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THE OPERATIONS OF THE SECOND REGIMENT (SECOND MARINE
DIVISION) ON SAIPAN-TINIAN, 15 JUNE-1 AUGUST, 1944

(Personal experience of a Regimental S-4)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN AN AMPHIBIOUS
OPERATION.

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the Second Regiment, Second Marine Division, in the battles for Saipan and Tinian, from 15 June, to 1 August, 1944. Since the Second Marines were initially held in Division reserve, it would be impossible to clearly describe the actions of the regiment without considering the actions of the Division. While it has been attempted to narrow the action to that of the regiment, the Division situation must be understood at all times to clearly understand how and why the regiment was committed. Therefore, it has been necessary to inter-weave regimental and Division actions as a means of clarification.

The beginning of the year 1944 found the Japanese forces madly improving the inner defenses of the Pacific domain while preparing to make any penetrations of the outer perimeter as slow and costly as possible. (1) It was a fight for time. Beginning with the assault on the Marshall Islands on January 31; then the capture of Kwajalein, Majuro, and Eniwetok in February -- all indicated to the Japanese high command that there was to be little time in which to complete his preparations. (2) Time ran out more swiftly than Tojo had gambled; none was wasted in long and bloody sieges of Truk and Rabaul, delays which he had counted upon. (3) Instead, Truk and Rabaul were neutralized by air and naval forces and by-passed.

(1, 2) A-6 p. 36; (3) A-7, par. 5.

By striking straight west, we caught the Japanese off balance at the start. (4) Saipan in the Marianas was a position of vital importance. Japanese documents disclosed that the Marianas and Bonin Islands were considered as a final defensive position of the homeland. (5) Saipan was to be the first blow in a plan that called for the capture of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam in rapid succession.

The principal components of the American Forces given the assignment of assaulting Saipan were the Second Marine Division, The Fourth Marine Division, and the 27th Army Infantry Division. (6) All three of these Divisions were veterans of Pacific warfare. The Second Marine Division had for its basic elements the Second, Sixth, and Eighth regiments, all infantry; and the Tenth Regiment, the artillery organic to the Division. This Division had fought against the Japanese first at Guadalcanal. Later, after a period of training in New Zealand, the Second Division had stormed the bloody beaches of Tarawa, and had wrested that atoll from the Japanese. After a period of training and re-organizing in Hawaii, this veteran Division had now been given the difficult task "to land on, seize, occupy, and defend Saipan; then be prepared to seize Tinian on order." (7)

PART I - SAIPAN

A. GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

Saipan is an irregularly shaped island, roughly twelve miles long and five miles wide, with its long axis running north and south. It is of volcanic origin, but in rising out of the sea was covered by coral formations, and coral is

(4, 5) A-6, p. 36 ; (6) A-1, p. 1356; (7) A-7, par. 1.

found practically everywhere on the island.

The key terrain feature is Mt. Tapotchau which rises to a height of some 1,554 feet and dominates all of the beaches and the entire island. This mountain breaks off in all directions to form a series of ridges and hills with no apparent principal direction. The terrain around Mt. Tapotchau is particularly "rugged"; there are many sheer cliffs and deep ravines.

The two principal towns of Saipan were Charan-Kanoa and Garapan, both of which had some well-constructed buildings. Most of the houses were of wood and tile, but some of the better buildings were made of concrete.

The beaches on the southwestern shore were flat, leading to a plateau bordered by hills and ridges. Just inland from these beaches behind the town of Charan-Kanoa was a fresh water lake, Lake Susupe, surrounded by a large swampy area. Better beaches were on the eastern side of the island on Magicienne Bay. Here the anchorages were deep, the beaches flat; the beach was concave and well protected from the weather.

On the northern end of Saipan was an area bordered by a steep cliff two to three hundred feet high along the western shore. Behind the cliffs was a rolling plateau. This was Marpi Point, the scene of the last organized Japanese resistance on the island, and also the sickening scene of mass suicides by Japanese soldiers and the civilians.

Saipan was almost completely surrounded by coral reefs. These extended from the shore roughly 1500 yards to seaward. There was a small channel leading to Government Docks near Charan-Kanoa and another channel leading to the finger pier near Garapan. Both of these channels were mined.

B. TRAINING AND REHEARSAL

Before the Saipan operation all major units had gained previous combat experience involving amphibious operations. By the first of May, the Second Division had completed all major training phases in the Hawaii area. A rehearsal with naval units was held from 15-19 May, emphasizing the use of the some 700 LVTs, perfecting the transfer of personnel from LCVPs and LCMs into LVTs. (8) The use of LVTs in such large numbers -- eight amphibian tractor battalions -- was a new wrinkle in amphibious warfare; but two of these battalions were new, having left the States only two weeks prior to rehearsal time. (9) The plan called for all assault troops to land in LVTs, thus nullifying the effect the reefs and changing tides might have upon the assault landing. The lesson learned at Tarawa had been a hard one!

C. MOVEMENT TO THE OBJECTIVE

Leading echelons of the Force sailed from Pearl Harbor on 29 May. The Second Marine Division sailed the next day. (10) Now the news of the Division's objective was revealed. Briefing and orientation was begun immediately. Each day was spent with all hands studying maps, charts, intelligence reports, plans of attack, alternate plans, and even the customs of the natives of Saipan. Every man in the Division became thoroughly familiar with the beaches, the terrain, and what to expect when he stepped ashore.

All of the Force dropped anchor at Eniwetok between 7 - 10 June. (11) Here final changes in plans were made and the remainder of the assault personnel were loaded into LSTs. The LVT group, in LSTs, sailed for the combat area on 11 June. (12)

(8) A-7 par. 2; (9) Personal interview of Lt. C.E. Lauer, USMCR, 2nd Amph Trac Bn; (10) A-7 par. 4; (11, 12) A-4 p. 17.

the movement to the target was without event. All elements of the attack force arrived off Saipan in the early morning of D-Day.

D. PLANS

The operation plan was issued to the Second Marine Division on 27 April by the V Amphibious Corps. In turn, the Division submitted plans for approval. On 1 May, V Amphibious Corps issued the preferred plan. This plan called for the landing of two divisions abreast on the western beaches of Saipan with Charan-Kanoa as the dividing point between the divisions. (13) On 3 May, the alternate plan was issued, calling for the two divisions to land on the beaches north of Garapan. (14)

One plan called for BLT 1/2 (1st Bn, 2nd Regt) to land on the beaches in Magicienne Bay the night of D-Day minus 1; to capture Mt. Tapotchau by dawn of D-Day, thus placing the key terrain feature in the hands of the attacking forces. (15) This BLT was specially trained in rubber boat operations and was kept in Landing Force reserve, readily available should such a plan be attempted. Luckily this plan was abandoned.

E. D-DAY

DEMONSTRATION. D-Day was 15 June, 1944; H-Hour had been set for 0830. At 0600, off the beaches at Tanapag Harbor, RCT 24, the Fourth Division reserve, and RCT 2, the Second Division reserve, conducted a diversionary movement. (16) Transports moved into position and lowered boats to simulate a landing on the beaches near Garapan. (See map I: Saipan) Marines with full equipment clambered down the sides of the ships into the boats. The boats circled, formed into boat waves, and headed toward the beach. Upon reaching the line of departure,

(13, 14, 15) A-7 part 1, p. 2.

the boats wheeled about sharply and returned to the ships. Boats were hoisted aboard the ships and the demonstration group returned to the transport area off the beaches where the landing was being made. This demonstration lasted from 0600 until H-Hour plus 60 and produced the desired result. Subsequent intelligence revealed that one Japanese infantry regiment was held in reserve north of Garapan to meet this threatened landing. (17)

THE LANDING. Off the landing beaches H-Hour had been delayed 10 minutes so boat waves would have more time to form. (18) The town of Charan-kanoa was the center of the landing zone. To the north of it were the Second Divisions' beaches, beaches Red 1, Red 2, Green 1, and Green 2; and to the south of it, the Fourth Division's beaches, beaches Blue 1, Blue 2, Yellow 1, and Yellow 2. (See Map I: Saipan)

The landing had been preceded by an intensive preparation of naval gunfire and aerial strikes. LCI(G)s moved in to shower the beaches with rocket fire and 40 mm. fire. A final massive air strike hit the beaches. The assault waves of troops in LVTs, preceded by LVT(A)s with their ugly 75mm. howitzers pouring direct fire on the beaches, moved across the reef and to the beaches. In spite of these heavy preparations, the Japanese were ready and waiting. (19)

The Second and Fourth Marine Divisions landed abreast, each with two RCTs abreast. On the Second Division's beaches the Battalion Landing Teams were (left to right): BLT 2/6, BLT 3/6, 3/8, and 2/8. (20) RCT 2 was Second Division reserve and did not land until later in the day. BLT 1/2 was in Landing Force reserve and was not landed until D-Day plus 2.

(17) A-4 p. 19; A-7 part II, p.2; (18) A-7 part II, p. 2;
(19) A-4 p. 20; (20) A-7 part II, p. 2.

The assault waves of the Second Division landed north of their intended zones. As the troops organized under heavy fire they had to fight in two directions, pushing inland and to the south. But by 1130 the Division's beachhead extended from north of Red Beach 2 inland and southeast for about one thousand yards, then southwest to the radio towers, and on south to Lake Susupe. (21) (See Map I: Saipan)

From the beaches where the landing was made, the operation order called for the Fourth Division to push eastward across the island, splitting the Japanese forces, and to capture Aslito airfield, Saipan's main air base. The Second Division was to strike northward along the west coast and to seize Mt. Tapotchau. (22) There was plenty of trouble on the beaches. The O-1 line was reached in only a few places. Behind the O-1 line on the reverse slopes of hills and ridges, the enemy artillery and mortars were emplaced, and by late afternoon were placing accurate fire on the beachhead area. This continued for three days. The whole beachhead was alive with snipers. (23)

By late afternoon the Division had tanks ashore and began employing them. The artillery elements of RCT 6 and RCT 8 landed from mid-afternoon until nearly dark. They immediately went into firing positions and engaged in counterbattery fire; and in return, they drew heavy enemy fire. (24) BLT 2/2 and BLT 3/2 of RCT 2 landed on D-Day in the late afternoon.

Throughout the night of D-Day the enemy tried small counterattacks, none of which was well coordinated. The largest counterattack was attempted about 2000, supported by tanks, striking down the coast road from Garapan against the lines of RCT 6. This counterattack was successfully repulsed and

(21) A-7 part II, p.2; (22) A-4, p. 18; (23, 24) A-7 part II p.3.

the enemy forced to withdraw. As they fell back, they were heavily hit by our artillery and naval gunfire with severe losses. (25)

F. EXPANSION OF THE BEACHHEAD

On 16 June, D-Day plus 1, at 0545, the Japanese again counterattacked south from Garapan, with infantry supported by tanks. (26) The counterattack struck the left flank units of RCT 6 and succeeded in pushing back the front line about fifty yards. But a platoon of our medium tanks was called into action, and the Japs were driven back with severe losses and our lines restored. (27) BLT 2/2 was attached to RCT 6 to plug a gap between RCT 6 and RCT 8; and BLT 1/29, a special battalion in the Division, was attached to RCT 8 to help cover the wide frontage. BLT 3/2 relieved BLT 2/6 on the Division's left flank about 1000 in the morning when RCT 2 (less BLT 1/2 and BLT 2/2) moved into that area. RCT 2 at this time consisted of BLT 3/2, Regimental Weapons Company (less detachments), and Regimental Headquarters Company. (Note: A regimental weapons company consisted of twelve 37mm AT guns and four 75 mm SP guns as organic weapons.) BLT 1/2 was still being held in Landing Force reserve. Little advance was made in the Division's zone this day, but positions were consolidated, rear areas cleaned out, and all units received plenty of water, food, and ammunition. (28)

Again the enemy tried a counterattack the night of D-Day plus 1. Employing tanks with infantry riding on the outside, at 0345 the enemy struck from the east in a poorly coordinated plan of attack in RCT 6's zone. The tanks were fed in piecemeal. Our bazookas, AT grenades, 75 mm SP guns, and 37 mm guns

(25) A-7 part II p.4; (26)(27) A-7 part II p. 7; (28) A-7 part II, p. 8.

had a field day. At daybreak twenty-four enemy tanks were smouldering in the area. (29) Another force of Japanese attacked down the coral road from Garapan, swinging sabers and screaming at the tops of their lungs. They bumped into BLT 3/2's lines and were repulsed by small arms fire.

On D-Day plus 2, the Second Division began to attack in earnest. RCT 2 advanced to within a thousand yards of the outskirts of Garapan. RCT 6 and RCT 8 made good progress, however RCT 8 was having unforeseen difficulty in the large marshy area around Lake Sususe. (30) RCT 2 and RCT 6 reached the O-2 line and were ordered to dig in for the night.

Now the enemy had lost his best opportunity to dislodge us from our positions and sweep us into the sea. After this day, the fate of the Japanese defenders became more and more apparent. Both Divisions occupied better ground; lines were stronger and positions better consolidated. (31) A steady stream of supplies had been coming on on the beaches. Since the Fourth Division had been in danger of over-extending its lines, the 27th Infantry Division had begun landing and was ordered to move down the southern end of the island to capture Aslito airfield. (32)

But another problem arose at this time -- the supply situation and naval support. Due to the approach of the Japanese fleet nearly all of the transports were withdrawn from the area during the week 17-24 June. (33) The Landing Force was dependent on stock piles that were already ashore. Ammunition supply was the greatest problem. Artillery ammunition was down to a "bare minimum"; 60 mm mortar, illuminating, was a near impossibility to obtain. (34)

(29) A-7 part II p. 8; (30) A-7 part II p.7; (31) A-7 part II p. 8; (32) A-7 part II p. 6, 9; (33) A-7 part II p. 5; (34) A-7 p. 24.

The American Fifth fleet was withdrawn to meet the threat of the Japanese fleet, thus the Landing Force was without naval gunfire and air support. Of greatest importance was the fact that the success of the entire operation depended on the success of the Fifth Fleet in its present engagement. On 19-20 June, the Fifth Fleet shattered the Japanese attack, sinking five ships and destroying 402 planes. (35)

During the night of D-Day plus 2 the enemy probed the lines of the Second Division trying to make a penetration, but with little luck. BLT 2/2, attached to and on the right flank of RCT 6, had its line breached and contact with RCT 8 was lost; but by a quick counterattack and by putting its mortar platoon in the line, positions and contact was regained. (36) At 0430 enemy barges attempted a counterlanding behind RCT 2 on the Division's left flank. The barges were taken under fire by a destroyer and several LCIs, with the resulting destruction of seventeen barges while the others were forced to turn back. (37)

Little advance was made by RCT 2 on D-Day plus 3 and D-Day plus 4. The days were spent in improving positions and intensive patrolling. The Fourth Division had completed its drive to the eastern shore of Saipan. (38) Now, as the drive to the north was started, a great pivot movement was begun with RCT 2 the anchor on the west coast. BLT 1/2 was finally released from Landing Force reserve but kept in Second Division reserve. Two platoons of BLT 1/2 were sent in to reinforce the lines in the left sector of RCT 8. (39) Due to expanding lines and steady casualties, the Division reserve was down to two platoons of BLT 1/2, as the remainder of BLT 1/2 went into the line on

(35) A-8, p. 24; (36, 38, 39) A-7 part II p. 10; (38) A-4 p.24.

the right of RCT 2.

As the pivot continued to the north, RCT 5 and RCT 6 could swing to the north toward Mt. Tapotchau. Only RCT 2 remained stationary with its left flank on the beach; but the regiment was not idle. Vigorous patrolling was continued and every effort was made to keep contact with the enemy. On the night of D-Day plus 7, just after dark, the enemy blew up a Division ammunition dump near Green Beach 1. (40) The greatest loss was M43 A1 81 mm mortar ammunition. When the result of this shortage became serious, mortar platoons used captured Japanese mortar ammunition and employed it effectively. (40)

RCT 2 began to direct aerial bombing, artillery, and naval gunfire on Garapan to destroy it. It had been hoped to keep this town intact for later use after the island was secured. No fires had been placed on it on D-Day and it had been purposely missed during the softening up process. (41) During the first three days of the operation the Japanese had used it as an assembly area from which to launch counterattacks against RCT 2 and RCT 6. So it was that now General Watson's request had been granted and the town was systematically reduced to rubble to deny its use to the Japanese. RCT 2 had a comparatively easy time of it while waiting for the remainder of the force to get into position for the final drive to the north. As a defensive measure RCT 2 laid mine fields forward of its left flank. (42)

On D-Day plus 9, RCT 2 joined in the attack with two BLTs abreast, BLT 3/2 on the left flank and BLT 1/2 on the

(40) A-7 part II p. 11; ((41) A-7 part II p. 12; (42) A-7, part II p. 13.

right. In forty minutes BLT 3/2 advanced nearly five hundred yards along the coast, but BLT 1/2 ran into enemy resistance from a hill on its right front. By 1500 this hill was occupied by BLT 1/2, allowing BLT 3/2 to continue forward against light resistance. At 1625, the Japanese launched a counter-attack from Garapan, supported by seven tanks. (43) Our 75 mm SP guns opened fire and were soon joined by a platoon of our medium tanks. Foot troops got into the skirmish too with bazookas and AT grenades. Six enemy tanks were destroyed and one got away. (44)

On D-Day plus 10, RCT 2 advanced into the edge of Garapan, finding little resistance in the rubble, but many mines. (45) The high ground to the right of Garapan, in RCT 6's zone of action, was still in the hands of the Japanese, giving good observation for enemy fire. To advance farther would be foolhardy. RCT 2 was ordered to halt until the commanding ground was taken. However, on this day, D-Day plus 10, Mt. Tapotchau finally fell to the Second Division. (46)

On D-Day plus 19, 4 July, RCT 2 advanced through Garapan, progressing with RCT 6 on its right. A little street fighting was encountered but most of the town was in ruins. The Second Division continued its drive to the sea to capture Garapan and Tanapag Harbor with its seaplane base. This finished the zone of action of the Division. Because of the narrowing width of Saipan, the Second Division was pinched out and reverted to Landing Force reserve on 5 July. (47)

(43, 44) A-7 part II, p. 16; (45, 46) A-7 part II, p. 17;
(47) A-4 p. 26.

G. THE FINAL DRIVE TO THE NORTH

Only the artillery of the Second Division was involved in the all out "Banzai" charge which the Japanese launched on 7 July. This counterattack over-ran front line battalions of the 27th Infantry Division and continued in the direction of Garapan. (48) The almost expended forward elements of the enemy reached the third and fourth battalions of the Tenth Marines (artillery). These battalions fired all available ammunition. Two batteries lost their field pieces but recovered them later. By dark about half of the ground lost had been retaken by the 27th Infantry Division's reserve. (49)

On 8 July, the Second Marine Division relieved the 27th Infantry Division in its zone of action. (50) However, RCT 2 was attached to the Fourth Division to aid in its final drive. With four RCTs abreast (left to right: RCT 23, RCT 2, RCT 24, RCT 25), the attack was made toward the northwest on the morning of 8 July. Resistance was moderate, but the terrain was difficult and troops were near exhaustion. However an advance of nearly 1500 yards was made that day. (51) On the following day, at 0630, three RCTs abreast (left to right: RCT 2, RCT 24, RCT 25), jumped off to complete the drive to Marpi Point. (52) All organized resistance ended that afternoon (D-Day plus 24), and Saipan was officially declared secured at 1600, 9 July, 1944.

Casualties for RCT 2 were 40 officers and 1012 men, a total of 1,052. (53)

H. MASS SUICIDES

The story would not be complete without at least a note about one of the most sickening sights of the war. In the last few days

(48) A-7 p.19; (49, 50) A-7 p. 21; (51) A-7 p. 22; (52) A-4 p. 26; (53) A-7 summary p.3.

of the operation, hundreds of civilians, as well as soldiers, destroyed themselves by jumping over the cliffs in the Marpi Point area, by wading into the surf to drown, by killing themselves with grenades. Some were shot by Japanese soldiers as they hesitated on the edge of the cliffs. Children were thrown over the cliffs or into the sea and their parents joined them soon after. Mothers clasped babies to them and jumped to the rocks below. It made one wonder just how good was the propaganda the Japanese had been telling these people. Whatever the power, its effectiveness was proved by this incident.

1. ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation it is seen that the Second Regiment operated under peculiar conditions. At the beginning, it was in Division reserve with one BLT detached and in Landing Force reserve. It was landed on D-Day; the next day another BLT was detached from RCT 2 and attached to another RCT, and the remainder of the RCT 2 put in the front lines. This certainly proved the flexibility and effectiveness of RCT and BLT organization.

Troops were near exhaustion after the operation. Flies in hordes, probably caused by rotting sugar cane, swarmed over every bite of food. Dysentery of course resulted. Mosquitoes at night were as bad as the flies in the daytime. Dengue or "breakbone" fever began to have telling effect on the troops. Hot meals were infrequent and usually not to be had. These factors all tend to wear down the fighting efficiency of the troops, especially during a period of twenty-four days of continuous combat.

The necessity of making a diversionary landing was demonstrated by the feint toward the beaches near Garapan, with the

result that the enemy kept one regiment in reserve to meet this threat. How much this aided the assault landing can only be surmised, but that it did aid materially during a precarious period cannot be denied.

The inferiority of enemy artillery tactics was seen in the failure of the Japanese forces to mass artillery fire on the beachhead. The area could have been made well-nigh untenable. Massed artillery fire in such a condensed area with the observation afforded by the surrounding hills and ridges would have been disastrous to the attacking forces.

The Japanese forces also used inferior counterattack tactics. When tanks and infantry attacked together, the tanks were fed in piecemeal. The enemy never made a full scale counterattack that was well coordinated, never massing artillery, tanks, and infantry together for a decisive blow.

The use of naval gunfire, air strikes, and artillery by RCT 2 to destroy the town of Garapan, thus avoiding the necessity for costly street fighting, is an excellent example of the mass of supporting arms available to the commanders of our attacking troops. Correct use of supporting arms prevented many unnecessary casualties.

The operation, bold as it was, proved our doctrines of amphibious warfare to be correct. Problems of ship-to-shore movement, communication, fire control, coordination of land, sea and air power, were dealt with effectively.

PART II - TINIAN

A. GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES (See Map II: TINIAN)

Tinian is a small island roughly ten miles long and five miles in width, with its long axis running north and south. It lies about three miles to the southwest of Saipan. On the north end of Tinian is much high ground rising to Mt. Lasso, the key terrain feature, which is a little over five hundred feet high. (54) In the center of the island the terrain is flat and rolling; here the ground was covered by sugar cane fields and farm lands. On the south end of Tinian there is a high plateau surrounded by steep cliffs.

There were three possible landing beaches on Tinian. The best was on the west side of the island near Tinian Town. Here the beaches were wide and gently sloping; the reefs had many openings; really an excellent beach. But the Japanese expected a landing to be made here. (55) The beaches were heavily mined; shore guns and automatic weapons covered the area with frontal and enfilade fire.

Four landing beaches were located on the east coast of the island opposite Mt. Lasso. These beaches were heavily defended from the high ground surrounding them. (56) The third possible landing area consisted of two small beaches on the northwest end of Tinian. One of these beaches was a mere sixty yards wide; the other one further west was only one hundred and fifty yards wide. The coral reefs off these beaches made the use of LVTs to carry troops ashore a necessity. (57)

(54) A-8, part I p.1; (55) A-8 part I p. 2; (56, 57) A-8, part I, p. 1.

B. PREPARATIONS PRIOR TO LANDING

While the fighting for Saipan was still going on, plans were made for the landing on Tinian. (58) The choice of landing beaches was made after study and actual reconnaissance. Between 12-24 July, the Second Marine Division and Fourth Marine Division were busily planning, re-organizing, re-equipping, and re-supplying. (59) Troops, after the twenty-four exhausting days of combat, were rested and fed in preparation for the next action. No rehearsal was thought necessary; and no training was conducted other than to fire new weapons. (60)

On the nights of 10-11 and 11-12 July, the V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Battalion approached to within 400 yards of White and Yellow beaches, from where scouts swam to shore to thoroughly reconnoiter these areas. (61) Valuable information was gained.

The small beaches on the northwestern tip of Tinian were chosen for the landing for the following reasons: 1) To achieve tactical surprise; 2) To shorten the shore-to-shore distance; 3) To more ably support assault troops with artillery fire from gun positions located on the southern end of Saipan; 4) To secure the air field at an early date. (62) One fact discovered in captured documents on Saipan was that the Japanese had only small defenses organized on the northwestern shores of Tinian. (63)

(58, 62) A-8, part I p.1; (59, 60, 61) A-8, part I, p. 2;
(63) Northern Task and Landing Force special action report on Tinian, p. 3.

C. J-DAY

Prior to the landings on J-Day, RCT 2 and RCT 8 conducted a demonstration landing off the beaches near Tinian Town. These two RCTs were embarked in APAs. Soon after dawn the ships moved into the transport area; boats were lowered, boat waves formed and headed toward the beach, only to turn around at the line of departure and return to the ships. A landing in this area was expected by the Japanese who were well prepared to meet it. Deceived by this ruse, the enemy could do little to shift forces to meet the assault landing on the northwest coast. Naval gunfire, artillery fire from Saipan, and the alert covering air force prevented the movement of troops into the landing area. (65) Thus tactical surprise was achieved, as the enemy had only a small force defending the northwestern beaches. (66)

At 0745, on J-Day, 24 July, the Fourth Marine Division landed on White Beach 1 and 2. (See Map II: Tinian) RCT 24 landed in column of battalions over White Beach 1, a beach only sixty yards wide. (67) RCT 25 landed over White Beach 2 with two battalions abreast. (68) A point of unusual interest was the artillery support of this landing. Thirteen battalions of artillery were lined up on Saipan to support the landing and the operation as it progressed. (69)

The Fourth Division had been ordered "to land on Beaches White 1 and 2, seize objective O-1; then on division order, make the main effort in the direction of Mt. Lasso and seize

(65, 66, 67, 68, 69) A-8, part V, p. 1.

the Force Beachhead Line. Reorganize and prepare for further operations." (70) The Second Division was ordered to land on order behind the Fourth Division and prepare for offensive operations to be carried out on order. (71)

The landing progressed satisfactorily. The Fourth Division had three RCTs in the line by afternoon. By 1850 a BLT of RCT 8 was landed and attached to the Fourth Division as Division reserve. At 0630 the following morning the remainder of RCT 8 started landing. RCT 2 started landing over White Beaches 1 and 2 about noon. (72)

D. EXPANSION OF THE BEACHHEAD

Early the following morning, J-Day plus 2, RCT 2 relieved RCT 24 in the line and continued the attack. (73) RCT 8 was on the left of RCT 2 and the Fourth Division on the right. (See Map II: Tinian) RCT 8 and RCT 2, in expanding the beachhead, were attacking almost east and by noon had reached the eastern shore and the O-3 line. In order to turn south and continue the attack, RCT 6 was ordered into the line on the right flank of RCT 2 and between RCT 2 and the Fourth Division. (74) This put RCT 2 on the left flank of the Second Division front with its left on the eastern shore of Tinian. RCT 8 was pinched out and reverted to Division reserve. RCT 2 and RCT 6 advanced to the south, meeting only light resistance, and dug in for the night between O-3 and O-4 lines. (75) The Fourth Division had succeeded in capturing Mt. Lasso and had continued slightly beyond before digging in for the night. (76)

The next day, J-Day plus 4, both Divisions advanced rapidly. The fight for Tinian was proving to be different from the long,

(70, 71) A-8, part II; (72, 73) A-8 Part V p. 4; (74, 75, 76) A-8, Part V, p. 5.

drawn-out operation on Saipan. (77) Here the terrain was more favorable for the employment of our tanks. Army planes based on Saipan were always overhead or on call. Artillery support, both from battalions in position on Saipan and from the battalions of 75 mm pack howitzers landed with the attacking troops, was readily available when called for. The advance was rapid. Most of our casualties were resulting from heat exhaustion, since the advance at this time was being made through dense cane fields. (78)

BLT 1/2, in regimental reserve of RCT 2, was being called upon often for patrol and mopping-up missions. In the early morning of J-Day plus 6, one of these patrols was pinned down about 500 yards in front of RCT 2's lines. The 2nd Platoon, C Company, 2nd Tank Battalion, was sent out to rescue this patrol. (79) Rescue was effected in time for RCT 2 to resume the attack on time at 0745. RCT 2 met little resistance on this day until soon after noon. The left BLT ran into strong resistance from a hill next to the coast. After heavy artillery fire had neutralized this resistance, the BLT over-ran the hill and RCT 2 continued the advance south to the O-7 line. (80) Night positions were well dug in and Dannert wire placed in front of the lines. It was a point of interest that Dannert wire was placed in front of defensive positions at night whenever possible. The time available, and the terrain were usually the factors deciding whether the wire was to be used or not. Trucks in the regimental dump were usually loaded with Dannert wire in the early afternoon, contemplating the possible or rather probable use of wire when the BLTs were ordered to dig in for

(77) A-4, p. 34; (78, 79) A-8, part V, p. 6; (80) A-8, part V, p. 7.

the night. The sending of Dannert wire forward to aid in preparing night defensive positions was almost automatic.

About 1700, the night of J-Day plus 6, BLT 3/2 received enemy machine gun and mortar fire from caves in the cliffs to its rear. BLT 1/2, the reserve BLT, was ordered to reduce these enemy positions. Flame thrower tanks of the 2nd Tank Battalion were called upon, and with the demolition and flame thrower teams of BLT 1/2, reduced the positions before dark.

From the O-7 line, the Second Division faced the enemy's final positions on the high plateau in its zone of action. This plateau rose sharply from the flat ground. The best approaches were on the Division's right front. The plan decided upon to take this area was for RCT 2 to establish a holding position at the foot of the cliffs on the left, while RCT 6 and RCT 8 moved by the approaches on the right up on and across the plateau. (81)

On J-Day plus 7, after an intense artillery preparation, RCT 2 advanced to the base of the cliffs as planned, and established the holding position. RCT 8 was moved into the front lines to the right of RCT 6. RCT 6 and RCT 8 then swung to the right on the approaches to the plateau. The enemy had heavy defensive positions on this route. BLT 1/8 managed to get up on the plateau by dusk and repelled attempted counter-attacks through the night. RCT 6 moved up on the plateau early the next morning. At 1130, the final drive across the plateau was started with RCT 6 and RCT 8 abreast, and RCT 2 continuing its holding attack. By late afternoon the last of

(81) A-8, part V, p. 8.

the high ground in the Division's zone of action was secured.

Except for mopping up operations the fight for Tinian was ended for the Second Marine Division, this 31st day of July. The Fourth Division pushed ahead the following day, J-Day plus 8, to seize the remainder of the island. Tinian was officially announced as being secured at 1855, on 1 August, 1944. (82)

A true account of the operation cannot be closed without mentioning the supply system used. In addition to two divisions landing across two narrow beaches, one sixty yards wide and the other one hundred and fifty yards wide, all the supplies to support this corps in combat were landed over these same two narrow beaches. LVTs and DUKWs were used entirely to land supplies. Instead of unloading on the beaches, these vehicles proceeded inland to dumps already established and were unloaded there. A storm on 27 July, caused heavy seas, causing the supply problem to become a major one. But it was found that LVTs and DUKWs could land when other craft could not. (83) Several NATS planes were pressed into service, and thirteen army transport planes brought up from the Marshalls. An air shuttle was established from Saipan to Tinian. Roughly 1600 casualties were removed to Saipan by this service. (84)

E. ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of the Tinian operation it will be seen that the technique involved was an adaptation of established doctrine. The enemy knew we would land on Tinian, yet tactical surprise was achieved. The landings were made over the narrowest beaches ever used in an amphibious operation, yet

(82) A-8, part V, p. 11; (83, 84) A-9, p. 1-7, 1-8.

two divisions were landed across these beaches with minimum casualties and with supplies sufficient to attack without delay. The support fires from artillery emplaced on Saipan were superb. The study and reconnaissance made before selecting the landing beaches paid off in huge dividends as the "ideal" amphibious operation was carried out.

Analysis would not be complete without a study of the supply methods employed. All supplies were landed by LVT's and DUKWs which did not unload on the beach but proceeded inland to be unloaded at dumps established there. "The DUKW personnel and their vehicles performed a remarkable feat of endurance, in that for five days the entire system of supply of a corps in battle was solely dependent on their continuous performance." (85)

The Tinian operation will stand out in records of amphibious warfare for the following reasons: (1) The landings were made over the narrowest beaches ever used in an amphibious operation. (2) The enemy knew a landing would be made on Tinian; he was prepared for the landing, yet tactical surprise was achieved. (3) The beachhead was established in record time. (4) It was the first shore-to-shore landing in the Central Pacific. (5) Supporting artillery fires were initially from an adjacent island. (6) The landing was made by troops two weeks after they had fought in one of the most costly operations in the Pacific. (7) Limited shore party operations on the beach and continuous supply in spite of a four day storm, since supplies were landed in vehicles which moved directly to inland dumps. (86)

(85) A-4 p. 36; (86) A-8 part VI.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the lessons to be learned from the Saipan-Tinian operation are:

1. The use of a feint or demonstration landing can cause the enemy to deploy large forces to meet the threat, giving tactical surprise to the assaulting forces.
2. The greatest effectiveness of artillery can be achieved by massing fires.
3. For longer operations involving many days in combat we must devise a better means for feeding troops. Fly-proof messes must be provided; more hot meals must be fed to prevent disease and exhaustion of troops.
4. Correct use of the supporting arms available to a BLT and RCT commander can prevent many casualties to our troops.
5. The American doctrine of counterattack is sound. A counter-attacking force is ineffective unless the counterattack is coordinated. Piece-meal counterattacks are foolish. When you start a counterattack, strike with everything available.
6. Study and reconnaissance before choosing landing beaches can pay off in big dividends, helping to obtain tactical surprise and keeping casualties to a minimum.
7. Counter propaganda measures must be adopted to defeat the Japanese militaristic propaganda which influenced a large number of civilians to commit suicide rather than surrender to American forces.
8. Enemy ammunition and materiel can be utilized to our advantage in an emergency.