

The Conquest of Southern Saipan¹

THE CAPTURE OF SOUTHERN SAIPAN

On the morning of 16 June, Admiral Spruance visited Admiral Turner's flagship, the *Rocky Mount*, to inform his principal subordinates how he intended to meet the threat posed by the approaching enemy fleet. Spruance wanted the vulnerable transports and other amphibious shipping to stand clear of Saipan until the Japanese carriers could be destroyed. General unloading over the western beaches was to stop at dusk on 17 June, after which transports that were not vital to the operation and all the LSTs would steam eastward from the island. If the cargo carried in any of the ships that had been withdrawn was later needed

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 OpRpt*; *TF 56 OpRpt*; *NTLF OpRpt*; *2d MarDiv OpRpt*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; *27th InfDiv OpRpt*; *2d Mar SAR*; *6th Mar SAR*; *8th Mar SAR*; *10th Mar SAR*; *14 Mar Rpt*; *23d Mar AR*; *24th Mar Rpt*; *25th Mar Rpt*; *105th Inf OpRpt*, dtd 20Sep44 (WW II RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.), hereafter *105th Inf OpRpt*; *106th Inf OpRpt*, n.d., hereafter *106th Inf OpRpt*; *165th Inf OpRpt*; *1/8 OpRpt*; *2/23 Rpt*; *2/23 OpRpt*; *2/24 Narrative*; *1/25 Rpt*; *3/25 Narrative*; *3/25 Saga*; *1/29 SAR*, dtd 1Sep44, hereafter *1/29 SAR*; Edmund G. Love, *The 27th Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1949), hereafter Love, *27th InfDiv History*; Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*; Hoffman, *Saipan*.

by the landing force, the necessary vessels, carefully screened by warships, could be sent back to Saipan.²

Spruance left the aerial support of operations ashore to planes based on the escort carriers. All of Task Force 58, the faster escort carriers included, was to concentrate on defeating Ozawa's approaching battle fleet. Certain cruisers and destroyers were freed from their mission of protecting Admiral Turner's amphibious force so they could reinforce Admiral Spruance's striking force. Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf was to station his old battle-ships, along with their screen of cruisers and destroyers, about 25 miles west of Saipan to shatter a possible night attack by Japanese surface units.³ In order to detect the kind of surprise blow against which Oldendorf's giants were guarding, Navy patrol bombers flew westward from Eniwetok and, on the night of 17 June, began operating from

² Admiral Hill, who remained in the unloading area off Saipan during this period, recalled that "each evening, after consultation with VAC, [he] informed Adm Turner what ships he desired at the anchorage at daylight the following day. In the main, this plan operated very well, and no serious shortages developed in supply to the three divisions ashore." *Hill comments Saipan*.

³ Units of Oldendorf's Covering Group could be recalled for specific fire support assignments for troops ashore and were so used in several instances during this deployment. *Ibid*.

off the west coast of Saipan. Spruance also ordered the transports carrying the Guam expedition to get clear of the Marianas and take up station east of their objective. The recapture of Guam could wait until the *Imperial Japanese Navy* had played its hand.

"Do you think the Japs will turn tail and run?" asked General Holland Smith as the meeting was coming to a close.

"No," Admiral Spruance answered, "not now. They are out for big game. If they had wanted an easy victory, they would have disposed of the relatively small force covering MacArthur's operation at Biak. But the attack on the Marianas is too great a challenge for the Japanese Navy to ignore."⁴

While Spruance's thoughts turned to the enemy ships advancing eastward toward him, Generals Watson and Schmidt plotted the conquest of the southern part of Saipan. The overall scheme of maneuver called for the two divisions to pivot on Red 1 to form a line stretching from the west coast, across the island, to a point just south of the Kagman Peninsula. While the 2d Marine Division held off any attacks from the vicinity of Mounts Tipo Pale and Tapotchau, the 4th Marine Division was to smash through to the shores of Magicienne Bay.

THE CAPTURE OF AFETNA POINT

On the morning of 16 June, Lieutenant Colonel Easley, wounded the day

⁴Quoted in Gen Holland M. Smith and Percy Finch, *Coral and Brass* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 165. hereafter Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*.

before, turned command of 3/6 over to Major John E. Rentsch and was evacuated from the island. Major Hunt had by this time assumed command of 2/6 from Lieutenant Colonel Kengla, the observer who had temporarily replaced the wounded Major Rice. Strengthened by the arrival of its self-propelled 75mm guns and 37mm anti-tank weapons, Colonel Riseley's 6th Marines, the pivot for the entire landing force, spent the day mopping up the area it already had overrun. Fighting flared whenever Marines encountered Japanese die-hards, only to end abruptly once the enemy soldiers had been killed.

The 8th Marines zone also was quiet in comparison to the frenzy of D-Day. The 2d Battalion, however, saw sustained action while driving the enemy from Afetna Point and pushing toward Lake Susupe. At the point, the going was comparatively easy, for many of the defenders had either fled inland or been killed during the fruitless night counterattacks. By 0950, 2/8 had established contact with the 23d Marines at Charan Kanoa pier.

The company that had cleaned out Afetna Point then reverted to battalion reserve. Japanese artillery began relentlessly stalking the unit, even when it occupied positions screened from observers on the 0-1 ridges. Some days later the culprit was found, an enemy soldier who had been calling down concentrations from his post in one of the smokestacks that towered over the ruined Charan Kanoa sugar refinery.⁵

⁵The commanding officer of the 23d Marines recalled that Japanese troops, who infiltrated from the north, repeatedly occupied this re-

While this one company was securing Afetna Point, and later dodging shell bursts, the remainder of the battalion advanced to the western edge of Lake Susupe.

D plus 1 also saw the further strengthening of General Watson's 2d Marine Division. The remainder of Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Nutting's 2/2 came ashore to serve for the time being with the 6th Marines. All of Lieutenant Colonel Arnold F. Johnston's 3/2 had landed on D-Day. Because of the volume of hostile fire that was erupting along the northern beaches, 1/2, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Wood B. Kyle, was diverted to the zone of the 4th Marine Division. Northern Troops and Landing Force intended that the battalion serve with the 4th Marine Division, but Kyle learned only of the change of beaches when he reported to the control vessel. As a result, when his men landed, Kyle marched them north and rejoined the 2d Marine Division. Once the move had been made, NTLF decided that a return to 4th Division territory and control was undesirable and 1/2 remained with its parent regiment.

Originally scheduled to be supplied by parachute after the contemplated landing at Magicienne Bay, Kyle's battalion had placed its 81mm mortars and .30 caliber water-cooled machine guns on board an escort carrier. The torpedo planes that were sent to deliver the

finery, which controlled the boat channel off Green 3. He noted that the danger was finally eliminated by the mopup action of two companies of Army troops assigned to the shore party on the Yellow Beaches. MajGen Louis R. Jones ltr to ACoS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 13Feb 63, hereafter *Jones ltr*.

weapons after the battalion had landed flew so low over the Charan Kanoa airstrip that the parachutes did not open completely. As a result, almost all the equipment was damaged. With his 2d Battalion attached to the 6th Marines and 1/2 presumably under control of the 4th Marine Division, Colonel Stuart had been assigned to command a composite force made up of 3/2 and 2/6. Since 2/6 had fought desperately to repel the previous night's counterattack, Stuart ordered the tired unit into reserve, relieving it with his other battalion.

The second day of the Saipan operation also saw the landing of two 105mm howitzer battalions of the 10th Marines. Late in the afternoon, the DUKWs carrying Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth A. Jorgensen's 4/10 and Major William L. Crouch's 3/10 crossed Green 3. Jorgensen's battalion went into position near the radio station, while Crouch's unit prepared to fire from an area 200 yards inland from the southern limit of Green 2. The 2d 155mm Howitzer Battalion, detached from VAC Artillery, did not come ashore because adequate firing positions were not available. To the south, the arrival on the Blue Beaches of General Harper and the advance parties of all four XXIV Corps Artillery battalions gave promise of increasingly effective fire support as the battle progressed.

THE 4TH MARINE DIVISION BATTLES FORWARD

General Schmidt had decided that a strong effort in the center of his zone of action offered the best chance for success. Before launching his attack,

scheduled for 1230 on 16 June, the 4th Marine Division commanding general parceled out elements of Colonel Hart's 24th Marines in order to strengthen his position. The 3d Battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel Alexander A. Vandegrift, Jr., was attached to Colonel Batchelder's 25th Marines in order to shore up the right-hand portion of the division front, relieving the weary 1/25, while Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Rothwell's 2/24 moved into positions from which to protect the left flank. The remainder of the 24th Marines took over the center of the beachhead. As 1/24 was moving forward, mortar fragments claimed the life of Lieutenant Colonel Maynard C. Schultz, the battalion commander, who was replaced by his executive officer, Major Robert N. Fricke.

The artillery battalions which were to support the attack also came under enemy fire. Lieutenant Colonel Reeve of 5/14 reported that by 1730 on 16 June, all but two of his 105mm howitzers had been knocked out. "When I say 'knocked out'," he continued, "I mean just that—trails blown off, recoil mechanism damaged, etc. By 1000, with the help of division ordnance and by completely replacing one or two weapons, we were back in business—full strength—12 guns."⁶ Early in the morning 4/14 also came under accurate counterbattery fire. After the Marine cannoners had blasted a 30-man patrol, hostile gunners retaliated by silencing one of the battalion's howit-

⁶ LtCol Douglas E. Reeve, ltr to Maj Carl W. Hoffman, dtd 6Jan49, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 82. No copy of this letter has been found.

zers, killing or wounding every member of the crew.

Although Agingan Point was secured early in the day, the attack of the 4th Marine Division was not a complete success, for darkness found the enemy clinging stubbornly to a portion of the 0-1 Line. The longest gains were made on the right by the 25th Marines. While Vandegrift's attached unit moved forward, Mustain, commander of 1/25, released control of those elements of 3/25 that had been entrusted to the 1st Battalion on the previous day. Once his 3d Battalion had been restored as a team, Chambers sent tanks and infantrymen against pockets of resistance to his rear. The Marines silenced five machine guns and two howitzers, killing in the process some 60 Japanese.

When this task had been finished, Chambers lent assistance to 2/25, which was trying to destroy a quartet of antiaircraft guns located on the reverse slope of the 0-1 ridge. In spite of help from tanks and two of Chambers' rifle companies, Hudson's Marines could not dislodge the enemy, for the Japanese were able to place grazing fire along the crest. Still, the 25th Marines, with Vandegrift's attached battalion, was able to claw its way to within a half-mile of Aslito airfield. In the center and on the left, the 24th and 23d Marines fought a similar tank-infantry battle against equally resolute Japanese of the *47th Independent Mixed Brigade*. The division front line by nightfall formed a crescent around the southern shore of Lake Susupe, bulged eastward almost to 0-1, crossed the critical ridge near the center of the zone of action, and continued to a point almost 1,000

yards east of Agingan Point. (See Map 17.)

ADDITIONAL REINFORCEMENTS ⁷

Ozawa's appearance east of the Philippines caused Admiral Spruance to order the American transports to safer waters, a withdrawal that would begin at darkness on 17 June. General Holland Smith was thus presented the choice of either landing his Expeditionary Troops reserve at Saipan or allowing it to disappear over the eastern horizon. Since the fierce battle on D-Day had served notice that the conquest of Saipan would be a difficult task, he released General Ralph Smith's 27th Infantry Division, less one regiment and its supporting artillery battalion, to Northern Troops and Landing Force and then ordered one of the Army regimental combat teams to land at once.

During the night, the 165th Infantry went ashore, came under General Schmidt's control, and got ready to pass through 3/24 and extend the 4th Marine Division right flank during the next day's attack. The 105th Infantry would land on Holland Smith's order, while the 106th Infantry, formerly scheduled to join Southern Troops and Landing Force at Guam, remained afloat as Expeditionary Troops reserve. Three of the 27th Division field artillery battalions, the 105th, 106th, and 249th, were ordered to disembark and serve under the direction of XXIV Corps Artillery, and by the middle of

⁷ An additional source for this section is: 27th InfDiv G-3 Periodic Rpt, 16-17Jun44.

the following morning, all of them were ready for action. While these reinforcements were crossing the darkened beaches, an advance party from Northern Troops and Landing Force headquarters arrived to select a site for Holland Smith's command post.

THE TANK BATTLE ⁸

During daylight on 16 June, the 2d Marine Division had not engaged in the savage kind of fighting endured by the 4th Marine Division. Once darkness arrived, their roles were reversed, for General Saito chose to hurl the *9th Tank Regiment*, *136th Infantry Regiment*, and *1st Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force* at the northern half of the beachhead. Because of the gains which the Marines had made during the past two days, the Japanese general could not hope to crush General Watson's division at a single stroke. Instead of simply issuing orders to drive the Americans into the sea, Saito directed his troops first to recapture the site of the Saipan radio station, some 400 yards behind the lines held by the 6th Marines. Once this initial objective had been gained, the Japanese would promptly launch further blows that would bring the Americans to their knees.

⁸ Additional sources for this section include: CinCPac-CinCPOA Items Nos. 9304, 9th TkRegt O/B, dtd 15May44, 9983-9985, Thirty-first ArHq outgoing msg file, msg no. 1039, and 10531, Excerpts from a Notebook of FOs; LtCol William K. Jones memo to Dir DivPubInfo, n.d., subj: "Campaign for the Marianas, comments on"; Maj James A. Donovan, "Saipan Tank Battle," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 32, no. 10 (Oct48).

Colonel Goto's *9th Tank Regiment*, which boasted new medium tanks mounting 47mm guns as well as older light tanks, was to spearhead the effort, attacking westward directly toward the radio station. Two of Goto's companies and part of a third had been sent to Guam, but 3½ companies were on hand at Saipan. Although one of these units had been almost wiped out during the earlier fighting, Goto was able to muster about 44 tanks, most of them mediums.

On the heels of the tank attack, Colonel Yukimatsu Ogawa's *136th Infantry Regiment*, which already had suffered serious losses, was to attack toward Charan Kanoa. From the north, Lieutenant Commander Tatsue Karashima's *1st Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force* would advance from Garapan along the coastal road. Although Saito directed the naval unit to cooperate with his Army troops in the eventual capture of Charan Kanoa, he apparently was unable to impose his will on Admiral Nagumo. What was to have been a serious effort to penetrate the lines of the 2d Marines and push southward along the highway did not materialize. Colonel Stuart's regiment, subjected to scattered mortar fire, beat off "minor counterattacks"⁹ but encountered no real peril from the direction of Garapan. To the south, however, Japanese Army troops delivered a blow which, in the opinion of Lieutenant Colonel Jones of 1/6, "could have been fatal to the division's fighting efficiency."¹⁰

Before darkness, American aerial ob-

servers had spotted several enemy tanks in the area inland of the 2d Marine Division beachhead, so the troops were alert to the possibility of an armored attack. At 0330 on the morning of 17 June, the Marines of 1/6 heard the roaring of tank motors. Star shells illuminated the darkened valley from which the noise seemed to be coming, a company of Sherman medium tanks was alerted, and supporting weapons began delivering their planned fires. Within 15 minutes, the hostile tanks, with Ogawa's infantrymen clinging to them, began rumbling into the battalion sector.

"The battle," wrote Major James A. Donovan, Jr., executive officer of 1/6, "evolved itself into a madhouse of noise, tracers, and flashing lights. As tanks were hit and set afire, they silhouetted other tanks coming out of the flickering shadows to the front or already on top of the squads."¹¹ Marine 2.36-inch rocket launchers, grenade launchers, 37mm antitank guns, medium tanks, and self-propelled 75mm guns shattered the enemy armor, while rifle and machine gun fire joined mortar and artillery rounds in cutting down the accompanying foot soldiers.

Between 0300 and 0415, when the battle was most violent, 1/10 fired 800 75mm rounds in support of 1/6. The battalion fired another 140 shells between 0430 and 0620, as the action waned. Additional support came from a 4/10 battery of 105mm howitzers.

Although directed primarily at 1/6, the attack spilled over into the sector manned by 2/2, which was still

⁹ 2d MarDiv D-3 Rpt, 16-17Jun44.

¹⁰ Jones memo, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Donovan, "Saipan Tank Battle," *op. cit.*, p. 26.

attached to the 6th Marines. Here three of Goto's tanks were disabled. By 0700, the hideous din had ended all along the front, but the quiet of the battlefield was broken by the bark of M1 rifles as Marines hunted down survivors of the night's bitter clash. Atop a hill in front of Jones' battalion, a Japanese tank, smashed by naval gunfire as it attempted to escape, lay wreathed in black smoke. At least 24 of the 31 armored vehicles whose charred hulks now littered the area were destroyed while attempting to pierce the lines of 1/6.¹² "I don't think we have to fear Jap tanks any more on Saipan," remarked General Watson. "We've got their number."¹³ The Marines had handled their antitank weapons so effectively that only a handful of Goto's vehicles survived the massacre. These few tanks, however, would strike again before the battle ended.

The *136th Infantry Regiment* also suffered intensely at the hands of 1/6 and 2/2. Neither battalion estimated the number of Japanese killed on that hectic morning. Judging from reports made to division on the following evening, Colonel Ogawa must have lost about 300 men. The Japanese had suffered a bitter reverse. Commented the commanding officer of the *135th Infan-*

¹² Because of the darkness and confusion, the troops involved could not accurately estimate the number of tanks they had destroyed. The tally made after the battle may have included some vehicles that were knocked out prior to the night attack.

¹³ Quoted in Robert Sherrod, *On to Westward, War in the Central Pacific* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1945), p. 68.

try Regiment in northern Saipan: "Despite the heavy blow we dealt the enemy, he is reinforcing his forces in the vicinity of Charan Kanoa. . . ." ¹⁴ Such was the epitaph to General Saito's counterattack.

In all but destroying the *9th Tank Regiment* and a 500-man detachment of infantry, 1/6 had suffered 78 casualties, more than one-third of a full-strength rifle company. The company from 2/2 that helped Jones' Marines shatter the attack lost 19 men killed and wounded. The battalions of the 10th Marines, whose positions had been carefully plotted during the day by Japanese observers, suffered many casualties, including the wounding of the commander of 2/10, Lieutenant Colonel Shell. The two battalions also lost a great deal of equipment to counterbattery fire. By dawn on 17 June, four of the 4th Battalion 105s were temporarily out of action, and only three of the 2d Battalion 75s were capable of firing.

In spite of these losses, which brought NTLF total casualties to approximately 2,500, the efficiency of the command was considered excellent. Now the two Marine divisions, aided by Colonel Gerard W. Kelley's 165th Infantry, would renew their efforts to break out from the coastal plain. While the 2d Marine Division sent the 2d and 6th Marines north toward Garapan and Tipo Pale and the 8th Marines eastward to 0-1, the 4th Marine Division and its attached Army regiment was to continue toward Aslito field.

¹⁴ NTLF G-2 Rpt, p. 13, in *NTLF OpRpt*.

17 *JUNE: THE ATTACK OF
THE 2d MARINE DIVISION*

The attack planned for 0730 on 17 June called for the 2d Marines to extend their beachhead almost halfway to Garapan, while the 6th Marines fought its way to a line drawn south and slightly east from the base of 1,133-foot Mount Tipo Pale. The 8th Marines had the mission of advancing across the Lake Susupe marshes to seize the O-1 ridges to its front. A planned 90-minute preparation by aircraft, warships, and artillery batteries was within 15 minutes of completion when General Holland Smith directed General Watson to postpone the attack until 0930. Convinced that he did not have time to inform all his infantry units of the delay, Watson allowed the three regiments to surge forward.

Colonel Stuart's 2d Marines, composed at the time of 3/2 and 2/6, advanced 400 yards within three hours. Resistance continued very light, and by 1800 the unit was digging in at its objective, about 1,000 yards south of Garapan. One company of 2/6, the regimental reserve, was inserted on the right of 3/2 to insure contact with the 6th Marines. General Watson then released to Stuart's control a company from 1/2, the division reserve, and this unit was attached to 2/6.

The men of the 6th Marines had barely finished ferreting out the snipers left behind as the Japanese counterattack receded, when they began an attack of their own. The regiment fought its way upward to the foothills of Mount Tipo Pale. Since the Japanese within the 6th Marines zone of action had been mauled during

the night's fighting, the survivors could offer only slight resistance, but difficulty in maintaining contact with the 8th Marines slowed Colonel Riseley's command. By the time the objective had been captured, 1/6, 3/6, and 2/2 were on line, with the regimental scout-sniper platoon the only available reserve. To add strength to the position, Colonel Riseley received one company from 1/2.

Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines moved rapidly forward in the left of its zone of action, as the 1st and 3d Battalions seized their assigned portions of the disputed ridgeline. Lieutenant Colonel Tannyhill's 1/29, however, soon found itself mired in the bog that extended northward from Lake Susupe. Japanese snipers lurking in the swamp killed or wounded many of the floundering Marines, while enemy troops firing from a hill on the O-1 Line and an adjacent grove of palm trees inflicted their share of the 80 casualties suffered by the battalion. Among those wounded and evacuated was Lieutenant Colonel Tannyhill, who was replaced during the afternoon by Lieutenant Colonel Rathvon McC. Tompkins.

No sooner had Tompkins arrived on the scene than four medium tanks came thundering along the one good road leading through the zone. He commandeered the Shermans, and their 75mm guns kept the defenders crouching in the trenches until Marine infantrymen could overwhelm the enemy and gain the crest. The tanks then rumbled up the hill to fire directly into a cave where a number of Japanese were holding out, killing the occupants. Although the hill itself was firmly in American hands, the nearby coconut

grove defied reduction. Whenever the battalion 81mm mortars took the stand of trees under fire, the Japanese responded with a torrent of bullets. To guard against a possible counterattack, four self-propelled 75mm guns were rushed onto the hill. No further advance was attempted that day.

On 17 June, the 2d Marine Division had almost doubled the area under its control. From a point on the coast 1,000 yards south of Garapan, the front curved inland past the approaches to Mount Tipo Pale, embraced the hard-won hill in the 8th Marines zone, and swung sharply toward Lake Susupe. The three regiments were in contact with one another, but a gap existed between divisions. To refuse the dangling flank, 2/8 dug in for the night facing generally to the south. (See Map 17.)

THE APPROACH TO ASLITO AIRFIELD

Two battalions of Colonel Kelley's 165th Infantry landed before dawn of 17 June, passed through the lines of 3/24, and attacked toward Aslito field. Vandegrift's Marine battalion, although it had become division reserve, remained in position until midmorning, when Kelley's remaining battalion, 3/165, was safely ashore. Attacking with its 1st and 2d Battalions abreast, the Army regiment thrust forward against comparatively weak defenses. As the day wore on, Japanese opposition along the southern coast increased in ferocity. Near Cape Obiam, 1/165 inched its way to the crest of the ridge that barred access to the airfield, only to be driven back down the slope by a

determined counterattack. The battalion then paused for the night at the base of the ridge. Since this unit could advance no farther, Colonel Kelley halted 2/165 along the high ground just short of the Aslito runways. The 2d Battalion occupied a position that afforded excellent fields of fire and insured contact with 1/165 on the right. The regimental losses for the day's action totaled 15 killed and 57 wounded?

Just to the north, Colonel Batchelder of the 25th Marines sent a column of battalions knifing forward with 2/25 in the lead. The drive netted some 1,500 yards, as the Marines secured the area due north of the airfield and occupied the ridge beyond. Although Marine patrols discovered that Aslito field had been abandoned, Colonel Kelley was unwilling to occupy it with elements of his 165th Infantry. He believed that any further advance would have involved exchanging a good defensive position for a poor one, and in the process assuming a frontage too wide for his pair of battalions. Thus, the successful 2/25 found itself about 600 yards forward of the unit on its right. Colonel Batchelder now ordered his 3d Battalion to form a line facing southward toward the vacant runways and battered buildings. A narrow gap, however, still existed between the Marine and Army regiments.

The 24th Marines, in the left-center of the 4th Marine Division zone of action, had been plagued throughout the early morning by incoming fire from mortars, artillery, and machine guns, as well as by air bursts from

¹⁵ 27th InfDiv G-1 PeriodicRpt. 17Jun44.

40mm antiaircraft guns. A 15-minute artillery preparation did not silence all these Japanese weapons, many of which continued to inflict casualties during the day. Because the division front was growing wider as the Marines moved inland, the 24th Marines had to shift its axis of advance slightly to the north, with 1/24 making a wide turning movement to come abreast of the 2d Battalion. A deluge of shells from antiaircraft guns, probably located near Nafutan Point, delayed completion of the planned maneuver by 1/24. By 1000, the long-range fire had subsided, so that Major Fricke's men, supported by mortars and by LVT(A)s, could overwhelm light opposition to capture their objective.

The attack of 2/24 also was slow in gaining momentum. On the battalion left, the 23d Marines found itself confronted by a defiant and well-entrenched group of Japanese from the *47th Independent Mixed Brigade*. These resolute defenders not only prevented the Marine units from maintaining contact along the regimental boundary but also turned a 3-inch dual-purpose gun against 2/24. The weapon was soon silenced, but almost an hour passed before Rothwell's battalion could extend to its left, make contact, and begin moving forward in the face of mortar concentrations and intermittent 40mm fire, probably from the same antiaircraft guns that were harassing the 1st Battalion.

At 1500, a barrage of 4.5-inch rockets, fired in support of the adjacent 23d Marines, struck the battalion, caus-

ing 20 casualties.¹⁶ In spite of this accident, Rothwell's Marines continued their attack in the face of increasing resistance. The battalion was poised to make a final lunge toward its objective, when a savage concentration of enemy fire erupted from the face of a cliff only 300 yards to the front. Caught in the open and unable to gouge foxholes in the hard coral, the Marines twice fell back, yielding some 600 yards in order to obtain a suitable defensive position. The 2d Battalion had suffered 53 casualties in advancing slightly more than 2,000 yards.

The 23d Marines was in the meantime being fought to a standstill southeast of Lake Susupe, in front of a hill that jutted from the objective ridge. All went well until the 1st Battalion attempted to cross the valley beyond Mount Fina Susu. Lieutenant Colonel Haas' Marines were stopped in their tracks, even though the 2d Battalion, attacking on the right, was able to push steadily forward. The two units soon lost contact, so Colonel Jones was forced to use 3/23, his regimental reserve, to restore the line. Since the 2d Marine Division had been stymied in the southern part of its zone, the two divisions were unable to form a continuous line. (See Map 17.)

General Schmidt's Marines and soldiers had gained the central portion of their objective, but on either flank the line receded somewhat. Although Aslito airfield had not been occupied, Colonel Kelley's soldiers seemed capable

¹⁶ A provisional rocket detachment had been attached to the headquarters battalions of both Marine divisions. The missiles were fired from multiple launchers mounted on trucks.

of overrunning that installation come morning. Also, the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel Marvin H. Floom's 2d 155mm Howitzer Battalion, detached from the 10th Marines, indicated that the 4th Marine Division would receive additional fire support when the attack was renewed.

*THE AMERICAN
BUILD-UP CONTINUES*

While the fighting raged a few thousand yards inland, command posts were being occupied along the western coast. Marine observation planes were preparing to operate from the Charan Kanoa flight strip, and additional troops were pouring ashore. At 1530 on 17 June, General Holland Smith entered the ruins of Charan Kanoa to direct the efforts of Northern Troops and Landing Force. Meanwhile, General Harper had chosen a site from which to direct his corps artillery, but his 155mm battalions would not land until the next day. General Ralph Smith also arrived on the island to assume command of his 27th Infantry Division. The 165th Infantry, however, was to remain attached to General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division for the time being.

Colonel Leonard A. Bishop's 105th Infantry landed during the day. Although all three rifle battalions came ashore ready to enter the fight, most of the regimental communications gear and transport as well as some elements of its headquarters troops were left behind on their transport.¹⁷ Since that

¹⁷ When it became evident that he would not be able to land much of his regimental headquarters and unit supplies, Colonel Bishop

vessel promptly set sail as Admiral Spruance had directed, a week passed before the missing men and equipment landed at Saipan. Acting upon orders from Holland Smith, Bishop posted 2/105 to the rear of the 4th Marine Division to guard against an enemy breakthrough.

Another Army unit which had difficulty in landing was the 864th Antiaircraft Artillery Group. The reef blocked the progress of its landing craft, so the group was unable to move into position until the next day. The 106th Infantry remained afloat as Expeditionary Troops reserve.

Although the transports began weighing anchor as darkness approached, the impending departure of these ships and the redeployment of Turner's combat vessels caused no great concern among the troops ashore, except for the equipment-short 105th Infantry.¹⁸ Over 33,000 tons of cargo had been unloaded to sustain Northern Troops and Landing Force until the convoy returned. The situation was far different from that faced less than two years before by General Vandegrift's 1st Marine Division, when its amphibious shipping suddenly vanished from the dangerous waters off Guadalcanal.

Although the combat efficiency of Northern Troops and Landing Force was regarded as "very satisfactory, impaired to a certain degree by a considerable number of casualties," Colonel

moved ashore ahead of schedule with some key personnel and communications gear. Until its ship returned, the 105th used some repaired Japanese trucks to meet its need for motor transport. Col Leonard A. Bishop, USA, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 28Feb63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Robert E. Hogaboom, corps G-3, detected in the events of 17 June "the first signs of weakening enemy resistance."¹⁹ The 2d Marine Division estimated 2,650 enemy dead in its zone, while the 25th Marines claimed that it alone had killed 1,550 Japanese.²⁰ The defenders of southern Saipan had suffered numerous casualties, though probably fewer than the Americans believed. Whatever the actual total of enemy dead, the coastal perimeter defenses had been shattered.

During the night of 17-18 June, a few weak counterattacks were crushed by Northern Troops and Landing Force. Weariness, casualties, and severed communications prevented the *136th Infantry Regiment* and *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* from making another serious effort to break through to the western beaches. Instead of a frontal attack, the Saipan garrison attempted a counterlanding behind the Marines—a move which had been anticipated.²¹ Of about 35 landing craft that took part in the ill-fated venture, 13 were sunk by fire from patrolling warships or from the 105mm howitzers of 4/10. The Japanese who survived the shelling turned back to scurry ashore near Tanapag.

Enemy aircraft reappeared during the evening to flail away at American shipping. Truk-based planes launched torpedoes at units of the Southern Attack Force, nervously awaiting W-Day at Guam, and damaged one LCT so badly that it had to be scuttled.

¹⁹ NTLF G-3 PeriodicRpt, 16-17Jun44.

²⁰ NTLF G-2 PeriodicRpt, 16-17Jun44.

²¹ RAdm Herbert B. Knowles ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 30Jan63.

Fighters, dive bombers, and torpedo craft from Yap damaged an LST that was retiring with the transports. Later the same airmen struck an escort carrier group, inflicting grave damage on the *Fanshaw Bay*.

18 JUNE—"THE BEGINNING OF OUR SHOWDOWN FIGHT."

As the third day of the battle for Saipan drew to a close, the Japanese premier, Hideki Tojo, radioed those in command of the beleaguered garrison that: "Because the fate of the Japanese empire depends on the result of your operation, inspire the spirit of officers and men and to the very end continue to destroy the enemy gallantly and persistently; thus alleviate the anxiety of our Emperor."²² Although this broadcast was intended to be inspirational, it all but conceded the eventual loss of Saipan. The *Thirty-first Army* headquarters, however, framed a reply that indicated "Have received your honorable Imperial words," read the message, "by becoming bulwark of the Pacific with 10,000 deaths, we hope to requite Imperial favor."²³

The *Thirty-first Army* acting chief of staff,²⁴ at a command post in the mountains east of Garapan, knew few details concerning the actual progress

²² NTLF G-2, Thirty-first Ar Incoming Msg File, no. 115, pt. 1, hereafter *Thirty-first Ar Incoming Msg*.

²³ NTLF G-2, Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg File, no. 1046, hereafter *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg*.

²⁴ Major General Tamura, the army chief of staff, was trapped with General Obata on Guam.

of the battle. After piecing together the few reports that reached him, he concluded that the situation facing the defenders on the morning of 18 June was bleak indeed. He had no information on troop dispositions in the south except the assurance that three reserve companies were in the immediate vicinity of *43d Division* headquarters. Rumor had it that General Saito was dead. Nothing, it seemed, could stop the American advance across Aslito airfield, and a powerful attack toward Garapan appeared in the making.²⁵ If the Japanese high command had on the morning of the 18th any flickering hopes of a victory ashore, such sentiments would not last the day.

Two American attacks were planned for 18 June. At 1000, both Marine divisions would strike, to be followed two hours later by the 27th Infantry Division. General Ralph Smith was granted the additional time to move his 105th Infantry into position along the coast on the right of the 4th Marine Division.

The close of the previous day's fighting had found the 8th Marines in possession of a hill that overlooked a staunchly defended coconut grove. Now, while the rest of General Watson's division dispatched patrols and improved positions, the 8th Marines renewed its effort to seize this objective. Supported by a 15-minute preparation by 2/10, a barrage that had to be carefully adjusted to avoid hitting nearby elements of the 4th Marine Division, 2/8 stormed through the stand of splintered trees. At the same time,

1/29 pushed forward, keeping abreast of Chamberlin's battalion. Because of these gains, contact was temporarily restored between divisions, but by dusk a gap had been reopened.

At 1000, the 4th Marine Division also attacked, plunging forward with three regiments abreast. On the left, the 23d Marines underwent a hasty reorganization prior to crossing the line of departure. The attached 3/24 passed through 1/23, while Colonel Jones attached the rifle companies and mortar platoon of 3/23 to the 2d Battalion. Finally, the 1st Battalion and the headquarters elements of the 3d were merged, charged with supporting the advance from the slopes of Fina Susu, and entrusted to Lieutenant Colonel Cosgrove. The assault battalions soon were stalled by machine gun and mortar fire, but the prompt commitment of Cosgrove's composite unit sent the attack rolling forward once again. Although patrols reached the regimental objective, Japanese machine gunners prevented the Marines from occupying the ridge. In order to obtain ground suited to the defense, Jones had to withdraw his regiment to positions 400 yards east of Lake Susupe. This withdrawal severed the link so recently re-established with the adjacent 8th Marines.

During the afternoon, as the 23d Marines were advancing steadily, a 75mm half-track, supporting the 2d Battalion, fired into a cave in which the Japanese were manufacturing picric acid. A cloud of sickening fumes enveloped the infantrymen crouching near the opening; two men were overcome with attacks of violent nausea, and the gas alarm was sounded. Since

²⁵ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1047.

the Marines made a habit of discarding gas masks as soon as they landed, many an uneasy moment passed before the cloud evaporated. Riflemen resolved never again to part with their gas masks, and an anonymous lieutenant dashed into the division command post to ask a startled General Schmidt if he had a mask to spare.²⁶

While the men of the 23d Marines were recovering from the confusion caused by the providentially false gas alarm, the 24th and 25th Marines were fast closing on the eastern shore of Saipan. Both regiments advanced swiftly, even though the 24th Marines had to deal with a desperate counterattack. At 1615, after the regimental supporting armor had retired to take on ammunition and gasoline, two Japanese tanks rumbled close to American lines and raked the Marines with fire from cannon and machine guns. Although the vehicles were driven off by artillery and bazookas, the sudden foray resulted in 15 American casualties. In spite of the hectic exchange, both regiments reached Magicienne Bay, thus isolating Nafutan Point from the rest of the island.

In order to reach the coast, the 24th Marines bypassed a fortified cliff that extended southward into its zone of action. The mission of securing this stronghold was assigned to 1/25, the division reserve. Because of the steep slope and the numerous caves, a coordinated sweep was impossible. The fight for the cliff was a series of separate actions in which four or five Marines,

hugging the jagged rocks to avoid enemy fire, climbed close to the mouth of a cave and attempted to kill the defenders with a burst from a flame-thrower or with demolitions charges. If the cave proved so deep or tortuous that the enemy troops could escape the effects of fire or of concussion, the attackers blasted shut the entrance and left the entombed Japanese to suffocate.

The 165th Infantry began the day amid some confusion, for Colonel Kelley was not certain whether his command was to operate as a part of the 4th Marine Division or of the 27th Infantry Division. He directed his S-3 to call General Schmidt's D-3 section, but the ensuing conversation did not clarify the status of the Army regiment. After discussing the matter with General Ralph Smith, Kelley concluded that he was again part of the Army division and would receive a formal order to that effect from General Schmidt. Although no such order arrived, the 165th Infantry attacked at 0730 to secure the ridge in the right-hand portion of its zone and 30 minutes later began advancing on the airfield. By 1000, both objectives were firmly in American hands. The regiment then paused to regroup and in doing so came under fire from dual-purpose guns located on Nafutan Point. These weapons soon were silenced by American artillery, so that the soldiers could advance to the ridge that overlooked Magicienne Bay.

The 105th Infantry, attacking along the southern coast, encountered difficulty from the outset. Both 3/105 and 1/105, which were to have relieved Kelley's 1st and 3d Battalions by noon, were about 45 minutes late in carrying

²⁶ Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to CMC, dtd 8Jan 50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 104. No copy of this letter has been found.

out their assignments. When the advance finally got underway, the troops entered a maze of dense undergrowth broken by coral peaks, some of them 90 feet high. Even though the Japanese chose not to oppose the passage, Colonel Bishop's men gained no more than 200 yards.

As darkness came on 18 June, Northern Troops and Landing Force held approximately three-fourths of southern Saipan. The enemy still clung to the approaches to Garapan, the foothills of Mount Tipo Pale, and a salient extending from Hill 500 toward Lake Susupe, as well as the jungle-clad hills southeast of Aslito field. Since the 4th Marine Division had captured a small segment of the eastern coast, the Japanese troops who had retreated toward Nafutan Point were isolated from their companions in the north. Elements of XXIV Corps Artillery, assisted by observation planes from the Charan Kanoa strip, had begun firing. General Holland Smith, concerned that his stockpile of supplies might become dangerously low, requested that the transports return on the following day, but Admiral Turner would release only those vessels carrying critical items. Two hospital ships made rendezvous on the 18th with the transports in order to pick up the seriously wounded. All in all, the situation looked as promising to American eyes as it seemed grave to the Japanese. (See Map 17.)

The *Thirty-first Army* now informed Tokyo that:

The Army is consolidating its battle lines and has decided to prepare for a showdown fight. It is concentrating the 43d Division in the area east of Tapotchau. The remaining units (two battalions of the 135th Infantry, one composite bat-

talion, and one naval unit) are concentrating in the area east of Garapan.²⁷

The new defensive line would extend inland from a point just south of Garapan, past the cliffs guarding the approaches to Mount Tapotchau, to the shores of Magicienne Bay. Perhaps the only consolation to the enemy was the knowledge that Saito was alive to direct the impending battle.

Among the missions assigned the troops manning the new line was that of preventing the Americans from using Aslito field, a task that would have to be accomplished by infiltration since most of the Japanese artillery had been destroyed. In addition, the defenders were to hold the Marpi Point airstrip and portions of the northern beaches so that supplies and reinforcements could be landed.²⁸ Along with these instructions, Tokyo broadcast further words of inspiration. "Although the front-line officers and troops are fighting splendidly," read a message from the Emperor, "if Saipan is lost, air raids on Tokyo will take place often; therefore you will hold Saipan."²⁹ On the same evening that this exhortation arrived, the *Thirty-first Army* intelligence section began burning all but a few of its code books to prevent their capture.³⁰

19 JUNE: THE FIGHTING ASHORE

On the morning of 19 June, after passing the quietest night since D-Day, the Marine and Army divisions continued their attack. In the north, the 2d

²⁷ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1050.

²⁸ *Thirty-first Ar Incoming Msg* No. 150; *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1054.

²⁹ *Thirty-first Ar Incoming Msg* No. 152.

³⁰ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1057.



HAND GRENADES are tossed by riflemen at Japanese positions as the battle lines move across Saipan from the invasion beaches. (USMC 83366)



SKIRMISH LINE of 27th Division infantrymen moves out to mop up the enemy on Nafutan Point. (USA SC210608)

Marine Division reorganized and sent patrols ahead of the battle position. The division reserve, 1/2, passed to regimental control. One company from 2/6, attached to the 2d Marines, was returned to its parent regiment. The patrols dispatched that day resulted in the destruction of three enemy tanks and the occupation of Hill 790, in the 6th Marines zone, a formidable height which the Japanese obligingly yielded. The 8th Marines probed the defenses to their front while simultaneously looking for routes over which to supply future operations. (See Map 17.)

As the 4th Marine Division was preparing to launch its attack, Japanese infantrymen and their armored support were seen massing in the vicinity of Tsutsuuran. Artillery fire promptly dispersed the enemy force, and the Marines lunged forward. While the 24th and 25th Marines consolidated their positions, the 23d Marines, with 3/24 attached, advanced almost to Hill 500. During the attack, Vandegrift's 3/24 was pinched out of the line, and Dillon's 2/23 along with Cosgrove's composite unit assumed responsibility for the entire regimental zone. The day's gains, however, could not be held because of the danger that the enemy might infiltrate along the division boundary, so the 23d Marines withdrew about 400 yards. Among the casualties was Lieutenant Colonel Cosgrove, wounded by a sniper's bullet; he was replaced by Major Paul S. Treitel.

Along the southern coast, the 27th Infantry Division was having difficulty in keeping its lines intact. The 165th Infantry pushed the remaining distance to Magicienne Bay, thus keeping

contact with the 4th Marine Division on the left. The attack of the 105th Infantry, however, bogged down in front of a sheer cliff. A gap opened between the two regiments, but the 165th Infantry patrolled the area. In addition, 1/105 and 3/105 could not keep abreast, and 1/165 had to be employed to restore the line.

During the early morning of 20 June, the Japanese struck back with local counterattacks. A force of 75 stormed the positions of 2/24 and was repulsed, but not before 11 Marines had been wounded. In the 6th Marines sector, some 15 Japanese infiltrators did little damage.

While jabbing at American lines, the defenders were falling back to the line selected on the previous day. General Saito, however, had suddenly become concerned lest the flank of this new position be turned. He directed the *118th Infantry Regiment*, reinforced by tanks, to guard against a landing in the vicinity of Laulau on Magicienne Bay.³¹ (See Map 18.)

During the course of the day, *Thirty-first Army* headquarters received additional reports from the units fighting in southern Saipan. According to the army chief of staff's tally, 3½ of *43d Division's* 7 infantry battalions and two-thirds of its artillery had been destroyed. The *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* no longer had any artillery and was unable to estimate the number of infantry units still capable of offering organized resistance. Of three or more rifle battalions that had been organized from the miscellaneous units stranded

³¹ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 10531, excerpts from a Notebook of FOs.

at Saipan when the invasion took place, approximately one battalion remained intact. Three engineer companies had been shattered completely, and only one antiaircraft battery remained in action. Although a few artillery pieces survived, all the Army artillery battalions were disorganized. Between 15 and 20 percent of the total Army strength was dead, wounded, or prisoners of war.³²

The land operations that took place on 19 June were important. Steady pressure had been maintained on the Japanese by Marine infantry units. Corps and division artillery blanketed with fire enemy troop concentrations and weapons positions, while Army antiaircraft guns went into position to protect Aslito field. The retreating Japanese, it seemed, were showing the effects of the constant hammering. Northern Troops and Landing Force intelligence officers could take heart from the surrender of five thirsty Japanese, who claimed that the garrison was dependent on rainfall for its water supply.³³ Yet, the most significant events of 19 June took place at sea.

*THE BATTLE OF THE PHILIPPINE SEA*³⁴

As his warships neared the Marianas, Admiral Ozawa realized that his attempt to cripple Spruance's fleet depended upon the cooperation of land-

based Japanese aircraft and the determination of Saipan's garrison. General Saito's men, though they were fighting desperately, had been driven from the ridges that dominated the western beaches. The invaders had landed enough men and supplies to enable them to dispense temporarily with their transports. Yet, the Japanese soldiers had been partially successful. While the vulnerable transports had withdrawn to the east, Saipan was far from secured, so Spruance's ships remained, in a very real sense, tied to the beachhead.

The promised attempt by the Japanese to fly land-based bombers into the Marianas was less than a partial success. American raids on the Volcano-Bonin Islands destroyed some of the enemy planes, and others were stopped by adverse weather. A few aircraft succeeded in getting through, and these took part in a series of raids launched on 18 June.

At 0540 on that day, the Japanese attacked the old battleships, inflicting no damage, but later in the day three American oilers were damaged, one seriously. The last effort of the day, directed against the escort carriers, cost the Japanese five fighters. Unfortunately, 19 of the intercepting American planes crashed while attempting to land on the carriers after dark.³⁵ A Japanese naval aviator, who had helped dispatch 120-130 aircraft, most of them manned by student pilots, from Japan to the Marianas, later estimated that only 40 percent of the pilots

³² *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1060.

³³ TF 56 G-3 Periodic Rpt, 19-20Jun44.

³⁴ An additional source for this section is: CinCPac-CinCPOA Ops in POA, Jun44, Anx A, pt. VII.

³⁵ *TF 52.2 OpRpt*, p. 124.

and virtually none of the planes survived the aerial battles of 18 June.³⁶

As the Japanese planes were limping back to their bases, Admiral Spruance maneuvered to prevent the enemy from getting past his ships to attack Saipan. Recent submarine sightings and interceptions of enemy radio messages by high frequency direction finders seemed to indicate that Ozawa would divide his forces, but this was not the case. The Japanese admiral was intent on destroying the American carriers.

On the morning of 19 June, the enemy launched the first of four powerful raids. When the gigantic air battle ended, 330 of the 430 planes launched by the enemy carriers had been destroyed. American attacks against airfields on Guam accounted for another 50 Japanese planes. In contrast, Mitscher's carriers lost 30 planes, 13 of them as a result of the sweeps over Guam.

Ship losses on 19 June also indicated that an American victory was in the making. Japanese bombers had slightly damaged the battleship *South Dakota* and scored near misses on two carriers and a cruiser, while an enemy plane had crashed the *Indiana*, but two of Ozawa's nine carriers were sunk by submarines. The Japanese ships now altered course to avoid the lash of Mitscher's planes long enough to refuel.

As a result of the enemy's change of course, American airmen were unable to deliver an attack of their own until late in the afternoon of 20 June. Ad-

miral Spruance then took a calculated risk in ordering the strike, for it was certain the planes could not get back to the carriers until after dark. The flyers sunk one carrier, slightly damaged two others, and downed 65 Japanese planes. American losses numbered 100 planes, but only about 20 of these were destroyed by the enemy. The rest crashed on or near the carriers, while attempting night landings. Although the waiting ships turned on their lights to aid the pilots, many planes were so low on gasoline that the first approach, good or bad, had to be the last one. Many of the pilots and crewmen who crashed were rescued from the sea that night and on the next day.

Ozawa had been crushed. Admiral Turner now was free to concentrate on supporting the troops ashore. On 20 June, as the Japanese were reeling under the blows of Mitscher's airmen, the transports unloaded 11,536 tons of supplies. In the following several days, increasing numbers of ships returned from the deployment area and the volume of supplies unloaded rose swiftly. With the defeat of the Japanese fleet, the eventual doom of the enemy garrison was assured. The defenders could no longer win the battle for Saipan, but they would fight as valiantly as though their triumph was certain.

THE CAPTURE OF HILL 500

On 20 June, while Navy planes were seeking out Ozawa's fleet, Marine and Army troops continued their pressure on the retreating enemy at Saipan.

³⁶ USSBS *Interrogation* Nav No. 91, Captain Akira Sasaki, IJN, dtd 23Nov45, II, p. 396.

In the northern part of the American beachhead, the 2d and 6th Marines continued patrolling, while the 8th Marines and the 4th Marine Division attempted to complete the turning movement that would enable the invaders to begin advancing north along the island spine. Meanwhile, in the south, the 27th Infantry Division persisted in its efforts to destroy the Japanese troops entrenched at Nafutan Point.

Patrols from the 2d Marines penetrated almost to the southern outskirts of Garapan, while those sent out by the 6th Marines discovered that the enemy had withdrawn at least 500 yards. Neither regiment, however, could advance until the 8th Marines had pushed forward. On 20 June, Colonel Wallace's unit completed its portion of the turning movement, with 2/8 advancing to the left of Hill 500 and gaining its part of the objective line against light opposition. The change in direction shortened the regimental front so that Colonel Wallace could move 3/8 and 1/29 into reserve, leaving 1/8 and 2/8 to man the line.

General Ralph Smith's troops had taken over responsibility for mopping up the shores of Magicienne Bay. Able to concentrate on its drive north, the 4th Marine Division made impressive gains during the day. The attack, originally scheduled for 0900, was delayed for 90 minutes to allow the 25th Marines, less its 1st Battalion, to replace the weary 23d. Critical terrain in the division zone was Hill 500, which was to be taken by Colonel Batchelder's regiment.

Because of the narrow frontage as-

signed him, Colonel Batchelder decided to attack in a column of battalions, Lieutenant Colonel Chambers' 3d Battalion leading the way. While the 1st Provisional Rocket Detachment, the regimental 37mm guns, and the battalion 81mm mortars joined the 1st and 3d Battalions, 14th Marines, in blasting the hill, Chambers' men, concealed by a smoke screen, advanced across the level ground to Laulau road, some 500 yards from the objective. Here the battalion reorganized, and, as the preparatory barrage increased in severity, the Marines began moving through wisps of smoke toward the crest. Although the summit was gained about noon, the sealing or burning out of bypassed caves took up most of the afternoon. When the action ended, 44 Japanese bodies littered the hill, while an unknown number lay entombed beneath its surface. The Marines lost 9 killed and 40 wounded, comparatively few casualties in contrast to the number the enemy might have exacted had he chosen to defend the hill more vigorously.

While Chambers' men were seizing Hill 500, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 24th Marines were racing forward a distance of 2,700 yards. Although these units encountered fire from rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, and occasionally from mortars, the Japanese had withdrawn the bulk of their forces to man the new defensive line. Assisted by medium tanks, armored LVTs, and light tanks mounting flamethrowers, Lieutenant Colonel Rothwell's 2/24 executed what the battalion commander termed "the best coordi-

nated tank and infantry attack of the operation."³⁷ In doing so, the battalion suffered 32 casualties.

During the 4th Marine Division swing toward the north, Lieutenant Colonel Mustain's 1/25 was battling to drive the enemy from the cliff bypassed on 18 June by the 24th Marines. On the 19th, Mustain's battalion attacked directly toward the sheer western face of the objective, gaining little ground and suffering 26 casualties. Now, on the 20th, he struck from the south. Twice American tanks thundered forward in an unsuccessful effort to draw enemy fire. The third time the armor advanced, Marine infantrymen also moved forward, and the Japanese greeted Mustain's troops with a deluge of fire. In spite of this violent opposition, the attackers moved steadily northward. Flamethrower operators and demolitions teams cleaned out those caves that could be approached on foot, while tanks fired into the openings cut into the face of the cliff.

In an accident reminiscent of the blockhouse explosion on Namur, a Japanese ammunition dump hidden in a cane field at the base of the cliff exploded, temporarily disorganizing Company A. The blast may have been caused by a Japanese shell, but it could have occurred when the flames set by American tracers reached the stockpile of explosives. Mustain's losses for the entire day totaled 31 killed or wounded.

South of the cliff, General Ralph Smith's soldiers continued their attack

toward Nafutan Point. Two battalions of the 165th Infantry, attacking from the north and northwest, gained about 1,000 yards, but 3/105 had a difficult time in overcoming the cave defenses dug into the cliffs and ridges within its zone. On 20 June, the last of General Ralph Smith's regiments, Colonel Russell G. Ayres' 106th Infantry, came ashore. General Holland Smith felt that he might need the regiment at Saipan, even though it had been earmarked as reserve for the Guam landings. Admiral Turner agreed with the Marine general, but he specified that as much as possible of the unit equipment be left on board ship to speed the eventual movement to Guam. Once ashore, the 106th Infantry became Northern Troops and Landing Force reserve, thus releasing 2/105 to division control.

Other heartening changes in the tactical situation took place on 20 June. The first American plane to use Aslito field³⁸ touched down that evening. Also, the 155mm guns of XXIV Corps Artillery began firing at targets on Tinian. With all of southern Saipan except Nafutan Point under American control, General Holland Smith could devote his full attention to shattering General Saito's mid-island defense line.

³⁷ Upon its capture by the 165th Infantry, Aslito field had been renamed in honor of Colonel Gardiner J. Conroy, regimental commander killed at Makin. Later the installation was officially christened Iseley Field in memory of Commander Robert H. Isely, a naval aviator killed during a preinvasion strike. For unexplained reasons, the original spelling of Isely was not retained by the XXI Bomber Command. See Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 515n.

³⁸ 2/24 Narrative, p. 5.

*PREPARATIONS FOR THE DRIVE
TO THE NORTH*

Prior to launching their blows against the newly formed Japanese line, the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions spent 21 June, D plus 6, in reorganizing, moving up supplies, and probing for enemy strongpoints which would have to be reduced when the attack began. Japanese troops who had taken refuge in the swamps surrounding Lake Susupe had been a source of trouble throughout the operation. A patrol attempted on 19 June to flush out these stragglers, killing seven of them and capturing a pair of machine guns before being forced to withdraw. A larger patrol returned the following day, but it too was not powerful enough to complete the task. On 21 June, 1/106 received orders to secure the area, and the Army unit went into action the following day. Although the soldiers conscientiously searched the marsh, they were unable to kill all the Japanese hiding there. The area remained a haven for enemy infiltrators for some time to come.

Elsewhere in the 2d Marine Division zone, patrols sought information on enemy defenses. A strong position was located south of Garapan, but neither the 6th nor 8th Marines was able to learn anything concerning General Saito's recent preparations. The 8th Marines took advantage of the lull to relieve 2/8 with 1/29, and the 2d 155mm Howitzer Battalion reverted to control of the 10th Marines.

On the right, the 4th Marine Division also paused before attacking along the east coast. Since 31 Japanese had been slain on Hill 500 during the pre-

vious night, 3/25 once again probed the caves that scarred its slopes. Lieutenant Colonel Chambers talked two enemy soldiers captured on the hill into trying to convince their comrades to surrender. Two wounded men yielded to their arguments, but four others emerged from their caves rifles ready and had to be killed.

At Nafutan Point, the 27th Infantry Division on 21 June continued its slow, cave-by-cave advance. In the midst of the day's action, an order arrived at Ralph Smith's headquarters directing the division, less one battalion and a light tank platoon, to pass into Northern Troops and Landing Force reserve and assemble northwest of Aslito field. A separate sub-paragraph assigned the reinforced battalion the mission of mopping up Nafutan Point and protecting the airstrip.³⁹ This assignment was made in the third paragraph of the order, the place, according to both Army and Marine Corps usage, where the commander stated the mission of his subordinate units.

Almost five hours after receiving the order, Ralph Smith telephoned Holland Smith to urge that a regiment rather than a battalion be assigned the job of reducing Nafutan Point. The Marine general approved the employment of the more powerful force, provided that one battalion was available for operations elsewhere on the island. At 2000, the Commanding General, 27th Infantry Division, ordered the 105th Infantry to "hold present front line facing Nafutan Point, with two battalions on line and one battalion in regi-

³⁹ NTLF OpO 9-44, dtd 21Jun44.

mental reserve.”⁴⁰ The regiment was to relieve by 0630 on 22 June those elements of the 165th Infantry manning the front lines, reorganize, and resume the attack by 1100 on the same day. The reserve battalion of the 105th Infantry could not be employed without General Ralph Smith’s approval.

At 0830 on 22 June, a modification of the previous NTLF order reached 27th Infantry Division Headquarters. The major change was the selection of a regiment, obviously the 105th Infantry, instead of a battalion to “continue the mission . . . of clearing up remaining resistance and patrolling [the] area.”⁴¹ Although the revised order from Northern Troops and Landing Force varied only slightly from the instructions issued by Ralph Smith, the fact that two commanders issued different orders to the same unit later served as partial justification for the relief of the Army general.

Holland Smith’s original order had in its third paragraph detailed a reinforced battalion to eliminate the Japanese resistance on Nafutan Point. The Marine general considered this proof enough that the unit involved was under Northern Troops and Landing Force control. The substitution of a regiment for a battalion did not alter the command situation. Apparently his Army subordinate assumed otherwise, for Ralph Smith issued his field order for 22 June as though the Nafutan force were responsible directly to the 27th Infantry Division. Technically at least, he had contravened an

order of his Marine superior. Also, Ralph Smith had specified that the 105th Infantry hold its present positions until late the following morning, even though the change to the NTLF order, which arrived after the division had assigned the regiment its mission, directed that the attack be continued. Both generals looked forward to taking the offensive, but by going on the defensive for even a few hours, Ralph Smith, his Marine corps commander later maintained, had countermanded a lawful order.⁴²

At dusk of 21 June, while the two generals were in the midst of issuing the series of orders which would become so controversial, the frontline troops steeled themselves for the usual night infiltration. Scarcely had the sun gone down, when infiltrators managed to touch off a 2d Marine Division ammunition dump on Green 1. Explosions continued to spew shell fragments over the beach throughout the night, but the Marines along the front lines passed a quiet night. Clashes between patrols and minor attempts at infiltration occurred, but there was no major counterattack.

In the 4th Marine Division sector, four more Japanese were killed at Hill

⁴⁰ 27th InfDiv FO No. 45A, dtd 21Jun44.

⁴¹ 27th InfDiv G-3 Jnl, 22Jun44, msg no. 14.

⁴² Cf. Testimony of MajGen Ralph C. Smith, dtd 31Jul44, p. 6, Exhibit AAA to Proceedings of a Board of Officers Appointed by Letter Orders Serial AG 333/3, 4Jul44, HQ, USAF CPA, hereafter *Army Inquiry*; CG, Expeditionary Trps memo to CTF 51, dtd 24Jun44, Subj: Authority to Relieve Army Officers from Command, Exhibit D to *Army Inquiry*; CG, NTLF memo to CTF 51, dtd 27Jun44, Subj: Summary of Events Leading to Relief from Command of MajGen Ralph C. Smith, USA, Exhibit E to *Army Inquiry*.

500, and enemy bombs crashed harmlessly to earth in the vicinity of General Schmidt's command post. The same 12-plane flight that attacked the beachhead also tried to destroy the transports but was thwarted by a smoke screen. On the following morning, the

fight for central Saipan would begin, as the Marines advanced toward some of the most formidable terrain on the entire island—the jumble of peaks that extended from the vicinity of Mount Tapotchau onto Kagman Peninsula. (See Maps 17 and 18.)

The Fight for Central Saipan¹

On the evening of 21 June, the day before the attack northward was scheduled to begin, Northern Troops and Landing Force reported its combat efficiency as "very satisfactory,"² in spite of the 6,165 casualties incurred since 15 June. During the fight for southern Saipan, the 2d Marine Division had suffered 2,514 killed, wounded, and missing, while the losses of the 4th Marine Division totaled 3,628. The 27th Infantry Division, which had not taken part in the costly assault landings, lost 320 officers and men in overrunning Aslito field and seizing the approaches to Nafutan Point. General Harper's XXIV Corps Artillery and the provisional antiaircraft group had yet to lose a man. Force troops had suffered two casualties, both men wounded in action.

THE ATTACK OF 22 JUNE

Numerous as these casualties had been, General Holland Smith believed

¹ Unless other noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 OpRpt*; *TF 56 OpRpt*; *2d MarDiv OpRpt*; *27th InfDiv OpRpt*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; *2d Mar SAR*; *6th Mar SAR*; *8th Mar SAR*; *10th Mar SAR*; *14th Mar Rpt*; *23d Mar Rpt*; *24th Mar Rpt*; *25th Mar Rpt*; *105th Inf OpRpt*; *106th Inf OpRpt*; *165th Inf OpRpt*; *1/8 OpRpt*; *2/23 Rpt*; *3/23 OpRpt*; *2/24 Narrative*; *1/25 Rpt*; *3/25 Rpt*; *3/25 Narrative*; *3/25 Saga*; *1/29 SAR*; Love, *27th InfDiv History*; Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*; Hoffman, *Saipan*.

² NTLF G-3 Periodic Rpt, 20-21Jun44.

his two Marine divisions were capable of advancing a maximum distance of 4,000 yards by dusk on 22 June. The 2d Marine Division was to move forward a few hundred yards along the western coast, to seize Mount Tipo Pale in the center of its zone, and on the right to capture Mount Tapotchau, some 3,000 yards forward of the line of departure. While General Watson's troops wheeled past Mount Tapotchau, General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division would keep pace by securing the series of ridges along the division boundary, driving the enemy from Hill 600, and capturing the two terrain features which lay southeast of Mt. Tapotchau that later bore the ominous names of Death Valley and Purple Heart Ridge. If the divisions became extended over too wide an area, Holland Smith planned to commit the 27th Infantry Division, less the regiment which was in action at Nafutan Point. Uncertain where the Army troops might be needed, the corps commander directed Ralph Smith to select routes over which his men might march to the assistance of either frontline division. A total of 18 artillery battalions was to support the main attack.

At 0600 on 22 June, after a 10-minute artillery preparation, the Northern Troops and Landing Force offensive got underway. In the 2d Marine Division zone, the 2d Marines stood fast along the coast, while the 6th and 8th

Marines plunged into a tangle of brush-covered ridges and deep gullies. Attacking in the center of the division zone, the 6th Marines had to maintain contact with the stationary 2d Marines on the left as well as with the advancing 8th Marines. To solve this problem, Colonel Riseley let the progress of the 8th Marines, which had a greater distance to travel, determine his pace. No resistance was encountered until early afternoon, when the 6th Marines began advancing up the slopes of Mount Tipo Pale.

One rifle company sidestepped a ravine strongpoint near the base of the hill and moved unopposed to the summit. The remainder of 3/6 followed the same route to the top of the 1,100-foot peak, but a sheer drop, not shown on the maps, and accurate enemy fire prevented the battalion from moving down the northern slope. While 3/6 made its ascent, the strongpoint below was proving more powerful than anticipated.

The 6th Marines' scout-sniper platoon was the first unit to attack the ravine which 3/6 had bypassed. These few Marines soon discovered that the Japanese had tunneled into several steep bluffs separated by ravines which extended like fingers from the massive hill. The earlier action had disclosed only one of several mutually supporting positions. A rifle company from 2/2, still attached to Riseley's command, took over from the scouts the task of reducing the strongpoint. After destroying a few Japanese emplacements, the unit found itself caught in a deadly crossfire and had to withdraw. The enemy would cling to these formidable positions for two additional days before

retreating to the north. The presence of this band of determined Japanese caused Riseley to bend his lines back along the fringe of the strongpoint, so that 2/2 faced more to the east than to the north.

In the 4th Division zone meanwhile, General Schmidt, prior to launching his attack, selected an intermediate objective line drawn near the base of Hill 600. Here the regiments could pause to reorganize before advancing the final 2,000 yards that separated them from the day's objective chosen by General Holland Smith. The rugged terrain as well as the distance to be covered compelled General Schmidt to employ this additional means of controlling the advance.

The 4th Marine Division moved forward with Colonel Batchelder's 25th Marines on the left, Colonel Hart's 24th Marines along the east coast, and Colonel Jones' 23d Marines in reserve. In front of Batchelder's troops lay the most jumbled terrain in the division zone, a series of four ridges that had for control purposes been labeled as 0-A, 0-B, 0-C, and 0-D. The last of these coincided with the intermediate objective. Fortunately, the regimental frontage was narrow enough to permit Batchelder to attack in a column of battalions, a formation that gave him a great degree of flexibility. Should he have difficulty in keeping contact with adjacent units, he would have enough reserve strength to extend his lines.

Lieutenant Colonel Chambers' 3/25 led the column, occupying 0-A by 0630. While the unit was reorganizing, the enemy counterattacked, triggering a violent fight that cost the Japanese 90

dead. Three successive commanders of Company K, the Marine unit hardest hit, were either killed or wounded, but the American attack quickly rolled forward. 0-B, only lightly defended, was captured, and by 1400, 3/25 had overcome increasing resistance to seize 0-C. During the advance, Colonel Batchelder had committed Lieutenant Colonel Hudson's 2d Battalion to seal a gap on the regimental right flank.

As Chambers' men approached 0-D, each of the two assault companies kept physical contact with elements of the flanking battalion, but not with each other, thus opening a hole in the center of the line. The battalion commander inserted his reserve into the gap, but he soon had to call for additional help, a company from Mustain's 1/25, to extend his line still farther to the right. The attack on 0-D was halted short of its goal by fire from caves dug into the ridge itself and from a patch of woods just south of the objective. The 3d Battalion had gained almost 2,000 yards during the day.

Late in the afternoon, an ammunition dump exploded near Chambers' observation post. The battalion commander was stunned by the blast, and Major James Taul, the executive officer, took over until the following day when Chambers resumed his duties. The major launched another attack toward 0-D, but his men were unable to dislodge the Japanese from the woods at the base of the objective.

While Colonel Batchelder's regiment was fighting for the succession of ridges within its zone, Colonel Hart's 24th Marines were advancing along the shore of Magicienne Bay. Gullies leading toward the beach and outcrop-

pings of rock slowed the unit, but Hart's men nevertheless made steady progress. Although the frequent detours caused by the broken terrain opened numerous gaps within the regiment, General Schmidt was more concerned about the difficulty that Hart's Marines were having in keeping contact with Batchelder's troops. At midday, he ordered the 23d Marines, the division reserve, into line between the two regiments.

At 1500, after marching 2,500 yards from its assembly area, Colonel Jones' regiment attacked in a column of battalions. Lieutenant Colonel Haas' 1/23 was in the lead; the 2d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Dillon, followed, while 3/23, commanded by Major Treitel, served as regimental reserve. The formidable terrain rather than the ineffectual enemy resistance slowed the advance, so that by dusk, 1/23 had halted some 200 yards south of the day's intermediate objective.

As darkness drew near, the 4th Marine Division completed adjusting its lines to thwart Japanese attempts at infiltration. On the right, 2/24 was inserted between the 1st and 3d Battalions, but this move did not restore the regimental line. Along the division boundary, the shift of one company from 3/25 caused Taul's battalion to lose contact with Lieutenant Colonel Tompkins' 1/29, on the right of the 2d Division. A company from 1/25 went into position to prevent the enemy from exploiting the break.

On 22 June, General Holland Smith decided to commit his corps reserve, the 27th Division. His operation order for that date fixed the next day's

objective. This line included the village of Laulau on the east, the central stronghold of Mt. Tapotchau, and a point on the west coast about 1,000 yards south of Garapan. General Ralph Smith's soldiers were to pass through the lines of the 25th Marines and at 1000 on 23 June attack toward this line. When the objective had been taken, the division would continue its effort upon order from Northern Troops and Landing Force. Since the corps commander was releasing the 106th Infantry to division control, General Ralph Smith elected to attack with two regiments abreast, Colonel Ayres' 106th on the left and Colonel Kelley's 165th on the right.

Holland Smith, on the afternoon of 22 June, decided that a single battalion should be able to clean up Nafutan Point. Ralph Smith felt otherwise, expressing belief that the Japanese might pierce the thin American line to storm Aslito field. Nevertheless, he prepared to execute the decision of his superior commander. At 2100 on 22 June, he issued a field order to 2/105, which was at that time in corps reserve, directing that unit and its attached tanks "to continue operations to mop-up remaining enemy detachments in the Nafutan Point area." After the Nafutan pocket had been reduced, the battalion would, read the Army general's directive, revert to corps control as corps reserve.

At 2330 on 22 June, the division CP received a practically identical order from the corps commander. It included the subject of reversion to corps control. There was just one difference between the two directives: Holland Smith indicated that the attack would

begin "at daylight," whereas Ralph Smith omitted those words. The corps commander subsequently objected that the Army general had issued an order to a unit not at the time under his tactical control. A relative fact was that the division commander had not been granted authority regarding use of the corps reserve.

This was Ralph Smith's second mistaken order to a unit not under his tactical control, the previous instance occurring on 21 June and also involving the 105th Infantry.

While preparations to resume the Nafutan Point mop up were underway, Colonels Ayres and Kelley were already selecting the routes which their regiments would follow to move into the front lines to the north. In the south, 2/105 extended its lines, while the remainder of the regiment reverted to corps reserve.³

On 22 June, the two Marine Divisions had advanced half the distance to the day's objective at a cost of 157 casualties.⁴ The Americans, however, now faced General Saito's main line of resistance. Here, the enemy had concentrated some 15,000 men, two-thirds of them from the *43d Division* and the remainder either sailors or stragglers whose "fighting ability is reduced by

³ NTLF OpO 10-44, dtd 22Jun44; NTLF G-3 Jnl, msg no. 743, dtd 1550, 23Jun44; 27th InfDiv FO No. 46, dtd 22Jun44; MajGen Ralph C. Smith, Notes on Ops of 27th Div at Saipan, Anx I to PreliminaryRpt on Ops of 27th Div at Saipan, dtd 11Jul44, Exhibit M to *Army Inquiry*; MajGen Ralph C. Smith memo to CG, NTLF, dtd 23Jun44, Subj: Hostile Forces on Nafutan Point, Exhibit VVV to *Army Inquiry*.

⁴ NTLF G-1 Rpt, App I in *NTLF OpRpt*.

lack of weapons.”⁵ When the NTLF attempted to overcome these defenders, the number of Americans killed and wounded was bound to soar.

At Nafutan Point, most of the day was spent in adjusting the front line. As a result of the shifting of its components, 2/105 had to yield some of the ground it already had captured. Opposing the reinforced battalion were approximately 1,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians, a force about equal in numbers to the Army unit.

On the morning of 22 June, Army Air Forces fighters (P-47 Thunderbolts) of the 19th Fighter Squadron landed at Aslito field. The planes, which had been launched from escort carriers, were refitted with launching racks and armed with rockets by ground crews already at the airstrip. By midafternoon, eight of the P-47s had taken off on their first support missions of the Saipan campaign.⁶

By Saipan standards, the night of 22-23 June was comparatively quiet. Four Japanese who attempted to infiltrate along the division boundary were killed in a hand-to-hand struggle. The 14th Marines and 106th Infantry were shelled by enemy batteries located near Mount Tapotchau, and artillery pieces on Tinian damaged an LST off the Green Beaches before they were silenced by counterbattery fire.

Japanese aircraft also saw action. Late in the afternoon, a torpedo plane scored a hit on the *Maryland*, forcing that battleship to steam to Pearl Har-

bor for repairs. A night aerial attack on the Charan Kanoa anchorage did no damage to American shipping.

23 JUNE: INCREASING RESISTANCE

The corps attack of 23 June was a continuation of the previous day's effort. Once again, the 2d Marines served as pivot for the 2d Marine Division. In the adjacent 6th Marines zone, Lieutenant Colonel William K. Jones' 1/6 also held its ground to enable 3/6, commanded by Major Rentsch, to come abreast. The 3d Battalion advanced about 400 yards, but the pockets of resistance on Tipo Pale could not be eliminated. During the day, 2/2 was pinched out as the frontage became more narrow. This unit was returned to Colonel Stuart's 2d Marines in exchange for Major Hunt's 2/6, which was reunited with its parent regiment.

Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines benefited from an aerial search by observation planes of VMO-2 for routes leading to Mount Tapotchau. The reconnaissance disclosed a suitable supply road, but the observer also discovered that the only feasible avenue by which to approach the summit, a ridge near the division boundary, was dominated by a towering cliff not yet in American hands.

Resistance in the 8th Marines zone proved light at first, but the attack had to be halted at 1130 because the adjacent 106th Infantry had not yet crossed its line of departure. Until the Army regiment began moving forward, Tompkins' 1/29 would be unable to advance. At 1345, General Watson ordered the

⁵ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1081.

⁶ AAF Hist Studies No. 38, OpHist of the Seventh AF, 6Nov43-31Jul44, p. 55 (MS at USAF Archives, Maxwell AFB, Ala.).

8th Marines to continue its attack. Colonel Wallace shifted Chamberlin's 2/8 to protect the exposed flank, and the Marines surged forward. Although 1/29 easily secured the cliff that barred the way to Mount Tapotchau, Lieutenant Colonel Hays' 1/8 collided with a force of 30 Japanese supported by six machine guns. These defenders, entrenched in a ravine at the left of the regimental zone, succeeded in halting the battalion advance.

As dusk approached, Chamberlin visited Major Almerin C. O'Hara at the 2/106 command post in an attempt to establish contact with the Army unit. General Ralph Smith soon arrived on the scene and permitted Chamberlin to borrow O'Hara's Company F in order to post it on the right flank of the 8th Marines. The officers involved reasoned that the Army battalion could more easily maintain contact with one of its own companies than with a Marine unit, but such was not the case. Although the additional company gave added protection to Wallace's flank, O'Hara could not extend far enough to the left to seal the opening, and for the next few days F/106 fought as a part of the 8th Marines.

The NTLF operation order for 23 June called for the 27th Infantry Division to assume responsibility for the center of the corps front by relieving the 25th Marines. The Marine regiment would then pass into Northern Troops and Landing Force reserve. The two Army regiments, the 106th and 165th Infantry, selected for the relief marched from their assembly areas at 0530, 4½ hours before the offensive was to begin. Within an hour, however, elements of the 165th

Infantry had cut across the road over which the other regiment was marching, and the approach had to be halted until the tangled units could be sorted out.

In spite of the confusion, 2/165 and 1/165, Colonel Kelley's assault battalions, were in position by 1000 in the right of what had been the 25th Marines zone. The colonel recalled that one of the Marine officers judged the combination of terrain and enemy within the zone to be "about the worst he had run into yet."⁷ To the front was a series of ridges and gullies that were dotted with camouflaged weapons positions. With the zone of the 106th Infantry on the left and parallel to the division line of advance was a steep slope, overshadowed by Mount Tapotchau and honeycombed with caves.⁸ The 165th Infantry launched its attack against this formidable defensive network at about 1015, but the adjacent Army regiment was not yet in position. Colonel Ayres' unit, arriving one company at a time, did not move forward until 1055.

Throughout the zone of the 27th Infantry Division, the enemy made a determined fight. Colonel Kelley, like Colonel Wallace of the 8th Marines, suspended his advance to enable the 106th Infantry to come abreast, but Colonel Ayres' soldiers were stopped at the regimental left, Ayres could not strongpoint dubbed Hell's Pocket. Although 2/106 was ordered into line on the regimental left, Ayers could not maintain physical contact with the

⁷ Testimony of Col Gerard W. Kelley, Exhibit PPP, p. 1, *Army Inquiry*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

company dispatched to the 8th Marines. The 165th Infantry, however, enjoyed some success, nearing the southern extremity of Purple Heart Ridge before being fought to a standstill.

The 4th Marine Division attacked with the 23d and 24th Marines on line. Lieutenant Colonel Dillon's 2/23 seized Hill 600. "This was very difficult terrain," reported the battalion commander, "and it was hard enough scaling the hill, let alone fighting up it."⁹ From the summit, Marine observers could view the whole of Kagman Peninsula, the area to be seized during the next phase of the battle. While Dillon's men were destroying the defenders of Hill 600 with grenades and flamethrowers, Colonel Hart's 24th Marines pushed all the way to Laulau. Because the adjacent 27th Infantry Division had been stalled, the 4th Marine Division line was echeloned to the left rear, extending from Laulau past Hill 600 to the right flank of the 165th Infantry.

The NTLF operations map was little changed from the previous day. Although the 2d Marine Division had made gains on either flank of Tipo Pale and the 4th Marine Division had advanced about 1,000 yards along the coast, the Army division had accomplished very little. At Nafutan Point, the situation was practically unchanged. At day's end, one platoon manned a temporary perimeter atop Mount Nafutan, but otherwise the battle position was the same as before. (See Map 18.)

⁹ 3/23 OpRpt, p. 3.

"THE COMMANDING GENERAL IS HIGHLY DISPLEASED"

During the afternoon of 23 June, General Watson had two rifle companies formed from among his divisional shore party units. As more of the cargo handlers became available, additional units would be formed to serve as part of the division reserve. Since the 2d Marine Division soon would be advancing upon Garapan, the 2d Marines removed the minefield sown to block the coastal road.

Northern Troops and Landing Force, like General Watson's headquarters, turned its attention to maintaining a strong reserve. The 25th Marines, relieved by the 27th Infantry Division, withdrew to Hill 500 to await further orders.

The headquarters area of the 10th Marines and its fire direction center were heavily shelled during the night. The regimental executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph E. Forsyth, was killed and several key officers and non-commissioned officers were wounded. Communication facilities were badly damaged and 1/10 had to take over the direction of artillery support for the 2d Division. It was the 27th Infantry Division, however, that saw the fiercest action between darkness on 23 June and dawn of the 24th. Five of six Japanese tanks that attempted to knife along the boundary between the Army regiments were destroyed; a later enemy attack proved more damaging. Five tanks accompanied by infantry struck the lines of the 106th Infantry, and again all but one of the vehicles were destroyed. The survivor, however, burst through the American defenses to

set fire to a stockpile of ammunition. The resultant explosions forced the 3d Battalion to fall back until the flames had died away. An attack up the western slopes of Hill 600 was beaten off by the 23d Marines, assisted by 1/165. Japanese aerial attacks during the afternoon and evening accomplished nothing at the cost of two enemy planes, but an early morning raid on the vessels off Charan Kanoa resulted in 18 American casualties at no loss to the marauders.

Holland Smith was angered by the failure of the 27th Infantry Division to advance. During the afternoon of the 23d, as the attack was grinding to a halt, he had discussed the situation with Major General Sanderford Jarman, the Army officer in command of the Saipan garrison.¹⁰ The NTLF commander asked Jarman to visit Ralph Smith at the 27th Division command post to see what could be done to get the unit moving. Later Jarman recalled:

I talked to General [Ralph] Smith and explained the situation as I saw it and that I felt from reports from the corps commander that his division was not carrying its full share. He immediately replied that such was true; that he was in no way satisfied with what his regimental commanders had done during the day and that he had been with them and pointed out to them the situation. He further indicated to me that he was going to be present tomorrow, 24 June, with this division when it made its jump-off and he would personally see to it that the division went forward. . . . He appreciated the situation and thanked me for coming to see him and

¹⁰ MajGen Sanderford Jarman statement, dtd 23Jun44, p. 1, Exhibit J to *Army Inquiry*.

stated that if he didn't take the division forward tomorrow he should be relieved.¹¹ Both Holland and Ralph Smith agreed that the Army division would have to press its attack more vigorously.

On the following morning, the Marine general sent a dispatch that left his Army subordinate with no doubts concerning his attitude toward the recent performance of the 27th Infantry Division:

Commanding General is highly displeased with the failure of the 27th Division . . . to launch its attack as ordered at King Hour [1000] and the lack of offensive action displayed by the division in its failure to advance and seize the objective 0-5 when opposed only by small-arms and mortar fire. . . .

The NTLF commander then pointed out that, because the 27th Infantry Division had failed to advance, the two Marine divisions were forced to suspend offensive operations to prevent "dangerous exposure of their interior flanks." Finally, he directed that "immediate steps" be taken to get the stalled Army unit moving forward.¹²

In stating that the 27th Infantry Division had been stopped by fire from small arms and mortars, Holland Smith underestimated the opposition which the soldiers had encountered. Tanks and mountain howitzers supported those portions of the *118th* and *136th Infantry Regiments* entrenched in front of the Army division. The strength of the *136th Infantry Regiment*, which also occupied positions in the 2d Marine Division zone, was less than 1,000 men. The other regiment, strung out from Mount Tapotchau to

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² CTF 56 disp to CG, 27th InfDiv, dtd 0836, 24Jun44, Exhibit G to *Army Inquiry*.

Magicienne Bay, was far under its peak strength of 2,600.¹³

Although their ranks had been seriously depleted, the defenders were posted on terrain ideal for their purpose. Any unit attempting to push rapidly along the floor of Death Valley would be exposed to fire from the slopes leading from Mount Tapotchau on the left and from Purple Heart Ridge on the right. On 23 June, Colonel Ayres, whose 106th Infantry zone included a portion of Tapotchau's slopes as well as part of the valley itself, had refrained from bypassing Hell's Pocket to advance across the level ground beyond. When asked what would have happened had he attacked vigorously up the valley, Ayres responded: "My candid opinion is that the regiment would have disappeared."¹⁴

Death Valley, then, was ringed with strong defenses, and the task facing Ralph Smith's division was more difficult than the corps commander realized at the time. Yet, the 27th Infantry Division commanding general, who had toured his front lines on 23 June, accepted Holland Smith's criticism, as reported by General Jarman, and admitted his own displeasure with the actions of some of his subordinates. Ralph Smith apparently believed that the fortifications to his front were strong but not impregnable. The next day's attack, he had vowed, would be both promptly and vigorously executed.

On the ground overlooking Death Valley, the Japanese were equally

determined to stop the renewed attack. General Saito's line was threatened in three places—around Tipo Pale, at the mouth of Death Valley, and along the shores of Magicienne Bay. In spite of this pressure from the front and the increasing bombardment of rear areas, General Saito was confident that his men would make the best possible use of the rugged terrain of Saipan. "The 43d Division units, with the firm decision to hold out until the last," the Saipan headquarters reported, "expect to smash the enemy."¹⁵

THE BATTLE RENEWED

The next objective of Northern Troops and Landing Force was a line extending from the southern part of Garapan due east to the opposite coast of the island. Between the present front lines and this distant objective lay Mount Tapotchau, Death Valley, Purple Heart Ridge, and the whole of Kagman Peninsula. The 2d Marine Division was to enter Garapan, advance some 2,000 yards beyond Mount Tipo Pale, and overrun Tapotchau. The 27th Infantry Division, would continue advancing on the 2d Marine Division right, while the 4th Marine Division would pivot to the east, capture Kagman Peninsula, and then pass into corps reserve. Thus, when the objective line was reached, the battle would enter a new phase, with two-thirds of Saipan in American hands and two divisions moving forward to secure the remainder.

On 24 June, the principal compo-

¹³ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 10,531, Excerpts from a Notebook of FOs.

¹⁴ Testimony of Col Russell G. Ayres, Exhibit CCC to *Army Inquiry*.

¹⁵ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1092, dtd 23Jun44.

nents of Northern Troops and Landing Force were to begin their drive toward the objective. Colonel Batchelder's 25th Marines would remain in the area of Hill 500, sending out patrols to eliminate the Japanese lurking around Lake Susupe. At Nafutan Point, 2/105 was to continue its operations against the isolated Japanese pocket.

In the 2d Marine Division zone, General Watson ordered Colonel Stuart's 2d Marines to take the offensive. After a swift initial advance, the regiment encountered more vicious fighting as it neared the town. Lieutenant Colonel Kyle's 1st Battalion, on the right of Major Harold K. Throneson's 3/2, soon collided with a Japanese outpost located on a ridge southeast of Garapan. Fire from mortars and 105mm howitzers enabled the Marines to gain the crest, but the enemy promptly counter-attacked. Fortunately for the Americans, the north face of the ridge was so steep that it was almost impossible to scale. "Difficulties notwithstanding," one observer has written, "the Japanese made the effort; but, with two hands required to scale the slope and another to throw grenades or wave sabers, they were one hand short from the outset."¹⁶

After beating back the counterattack, the Marines began digging fox-holes overlooking Radio Road in the southern part of Garapan. The 3d Battalion was in the midst of its preparations for the night when seven enemy tanks, unprotected by infantry, charged from the ruined town. Medium tanks and self-propelled 75s destroyed six of the vehicles and sent the

seventh fleeing for cover. The arrival of the two-company provisional battalion that had been formed from among the shore party gave added depth to the regimental defenses.

In the center of the 2d Marine Division zone of action, 1/6 advanced 900 yards over comparatively open terrain, but 3/6, on the regimental right, was slowed by cliffs and ravines. The pocket north of Tipo Pale defied efforts to destroy it, but the southern and eastern slopes of the mountain were by now secured. Because the broken ground on the right had caused such uneven progress, Major Rentsch's 3/6 ended the day holding a 1,500-yard frontage. Since a rifle company from 2/2 and another from 2/6 had joined its three rifle companies on line, the 3d Battalion was able to establish contact throughout its zone.

On the division right, where the 8th Marines were battling toward Mount Tapotchau, Lieutenant Colonel Hays' 1/8 again attacked the pocket of resistance that had stopped the previous day's advance. While infantrymen attempted to keep the defenders pinned down, engineers armed with demolitions, rocket launchers, and flame-throwers crawled across the jagged coral to seal or burn enemy-infested caves. By late afternoon, the strongpoint had been reduced, freeing the battalion to continue its advance.

While Hays' men were eliminating the strongpoint within their zone, Major Larsen's 3/8 and, on the far right, Tompkins' 1/29 were approaching Tapotchau as rapidly as the terrain and the need to protect their flanks would permit. Tompkins' unit was pushing along an uneven plateau, a coral for-

¹⁶ Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 141.

mation that resembled a stairway leading toward the mountain. Trees and vines choked a part of the battalion zone, and, as happened so often during the Saipan campaign, the unit became overextended. Colonel Wallace then ordered 2/8 to protect Tompkins' flank and also posted his 37mm antitank guns along the ridge separating the 2d Marine and 27th Infantry Divisions.

As the 2d Marine Division surged forward, General Ralph Smith launched an attack which, he believed, would redeem the failure of the day before. The results, however, were disappointing. On the right, Colonel Kelley detoured 3/165 through the area already overrun by the 23d Marines so that the battalion could take up a position on the eastern slopes of Purple Heart Ridge. Although the Army regiment gained little ground, it was now in position to exert pressure from two directions against the formidable ridge.

In spite of pressure from the division commanding general, the 106th Infantry again failed to penetrate beyond Hell's Pocket. The action was much sharper than before. Prior to its relief during the afternoon, 3/106 suffered 14 killed and 109 wounded, more than twice the number of casualties it had endured on the previous day. In summing up the action of 24 June, Colonel Ayres stated that his regiment had been "thrown back onto the original line of departure."¹⁷

Having for two days bloodied his fists against the gates of Death Valley, Ralph Smith now decided upon a new approach. By making an attack along Purple Heart Ridge, he hoped to knife

past the valley and establish firm contact with the Marine divisions, leaving one of Ayres' battalions to contain the bypassed Japanese.¹⁸ Holland Smith however, simultaneously issued orders to continue the attack up the valley.¹⁹ Before the two men had resolved this conflict, Ralph Smith had been relieved. General Jarman, the new commanding general, would decide to try the scheme of maneuver proposed by his predecessor.

While the main body of the 27th Infantry Division was hammering at the defenses to its front, the battalion at Nafutan Point was making little headway. On 25 June, 2/105 was to continue its attack under the command of Colonel Geoffrey M. O'Connell, chief of staff of the island garrison force. Responsibility for reducing the stronghold now rested with the Saipan Garrison Force.²⁰

On 24 June, General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division began pivoting toward Kagman Peninsula. The 23d Marines, on the left, moved around an enemy outpost near Hill 66 to advance onto the peninsula itself. This turning movement, carried out against moderate resistance, exposed the left flank of the unit, which was separated by almost 1,000 yards from the positions held by the adjacent 165th Infantry. The 24th Marines, turning on a shorter radius, kept pace, so that by dusk the

¹⁷ Ayres Testimony, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁸ 27th InfDiv FO No. 48, dtd 1800, 24Jun44.

¹⁹ NTLF OpO 12-44, dtd 1800, 24Jun44.

²⁰ CG, NTLF ltr Concerning Conduct of Ops by 2/105 in the Nafutan Point Area, Exhibit H to *Army Inquiry*; Col Geoffrey M. O'Connell memo to Gen Richardson, dtd 2Jul44, Subj: Ops of 2/105, Saipan, on Nafutan Point, p. 1, Exhibit WW to *Army Inquiry*.

division front lines formed an arc that encompassed almost one-third of Kagman Peninsula.

To the weary Japanese, the oncoming Marines seemed invincible. General Saito's chief of staff reported that "300-400 troops along with four or five tanks have broken through Chacha in the area of the eastern foot of Tapotchau [near the base of Kagman Peninsula]." He went on to confess that, though the *43d Division* was doing its best, the forces in the area were "reduced to the condition where we cannot carry out this plan [holding the cross-island line] with our present fighting strength." The enemy officer then repeated a call for reinforcements which he had made on the previous day.²¹

*THE RELIEF OF GENERAL RALPH SMITH*²²

In his conversation with General Jarman, Holland Smith had predicted that summary relief of an Army officer, if such an incident should take place, was bound to stir up a controversy. On 24 June, however, the corps commander decided, come what may, to embark on "one of the most disagreeable tasks I have ever been forced to perform."²³ The Marine general, in a conference with Admirals Turner and Spruance, stated the problem, and Spruance, the overall commander, directed Holland Smith to replace Ralph Smith with

Jarman.²⁴ "No other action," the Fifth Fleet commander later observed, "seemed adequate to accomplish the purpose."²⁵

In requesting authority to relieve Ralph Smith from command of the 27th Infantry Division, Holland Smith stated that such action was necessary to give the corps commander "sufficient authority to cause Army units within landing forces to conduct operations in accordance with his own tactical orders." As examples of his subordinate's failure to follow orders, the Marine general cited the two instances, on 21 and 22 June, when Ralph Smith had issued instructions to units under corps control and the fact that the attack of 23 June had been delayed because of the late arrival of components of the 27th Infantry Division.²⁶ The basic reasons he stressed, however, for this drastic action were the "defective performance" of the Army division and its need of "a leader would make it toe the mark."²⁷

No sooner had the relief been accomplished than the expected storm of

²⁴ *Moore comments Saipan*. At this same meeting, the three officers decided to maintain the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade as floating reserve for possible use at Saipan and to send the 3d Marine Division to Eniwetok, where it would await the Guam operation.

²⁵ Comdr Fifth Flt ltr to CinCPOA, dtd 29Jun44, Subj: Summary of Events Leading up to the Relief from Command of Major General Ralph C. Smith, p. 1, Exhibit C to *Army Inquiry*.

²⁶ CG, ExpeditionaryTrps ltr to CTF 51, dtd 24Jul44, Subj: Authority to Relieve Army Officers from Command, Exhibit D to *Army Inquiry*.

²⁷ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 173; *Moore comments Saipan*.

²¹ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1096.

²² An Army-oriented account of the relief and the controversy that followed is contained in Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, pp. 191-201.

²³ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 173.

controversy began to break. Although not included in the chain of command for the Marianas operation, Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson, Jr., ranking Army officer in the Central Pacific, apparently was angered that the change had been made without his knowledge. When Ralph Smith reached Hawaii, Richardson appointed him, as a gesture of confidence, commanding general of the 98th Infantry Division. The Army lieutenant general also convened a board of officers to inquire into the circumstances surrounding what some of his fellow officers considered "the slur on their service implied by the relief of Ralph Smith."²⁸

The board, headed by Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner, Jr., could examine only those reports contained in Army files and hear testimony only from Army officers. Yet, in spite of its *ex parte* nature, the Buckner board concluded that Holland Smith had the authority to relieve his Army subordinate and that he issued in a proper fashion the orders effecting that relief. The investigators, however, objected that the Marine general, unaware of the resistance that the 27th Infantry Division had encountered, had taken action that was "not fully justified by the facts."²⁹ The report of the board proceedings also contained recommendations that Ralph Smith's future assignments not be adversely affected by the Saipan incident, that the senior Army commander be fully informed of theater and JCS policies concerning command relationships, and finally

that "when it is necessary to combine elements of two or more services into one major unit, the most careful consideration be given to the personality and qualifications of the senior commanders concerned."³⁰ The Army board thus implied that Holland Smith, though his action was legally correct, had been more vigorous than circumstances warranted. The Marine general, the board members appear to have believed, was singularly lacking in tact.

Upon studying the Buckner report, certain of General Marshall's advisers, though they did not approve of Holland Smith's action, admitted that the 27th Infantry Division had not been performing as well as it should have been, principally because certain of Ralph Smith's subordinates lacked vigor. These officers nonetheless believed that the relief of the division commanding general was not necessary.³¹ Once again, the Marine general's judgment and tact were questioned rather than his right to effect a change of command.

During the hearings, General Richardson visited Saipan, ostensibly to inspect Army forces, and engaged in a heated argument with Holland Smith. The spirit of harmony that had so far characterized the Central Pacific campaign was fast evaporating. In order to remove the occasion of the friction, the War Department had Ralph Smith recalled from Hawaii and eventually assigned to the European Theater of Operations. After Saipan had been declared secured, Holland Smith assumed command of Fleet Marine Force,

²⁸ Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, p. 192.

²⁹ Rpt of *Army Inquiry*, p. 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, p. 195.

Pacific, a post in which he would have no control over Army divisions. No effort was made, however, to alter the command structure for the imminent Guam operation. There the untested 77th Infantry Division would fight effectively when included with Marine units in a corps commanded by Marine Major General Roy S. Geiger.

The Saipan controversy, by no means typical of interservice relations in the Pacific, seemed destined to be fought to its conclusion in an atmosphere of comparative secrecy. Unfortunately, somewhat distorted accounts of Ralph Smith's relief slipped past the censors to touch off a journalistic battle that flared intermittently until 1948. The volcano of adverse publicity that erupted after the Saipan campaign, specifically the article in *Time* magazine that claimed the soldiers "froze in their foxholes"³² at the entrance to Death Valley, had a crushing effect on the morale of the 27th Infantry Division. The story itself caused a flood of anger, but the arrival of letters from friends and relatives in the United States, who accepted the article as completely accurate, was a cruel blow to the men of the division.³³

In November 1944, after the entire Marianas operation had ended, General Marshall suggested to Admiral King that both Nimitz and Richardson, as senior representatives of their services in the Central Pacific, should thoroughly investigate the incident in order to prevent future discord. King refused, for he believed that Richardson's

previous inquiry had prolonged the strife instead of ending it. In the opinion of the Chief of Naval Operations, the record of the Buckner board contained intemperate outbursts against Holland Smith, and statements that did not pertain to the issue under investigation. The admiral was convinced that any new inquiry would degenerate into a clash of personalities, and Marshall apparently adopted a similar point of view, for no further official action was taken.³⁴

The Smith against Smith controversy was caused by failure of the 27th Infantry Division to penetrate the defenses of Death Valley. Holland Smith had told the division commanding general that operations in the area had to be speeded up. Ralph Smith, who was thoroughly familiar with the tactical situation, informed Jarman of his own annoyance with the slow progress of his unit. He told the island commander that he intended to press the attack, but he postponed making the changes in command which, according to Jarman, he intimated might be necessary. The NTLF commander, after stating that the objective had to be taken, saw that no significant progress had been made on 24 June and promptly replaced the officer responsible for the conduct of the Army division. The Army Smith offered his subordinates another chance, but the Marine Smith did immediately what he felt was necessary, without regard for the controversy he knew would follow.

³² *Time*, v. 44, no. 12 (18Sep44), p. 26.

³³ Love, *The 27th InfDiv History*, pp. 522-523.

³⁴ CofS, USA memo for Adm King, dtd 22 Nov44; FAdm King memo for Gen Marshall, dtd 23Nov44, Subj: Article in *Time* magazine (Smith-Smith File, HistBr, HQMC); Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, p. 196.

25 JUNE: MOUNT TAPOTCHAU
AND KAGMAN PENINSULA

During the evening of 24 June, as the relief of Ralph Smith was taking place, Japanese planes attacked ships clustered off Saipan. Neither antiaircraft guns nor Army night fighters (P-61 Black Widows) in the first of 105 sorties these planes would fly during the campaign, were able to down any of the attackers. The Japanese bombs, however, did no damage.³⁵

Ashore, the enemy made repeated attempts to infiltrate the lines of General Watson's 2d Marine Division. Colonel Stuart's 2d Marines, which saw sporadic action through the night, killed 82 Japanese at a cost of 10 casualties. Enemy artillery and mortar fire forced Major Rentsch, in command of 3/6, to find a new location for his command post and disrupted the battalion communications. Elsewhere the night was quiet, although marred from time to time by the flash of rifle fire or the bursting of a grenade as Japanese attempted to slip through the corps lines.

Although little ground was captured on 25 June by elements of the 2d Marine Division, General Watson's troops dealt the Japanese a jarring blow. While the 2d Marines stood fast on the outskirts of Garapan and the 6th Marines hammered at the Tipo Pale pocket of resistance, the 8th Marines captured Tapotchau, the finest observation post in central Saipan. During the attack against this key height, some 200 members of the shore party finished their tasks at the beaches and formed

replacement units for the 6th and 8th Marines.

Some portion of Tapotchau's bulk lay in the zone of each of the four battalions of Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines. The western slopes were to the front of the 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hays, and Major Larsen's 3d Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Tompkins faced the arduous task of leading his 1/29, still attached to the 8th Marines, directly toward the summit, while 2/8, under Major Chamberlin, had responsibility for securing the eastern slopes. Two routes led toward the mountain crest. Tompkins was to attack through the densely wooded valley and up the steep southern face. Chamberlin would follow the ridge in his sector until abreast of Tapotchau and then veer to the left, advancing up the eastern slope.

By 0930, after two hours of fighting, 1/29 became bogged down in the woods, halted by impassable terrain and enemy fire. On the right, however, 2/8 pushed rapidly to the cliff that marked the eastern terminus of the crescent-shaped mountain. Chamberlin ordered one platoon to scale the cliff, and this unit encountered no opposition. A smaller patrol advanced almost to the crest without being challenged. Since Hays and Larsen were maintaining unceasing pressure on the Japanese defending the western slopes, Tompkins decided to move to his right, pass through Chamberlin's lines, and approach the summit from the east rather than from the south.

Taking with him a detachment from the division reconnaissance company, the commander of 1/29 moved through the adjacent zone of action, scaled the

³⁵ AAF Hist Studies no. 38, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

cliff, and gained the summit. He then left the scouts to hold the objective and returned to his battalion. During the afternoon, Tompkins withdrew two of his three rifle companies from contact with the enemy. Companies A and C formed in single file for the march to the crest of the mountain, while Company B remained in the valley.

While Tompkins was shifting his main body, the Japanese awoke to the danger and launched a series of counterattacks against the perimeter manned by the reconnaissance detachment. During the afternoon, the enemy suffered 40 casualties and the Marines 3. The Japanese also turned upon the platoon which Chamberlin had posted atop the cliff. A violent concentration of mortar fire forced the 2/8 unit to fall back from its exposed position, but this withdrawal did not affect Tompkins' plans.

The sun was about to set by the time 1/29 was ready to climb the mountain. The battalion 81mm mortars blanketed the northern slopes with smoke, while Chamberlin's mortars and 105s of 3/10 blasted possible enemy positions. Tompkins' riflemen ascended the cliff, crossed the pinnacle at the eastern end of the hill mass, passed through a saddle, and moved up the gradual slope leading to the summit. Not a man was lost during the climb.

Atop the mountain, the Marines found that their entrenching tools could scarcely dent the rocky surface. The fortunate few whose positions were located on patches of soft earth scratched out foxholes, but the rest used loose stones to build low parapets over which to fire. Shortly before midnight, the Japanese attacked from the

northwest. The hastily prepared defenses proved adequate, as evidenced by the 18 Japanese dead discovered the following morning.³⁶

In the center of the island, the 27th Infantry Division, now commanded by General Jarman, attempted to bypass and isolate Death Valley. The 2d Battalion of Colonel Kelley's 165th Infantry captured the southern third of Purple Heart Ridge, then yielded its conquests in order to obtain a better defensive position. Meanwhile, 3/165, poised to attack to the west from positions along the division right boundary, had been halted by a pocket of resistance. Since the 3d Battalion could make no headway, Colonel Kelley ordered the unit to swing through the area already cleared by the 4th Marine Division in order to establish contact with the 23d Marines. By nightfall, the Army battalion was digging in astride the division boundary just west of the Chacha-Donnay road. (See Map 18.)

Colonel Ayres' 106th Infantry, less the 2d Battalion which was maintaining pressure on the southern entrance to Death Valley, had the mission of circling to the right of Purple Heart Ridge and making contact with the 2d Marine Division in the vicinity of Mount Tapotchau. Had this maneuver succeeded, the powerful strongpoint would have been isolated and an integrated corps front restored. Unfortunately, the enveloping force did not

³⁶ In addition to the reports of the units involved, the account of the capture of Mount Tapotchau is based on Capt James R. Stockman, "The Taking of Mount Tapotchau," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 30, no. 7 (Jul46).

reach its attack position until midafternoon. The 1st Battalion attempted to advance to the northwest along the road leading from Chacha across the valley, but the drive was stopped by enemy fire. The remainder of Ayres' maneuver element, 3/106, started toward Chacha, was delayed by road traffic, and elected to return to its original assembly area south of Death Valley. The 2d Battalion, in the meantime, pushed directly into the valley, enjoyed brief success, but finally was driven back to its line of departure.

Although Jarman's plan had failed, the 4th Marine Division managed to overrun Kagman Peninsula. General Schmidt's attack was delayed 45 minutes, for the supporting tanks had difficulty in negotiating the trails leading to the front lines. At 0815, the 23d and 24th Marines crossed the line of departure to begin their surge toward Mount Kagman and the coast. Although Colonel Hart's 24th Marines swept forward against extremely weak opposition, Colonel Jones' 23d Marines encountered a number of stragglers and was taken under fire by a field piece located in the 27th Infantry Division zone. After coordinating with the Army unit, the 14th Marines opened fire and succeeded in temporarily silencing the weapon.³⁷ By late afternoon, the entire peninsula was in American hands, but the task of mopping up had just begun.

The day's fighting in central Saipan resulted in important gains. Although the attackers had been unable

³⁷ Later, when this piece opened fire again, a patrol of the 23d Marines destroyed gun and crew. *Jones ltr.*

to seal off Death Valley, Tapotchau had fallen and organized resistance on Kagman Peninsula had been shattered. At Nafutan Point, however, the Japanese made good use of broken terrain and heavy underbrush to stall 2/105, but not until after the battalion had pierced the main defenses. During the afternoon, the 40mm and 90mm antiaircraft guns assigned, on the previous day, to support Colonel O'Connell's troops, registered to fire air bursts in preparation for the attack of 26 June.³⁸

The night of 25 June saw the foiling of a Japanese attempt to send reinforcements from Tinian. An infantry company, moving on 11 barges toward the Saipan coast east of Chacha, was detected by the destroyer USS *Bancroft* and the destroyer escort USS *Elden*. One of the barges was reportedly sunk, while the others were frightened back to Tinian.

Except for that incident and the fight atop Mount Tapotchau, the night was quiet. The defenders had been seriously weakened by 11 days of sustained fighting. Even had the Japanese troops been rested and more numerous, the lack of communications probably would have prevented a coordinated counterattack.

During 25 June, the Japanese *Thirty-first Army* Headquarters could account for a total of about 950 combat troops remaining in the *135th*, *136th*, and *118th Infantry Regiments*. The *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* was believed reduced to 100 men and the *7th Independent Engineer Regiment* to approximately 70 effectives. The *3d Independent Mountain Artillery Regi-*

³⁸ O'Connell memo, *op. cit.*, pp. 1, 3.

ment had no field pieces, and the 9th Tank Regiment only three tanks.³⁹ These estimates took into account only those Army units in communication with Saito's headquarters. Many other detachments, isolated from the army command post, were fighting savagely. Yet, to General Saito the destruction of the Japanese garrison force seemed inevitable. "Please apologize deeply to the Emperor," he asked of Tokyo headquarters, "that we cannot do better than we are doing."⁴⁰

26 JUNE: THE ADVANCE BEYOND TIPO PALE

The action on 26 June centered around Tipo Pale, where the 6th Marines had been stalled since the afternoon of the 22d. Instead of attacking along the stubbornly defended draw, Colonel Riseley's regiment bypassed the pocket, left one company to mop up, and continued advancing to the north. Lieutenant Colonel Jones' 1st Battalion moved into position to support by fire the capture of the next objective, a ridge that extended west from Mount Tapotchau. While crossing an open field, 2/6 came under deadly fire from the ridge and was forced to break off the action.

East of Tipo Pale, Tompkins' 1/29 strengthened its hold on the summit of Tapotchau. The company left behind in the valley succeeded in joining the rest of the battalion, but a patrol sent to the northernmost pinnacle of the jagged mountain was beaten back by the Japanese. Elsewhere in the 8th

Marines zone, progress was slow. Along the western approaches to Mount Tapotchau, the 1st and 3d Battalions battled through dense woods to drive the enemy from a seemingly endless succession of ravines and knolls. For most of the day, these Marines clawed their way forward, dodging grenades and often diving for cover to protect themselves from the plunging fire of machine guns. East of the mountain, 2/8 extended its lines to the rear along the rim of Death Valley, but Chamberlin's battalion, with its adopted Army company, could not make physical contact with the 106th Infantry.

At the entrance to Death Valley, the battle was beginning again. After gaining ground on the previous day, 2/106 had fallen back under cover of darkness to its original position. General Jarman decided to shift slightly the axis of his main attack, but the most difficult tasks again were assigned to the 106th Infantry. While the 1st Battalion tried to reduce Hell's Pocket, the other two battalions, instead of circling completely around the valley, were to attack along the western slope of Purple Heart Ridge, then extend to the left in order to close the gap in the corps front. Meanwhile, 2/165 was to mop up the eastern slope of the ridge.

The attack of the 106th Infantry got off to a confused start, and for this reason General Jarman decided to entrust the regiment to Colonel Albert K. Stebbins, his chief of staff.⁴¹ By the end of the day the 2d and 3d Battalions occupied all but the northern tip of the ridge. The defenders of Hell's Pocket,

³⁹ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1102.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 1097.

⁴¹ Jarman Statement, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.



MARINES DIG IN *night defensive positions on 24 June as the attack moves northward on Saipan.* (USN 80-G-234720)



COMPANY CP *in the smoking ruins of Garapan stays in close touch with its attacking platoons.* (USMC 85174)

however, hurled 1/106 back on its line of departure.

The 4th Marine Division, charged with mopping up Kagman Peninsula, had been pinched out of the corps line to revert to Northern Troops and Landing Force reserve. Although harassed by artillery fire from enemy batteries in the vicinity of Death Valley, the Marines wiped out the Japanese forces that had survived the fighting of 24 and 25 June. As General Schmidt's troops were assembling at the close of day, the division, less the 25th Marines at Hill 500, was ordered to re-enter the lines. In place of the 25th Marines, General Schmidt was given Colonel Kelley's 165th Infantry, now composed of 1/165, 3/165, and 1/105.

The 26th of June also marked the beginning of the systematic hammering of Tinian by ships and planes as well as by artillery. Since 20 June, 155mm guns, first a battery and then an entire battalion, had been shelling the adjacent island. Now aircraft and cruisers joined in the bombardment. Tinian was divided into two sectors. Each day, the planes would alternate with the ships in blasting both portions of the island. XXIV Corps Artillery was to fire upon any suitable targets not destroyed by the other arms. The naval shelling, however, proved unsatisfactory, for the guns of the cruisers were ill-suited to area bombardment.

SEVEN LIVES FOR ONE'S COUNTRY ⁴²

Operations at Nafutan Point were speeded on 26 June, for O'Connell's

⁴² An additional source for this section is: O'Connell memo, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

men already had broken the enemy's main defensive line. Advancing against light opposition and supported by antiaircraft weapons, tanks, and naval gunfire, the soldiers secured Mount Nafutan. Late in the afternoon, the Japanese, their backs to the sea, began resisting more vigorously. Since the attacking companies had limited fields of fire, they withdrew before digging positions for the night. The American line was porous, with a gap on the left flank, and no more than a line of outposts on the right.

The enemy's slow response to the pressure applied by the Army battalion did not indicate that these disorganized Japanese were beaten. Captain Sasaki, commander of the *317th Infantry Battalion* of the ill-fated *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* gathered together some 500 soldiers and sailors, survivors from the various units that had helped defend southern Saipan, and issued orders to break out at midnight from the Nafutan Point trap. The men, "after causing confusion at the airfield," were to assemble at Hill 500, formerly the site of brigade headquarters but now the bivouac area of the 25th Marines. "Casualties will remain in their present positions and defend Nafutan Mount," Sasaki continued. "Those who cannot participate in combat must commit suicide. Password for the night of 26 June [is] *Shichi Sei Hokoku*, (Seven Lives for One's Country)." ⁴³

The enemy passed undetected through O'Connell's line of outposts. The first indication of a *banzai* attack

⁴³ Quoted in NTLF G-2 Rpt, p. 34, in *NTLF OpRpt*.

came when a group of Japanese attacked the command post of 2/105. The marauders were driven off after killing 4 Americans and wounding 20 others at the cost of 27 Japanese dead. At 0230, the main force stormed across Aslito field, destroying one P-47 and damaging two others.⁴⁴ Three hours later, the Japanese reached Hill 500, where the 25th Marines greeted them with a deadly barrage of grenades and bullets. Fragments of Sasaki's group struck positions manned by the 14th Marines and 104th Field Artillery, but both units held firm.

On 27 June the 25th Marines mopped up the Japanese who had survived the night's action, while 2/105 overran the remainder of Nafutan Point. The soldiers discovered some 550 bodies within their zone. Some of the dead had been killed during the earlier fighting; others had committed suicide in obedience to Sasaki's instructions. Thus, in a burst of violence, ended the wearisome battle for Nafutan Point.

27 JUNE: THE ADVANCE CONTINUES

Considering the effect it had upon the Japanese in central Saipan, the Nafutan Point action might as well have been fought on another planet. If General Saito was aware that 1,000 members of his Saipan garrison had perished within the space of a few days, such knowledge could not have altered his plans. The general already had selected his final line of resistance, a line that stretched diagonally across

the island from Tanapag village past Tarahoho to the opposite coast. Here the battle would be fought to its conclusion.⁴⁵ (See Map 19.)

On 27 June, the 2d Marine Division, composed of the 2d, 6th, and 8th Marines plus 1/29, readjusted its lines. Along the coast, the 2d Marines waited for orders to seize the town of Garapan. North of Tipo Pale, the 6th Marines repulsed an early morning counter-attack, moved forward, but again was stopped short of the ridge that had previously stalled its advance. On the right, 1/29 secured the remainder of Mount Tapotchau, while 2/8 sent patrols into the area east of the mountain. During the morning, Lieutenant Colonel Hudson's 2/25 passed to control of the 2d Marine Division. General Watson attached the battalion to Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines. Hudson's men then relieved Chamberlin's troops of responsibility for guarding the division right flank.

In the 27th Infantry Division zone, the 106th Infantry made important gains. Two rifle companies of the 1st Battalion circled around Hell's Pocket to gain the crest of the ridge that formed the division left boundary. Meanwhile, at the northern end of Death Valley, the 2d and 3d Battalions succeeded in forming a line across the valley floor. On the eastern slopes of Purple Heart Ridge, 2/165 pushed forward to dig in to the right of 2/106.

Although the advance of the Army division had been encouraging, the most spectacular gains of the day were those made by the 4th Marine Division. On the east coast, the 23d Marines by-

⁴⁴ AAF Hist Studies No. 38, *op. cit.*, p. 59; USAF Comments.

⁴⁵ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1120.

passed a minefield and advanced against intermittent fire to overrun the villages of Donnay and Hashigoru, capture a supply dump, and gain its portion of the corps attack objective. The attached 165th Infantry, made up of 1/165, 3/165, and 1/105, fared almost as well. By dusk, General Schmidt's lines ran west from the coast and then curved toward the division left boundary, along which 1/165 had encountered stubborn resistance. To maintain contact between that battalion and the units at Death Valley and Purple Heart Ridge, 2/24 was shifted to the 4th Marine Division left flank.

By the coming of darkness on 27 June, the gaps which had marred the corps front were well on their way to being closed. Although Japanese planes bombed both the Charan Kanoa roadstead and Aslito field, there was little infiltration during the night. A truck loaded with 12 enemy soldiers and civilians drove toward the lines held by the 23d Marines, but an antitank gun destroyed the vehicle and killed its occupants. On Purple Heart Ridge, 2/165 was shelled and its commander wounded. Sporadic mortar fire fell in the lines of the 2d Marines near Garampan, but, all in all, the night was quiet.

28 JUNE: MAINTAINING PRESSURE ON THE ENEMY

The Japanese, under steady pressure all along the front, were now preparing defenses to make the area north of Donnay and around Tarahoho secure. While these positions were being completed, those elements of the *118th* and *136th Infantry Regiments* that were opposing the 27th Infantry Division

were to fight to the death. Checking the rapid advance of the 4th Marine Division was the task assigned the *9th Expeditionary Unit* and a 100-man detachment from the *9th Tank Regiment*.⁴⁶

The tempo of action in the 2d Marine Division zone remained fairly slow during 28 June. While the 2d Marines conducted limited patrols, aircraft, supporting warships, and artillery pounded suspected strongpoints which might be encountered when the regiment resumed its advance. One preparatory air strike resulted in 27 Marine casualties, when a pilot mistook a puff of smoke for the bursting of the white phosphorous shell that was to mark his target and accidentally fired his rockets into a position manned by 1/2.

The 6th Marines made scant progress, for the 2d Battalion could not drive the Japanese from the ridge to its front. The longest gain made by Colonel Riseley's regiment was about 200 yards. To the rear, however, the bypassed Tipo Pale pocket was at last completely destroyed.

Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines, with 2/25 again withdrawn to corps control, found itself up against a formidable barrier, four small hills, one lying within the zone of each battalion. Because of their size in comparison to Tapotchau, the hills were dubbed the Four Pimples. To make identification easier, each of them was given the nickname of the commander of the battalion that was to capture it. Thus, Major William C. Chamberlin of 2/8 was responsible for Bill's Pimple, Lieutenant

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 1123.

Colonel Rathvon McC. Tompkins of 1/29 for Tommy's Pimple, Major Stanley E. Larsen of 3/8 for Stan's Pimple, and Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence C. Hays, Jr., of 1/8 for Larry's Pimple. (See Map 18.)

As the 8th Marines approached the four hills, enemy resistance increased, so that darkness found the regiment short of its objective. Chamberlin's 2d Battalion faced an especially difficult problem in logistics. Because of the rugged terrain, eight stretcher bearers were needed to evacuate one wounded Marine. Thus, a single bullet or grenade could immobilize most of a rifle squad. The battalion, however, did not passively accept enemy fire, for 100 Japanese perished during the day.

Beyond the ridge to the right, Army units again attempted to come abreast of the Marine divisions. Major General George W. Griner, dispatched from Hawaii by General Richardson, assumed command of the 27th Infantry Division on the morning of 28 June, and General Jarman returned to his assigned duties with the garrison force. Griner's first day of command on Saipan saw the 106th Infantry push a short distance forward in the north, at the same time crushing organized resistance in the bypassed Hell's Pocket. The regimental gains were made costly by accurate mortar fire and by a daring enemy foray in which two tanks killed or wounded 73 members of the 1st and 2d Battalions.

Because of the accumulated losses, Griner shifted his units. With only 100 riflemen present for duty,⁴⁷ 3/106

was replaced by the 1st Battalion of the 106th. Company F, which had been under Marine control, now returned to 2/106. On the right, 3/105, idle since its relief at Nafutan Point, entered the battle. With the new battalion came the regimental headquarters, and, as a result, 2/165, which was trying to destroy the knot of resistance at the northern tip of Purple Heart Ridge, was detached from Stebbins' command and attached to the 105th Infantry.

The 4th Marine Division, which had made such impressive gains on the 27th, paused to adjust its lines. While the 23d Marines sent patrols 500 yards to its front, the 165th Infantry occupied Hill 700 at the corner of the division's zone of action. Neither regiment encountered serious opposition, but Colonel Kelley was wounded by mortar fragments and replaced in command of the Army unit by Lieutenant Colonel Joseph T. Hart. Along the left boundary, the attached Army regiment, assisted by 1/24 and 3/24, was unable to make physical contact with General Griner's division. At dusk on 28 June, the 4th Marine Division lines formed an inverted L, with the 23d Marines and part of 3/165 facing north, while the rest of 3/165, 1/105, and the two battalions of the 24th Marines faced west.

The darkness of 28-29 June was pierced by the flash of rifles, bursting of grenades, and explosion of aerial bombs. Once again enemy planes raided both the anchorage and the airfield. In a typical night action, the 6th Marines killed 10 members of a

⁴⁷ 106th Inf Jnl, msg no. 609, dtd 1010, 28

Jun44 (WW II RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

Japanese patrol. The 23d Marines, however, encountered an unusual situation when a 10-truck enemy convoy, lights ablaze, came rumbling toward the front lines. The Japanese realized where they were heading and beat a hasty retreat before the Marines could open fire.

SUCCESS IN DEATH VALLEY

On 29 and 30 June, the corps line remained almost stationary on its flanks, even though the fighting still blazed in its center. "With the operation two weeks old, *everyone* on the island felt the weight of fatigue settling down," a historian of the campaign has written. The Japanese after a succession of bloody reverses, were badly worn, and the American divisions resembled "a runner waiting for his second wind."⁴⁸

Although tired, the Marines and soldiers were determined to finish the grim job at hand. Near Garapan, this determination resulted in a cleverly delivered blow against a formidable Japanese redoubt. About 500 yards in front of the 2d Marines lines, an enemy platoon had entrenched itself on Flametree Hill. During the day, the defenders remained in caves masked by the orange-red foliage that covered the hill. If the regiment should attempt to advance through Garapan, the Japanese could emerge from cover and rake the attackers with devastating fire. Either the enemy had to be lured onto the exposed slopes and scourged with long-range fire, or the hill itself would have

to be captured, probably at a large cost to the attackers.

On the morning of 29 June, Marine artillery blasted Flametree Hill, and machine guns raked the tree-covered slope, while mortars placed a smoke screen in front of the objective. When the barrage stopped, the defenders dashed from their caves to repel the expected assault. Since rifle fire could be heard from beyond the smoke, the Japanese opened fire. Suddenly the American mortars began lobbing high explosives onto the hill, the machine guns resumed firing, and artillery shells equipped with time fuzes started bursting over the trenches. When the deluge of bullets and shell fragments ended, the weapons on Flametree Hill were silent.

Another accident befell the 2d Marines on 30 June. A Navy torpedo plane, damaged by enemy fire, crashed into the positions of 1/2, injuring seven infantrymen. The pilot escaped by taking to his parachute at an extremely low altitude.

During the last two days of June, the 6th Marines patrolled the area to its front. Colonel Riseley's men made no spectacular gains, but the 3d Battalion managed at last to seize the ridge from which the enemy had blocked the advance. Major Rentsch's troops gained a foothold on 29 June and, on the following day, secured the remainder of the objective. The capture of this ridge, which lay just north of Tapotchau, placed the regiment "on commanding ground in the most favorable position for continuation of the attack since D-Day."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 180.

⁴⁹ *2nd MarDiv OpRpt*, Sec VI, p. 19.

The 8th Marines devoted these two days to finding a route over which tanks could move forward to support the attack against the Four Pimples. On 30 June, while moving toward Stan's Pimple, the 3d Battalion captured a road which could be improved adequately by bulldozers. On the far right, Chamberlin's 2/8 overcame light resistance and seized Bill's Pimple late in the afternoon of the 30th. The other hills, though blasted by shells and rockets, remained in enemy hands. Prospects for the 8th Marines, however, seemed excellent, for by the evening of 30 June, Army and Marine tanks had reached the front lines, supplies were arriving to sustain the regiment, and the gap along the division boundary was being patrolled by elements of the 106th Infantry.

The 2d Marine Division, which had suffered 4,488 casualties since D-Day, was employing all three of its regiments on line when the fight for central Saipan came to an end. Since replacement drafts had not yet arrived, support units had been organized to serve as the division reserve. A total of five such companies were available to General Watson on the evening of 30 June.

Success at last crowned the efforts of the 27th Infantry Division, for on 29 and 30 June the soldiers burst through Death Valley and drew alongside the 8th Marines. The 106th Infantry joined the 105th in overrunning the valley, a company from 1/106 wiped out the stragglers trapped in Hell's Pocket, and 2/165 eliminated the die-hards entrenched on Purple Heart Ridge. Looking back upon the one-week battle, General Schmidt, who later succeeded

General Holland Smith as corps commander, observed that: "No one had any tougher job to do."⁵⁰ In clearing Death Valley and Purple Heart Ridge, the Army unit sustained most of the 1,836 casualties inflicted upon it since its landing.

Although no further advance was attempted, the 4th Marine Division continued to send patrols beyond its positions. Marine units made only occasional contacts with small groups of Japanese. The 165th Infantry, which yielded some of its frontage to the 23d Marines, exchanged long-range fire with the enemy.

On the 29th, the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 24th Marines protected the division left flank, while 2/24 mopped up Japanese infiltrators. Lieutenant Colonel Vandegrift, who had been wounded two days earlier, was evacuated. Command of 3/24 then passed to Lieutenant Colonel Otto Lessing, formerly the executive officer of the 20th Marines.

By dusk on 30 June, the 27th Infantry Division had advanced far enough to relieve 1/24 of responsibility for the southern segment of the left flank. The 4th Marine Division, however, continued to man an L-shaped line, though it encompassed less territory. The 25th Marines remained at Hill 500 in corps reserve. To date the division had suffered 4,454 casualties.

Central Saipan was now under American domination. The front stretched from Garapan past the Four Pimples to the 4th Marine Division left boundary.

⁵⁰ Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to MajGen Albert C. Smith, USA, dtd 10Jan55, quoted in Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, p. 230.

Here the lines veered sharply northward to Hill 700, and then extended along a generally straight line from that hill to the eastern coast. Behind the lines, the hectic pace of the first few days had slowed. Of all the supplies carried for the assault troops, all but 1,662 tons had been unloaded by 28 June. (See Map 18.)

In spite of the long routes of evacuation and the difficult terrain, casualties were being moved speedily to the hospitals established on the island. Evacuating the wounded from the combat zone was a more difficult problem after the departure on 23 June of the last of the hospital ships. Transports and cargo vessels, some of them poorly

suites to the task, were pressed into service. Since the corps casualty rate declined toward the end of June, these ships, supplemented by planes flying from Aslito field, proved adequate.⁵¹

By the evening of 30 June, the Japanese had begun withdrawing to their final defensive line. During the next phase of the Saipan operation, General Holland Smith planned to thrust all the way to Tanapag. Near Flores Point, the 2d Marine Division would be pinched out, leaving the 27th Infantry Division and 4th Marine Division face to face with Saito's recently prepared defenses. (See Map 19.)

⁵¹ CominCh, *The Marianas*, pp. 5:19-5:20.