

Sacked at Saipan

**A Monograph
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Abstract

Sacked at Saipan by Maj William B. Allen IV, US Marine Corps, 43 pages.

The relief of Major General Ralph Smith, United States Army, from the command of the 27th Infantry Division during the battle for Saipan on 24 June 1944 by Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, United States Marine Corps, seemingly ignited a slow-burning fuse of service competition, jealousy, and animosity that some say is still burning bright today. If not for the sheer determination of the highest Army, Marine Corps, and Navy commanders in Washington, something so trivial, yet historic, as the relief of Ralph Smith could have hindered the strategic goals and operational objectives of the war against the Japanese. Nearly seventy years later, the question is still a topic of debate. Was Lieutenant General Holland Smith justified in relieving Major General Ralph Smith? Holland Smith's justifications centered on Ralph Smith's apparent disregard of orders and perceived inability to lead his division in combat. Historical appraisals of this relief have most often focused on either Army or Marine Corps doctrines in place at the time of the battle for Saipan. Instead of comparing and contrasting doctrines from the Second World War, this monograph appraises Lieutenant General Holland Smith's effectiveness as a corps level commander and the factors influencing his decision to relieve Major General Ralph Smith using today's doctrinal combat power assessment from the Army's *Operations*, FM 3-0 Change 1. As stated in this Army doctrinal publication, there are eight elements of combat power: mission command, movement and maneuver, fires, sustainment, intelligence, protection, information, and leadership. This monograph evaluates the justifications based on today's standards of combat power analysis, focusing on only three of the eight elements of combat power: military intelligence, mission command, and leadership. The flawed military intelligence assessment of the enemy's strengths and capabilities at two pieces of key terrain, the unclear operational orders in the midst of battlefield friction, and the underappreciated leadership abilities of Ralph Smith all contributed to Holland Smith's reasoning for relieving the Army division commander. In viewing the relief through the elements of today's combat power application, Holland Smith's decision appears premature and the justifications that Ralph Smith disregarded orders and lacked leadership are not fully substantiated when weighed against this monograph's methodology.

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Introduction

At the height of the afternoon heat of 24 June 1944, a Marine messenger from Marine Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith's V Amphibious Corps command post on Saipan handed a message to Army Major General Ralph C. Smith, commanding general of the 27th Infantry Division. The Army general read the message and placed it in his pocket without comment. After spending the past several hours on the front lines directly observing the vicious fighting, Ralph Smith was in the middle of briefing his two regimental commanders on the division's new scheme of maneuver to break the Japanese's fierce hold in what the division commander's soldiers were now calling "Death Valley."¹ The 27th Infantry Division fought against these Japanese forces at the mouth of Death Valley for nearly two days, and the enemy defenses were disrupting the American attack north into the heart of the island. The Army division was grossly lagging behind the two Marine divisions attacking north on either flank.² The V Corps' commander had become impatient with the Army's apparent inability to fight and its commander's presumed disregard of Holland Smith's orders. The message Ralph Smith had just read was Lieutenant General Smith's order relieving him from his command. The afternoon heat on Saipan was nothing compared to the heat from the interservice fire ignited by the Marine general.

Holland Smith's relief of Ralph Smith from command during the battle for Saipan ignited a slow burning fuse of service competition, jealousy, and animosity that some historians, politicians, and service members say is still burning bright today. If not for the sheer determination of the highest Army, Marine Corps, and Navy commanders in Washington, something so trivial, yet historic, would have hindered the strategic goals and operational objectives of the war against the Japanese. In the months and years that followed victory on the two fronts of the Second World War, talk and speculation continued to swirl amongst the separate services regarding the infamous relief of an Army general by a senior Marine Corps

¹ See APPENDIX, Map, Saipan, June 1944.

² Sharon Tosi Lacey, "Smith vs Smith," *World War II* (May/June 2011): 60.

general.³ In today's Department of Defense, joint operations are the primary, if not sole, way the United States military engages in uncertain and complex conflicts throughout the world. The relevance of command relationships, the understanding of joint doctrine as well as separate service doctrines, and the efficient employment of combat power all remain critical factors regarding the application of operational art today, just as during the Second World War.

Nearly seventy years later, the question is still a topic of debate. Was Lieutenant General Holland Smith justified in relieving Major General Ralph Smith? Holland Smith's justifications centered on Ralph Smith's apparent disregard of orders and perceived inability to lead his division in combat. Historical appraisals have more often focused on either Army or Marine Corps doctrines in place at the time of the battle for Saipan. This monograph evaluates Holland Smith's justifications based on today's standards of combat power analysis, focusing on only three of the eight elements of combat power: military intelligence, mission command, and leadership. The following conflicting versions of the events set the historical stage for a modern day evaluation of this controversial relief.

Army Version

Holland Smith's actions and his justification for the relief outraged the Army's senior leadership and supporters. Whether the relief of Major General Ralph Smith brought about any significant change one way or the other in the fighting spirit of his division is purely speculative. However, there is no doubt that the relief of an Army general by a Marine general fueled an interservice controversy "of alarming proportions--a controversy that seriously jeopardized harmonious relations at all levels among the Army and the Navy and the Marine Corps in the Pacific."⁴ Army officers were quick to defend their service in the immediate aftermath of Ralph Smith's relief. By the end of the battle for Saipan, relationships between Army officers and Marine officers on Lieutenant General Smith's corps staff had reached their

³ Anne Cipriano Venzon, *From Whaleboats to Amphibious Warfare* (London: Praeger, 2003), 111-115.

⁴ Philip A Crowl, *The War in the Pacific: Campaign in the Marianas* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1960), 192.

breaking point. Several high ranking Army staff officers reported that the Marine officers made little effort to hide their opinion that the 27th Infantry Division was an inferior organization relative to 2d Marine Division's and 4th Marine Division's performances in battle.⁵ According to Army historians, the first indications of tension between the two services appeared ironically enough just prior to the landing on Saipan, where soldiers and Marines still had to fight shoulder to shoulder for more than three weeks to capture the island.

The tension between the two services continued to grow as numerous Army officers continued to voice their disdain for the Marine Corps.⁶ The openly hostile reaction of several senior ranking Army officers present on Saipan culminated with a determination never to serve again under Lieutenant General Holland Smith.⁷ Coming as no surprise, Major General Ralph Smith opined to Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson, the commanding general of all Army forces in the Pacific Ocean theater, that "no Army combat troops should ever again be permitted to serve under the command of Marine Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith."⁸ The commanding general of the 27th Division Artillery, Brigadier General Redmond F. Kernan, as well as Major General George W. Griner, who later took over command of the 27th Infantry Division, agreed with Ralph Smith's assessment. George Griner quarreled so bitterly with the V Corps commander that Major General Griner came away from Saipan with the "firm conviction that [Holland Smith] is so prejudiced against the Army that no Army Division serving under his command alongside of Marine Divisions can expect that their deeds will receive fair and honest evaluation."⁹

Just five days before the conclusion of the battle, Lieutenant General Richardson appointed a board of inquiry to examine the facts regarding Major General Smith's relief. Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner was its chair, and it consisted of four other senior Army officers: Major General John R.

⁵ Ibid., 193.

⁶ Harold J. Goldberg, *D-Day in the Pacific* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 46-47.

⁷ Joseph H. Alexander, "World War II: 50 Years Ago," *Leatherneck* 77(June 1994): 19; Editorial, "Free Criticism," *The Washington Post*, 25 November 1948.

⁸ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 193.

⁹ Ibid.

Hodge, Brigadier General Henry B. Holmes, Jr., Brigadier General Roy E. Blount, and Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Selby.¹⁰ For nearly three weeks, the board discussed the event, hearing the testimony of Army officers, and examining only official reports from Army files related to the battle for Saipan. After examining only the evidence available to the U.S. Army Forces, Central Pacific Area command, the board concluded:

(1) that General Holland Smith had full authority to relieve General Ralph Smith; (2) that the orders effecting the change of command were properly issued; (3) that General Holland Smith "was not fully informed regarding conditions in the zone of the 27th Infantry Division," when he asked for the relief of General Ralph Smith; and (4) that the relief of General Ralph Smith "was not justified by the facts."¹¹

This Army board substantiated that the heavy resistance facing the 27th Infantry Division at the entrance to Death Valley was far more serious than Lieutenant General Holland Smith and his staff had assessed. "The bulk of the 27th Infantry Division," the board reported, "was opposed by the enemy's main defensive position on a difficult piece of terrain, naturally adapted to defense, artificially strengthened, well manned and heavily covered by fire."¹² According to the board's assessment, the V Corps commander and his staff "was not aware of the strength of this position and expected the 27th Division to overrun [the enemy defensive positions] rapidly."¹³ Holland Smith misinterpreted the delay in the division's attack north as an indication that the Army division was "lacking in aggressiveness and that its commander was inefficient."¹⁴ Furthermore, the board argued, there was no evidence that Major General Smith attempted to disregard orders during the clean-up operations back at Nafutan Point, the southeastern peninsula on Saipan. Considering the results came from an all-Army board that evaluated only Army documents, reports, records, and personnel, the findings of the "Buckner Board" by no means ended the controversy.

¹⁰ Harry A Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army* (Novato, CA: Presido Press, 1986), 220.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹² Venzon, *From Whaleboats to Amphibious Warfare*, 106.

¹³ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 193.

¹⁴ Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 225.

Marine Version

Marine Corps historians record the battlefield events prior to Major General Ralph Smith's relief slightly different from Army historians. The difference begins with the V Corps' operation order for 23 June establishing 1000 as the time of attack for 27th Infantry Division in support of the two Marine divisions fighting along Death Valley.¹⁵ The planned movement of the 27th Division into the center of the V Corps' frontal attack would nearly cut the 4th Marine Division's zone of action in half.¹⁶ This narrowing of the 4th Marine Division's zone of action would allow the division commanding general to pull his western regiment, the 25th Marines, into reserve and swing the Marine division's attack out to the east onto Kagman Peninsula.

The 27th Infantry Division's movement at daylight on 23 June from its assembly area to the line of departure was an uphill hike of about four miles.¹⁷ Difficulty developed when the 165th Infantry took the wrong road, which placed the regiment on the same road as the 106th Infantry. This traffic caused a delay and some confusion, but after a conference between the two commanders, the division bottleneck was rectified and the 165th Infantry moved off-road back onto its assigned route. The 165th Infantry continued its movement to the line of departure and accomplished its relief in place with the Marines around 1000. The commander of the 165th waited for the 106th to come abreast before starting his attack.

Lieutenant General Holland Smith was frustrated with the failure of the 27th Division to simultaneously attack north with the two Marine divisions on 23 June.¹⁸ Additionally, his disappointment with the 2d Battalion, 105th Infantry back on Nafutan Point was for a similar reason. The 2d Battalion was removed from the 27th Division to operate directly under V Corps control, and the battalion was

¹⁵ Henry I. Shaw Jr, Bernard C Nalty, and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World II, Volume III: Central Pacific Drive* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Corps, 1966), 308.

¹⁶ Carl W. Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Section, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1950), 134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1991), 413.

directed to attack into Nafutan Point "at daylight" on 23 June.¹⁹ The 2d Battalion did not commence its attack until 1330, and then only minimal movement was conducted and limited contact was made with the enemy.²⁰ The question of who controlled the 2d Battalion on 23 June and the apparent lack of aggressiveness in the Army division's fighting spirit became central points of contention regarding Holland Smith's justification for relieving Ralph Smith.

According to Lieutenant General Holland Smith's assessment, the 27th Infantry Division's failure to attack on time, inability to make measurable progress at Nafutan Point, and inadequate support of the V Corps' main assault in the north was a direct result of Ralph Smith's poor leadership.²¹ Lieutenant General Holland Smith decided that a change of command was necessary before additional lives were needlessly lost.²² On the morning of 24 June, the V Corps Commander went aboard the *USS Rocky Mount* to discuss the battlefield situation with Admiral Kelly Turner. Lieutenant General Smith briefed Admiral Turner using his operational map to express his frustration with Major General Ralph Smith, and he gave the operational justification for wanting to relieve the Army division commander. The Admiral agreed with the V Corps Commander, and the two Flag Officers went aboard the *USS Indianapolis* to brief Admiral Spruance, the overall commander of the operational area.²³ After briefing Admiral Spruance, he asked Lieutenant General Smith what to do. "Ralph Smith has shown that he lacks aggressive spirit," the V Corps commander replied, "and his division is slowing our advance. He should be relieved."²⁴ The Marine general suggested that Army Major General Jarman take command of the 27th Infantry Division

¹⁹ Lacey, "Smith vs Smith," 65.

²⁰ Shaw, Nalty, Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, 309.

²¹ Joseph H. Alexander, *A Fellowship of Valor* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 175.

²² Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 413-415.

²³ Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End*, 146.

²⁴ Holland M. Smith and Percy Finch, *Coral and Brass* (Washington, D.C.: Zener Publishing Co, 1948), 172-73.

until the appointment of another general by Army command back in Hawaii occurred. Admiral Spruance agreed and authorized the relief of Major General Ralph Smith.²⁵

Stateside Version

On 8 July 1944, while the battle for Saipan was still raging, the San Francisco Examiner reported a front-page story describing a dispute between two generals in the Pacific theater of operation.²⁶ It was reported that because of the quarrel, the Marine commander of the V Amphibious Corps had relieved the Army general commanding one of the divisions actively engaged in battle with the enemy. The sacked general was unceremoniously removed from the field of battle and sent back to Army headquarters at Pearl Harbor. The Associated Press quickly picked up this news, and the story spread across the country. The War Department was asked about the situation and officially responded with a statement regarding the relief but would not offer any details regarding the cause.²⁷

The relief of Ralph Smith continued to play out in the press. Editorial comments appeared in virtually all the large newspapers.²⁸ Several newspaper editorials called for extensive changes in the top commands throughout the entire Pacific sea, air, and ground forces. In the months following the news releases, several bills were introduced into Congress asking for an official investigation into the events on Saipan that led to the relief of Major General Smith.²⁹ These attempts by Congress to intervene eventually died before reaching committees. The public interest in the relief began to wane by the end of September 1944. None of the public interest stories and press releases about the affair contained an official explanation from either the War or Navy Departments in Washington. The bulk of information was

²⁵ Venzon, *From Whaleboats to Amphibious Warfare*, 106.

²⁶ Ray Richards, "Army General Relieved in Row Over High Marine Losses," *San Francisco Examiner*, 8 July 1944.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Editorial, "Spelling out a Merger," *The Washington Post*, 15 September 1944.

²⁹ Associated Press, "Data on Change of 27th Division Command Sought," *The Washington Post*, 19 September 1944.

primarily inaccurate and factually misleading. A good example comes from the August 1946 edition of *Harper's* magazine, stating that Admiral Spruance had been influenced in one of his decisions on 16 June 1944, by the fact that the 27th Infantry Division was not fighting well, undisciplined, and poorly led.³⁰ Even though no unit from the 27th Infantry Division was ashore on 16 June, therefore making the admiral innocent of the false accusations, *Harper's* has never corrected the statement even though official Army historians pressed the magazine on the matter.³¹

Many of the official statements submitted after the battle for Saipan appear to significantly support Lieutenant General Smith's assessment of the 27th Infantry Division, which reflected the public opinion on the relief.³² Members of the V Corps staff, including several Army officers, concurred with Holland Smith's view that the 27th Infantry Division was not fighting as well as it should have. The V Corps staff possessed a negative opinion of the Army division's fighting abilities; however, this negative view did not take into account poor and inaccurate enemy intelligence, which by some accounts suggests a "V Corps intelligence [staff that] was practically nonexistent."³³ Several official records support findings that the disorganized V Corps headquarters lacked command and control and had minimal battlefield awareness regarding actions occurring at the front lines.³⁴ Other official inquiries reveal that Lieutenant General Smith made unrealistic demands upon 27th Infantry Division and failed to properly employ the division within its combat capabilities on Saipan.³⁵ Inaccurate battlefield assessments and a faulty reporting system were crucial factors in Lieutenant General Holland Smith's leadership decisions regarding the employment of Major General Ralph Smith's division.

³⁰ Fletcher Pratt, "Spruance: Picture of the Admiral," *Harpers* (August 1944): 144-152.

³¹ Edmund G. Love, "Smith versus Smith," *Infantry Journal* (November 1948), 5.

³² George C. Dyer, *The Amphibians came to Conquer: the story of Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner* (Washington, D.C.: U.S Government Printing Office, 1972) 928.

³³ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 5.

³⁴ Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 414.

³⁵ Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 150.

Methodology

Instead of comparing and contrasting doctrines from the Second World War, this monograph appraises Lieutenant General Holland Smith's effectiveness as a corps level commander and the factors influencing his decision to relieve Major General Ralph Smith by using today's doctrinal combat power assessment from the Army's *Operations*, FM 3-0 Change 1. As stated in this Army doctrinal publication, there are eight elements of combat power: mission command, movement and maneuver, fires, sustainment, intelligence, protection, information, and leadership. The first six are commonly known within joint operations as the six warfighting functions. Army doctrine adds leadership as an all-encompassing element of combat power, which is complemented and enhanced by information as the final element. *Operations* explains the importance of combat power as "the total means of destructive, constructive, and information capabilities that a military unit or formation can apply at a given time. Army forces generate combat power by converting potential into effective action."³⁶

Commanders convert potential by using leadership and information to more effectively apply combat power through the six warfighting functions. The efficient and effective application of combat power through a combination of leadership and information compounds the synergistic effects of the other six elements of warfighting functions. Regardless of type, every military unit either generates or maintains potential combat power that is then employed across the full range of military operations.³⁷ A commander controls and filters the employment of combat power via leadership and information, which ultimately enables the commander to defeat the enemy, alleviate a complex situation, or empower a partnership.

³⁶ U.S. Army, *Field Manual 3-0 Change 1, Operations, 2011* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, February 2008), 4-1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

The Army's doctrine states, "generating and maintaining combat power throughout an operation is essential to success."³⁸ Commanders must ensure their units have enough potential combat power to complete their mission and fulfill their commander's intent. The balancing act for the commander is the speed in which the mission is accomplished while ensuring critical resources are not prematurely exhausted or held in reserve too long. The tailoring of the commander's force flow to maximize the power of the decisive effort or being able to project and sustain the combat power requirements of follow-on forces are factors that contribute to generating the appropriate conditions and decisive locations for effectively employing combat power.³⁹

During the Second World War, a number of flag officers in the United States Army were generally relieved of their command for inadequately employing at least one tenet of combat power. Five reliefs took place in the Pacific theater.⁴⁰ All of these reliefs except one occurred with minimum attention and virtually no effect on the unit except for the individual officers involved in the matter. The relief of Major General Smith in the midst of the battle for Saipan did result in a firestorm far out of proportion to its significance and did adversely affect the unit.⁴¹ The 27th Infantry Division was virtually demoralized and rendered nearly combat ineffective by the relief of its commander.⁴² Interservice bickering reached a point where General George C. Marshall in Washington was forced to issue orders stating that there would be no further discussion regarding Major General Smith's relief.⁴³ General Marshall, the equivalent of today's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, believed the interservice tension over the matter endangered the war effort in the Pacific theater. In spite of the interservice tension, the American forces did prevail on

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 3.

⁴¹ Robert Sherrod, "The Saipan Controversy," *Infantry Journal* (January 1949), 15.

⁴² Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 413.

⁴³ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 3.

Saipan and eventually defeated the Japanese military in the Pacific theater.⁴⁴ For his part as the corps commander during the battle for Saipan, Lieutenant General Holland Smith did effectively apply most elements of combat power. However, he was less effective in assessing the elements of military intelligence, mission command, and leadership resulting in the questionable relief of one of his division commanders. These three elements of combat power will form the basis for evaluating some of the factors leading to Ralph Smith's relief.

Intelligence Assessment

After twenty-four hours of fierce fighting following the first amphibious assault wave landing, weary Marines finally tried to get some sleep just a few hundred meters from the shore break. Two things became very clear to the Marines on Saipan: they forced a dangerous beachhead assault into the heart of a bitter enemy firestorm, and a long, tough battle against a very determined foe lay ahead of them.⁴⁵ The pre-assault military intelligence assessment had not adequately prepared the Marines for the twenty-four hours of fierce fighting they had just barely survived. At sea prior to the V Corps landing, the military intelligence assessment for Saipan consisted of maps of the island based upon recent American aerial and submarine photographs and an estimated enemy troop strength of 15000, of which only 9000 to 11000 were forecasted as combat troops.⁴⁶ After the battle for Saipan and with the benefit of hindsight, American military intelligence estimated the Japanese commanders, Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saito and Vice Admiral Chiuchi Nagumo, had nearly 30000 troops within reach of Saipan and available for

⁴⁴ Jon T Hoffman, "The legacy and lessons of the Marianas campaign," *Marine Corps Gazette*, 78 (July 1994): 76.

⁴⁵ John C. Chapin, *Breaching the Marianas* (Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1994), 5.

⁴⁶ Forth Marine Division: Operations Report, "Annex B (Intelligence) to Special Action Report, Saipan," (Gray Research Library Archives, Marianas, Saipan, 1944, Box 16), 23; Chapin, *Breaching the Marianas*, 7.

battle.⁴⁷ The lack of adequate military intelligence assessment prior to and during the battle for Saipan significantly contributed to the controversial relief of Major General Ralph Smith.

The overall operational commander is responsible for ensuring his military intelligence staff operates beyond just the collection of data. The military intelligence officers and analysts must work a continuous analysis process that generates useful information or actionable intelligence from multiple sources, reports, or operations. According to *Operations*, “the intelligence warfighting function is the related tasks and systems that facilitate understanding of the operational environment, enemy, terrain, and civil considerations.”⁴⁸ The V Corps’ military intelligence staff⁴⁹ failed to adequately assess the enemy strength, activities, and capabilities at Nafutan Point and in Death Valley. This failure of military intelligence led Holland Smith to the ineffective employment of the 27th Infantry Division at these two critical locations during the battle, and it ultimately led the V Corps commander to relieve Ralph Smith from command.

Underestimated force at Nafutan Point

On 20 June, the 27th Infantry Division launched its first determined attack against the 1200 strong Japanese force consolidated in the center of Nafutan Point, where the enemy had established fortified defensive positions.⁵⁰ However, the Army division had not reached the enemy’s main line of defense during the first day’s movement, and the four battalions from the center of the division’s advance

⁴⁷ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, *G-2 Report On Operation FORAGER, Volume E* (31 August 1944), 42. It is important to note that this G-2 Report was written nearly two month after the initial invasion for Saipan. The report is not based on analytical forecasts but on reporting after the campaign had concluded.

⁴⁸ U.S. Army, *Operations*, 4-7.

⁴⁹ The V Amphibious Corps military intelligence staff provided two separate staffs during the battle for Saipan. The main effort and staff for the military intelligence staff was forward deployed with Holland Smith. This staff consisted of six officers and ten enlisted intelligence analyst. An active duty Marine colonel led Lieutenant General Smith’s military intelligence staff. A skeleton rear echelon portion of the V Corps military intelligence staff remained at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. *G-2 Report On Operation FORAGER, Volume E*, 1, 6-7.

⁵⁰ John Wukovits, “Crucial Foothold in the Marianas,” *Military Heritage* (June 2006): 30.

made quick territorial gains. Based on this information, the V Corps' military intelligence staff made an erroneous and dangerous assumption regarding Japanese combat capability within the 27th Infantry Division's sector, especially given the lack of resistance over the previous twenty-four hours of fighting.⁵¹ Division reports filed prior to 1830 on 20 June indicated no enemy resistance. However, between dusk and dawn on 21 June the whole character and intensity of the Army's fight dramatically changed.⁵² Soldiers in the center American infantry battalion entrenched for the night directly in front of the main Japanese defensive line. Soon after sunset, the enemy counterattacked, and by daybreak, a deadly battle was in progress and every weapon and man in the American centerline was engaged against the attacking Japanese force. By midday, the counterattack force had withdrawn back to its prepared defensive positions, and the 27th Infantry Division resumed its attack in sector. Heavy resistance slowed the division advancement with every yard being contested by the Japanese.⁵³ The American advance was in stark contrast to the previous day's rapid surge. The heavy Japanese resistance was evidence that there was still plenty of well-organized and armed enemy willing to fight to the very last man.

Holland Smith and his intelligence staff failed to properly assess the Japanese fighting strength and capabilities on Nafutan Point during the Army division's fight against the enemy. The initial reports from elements of the 27th Infantry Division indicated enemy strength around three to five hundred Japanese fighters on the ridgeline southeast of the Aslito Airfield.⁵⁴ However, this estimate was after a vicious counterattack by the Japanese on the evening of 15 June when the 165th Infantry was still fighting under 2d Marine Division. The surviving Japanese forces from the failed counterattack had merely

⁵¹ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 6," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (20 June 1944), 2.

⁵² *G-2 Report On Operation FORAGER, Volume E*, 15.

⁵³ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 7," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (21 June 1944), 1.

⁵⁴ Aslito Airfield was the main airfield under American control on the southern portion of the island. Goldberg, *D-Day in the Pacific*, 145.

relocated to the base of Mount Nafutan⁵⁵ with the bulk of the Japanese combat troops defending the southern peninsula of Saipan.⁵⁶ The tough Japanese fighting forces supported with accurate artillery from within Nafutan Point were indications to both 2d Marine Division and the 27th Infantry Division regarding the Japanese strength and capability to defend the southern portion of the island. The daily operational reports from both divisions reflected the enemy's tenacity and deadly use of supporting arms.⁵⁷ The V Corps commander and his military intelligence staff disregarded these clear indications and warnings of a lethal Japanese force remaining on Nafutan Point and shifted to the second phase of the campaign, the northern portion of Saipan.⁵⁸ This lack of understanding of the operational environment on Nafutan Point became one of the focal points surrounding the confusion regarding the V Corps' orders defining operational control of the 27th Infantry Division rearguard force, which was tasked to defeat the enemy forces on the southeastern portion of Saipan.

Shortly after Ralph Smith's relief and departure from the island, the fighting on Nafutan Point took a bitter turn, just as the relieved Army general had predicted in a letter to the V Corps commander on 23 June. The division commander felt so strongly about the level of risk being accepted on Nafutan Point, that he wrote this letter requesting that the V Corps place the air and services personnel near Aslito Airfield on full alert.⁵⁹ His recommendation would inform the airfield units that infiltration from Nafutan Point through the porous lines of the 27th Infantry Division isolation force was likely to occur in the near future. The sole remaining battalion from the 27th Infantry Division at Nafutan Point had its outnumbered and overextended frontline infiltrated by the remaining Japanese forces during the night of 25 June. Nearly five hundred Japanese fighters penetrated the 2d Battalion, 105th Infantry's perimeter and attacked

⁵⁵ Mount Nafutan is only four hundred feet above sea level, but it guards the entrance to Nafutan Point's southernmost peninsula. Gordon L Rottman, *Saipan and Tinian 1944: piercing the Japanese empire* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2004), 10.

⁵⁶ Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 140.

⁵⁷ *G-2 Report On Operation FORAGER, Volume E*, 16.

⁵⁸ Venzon, *From Whaleboats to Amphibious Warfare*, 103.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Aslito Airfield and its rear area supporting units.⁶⁰ This final desperate attack by the remaining Japanese combat troops merely underscored the failings of the American military intelligence assessment and Holland Smith's lack of understanding regarding the enemy's fighting spirit on Saipan.

Terrain + determined enemy = Death Valley

As the V Corps Intelligence Officer, Colonel Saint Julien R. Marshall, and his military intelligence staff were inadequately assessing the enemy strength, activities, and capabilities at Nafutan Point, the same intelligence assessment errors were made regarding the enemy at Death Valley. Unknown to the V Corps' chief of staff, the 4th Marine Division suffered a heavy counterattack near Death Valley during the late afternoon of 22 June. The Marine division was pushed back four hundred meters from where it was previously depicted on the map during Brigadier General G. B. Erskine's, the V Corps chief of staff, and Major General Smith's meeting at Corps headquarters. The 4th Marine Division's front line on the morning of 23 June created a difficult combat situation not known to the V Corps or 27th Infantry Division the previous evening.⁶¹ The 27th Infantry Division was now fighting for every inch in its movement north since crossing the line of departure early on 23 June. Major General Smith's division fought all day and took heavy casualties in the process of trying to form a new front adjacent to the 4th Marine Division.⁶² After hard fighting on 23 June, the division commander finished the day where he had anticipated he would begin the day's fighting. To further complicate matters, one company from the 106th Infantry was separated from the rest of its battalion during the road march to the line of departure.⁶³ The 165th Infantry was unaware of the gap created in the 106th Infantry's front line, and the 165th Infantry began its attack without knowing there was a company size gap on its flank. The tardy company from the 106th Infantry faced the most difficult fighting on 23 June, and the division's advance hinged on this

⁶⁰ Chapin, *Breaching the Marianas*, 33.

⁶¹ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 9," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (23 June 1944), 1.

⁶² Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 164-171.

⁶³ Chapin, *Breaching the Marianas*, 13.

company's ability to form the centerline of the division.⁶⁴ However, the entire V Corps line would lag 1500 yards back into the 27th Infantry Division's zone,⁶⁵ and this was too much for Holland Smith to accept.

The V Corps intelligence staff on 23 June was still assessing the Japanese resistance in the 27th Infantry Division's northern sector as minimal, mainly consisting of only small arms and machine gun fire.⁶⁶ This inaccurate assessment was based on 4th Marine Division's rapid advancement north in the same sector just the day prior. However, Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saito, the Japanese commander on Saipan, had established a reinforced defensive perimeter at the northern end of the valley where the 27th Infantry Division was fighting.⁶⁷ A four thousand man Japanese force was now operating in the sector where the 4th Marine Division had so easily moved on the previous day. Lieutenant General Saito made maximum use of the deadly terrain by fortifying and defending the numerous ravines, caves, hills, valleys, and cliffs located in the 27th Infantry Division's zone of action.⁶⁸ The fresh Japanese regiment was instructed by Lieutenant General Saito to fight to the death in defense of the northern end of Saipan. Despite the Army division's combat reports and heavy losses in combat power and soldiers, the V Corps Intelligence Officer, Colonel Marshall,⁶⁹ continued to assess the Japanese resistance in 27th Infantry Division's sector as "a few scattered riflemen."⁷⁰

Major General Ralph Smith's division had indeed suffered heavy casualties within a twenty-four hour period of fighting. The division suffered over six hundred casualties, and fourteen out of sixteen

⁶⁴ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 9," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (23 June 1944), 2.

⁶⁵ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 10," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (24 June 1944), 1.

⁶⁶ *G-2 Report On Operation FORAGER, Volume E*, 17.

⁶⁷ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 9.

⁶⁸ William K Jones, "The Battle of Saipan-Tinian," *Marine Corps Gazette* 72 (June 1988): 59; Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, *G-2 Report On Operation FORAGER, Volume E* (31 August 1944), 6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁰ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 9.

medium tanks in support of the division had been destroyed. During the evening of 23 June, the Japanese launched a vicious counterattack with their fresh regiment reinforced with a company of tanks down the narrow corridor the 27th Infantry Division was defending.⁷¹ The intensity and scale of the attack was contrary to the assessment of the enemy's capability Holland Smith's military intelligence staff had given him.

Given the inaccurate assessment by the V Corps intelligence staff and the rapid advance of the 4th Marine division the day prior, Lieutenant General Smith was frustrated with Major General Smith's division's inability to advance alongside the two Marine divisions.⁷² The V Corps commander sent a message to the 27th Infantry Division commander on the morning of 24 June. The telegram expressed Holland Smith's extreme dissatisfaction with the division's lack of movement on 23 June.⁷³ Lieutenant General Smith did not account for the heavy resistance in 27th Infantry Division's area of operation or the additional five hundred meters the division had to fight on 23 June. His poor understanding of the operational environment on Saipan contributed to Holland Smith's inability to properly assess the cause of the Army division's failure to penetrate Death Valley and resulted in Ralph Smith's premature relief from command.

Mission Command Assessment

The Army describes mission command as the warfighting function that “develops and integrates those activities enabling a commander to balance the art of command and the science of control.”⁷⁴ The United States Marine Corps refers to this warfighting function as command and control, which is how the Army formerly classified mission command. This change by the Army is a philosophical shift emphasizing the commander rather than the system for command and control. The previous philosophical approach to this warfighting function did not adequately address the increased requirement for

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Shaw, Nalty, Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, 313.

⁷³ Chapin, *Breaching the Marianas*, 14.

⁷⁴ U.S. Army, *Operations*, 4-3.

commanders to continually assess and reframe the operational environment; especially, when operating with ill-structured problems and against complex systems or organizations across the globe.

The commander's leadership magnifies mission command during combat operations. The commander must effectively communicate via mission command his understanding, visualization, description, direction, leadership, and assessment of the operations to his staff and subordinate commanders. According to *Operations*, "mission command enables an operationally adaptive force that has both the authority and resources to operate effectively at all levels, under clear mission orders."⁷⁵ This philosophical approach is reinforced by the contribution of leaders at every echelon of command. With this overarching approach to mission command as both a warfighting function and a philosophy of command, the Army is guiding its leaders in how to think about what soldiers do and what they need to successfully accomplish their operational end-state and the mission.⁷⁶ Holland Smith and his V Corps staff failed to effectively communicate how the corps commander understood,⁷⁷ visualized,⁷⁸ described,⁷⁹ and directed⁸⁰ his operational end-state and mission orders to Ralph Smith's 27th Infantry Division.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁷⁷ "To understand something is to grasp its nature and significance. Commanders continuously develop, test, and update their understanding throughout the conduct of operations. They base effective plans, assessments, decisions, and actions on reasoned, informed, and shared understanding. As commanders develop their understanding, they see patterns emerge, dissipate, and reappear in their operational environment. Recognizing these patterns helps them direct their own forces' actions with respect to other friendly forces, unified action partners, the population, and the enemy." U.S. Army, *Field Manual 6-0, Mission Command, 2011* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, September 2011), 2-2.

⁷⁸ "To visualize is to think in mental images. As commanders begin to develop an understanding of the operational environment, they start visualizing the operation's end state and potential solutions to solve problems. Collectively, this is known as the commander's visualization--the mental process of developing situational understanding, determining a desired end state, and envisioning the broad sequence of events by which the force will achieve that end state. Commanders develop an understanding of the conditions in the operational environment--the current situation. From this understanding, commanders next visualize the operation's end state--the desired future conditions." U.S. Army, *Mission Command*, 2-3.

⁷⁹ "To describe is to represent or account for something in words and images. After commanders visualize an operation, they describe it to their staffs and subordinates. This description facilitates shared understanding of the situation, mission, and intent. Commanders ensure subordinates understand their

Unclear Mission Orders

Holland Smith wanted to concentrate all of his combat power against the Japanese force on the northern side of the island, but he failed to effectively communicate how Ralph Smith was to employ elements of his division against the enemy remaining on Nafutan Point. The V Corps commander was planning with great care his attack against the northern end of the island, and it was to be his decisive action against the enemy.⁸¹ The orders for the attack were completed and issued before 0900 on 21 June, and a copy of them reached the 27th Infantry Division at noon.⁸² After reviewing the order, Major General Smith realized that his division was to withdraw all its troops, except one battalion from the southern part of the island, and assemble the division near the frontlines with the two Marine divisions. A lone infantry battalion from the division remaining in the south was expected to clear the remaining Japanese forces on Nafutan Point.⁸³ The problem with this portion of the plan was that Holland Smith, along with his staff, was unaware of the enemy strength and the level of intense fighting still occurring on Nafutan Point.

Acting upon further reports of intense fighting within the 27th Infantry Division's front lines on Nafutan Point, Colonel Albert K. Stebins, the division's chief of staff, called the V Corps operations officer, Colonel J.C. McQueen, at 1430 and advised him that two battalions might be needed for the

visualization well enough to begin course of action development. Commanders describe their visualization in doctrinal terms whenever possible. They continually refine and clarify it throughout the operations process." Ibid.

⁸⁰ "To direct is to regulate the course of events. Commanders make decisions and direct action throughout the operations process based on their understanding of the situation. They use control measures to focus the operation on the desired end state. Commanders direct operations by: preparing and approving plans and orders; assigning and adjusting tasks, task organization, and control measures based on changing conditions; positioning units to maximize combat power, anticipate actions, or create or preserve options; positioning key leaders at critical times and places; allocating resources based on opportunities and threats; accepting prudent risk; committing the reserve; changing priorities of support." Ibid., 2-4.

⁸¹ Smith, *Coral and Brass*, 168-169.

⁸² Love, "Smith versus Smith," 5.

⁸³ Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1985), 313.

clearing operation at Nafutan Point. Colonel McQueen made no decision and none was asked for at the time of the conversation.⁸⁴ After spending two hours at the division's front lines, Ralph Smith called Holland Smith to advise the V Corps commander about the situation at Nafutan Point.⁸⁵ Ralph Smith requested to leave an entire regiment for the clearing operation on Nafutan Point and Holland Smith agreed to this request, stipulating only that the 27th Infantry Division employ two of the regiment's battalions and save the other battalion so it could be employed to the north if necessary.⁸⁶ Written confirmation of this agreement was not received at the division headquarters until 0830 the next morning, and no orders were ever issued by the V Corps commander as to which regiment was to remain on Nafutan Point. The decision was left to Ralph Smith as to which regiment from the 105th Infantry would remain in the south.⁸⁷

The orders issued by Major General Ralph Smith to the 105th Infantry are a key element in the Smith verses Smith saga. In Lieutenant General Smith's justification to Admiral Spruance, he stated that Ralph Smith had contravened his order regarding the 105th Infantry.⁸⁸ According to Holland Smith, the 105th Infantry had been removed from Ralph Smith's command authority, and the regiment was then under the direct operational control of the V Corps the evening of 21 June.⁸⁹ Lieutenant General Smith states the 27th Infantry Division commander had no authority to issue orders to the 105th Infantry.⁹⁰

In support of Major General Smith's actions after his relief, the former division commander pointed out that Colonel Leonard Bishop, the 105th Infantry commander, had been instructed to attack in the division order, but only after the regimental commander had time to reorganize his front lines. The

⁸⁴ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 5.

⁸⁵ Ralph Smith, "Report on Operations, 27th Division, Saipan" 15-24 June, Ralph Smith's private papers, p3, as cited in Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 145.

⁸⁶ Rottman, *Saipan and Tinian 1944*, 63.

⁸⁷ Chapin, *Breaching the Marianas*, 12-13.

⁸⁸ Venzon, *From Whaleboats to Amphibious Warfare*, 107.

⁸⁹ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 9," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (23 June 1944), 2.

⁹⁰ Northern Troop Landing Force, "Operation Order 10-44," 2200 22 June 1944, 1.

additional time was required because the 105th Infantry was using two battalions during the relief in place with the 165th Infantry, which was using four battalions to form its front lines.⁹¹ Major General Smith also presented evidence that V Corps never issued orders that the 105th Infantry was detached from his command. If the division had not issued orders to Colonel Bishop on the night of 21 June, the regimental commander would never have received any orders from the corps commander because there is no record of any ever being issued to the regiment.⁹² When a gaining command receives a new subordinate unit, the higher headquarters is responsible for issuing orders to the new unit. If the V Corps had operational control of the 105th Infantry on the night of 21 June, the V Corps commander neglected to issue orders to Colonel Bishop to execute on the following day.⁹³ Holland Smith and his V Corps staff failed to effectively communicate how the V Corps commander understood and visualized the conduct of the clearing operations at Nafutan Point. He did not describe his operational end-state or direct actionable mission orders to Ralph Smith's 27th Infantry Division. Additionally, Holland Smith did not issue orders directly to Colonel Bishop's infantry regiment regarding operations on Nafutan Point.

Staff Unity of Effort?

Confusion regarding operations along Nafutan Point continued throughout the following day. After his meeting with Lieutenant General Holland Smith, the 27th Infantry Division commander next met with Brigadier General Erskine. This meeting occurred shortly after 1600 on 22 June. Brigadier General Erskine detailed the day's events over an operational map with the division commander.⁹⁴ The Corps' attack north was going well, but the 4th Marine Division was wearing down.⁹⁵ The Marine division had taken heavy casualties during the amphibious assault as well as during its stiff fight at Hill

⁹¹ Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 142-43.

⁹² Love, "Smith versus Smith," 6.

⁹³ Goldberg, *D-Day in the Pacific*, 150-151.

⁹⁴ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 6.

⁹⁵ Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 413.

500.⁹⁶ The V Corps chief of staff was considering conducting a relief between 27th Infantry Division and 4th Marine Division. Major General Smith agreed that his division was relatively fresh and had suffered the least casualties since the amphibious assault.⁹⁷ The 27th Infantry Division commander stated that conducting the relief in place opposite the Kagman Peninsula⁹⁸ would increase frontage beyond the division's ability to adequately cover the V Corps' new frontline. Brigadier General Erskine concurred, and the two generals decided to pass the Army division through the left two regiments of the 4th Marine Division.⁹⁹ This movement would leave the 23d Marine Regiment covering the 27th Infantry Division's right flank as the Army division advanced into position.¹⁰⁰ The 27th Infantry Division's movement to the mouth of Death Valley would place the Army division in the middle of the two Marine divisions.¹⁰¹

The final topic discussed between Major General Smith and Brigadier General Erskine was the situation at Nafutan Point. The 27th Infantry Division commander assessed that the division's movement north would require that the 105th Infantry be released to form the reserve for the Army division. The V Corps chief of staff directed the division commander to withdraw the 105th Infantry, leaving only one infantry battalion to conduct the clearing operations on Nafutan Point.¹⁰² Major General Smith protested this decision stating that one infantry battalion was not enough combat power to deal with the stiff Japanese resistance at Nafutan Point.¹⁰³ The V Corps chief of staff replied that the attack north was the

⁹⁶ Forth Marine Division: Operations Report, "Section VI: Narrative of the Assault," (Gray Research Library Archives, Marianas, Saipan, 1944, Box 16), 21; Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End*, 115.

⁹⁷ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 8," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (22 June 1944),1-2.

⁹⁸ The Kagman Peninsula is located near the center of the island and to the east of Mount Tapotchau, the highest location on Saipan. Kagman Peninsula forms the northern side of Magicienne Bay, also located on the eastern side of the island, with Nafutan Point forming the southern side of the bay.

⁹⁹ Northern Troop Landing Force, "Operation Order 10-44," 2200 22 June 1944, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Rottman, *Saipan and Tinian 1944*, 63.

¹⁰¹ Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, 313.

¹⁰² Rottman, *Saipan and Tinian 1944*, 63.

¹⁰³ Chapin, *Breaching the Marianas*, 12-13.

priority and that consolidating the Corps' combat power north was critical to securing the island. Brigadier General Erskine suggested that if one infantry battalion was insufficient to clear Nafutan Point, then the enemy there could be contained and a larger clearing force would be sent back south after operations to the north were completed.¹⁰⁴ The difficulty with this approach was the fact that one infantry battalion would be assigned to cover a frontage of three thousand yards containing a strongly entrenched enemy force in impassable terrain.¹⁰⁵ The risk was too great for Ralph Smith to accept at Nafutan Point, so he wrote the letter requesting Holland Smith to place the air and services personnel near Aslito Airfield on full alert.¹⁰⁶ This grave warning from the division commander would be a harbinger of things to come after Ralph Smith was relieved of his command and the enemy infiltrated 105th Infantry's defense, attacked units at the airfield, and caused several dozen American casualties.¹⁰⁷

The division operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Frederic Sheldon, began drafting a division order for the next day's attack north. This was a change in the orders process since landing on Saipan because the division had just issued verbal orders up to this point in time. Lieutenant Colonel Sheldon was crafting the division orders based on the draft V Corps orders that his boss received after his meeting with Brigadier General Erskine. This division order, number 45A, was finally sent to the regimental headquarters by courier at 2100 on the evening of 22 June.¹⁰⁸ A copy was also sent to 2d Battalion, 105th Infantry, which was the lone infantry battalion responsible for continuing the clearing operations at Nafutan Point. In the division orders to the 2d Battalion, the infantry battalion was instructed to report directly to the V Corps once the remaining enemy forces at Nafutan Point were cleared.¹⁰⁹ The division's orders to the 2d Battalion, 105th Infantry were quoted directly from the draft V Corps orders that were

¹⁰⁴ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 151.

¹⁰⁵ *G-2 Report On Operation FORAGER, Volume E*, 16-17.

¹⁰⁶ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 7.

¹⁰⁷ Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End*, 162-63.

¹⁰⁸ Goldberg, *D-Day in the Pacific*, 150.

¹⁰⁹ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 149.

received earlier in the day by the division commander, with the exception of a unit designation for the infantry battalion to remain on Nafutan Point.¹¹⁰

Orders from the V Corps finally arrived at the division command post around 2330 hours on 22 June. A copy of orders for the 27th Infantry Division and a copy of orders directed to the 2d Battalion, 105th Infantry arrived by courier at the division headquarters. The division operations officer reviewed the two Corps orders and was startled to learn that a specific time for the 2d Battalion to begin clearing operations on 23 June had been specified.¹¹¹ The new orders stated that clearing operations at Nafutan Point were to begin at dawn on 23 June.¹¹² This was a change from the draft Corps orders the division commander had received earlier that same day. Lieutenant Colonel Sheldon immediately notified Major General Smith about the change in orders and sent a courier to 2d Battalion, 105th Infantry's command post to notify its commander of the change. However, the battalion commander was not notified of the change until after sunrise on 23 June, and the battalion did not begin clearing operations until 1300.¹¹³ Given the multiple relief-in-place tasks the battalion had to complete during the night, it is purely speculative to believe the battalion could have begun operations at dawn as the V Corps orders directed. The delay in the 2d Battalion's attack did not adversely affect Holland Smith's operational plans for 23 June and did not provide sufficient grounds for justifying Ralph Smith's relief.

The 2d Battalion, 105th Infantry was now responsible for a front line that was previously defended by four infantry battalions less than 48 hours earlier.¹¹⁴ The task of reorganizing the battalion's new massive front was certainly time consuming and could not be effectively accomplished under the cover of darkness. Holland Smith's inability to effectively communicate his understanding and vision to

¹¹⁰ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 7.

¹¹¹ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 9," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (23 June 1944), 2.

¹¹² Sherrod, "The Saipan Controversy," 17.

¹¹³ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 8.

¹¹⁴ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 7," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (21 June 1944), 1; Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 8," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (22 June 1944), 2.

effectively employ the 27th Infantry Division is manifested again just hours before Ralph Smith's relief. The V Corps chief of staff did not understand Holland Smith's vision or direction for operations at Nafutan Point, and neither did the V Corps operations officer in writing the mission orders. Holland Smith and his V Corps staff failed to effectively communicate how the V Corps commander understood, visualized, described, or directed his operational end-state or mission orders to Ralph Smith's 27th Infantry Division. Unfortunately, Ralph Smith's relief was not the only casualty resulting from this lack of V Corps mission command capability.

Leadership Assessment

Commanders at all levels must be the embodiment of effective leadership qualities and traits; if not, their unit will fail. Whether in today's operational environment or during Second World War's Pacific Island campaigns, a commander's leadership skill often means the difference between success and failure. The commander provides his subordinate leaders the purpose, direction, and motivation throughout the unit's operations. It is through leadership that a commander ensures that his subordinates understand the purpose of the operation, directs how to employ the resources allocated, and instills the motivation to accomplish the mission with the combat power allocated.

The Army's *Operations* doctrine defines leadership "as the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation, while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization. An Army leader, by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility, inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals."¹¹⁵ By applying leadership through the warfighting functions, commanders can intensify and unify the elements of combat power towards the accomplishment of the unit's objectives. *Operations* expands on these principles by stating, a "confident, competent, and informed leadership intensifies the effectiveness of all other elements of combat power by formulating sound operational ideas and assuring discipline and motivation in the force."¹¹⁶ Effective

¹¹⁵ U.S. Army, *Operations*, 4-2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

leadership can overcome deficiencies in other warfighting capabilities, but ineffective or poor leadership can negate relative advantages in combat power. One of Holland Smith's justifications for the relief was that Ralph Smith was failing to lead his division and engage the enemy. The leadership assessment section of this monograph will demonstrate how Ralph Smith provided purpose, direction, and motivation to his division; however, Holland Smith failed to recognize or accept Ralph Smith's leadership skills, and therefore relieved him for ineffective leadership in combat.

Fighting for Nafutan Point

Ralph Smith ensured his subordinate commanders understood the purpose¹¹⁷ of their orders throughout the battle for Saipan. This was particularly the case when the division shifted north leaving the 105th Infantry to fight on Nafutan Point. In Major General Smith's orders issued at 2000 on 21 June to his regimental commander, Colonel Leonard Bishop, the division commander did order the colonel to hold his frontline with two battalions and keep one battalion in reserve. The division commander also instructed the 105th Infantry to relieve all elements of the 165th Infantry, then on the frontline, no later than 0600 on 22 June.¹¹⁸ Then after conducting the relief in place, Colonel Bishop was to immediately resume offensive operations to clear the remaining enemy on Nafutan Point, thus preventing the Japanese from interfering with the V Corps' main assault. The division commander's orders stated that offensive operations were to commence no later than 1100 on 22 June.¹¹⁹ Colonel Bishop clearly understood the purpose of his regiment was to seal the remaining enemy forces on Nafutan Point and to ensure his soldiers were properly positioned after conducting the relief in place in order to continue clearing operations on the following morning.

¹¹⁷ "Purpose gives subordinates the reason to act in order to achieve a desired outcome. Leaders should provide clear purpose for their followers and do that in a variety of ways. Leaders can use direct means of conveying purpose through requests or orders for what to do." U.S. Army, *Field Manual 6-22, Leadership, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, October, 2006), 1-2.

¹¹⁸ Headquarters, 27th Infantry Division, "Field Order 45A, Operations Report" (National Achieves, Suitland, Md) as cited in Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 142.

¹¹⁹ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 5.

The next day, Major General Ralph Smith met briefly with Lieutenant General Holland Smith after the V Corps commander's regular afternoon staff meeting on 22 June to discuss the situation at Nafutan Point. Holland Smith expressed some concerns to Ralph Smith regarding the timeliness and effectiveness of the clearing operations at the southeastern peninsula.¹²⁰ Holland Smith was specifically concerned with reports that Colonel Bishop was not aggressively pursuing the enemy but rather isolating the Japanese with the intent to "starve them out if necessary."¹²¹ This slow and deliberate approach by the 105th Infantry commander was not one of Holland Smith's preferred tactics.¹²² The Marine general was known for faster paced operations that were often classified as more costly methods of dealing with enemy resistance.¹²³ Several other Army generals who had also served under the V Corps commander officially renounced Lieutenant General Smith's high level of risk acceptance for decisive action.¹²⁴ Major General Smith stated that if this was indeed the case, Colonel Bishop was not taking the proper approach to the situation on Nafutan Point and that the Army division commander would take the necessary actions to correct this problem. Colonel Bishop later testified that he made no statement to anyone from the V Corps staff regarding a "starve them out" approach to clearing the enemy from Nafutan Point.¹²⁵ Similar to the lack of military intelligence analysis, the V Corps staff was inaccurately assessing the 27th Infantry Division's actions.¹²⁶ The commander of the 105th Infantry clearly understood Ralph Smith's purpose for the operation on Nafutan Point and executed the division commander's

¹²⁰ Goldberg, *D-Day in the Pacific*, 150.

¹²¹ Sherrod, "The Saipan Controversy," 17.

¹²² Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 413.

¹²³ E. P. Forrestel, *Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, USN: A Study in Command* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1966), 148.

¹²⁴ Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 474; Love, "Smith versus Smith," 6.

¹²⁵ Sherrod, "The Saipan Controversy," 17.

¹²⁶ Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 142-43.

directed scheme of maneuver, also in accordance with V Corps' concept of operations for the 27th Infantry Division.¹²⁷

Aside from discussing the situation regarding the 105th Infantry, the meeting on the afternoon of 22 June between the two Smiths was light and uneventful.¹²⁸ No other issues or concerns were discussed between the two generals. There was no argument regarding Nafutan Point, and the matter concerning adjusting Colonel Bishop's tactical approach was amicably agreed to by the end of the meeting.¹²⁹ This would be the last face-to-face meeting between the two Smiths. Herein lies a crucial difference between the two generals. Up to this point, Holland Smith was relying on his staff for battlefield reports and key staff members to communicate his vision and direction for the invasion. Ralph Smith's leadership style was to directly yet tactfully confront his commander regarding any operational or tactical concerns during the battle for Saipan. The Army general utilized a similar approach with his subordinate commanders. He directly confronted his regimental commanders to ensure they understood the purpose of their mission orders, and he held them accountable for the execution of the division's orders.

Leaders Recon into Death Valley

On the morning of 22 June, the bulk of the 27th Infantry Division moved into an assembly area on the northern side of Aslito Airfield as the V Corps reserve. From its assembly area the division was in a position to respond quickly to either 2d or 4th Marine Divisions currently engaged with the Japanese forces to the north of the airfield. Major General Smith, accompanied by his operations officer and an observer from the War Department, departed the assembly area to coordinate with the two forward Marine Divisions.¹³⁰ The 27th Infantry Division commander received current situation reports and

¹²⁷ Shaw, Nalty, Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, 308.

¹²⁸ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 150.

¹²⁹ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 6.

¹³⁰ Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 142.

friendly position locations from each of the Marine headquarters.¹³¹ Upon completing his linkup with the Marine divisions, the command group then proceeded to the V Corps' forward command post. Ralph Smith wanted to ensure the direction¹³² he provided his division was coordinated with the V Corps and Holland Smith's vision¹³³ for the operations against the Japanese in the north central region of the island.¹³⁴

Major General Smith placed the division on alert for movement north in support of the two Marine divisions at approximately 1700 on the afternoon of 22 June.¹³⁵ After gaining a clear understanding of the new course of action with the V Corps chief of staff, Major General Smith then telephoned his artillery commander, Brigadier General Redmond F. Kernan, and ordered him to begin a reconnaissance for new firing positions, which would support the division movement north toward the base of Mount Tapotchau.¹³⁶ Next, the division commander contacted the 106th and 165th commanders to report to the division command post for orders upon his return from the V Corps headquarters. Before departing the corps headquarters, Major General Smith confirmed with Brigadier General Erskine, the V Corps chief of staff, the Corps' new concept of operation and set 1000 the next morning for the time of the attack north.¹³⁷ There was some discussion as to whether the division could meet this aggressive

¹³¹ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 6.

¹³² "Providing clear direction involves communicating how to accomplish a mission: prioritizing tasks, assigning responsibility for completion, and ensuring subordinates understand the standard. Although subordinates want and need direction, they expect challenging tasks, quality training, and adequate resources. They should be given appropriate freedom of action. Providing clear direction allows followers the freedom to modify plans and orders to adapt to changing circumstances. Directing while adapting to change is a continuous process." U.S. Army, *Leadership*, 1-2.

¹³³ "Vision is another way that leaders can provide purpose. Vision refers to an organizational purpose that may be broader or have less immediate consequences than other purpose statements. Higher-level leaders carefully consider how to communicate their vision." Ibid.

¹³⁴ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 150-51.

¹³⁵ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 7.

¹³⁶ Mount Tapotchau is 1554 feet tall, and it is the most dominate piece of key terrain on the island. Rottman, *Saipan and Tinian 1944*, 10.

¹³⁷ Venzon, *From Whaleboats to Amphibious Warfare*, 106.

timeline, but no major issue was made of it other than for the division commander to keep the corps headquarters apprised of its movement throughout the next morning.

Upon his return to the division headquarters, Major General Smith spent thirty minutes with his regimental commanders. The division commander reviewed his notes from his earlier meetings at corps headquarters, particularly his notes from his meeting with Brigadier General Erskine. After a careful map study with his commanders, the division commander assigned the left sector of the division's area of operation to the 106th Infantry and assigned the right sector to the 165th Infantry.¹³⁸ The regimental commanders were familiar with the road network approaches within their assigned sectors since both commanders had conducted route reconnaissance days earlier as part of their current mission as the reserve for the two Marine divisions.¹³⁹ At the conclusion of the division order's brief, both regimental commanders returned to their respective command posts to confer with their battalion commanders. The division was set to begin its three mile movement north at 0530, 23 June.¹⁴⁰ Ralph Smith provided the detailed direction and purpose to his commanders regarding the division's attack north into Death Valley.

Spurring action in Death Valley

After fighting for twenty-four hours in Death Valley, a telegram arrived from the V Corps commander expressing his frustration with the Army division's lack of movement north and inability to come alongside the two Marine divisions. Ralph Smith decided to personally assess the fighting spirit of his soldiers and motivate¹⁴¹ his division into action. Major General Ralph Smith and his assistant division commander, Brigadier General Ogden J. Ross, departed the division command post for the front lines.

¹³⁸ Cowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 151.

¹³⁹ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 7.

¹⁴⁰ Shaw, Nalty, Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, 311.

¹⁴¹ "Motivation supplies the will to do what is necessary to accomplish a mission. Motivation comes from within, but is affected by others' actions and words. A leader's role in motivation is to understand the needs and desires of others, to align and elevate individual drives into team goals, and to influence others and accomplish those larger aims. Some people have high levels of internal motivation to get a job done, while others need more reassurance and feedback. Motivation spurs initiative when something needs to be accomplished." U.S. Army, *Leadership*, 1-2.

The two generals surveyed each company's position and observed their men fighting against the heavy Japanese resistance.¹⁴² By noon, the division commander devised a plan to maneuver his forces in an effort to flank the Japanese stronghold, and he began briefing his regimental commanders.¹⁴³ There is no record of any V Corps delegation visiting or observing the 27th Infantry Division during the two days of intense fighting with the Japanese force in the valley. The only officer remotely connected with the corps headquarters was an artillery officer from the corps operations section. This artillery officer later testified that the 27th Infantry Division was heavily engaged against stiff opposition on 23 and 24 June.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, Holland Smith received no first hand reports from members of his own staff regarding Ralph Smith's active leadership effort to fight his division.

While Major General Ralph Smith was motivating and directing the frontlines of his division on the morning of 24 June, Lieutenant General Holland Smith was already starting his relief process. At 1130 the V Corps commander met with Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, the overall commander of the amphibious task force in the Marianas.¹⁴⁵ After updating the admiral on the past twenty-four hours of the Corps' operations and detailing the cause for relief, the V Corps commander requested permission to relieve the 27th Infantry Division commander.¹⁴⁶ The main causes for relief were based on the grounds that Major General Ralph Smith had contravened Lieutenant General Holland Smith's orders relating to Nafutan Point and the fact that the division's attack north in support of two Marine divisions was late and uncoordinated.¹⁴⁷ The latter cause was the more significant because the 27th Infantry Division's failure to conduct a timely, coordinated attack jeopardized the success of the Corps' entire operations on 23 June.¹⁴⁸ Admiral Turner and General Smith then transferred over to Admiral Raymond Ames Spruance's flagship

¹⁴² Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 188-89.

¹⁴³ Shaw, Nalty, Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, 316.

¹⁴⁴ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 9.

¹⁴⁵ Dyer, *The Amphibians came to Conquer*, 927.

¹⁴⁶ Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End*, 147.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *Coral and Brass*, 172-73.

¹⁴⁸ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 10.

to confer with the commander of naval operations in the South Pacific. Although no official record details the substance of the meeting with Admiral Spruance, he authorized Lieutenant General Smith to relieve the 27th Infantry Division commander.¹⁴⁹ The V Corps commander returned to his headquarters and wrote the orders relieving Ralph Smith from his command of the 27th Infantry Division.¹⁵⁰ The orders were delivered to Major General Ralph Smith by courier at 1500 on 24 June while the division commander was actively motivating and directing his frontline commanders' counterattack against the Japanese.¹⁵¹

Ralph Smith was leading, motivating, and directing his division's counterattack from the frontlines while Holland Smith was seeking authorization to relieve him for ineffective leadership.¹⁵² The counterattack plan designed by the division commander was already underway prior to his relief. Shortly after 1330, the 165th Infantry launched its attack into the enemy defenses and began its flanking movement nearly two hours after the V Corps commander requested authority to relieve the division commander. Major General Smith's assessment of the division's advancement during the early afternoon of 24 June gave the commander the basis for planning the division's actions for the next twenty-four hours. His plan of attack for the following day was aggressive and involved both regiments.¹⁵³ After reading his relief orders, Major General Smith again briefed his plan to both regimental commanders and departed from the frontline command post without informing his subordinates about his relief. He arrived at his headquarters around 1700 and found Major General Sanderford B. Jarman already in command of the division.¹⁵⁴ General Jarman asked Ralph Smith for a situation report regarding the division's current

¹⁴⁹ Forrestel, *Admiral Raymond A. Spruance*, 148; Commander Fifth Fleet, "Mailgram dated 24 June 1944 authorizing the relief of Major General Ralph Smith" (Holland M Smith Official Correspondence, Gray Research Library Archives, 1944, PC#382, Box 7 of 12).

¹⁵⁰ Chapin, *Breaching the Marianas*, 16.

¹⁵¹ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 10.

¹⁵² Goldberg, *D-Day in the Pacific*, 159-60.

¹⁵³ Shaw, Nalty, Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, 316-17.

¹⁵⁴ Chapin, *Breaching the Marianas*, 21.

operations. The new division commander was unfamiliar with the problem facing the 27th Infantry Division and the previous courses of action taken by the division to defeat the Japanese forces in the valley. Ralph Smith's brief outlined the division's efforts in the valley and the course of action he had just given to the regimental commanders.¹⁵⁵ The new division commander then contacted 106th and 165th commanders to inform them of Ralph Smith's relief and order them to execute the course of action already briefed for the next twenty-four hours.¹⁵⁶ Major General Smith continued to debrief Major General Jarman until 2300 that evening, when a message arrived at the division's command post instructing the former commander to depart the island before daylight. A seaplane was prepared to transport him back to Hawaii, and at 0530, 25 June the general left Saipan accompanied by his aide, Captain Warner McCabe.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

It was reported that when Emperor Hirohito learned of Saipan's fall into American control, the emperor said, "Hell is on us."¹⁵⁸ For his part as the corps commander during the battle for Saipan, Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith did effectively apply most elements of combat power. The Japanese forces were defeated after twenty-five days of bitter fighting. The human cost of the campaign was tremendous for both sides: American casualties were over 16,500 including almost 3,500 dead, and the Japanese losses were 24,000 known dead and 1,810 taken prisoner.¹⁵⁹ Although the price for the victory was high, the capture of Saipan was a strategic victory in the Central Pacific Theater for the American military leadership. The seizure of the Marianas Islands was a significant milestone in the

¹⁵⁵ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 203.

¹⁵⁶ Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End*, 146.

¹⁵⁷ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 10.

¹⁵⁸ Fletcher Pratt, "The Marines in the Pacific War: Chapter 15: Saipan: 'Hell is on Us'," *Marine Corps Gazette*, 31 (September 1947): 52.

¹⁵⁹ William D. Parker, *A Concise History of the United States Marine Corps 1775-1969* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 66.

American march toward the Japanese home island because Saipan would become a critical Air Force B-29 bomber base.¹⁶⁰

However, Holland Smith's justification for relieving Ralph Smith is not as certain and concrete as the historical capture of Saipan. The flawed military intelligence assessment of the enemy's strengths and capabilities at Nafutan Point as well as in Death Valley, the unclear operational orders in the midst of battlefield friction, and the underappreciated leadership abilities of Ralph Smith all contributed to Holland Smith's reasoning for relieving the Army division commander. In viewing the battle through today's doctrinal lens of combat power application, Holland Smith's questionable reasoning and justification for the controversial relief centers on Ralph Smith's apparent disregard of corps operational orders and the perception of the Army general's inadequate fighting leadership.

First, the flawed military intelligence assessment by Holland Smith of the enemy's strengths and capabilities at Nafutan Point as well as in Death Valley did significantly shape his justification for relieving Ralph Smith.¹⁶¹ The lethal Japanese resistance was evidence of a well-organized and armed enemy willing to fight to the very last man.¹⁶² Holland Smith and his intelligence staff did not properly assess or simply discounted the Japanese fighting strength and capability during the Army division's fight against the enemy.¹⁶³ The daily operational reports from both the 2d Marine Division and the 27th Infantry Division reflected the enemy's tenacity and deadly use of supporting arms on Nafutan Point.¹⁶⁴ Up north in Death Valley, Major General Smith's division fought all day on 23 June as it initially moved in support of the corps' decisive attack against the enemy. The Army division took heavy casualties in the

¹⁶⁰ Joseph H. Alexander, "World War II: 50 Years Ago: Saipan's Bloody Legacy," *Leatherneck*, 77 (June 1994): 12.

¹⁶¹ Gordon B. Turner, "Dual Conflict: A Study of Saipan" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1948), VII-5 - VII-6; J.C. Hardee, "In the Eye of the Storm" (master's thesis, Marine Corps University, 1991) Chapter III, printed page 6 of this chapter (no page numbers on the document).

¹⁶² Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 7," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (21 June 1944), 1.

¹⁶³ Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 140.

¹⁶⁴ *G-2 Report On Operation FORAGER, Volume E*, 16.

process of trying to form a new front adjacent to 4th and 2d Marine Divisions.¹⁶⁵ Despite the Army division's combat reports and heavy losses in combat power and soldiers, the V Corps Intelligence Officer, Colonel Marshall, continued to assess the Japanese resistance in Death Valley as "a few scattered riflemen."¹⁶⁶ The V Corps' military intelligence staff failed to adequately assess the enemy strengths, activities, and capabilities at Nafutan Point and in Death Valley, and Holland Smith did not question the disparities between the intelligence assessments and the first-hand operational reports from his commanders.¹⁶⁷ This assessment failure led Holland Smith to the ineffective employment of the 27th Infantry Division at these two critical locations during the battle and eventually to Ralph Smith's relief.

Next, the unclear operational orders from Holland Smith did not provide his subordinates the understanding, visualization, description, and direction needed to effectively employ the Army division in the midst of battlefield friction, which is inherent in the chaos of war. Lieutenant General Smith wanted to concentrate all of his combat power against the Japanese forces on the northern side of the island, but he failed to effectively communicate how Ralph Smith was to employ elements of his division against the enemy remaining on Nafutan Point.¹⁶⁸ Holland Smith and his staff either underestimated or disregarded the enemy strength and the intensity of the fighting still occurring on Nafutan Point. The orders issued by Ralph Smith to the 105th Infantry between 21-23 June are key elements in the Smith versus Smith saga. In Holland Smith's justification to Admiral Spruance, he stated that Ralph Smith had contravened his orders regarding the 105th Infantry.¹⁶⁹ According to Holland Smith, the 105th Infantry had been removed from Ralph Smith's command authority, and the regiment was then under the direct operational control of

¹⁶⁵ Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs The Army*, 167-171.

¹⁶⁶ Love, "Smith versus Smith," 9.

¹⁶⁷ Turner, "Dual Conflict: A Study of Saipan," VII-14 - VII-15; Norman Varnell Cooper, "The Military Career of General Holland M. Smith, USMC" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1974), 341-342.

¹⁶⁸ Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 414.

¹⁶⁹ Smith, *Coral and Brass*, 173.

the V Corps the evening of 21 June.¹⁷⁰ Ralph Smith presented evidence to the Army board of inquiry that the V Corps never issued orders detaching the 105th Infantry from his command. Colonel Bishop would never have received orders from Lieutenant General Smith because there is no record of the V Corps issuing any orders to the regiment on the night of 21 June.¹⁷¹ Holland Smith did not effectively communicate how he understood and visualized the conduct of the clearing operations at Nafutan Point.¹⁷² He did not describe his operational end-state or direct Ralph Smith's 27th Infantry Division with clearly stated operational orders regarding the mission and purpose at Nafutan Point.¹⁷³ This lack of mission command further fueled Holland Smith's frustration with Ralph Smith and cemented just cause in Holland Smith's mind to relieve the Army division commander.

Finally, the underappreciated leadership abilities of Ralph Smith eventually sealed Holland Smith's reasoning for relieving him. It is through leadership that a commander ensures his subordinates understand the purpose of the operation, directs how to employ the resources allocated, and instills the motivation to accomplish the mission with the combat power allocated.¹⁷⁴ Ralph Smith's leadership actions during the battle for Saipan appear to demonstrate how a commander provides purpose, direction, and motivation to his subordinates; however, Holland Smith neither recognized nor accepted the Army division commander's leadership abilities. Ralph Smith ensured his subordinates understood the purpose of their orders throughout the battle for Saipan. Specifically, the 105th Infantry commander understood Ralph Smith's purpose for the operation on Nafutan Point and executed the division commander's directed scheme of maneuver, which was also in accordance with the V Corps' concept of operations for

¹⁷⁰ Headquarters Expeditionary Troops Task Force 56, "G-3 Periodic Report No 9," *Report On Operation FORAGER Volume D* (23 June 1944), 2.

¹⁷¹ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 197-201.

¹⁷² Turner, "Dual Conflict: A Study of Saipan," VII-8 - VII-9; Cooper, "The Military Career of General Holland M. Smith, USMC," 328-329.

¹⁷³ J.C. Hardee, "In the Eye of the Storm", Chapter III, 13-15.

¹⁷⁴ U.S. Army, *Operations*, 4-2 - 4-3.

the division.¹⁷⁵ Ralph Smith took measures to ensure the direction he provided his division was in accordance with Holland Smith's vision for the operations against the Japanese.¹⁷⁶ For example, Ralph Smith provided the detailed direction and purpose to his commanders regarding the division's attack north into Death Valley. Upon his returning from Corps headquarters, Major General Smith spent thirty minutes with his regimental commanders detailing the operational plans. The division commander reviewed his notes and a draft copy of the Corps' orders with his commanders.¹⁷⁷ Ralph Smith personally assessed the fighting spirit of his soldiers and motivated his division into action after twenty-four hours of fierce fighting at the mouth of Death Valley. He was actively leading, motivating, and directing his division's counterattack from the frontlines while Holland Smith was seeking authorization to relieve him for ineffective leadership.¹⁷⁸ Ralph Smith's assessment of the division advancement during the early afternoon of 24 June enabled him to plan the division's successful attack. His plan for the following day was aggressive and involved the majority of the division's combat power.¹⁷⁹ Unfortunately, Ralph Smith was not in command to direct the successful execution of his plan that broke the enemy's deadly grip on Death Valley.¹⁸⁰ Holland Smith had just relieved the division commander hours earlier for ineffective leadership.

Was Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith justified in relieving Major General Ralph C. Smith? The flawed military intelligence assessment of the enemy's strengths and capabilities at Nafutan Point as well as in Death Valley, the unclear operational orders in the midst of battlefield friction, and the perceived ineffective leadership abilities of Ralph Smith all contributed to Holland Smith's justification for relieving the Army division commander. In viewing the relief through the elements of today's combat

¹⁷⁵ Shaw, Nalty, Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, 308.

¹⁷⁶ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 150-51.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

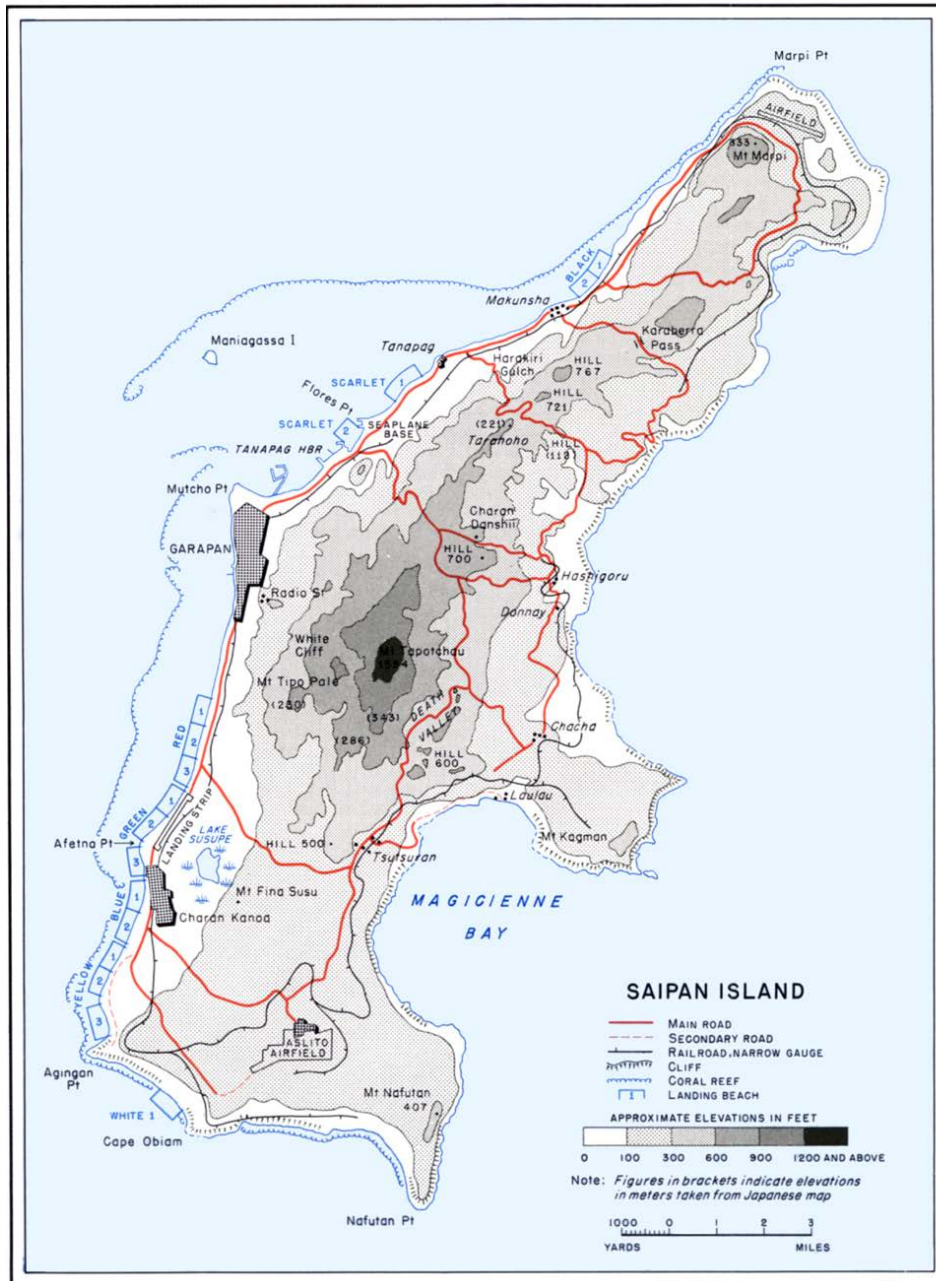
¹⁷⁸ Goldberg, *D-Day in the Pacific*, 159-60.

¹⁷⁹ Turner, "Dual Conflict: A Study of Saipan," VII-14 - VII-15.

¹⁸⁰ Shaw, Nalty, Turnbladh, *Central Pacific Drive*, 316-17.

power application, Holland Smith's decision appears premature and the justifications that Ralph Smith disregarded orders and lacked leadership are not fully substantiated.

APPENDIX



Map. Saipan, June 1944.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, Map I.

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