeared tumbling through the air as though it was weightless. . .

Foxholes were filled with water, cans of rations were floating; everything was utterly soaked through and through. . . . If we weren't fighting the Nips, we were fighting the damned elements (Spooner 2007:251-254).

Fortunately, because the Seabees had repaired the Japanese airfield, the Army Air Force C-47s Admiral Spruance had ordered up began arriving, bringing in supplies and carrying out wounded. Over the next three days, Marine Corps and Army Air Force airplanes delivered 33,000 rations to Tinian and began evacuating wounded, while Seabees repaired the causeway damaged by the typhoon.

Tinian Town, or what was left of it, was occupied on July 30 (Figure 8.48). The Marines found no Japanese, only a stray cow or two. Sanhalom Bay was swept for mines and became the main landing beach for Tinian supplies and reinforcements without a bloody battle to capture it.

Marine Don Swindle remembers going through the rubble of Tinian Town:

I can remember we were checking the railroad tracks and seeing all the pillboxes. Some were built under the tracks. We realized that if we had landed at Tinian Town beaches we would have had a bad time of it. Other Marines were having a bad time to our left at the bluff area in back of Tinian Town. That's where the big guns were that hit the battlegroup and also a destroyer [*Norman Scott*]. Just as soon as we reached the last hill, they said there were 10,000 civilians and soldiers left on the



**Figure 8.48.** Ruins of Tinian Town July 30, 1944. NARA.

island and for us not to fire unless we were fired upon. The next day we marched back toward Tinian Town and boarded ship. While we walked back the trucks dusted us, constantly hauling prisoners past us which didn't help our thoughts (Don Swindle, March 25, 2009 pers. comm.).

Having lost all his aircraft in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, Kakuta wired to Tokyo on July 31, "I will make a charge with all forces under my command. All confidential documents have been destroyed. This may be my last communication." It was. However, there is no record of such a banzai and it is not known how he died, although he thrice attempted to escape by rubber boat. The man who had lied to Ozawa repeatedly during the Battle of the Philippine Sea died ignobly.

Meanwhile, Colonel Ogata rallied his remaining troops on the Carolinas Plateau cliffline above Marpo Valley to make his last stand. Many patriotic local Japanese nationals also joined in this fight to the end. Others chose suicide. Ogata's men were able to prevent the Marines from topping the cliffline for a whole day, but were finally overrun. By the morning of the August 1, the battle for Tinian was virtually over. The Marines advanced across the plateau, pushing the Japanese back to the edge of the far cliff. There, as had happened on Saipan, the Americans watched in horror as Japanese and Okinawan civilians threw themselves and their children off

the cliffs. Finally, the superintendent of the sugarcane refinery and his wife, both of whom had surrendered, came forward and begged their countrymen not to forfeit their lives.

The island was declared secured at 1855 on August 1, 1944. Of the 9,000 Japanese soldiers and sailors that had stood in defense of Tinian, only 242 became prisoners of war. To give credit where credit is due, the Saipan veteran Marines who landed on Tinian said that in many encounters they had with the Japanese soldiers on Tinian, they fought better than those on Saipan.

The battle for Tinian, not counting mopping up, had cost the US Marines 24 officers and 304 enlisted men killed in action and 1,595 wounded (Hoffman 1951:150).

At 1500 on August 3, the American flag was officially raised over Tinian. On August 6, the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, relieved the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division as Tinian Island Garrison. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, Brigadier General James L. Underhill, USMC, became Tinian Island Commander.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, less the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment, moved back to Saipan where they established their camp. The 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment was not moved to Saipan until October 25, while the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was left mopping up the Japanese still holding out in Tinian's rugged southern cliffline. Over the four months the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment spent patrolling Tinian; they killed 542 more Japanese, but took another 163 casualties, 38 of them killed in action (Morison 1968:369).

After the war, Admiral Spruance wrote: "In my opinion, the Tinian operation was probably the most brilliantly conceived and executed operation in World War II" (Forrestel 1966:156; Hoyt 2000:401).

Lieutenant General Smith, Expeditionary Troops Commander, said of the battle for Tinian:

In war as in any other phase of activity, there are enterprises so skillfully conceived and successfully executed that they become models of their kind. Our capture of Tinian, southern sister island of Saipan, belongs in this category. If such a tactical superlative can be used to describe a military maneuver, where the result brilliantly consummated the planning and performance, Tinian was the perfect amphibious operation in the Pacific War (Morison 1968:370; Smith 1987:201).

Meanwhile, the Southern Attack Forces pressed forward with the capture of Guam (Lodge 1954; Farrell 1944; 1984; Gaily 1988). With overwhelming naval gunfire support and absolute air supremacy, General Roy Geiger's 57,000 troops overcame General Takeshi Takashina's defending 18,500 troops in 20 days. At 1130 on August 10th, Geiger declared the island secured. The Campaign for the Marianas had taken two months, less one day. In the process, the United States had lost some 5,200 killed in action and another 22,000 wounded. The Japanese had



lost their Central Pacific headquarters, their naval air arm and some 50,000 men (Forrestal, 1966:162).

## **Conclusion**

After the war Admiral Turner said:

The Marianas Campaign, from an amphibious view point had nearly everything; great strategic importance, major tactical moves including successive troops landings on three enemy islands; tough enemy resistance of all kinds, including major Fleet battle; coordination of every known type of combat technique of the land, sea, and air; difficult logistic problems; and the buildup of a great military base area concurrently with the fighting (Dyer 1969:861).

From the Japanese perspective, the American capture of the Marianas was a psychological disaster of major proportions. Politically and militarily, the loss of the Marianas was a knife thrust into the heart of Japan's military/industrial complex. It was a military failure of the first order. In essence, it said, "The Japanese Army and Navy cannot defend Japan against America."

The great Japanese industrialists that grew out of the Meiji Restoration, the zaibatsu, such as Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Sumitomo, Kawasaki and Nakajima that had funded the war in Manchuria and China, gaining fortunes on nationalized economies and the blood of Chinese, now saw their gamble failing. They had backed the aggressive military expansion of Japan on the bet that they would make fortunes from foreign acquisitions after the war. Now they realized that not only were their Midas dreams being dashed by the undaunted American advance, but also that they were about to lose their family treasures. Mitsubishi's factories, the same that had created the planes that destroyed Nanking and sank the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, would now be destroyed by American aircraft launched from the Marianas, their old playground. Suddenly, the term "defense" sprang up in Japanese military correspondence and the term "peace" in political dialogues.

The evolution of the American Navy into an effective fast carrier and submarine task force was, ultimately, more influential on the outcome of the war than was Japanese preparedness. No Japanese or, for that matter, American naval planner of that era could possibly have predicted that the United States could deploy a 15-carrier, 8-battleship task force supporting an amphibious group capable of landing over 100,000 troops against a single target in the Pacific in June 1944, while at the same time supporting an even larger invasion half a world away at Normandy. The American materiel superiority in weapons and numbers is reflected in the high percentage of sunken Japanese ships, planes, landing craft and other materiel found throughout the Pacific. The enormously effective submarine war (once torpedo defects were corrected) contributed to the majority of Japanese merchant ship losses in all areas; this is also reflected in the known shipping losses in the Central Pacific and the Marianas region, when deep waters outside island groups are considered.

Neither the number of ship and plane losses nor their home country are indicative of the full valor and sacrifice experienced on both sides in defending or attacking the islands of the Central Pacific. No Japanese-held island directly assaulted in the Pacific war ever surrendered, no white flag was ever raised from the one remaining Japanese command bunker, and no ceremonial sword was passed to the victor's hand. On the other side, no US amphibious assault on a Pacific island was ever unsuccessful; no assault waves were thrown back into the sea. These are the facts that should be remembered, and these are the facts to which the Pacific wrecks of World War II bear mute testimony.

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