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U. S. PACIFIC FLEET. THIRD AMPHIBIOUS FORCE.

COMMAND HISTORY.

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U.S. Pacific Fleet, Third Amphibious Force.

COMMAND HISTORY



SOUTH PACIFIC

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| Guadalcanal | Treasury |
| Russells | Bougainville |
| New Georgia | Green Islands |
| Vella Lavella | Emirau |

WESTERN PACIFIC

- | | | |
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| Peleliu | Angaur | Ulithi |
| Leyte | Lingayen | |

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THIRD AMPHIBIOUS FORCE - COMMAND HISTORY

In the Spring of 1942, the Japanese had, by a series of rapid conquests, extended their control of the Western Pacific as far south as a line running approximately along the tenth parallel of latitude South. This area included the Philippines, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea (less Papua and a small portion of South Dutch New Guinea), the Solomons and Bismarcks and the Gilbert Islands. The threat of an invasion of Australia had been temporarily removed in the Battle of the Coral Sea in May, 1942, but the positions which the Japanese were rapidly developing on Guadalcanal threatened New Zealand and New Caledonia, and endangered the Allied Nations' supply lines to Australia.

Pursuant to decision of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of the Navy, on 20 April 1942, established the South Pacific Area, defined as that area bounded on the north by the equator, on the west by the one hundred sixtieth meridian, east longitude, and on the east by the one hundred tenth meridian, west longitude. Shortly thereafter the western boundary was changed to read "one hundred fifty-ninth meridian, east longitude".

Vice Admiral Robert Ghormley, U.S.N., was designated "Commander South Pacific Area and South Pacific Force", and on 19 June 1942 assumed command of all Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Allied Nations' forces then assigned or to be assigned to the South Pacific Area. Headquarters were established initially at Auckland, New Zealand, later at Noumea, New Caledonia. By early summer, bases at Efate and Espiritu Santo, in the New Hebrides, had been established.

It was apparent that offensive operations were essential to wrest the initiative from the enemy in the South Pacific. The Japanese advance had been slowed in the Battle of the Coral Sea; it had not been stopped. Means available for offensive action were admittedly scanty. The priority assigned the European conflict resulted in denial of many requests for the allocation of ships and forces to the South Pacific. Nevertheless, operations were undertaken to seize the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area in order to halt the Japanese advance and provide bases for offensive operations.

Three major task forces were designated for the Guadalcanal operation; a carrier force under Rear Admiral Noyes, an amphibious force under Rear Admiral Turner, and a land and tender-based air force under Rear Admiral McCain. The first two task forces listed above were under the overall command of Vice Admiral Fletcher. The amphibious force under Admiral Turner, who had flown from the United States to New Zealand in July, included 13 APA's, 6 AKA's, 4 APD's, 6 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers, 15 destroyers, and 5 minesweepers. The landing force, under Major General Vandegrift, comprised the 1st Marine Division (less 7th Marines), the 2nd Marines, the 1st Raider Battalion, and the 3rd Defense Battalion, a total of 19,546 men. This landing force was mounted in New Zealand and staged through the Fiji Islands.

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The initial landings were made on Guadalcanal and Tulagi on 7 August 1942. Little opposition was encountered at the outset by the Marines on Guadalcanal and they quickly captured the partially completed airfield, later known as Henderson Field. Opposition to the Tulagi landing was more severe and the Marines suffered a number of casualties before completing the capture of Gavutu and Tanambogo.

A bitter struggle to hold these positions began immediately and continued for some months. Due to shortage of fuel and plane losses incurred in covering the landings, it became necessary to withdraw the carrier forces on 8 August. In the First Battle of Savo Island on the night of 8-9 August, our losses were four heavy cruisers and one destroyer. As result of this action it was necessary to withdraw the transports and cargo ships without completion of unloading, leaving the forces ashore in a sensitive logistical situation, remedied only with great difficulty in the ensuing days.

During the period August 9-23, the troops ashore on Guadalcanal were subjected to numerous counter attacks, daily bombing attacks, and to almost nightly bombardments by enemy surface forces which operated at will in the area. This condition ended 23-25 August, when in the battle of the Eastern Solomons a large Japanese task force was routed, losing a carrier (RYUJO), other combatant vessels and one transport.

During September and early October the amphibious forces were engaged in bringing in reinforcements, the Seventh Marines being lifted to Guadalcanal from the Samoan area and the 164th Infantry Regiment, Americal Division, from Noumea. Frequent Japanese air attacks, mounted from Buin and Rabaul, were encountered by the amphibious echelons both while unloading at Guadalcanal and enroute to and from. On one occasion a transport division under Captain Kiland for two hours successfully outmaneuvered a night torpedo plane attack.

On 18 October Vice Admiral Halsey relieved Vice Admiral Ghormley as Commander South Pacific Area and South Pacific Force. His organization comprised the ground forces (less Marines) under Major General Harmon, the Air Forces under Rear Admiral McCain, later Vice Admiral Fitch, the Amphibious Force under Rear Admiral Turner, the First Marine Amphibious Corps, Major General Vogle, the island bases under their respective commanders, a Service Squadron, and a Naval Advance Bases command (for construction and naval defenses). He exercised direct strategical command of combatant units of the Fleet assigned to the South Pacific.

The climax of the Guadalcanal campaign occurred during the period 11-15 November. An all out Japanese attack preceded by land-based air attacks was launched from the Buin-Faisi-Tonolei anchorages. A desperately-fought cruiser night action occurred 12-13 November. A battleship night action followed 14-15 November. A Jap convoy of 12 transports carrying about 15,000 men and screened by 12 destroyers was met off New Georgia by DD's, PT's and aircraft, and all those ships but one destroyer were sunk or beached. In these actions the sea power of the Japanese in the Guadalcanal area was destroyed.

The Japanese position on Guadalcanal steadily deteriorated from this point. The amphibious force successively brought in more troops and stores, while the Japanese were unable to reenforce or supply their troops. As the end of January 1943 approached, the situation of the enemy's ground establishment became desperate and on 9 February 1943, Guadalcanal was finally completely secured by the annihilation of the last of the enemy troops. Rear Admiral Turner thereupon set up his headquarters at Koli Point on Guadalcanal, which remained thereafter the Amphibious Force headquarters.

No time was lost in preparing for further offensive moves. During the latter stage of the Guadalcanal campaign, large stock piles had been assembled on the island in spite of serious unloading difficulties. Rabaul, a major Japanese naval and air stronghold, appeared at this time to be the logical objective towards whose capture or neutralization all efforts of both the South and Southwest Pacific Forces would be directed. Progress in the South Pacific toward that objective must necessarily be by steps in order that each successive operation might, in the absence of carrier air forces, be covered by land-based air protection against the strong Japanese air forces based on Rabaul and its outposts, Buka and Buin on Bougainville and Munda on New Georgia.

In order to secure airfield sites and as a base for operations nearer to the next major objective, New Georgia, a task force under Rear Admiral Turner, composed of elements of the 43rd Infantry Division, the 3rd Marine Raider Battalion and Construction personnel, occupied the Russell Islands 21 February 1943 without resistance. The landings were made by a shore to shore movement from Guadalcanal in LCT's and small craft. The development of air and minor naval facilities was immediately pressed.

The next step in the advance up the Solomons involved the seizure of the enemy air base at Munda on New Georgia. It was decided first to capture Rendova Island and points in Southern New Georgia, including Wickham Anchorage, Segi and Viru. Rear Admiral Turner commanded the Expeditionary Force, consisting of the Amphibious Force, comprising transports, destroyers, and APD's, and the Landing Force, under Major General Hester, comprising a reinforced infantry division, two Marine Raider Battalions and a Marine Defense Battalion.

Landings were first made on 30 June 1943 at Rendova and the small islands off shore from Munda (the main attack), and at Wickham Anchorage, Segi and Viru on New Georgia. At Rendova several air attacks came in during the landings and a well-executed and bold torpedo plane attack resulted in the sinking of the flagship, the transport McCRAWLEY. The landing operations were successful, and, assisted by artillery emplaced on Rendova, landings were in the next few days effected on New Georgia near Munda. An attack was launched westward in the direction of the Munda airfield. Progress toward the capture of this airfield was slow due to the thick jungle, strong enemy positions and stout resistance. It became necessary to bring in portions of two additional infantry divisions, and Major General O. W. Griswold, commanding the XIV Corps, assumed

command of the ground forces. Finally, on 5 August the airfield was seized and the going became easier. Meanwhile the Amphibious Force brought in supplies, and conducted a flanking movement, landing at night through Kula Gulf, dominated by the Japanese positions on Kolombangara and New Georgia, two Army infantry battalions and one Marine battalion at Rice Anchorage on Kula Gulf. The New Georgia operation was successfully completed on 25 August.

Rear Admiral T. S. Wilkinson, U. S. Navy, relieved Rear Admiral R. K. Turner as Commander Amphibious Forces, South Pacific, on 15 July 1943.

Naval and air operations directly influenced the success of the New Georgia operation. Cruiser-destroyer task forces under Rear Admirals Merrill and Ainsworth bombarded the Vila-Munda area on numerous occasions, destroying supplies and temporarily neutralizing the airfields. In the first and second battles of Kula Gulf, on 5-6 July and 12-13 July and in the battle of Vella Gulf, on the night of 6-7 August, these surface units defeated and turned back Japanese forces, which could have seriously interfered with our landing and reinforcing operations. Meanwhile the enemy was using destroyers to lift troops to Vila on Kolombangara, moving them from there to New Georgia by barge. DD's and PT's assigned to Commander Amphibious Force were utilized to interdict this traffic. The South Pacific air forces ably protected convoys, covered the newly-established positions, and made crippling attacks on the Japanese fields at Buin.

After the capture of Munda airfield the enemy still held Kolombangara with its airfield at Vila on the south coast. It was determined, however, to bypass these positions, seizing Vella LaVella. This was done in a period 15-30 August with initial landings at Barokoma on 15 August. Because of the threat of enemy air from Rabaul and Buin this landing was made as a hit-and-run operation. At daybreak APD's carrying assault companies landed their troops and withdrew; then LCI's followed suit and finally LST's beached and discharged supplies. The APD's were clear before the expected air attack came in, and the LCI's left before a second attack appeared.

With the capture of Vella LaVella, enemy positions on Kolombangara and Santa Isabel were untenable, and the Japanese forces withdrew, suffering severe losses in their evacuation by barges, and left the Central Solomons area in our complete possession.

During this period of the Solomons campaign the Amphibious Force was constantly occupied in supplying and reinforcing newly won positions even while further landings were being planned and executed. A variety of factors militated against mounting large forces for any particular operation or moving sufficient supplies with the assault echelons to sustain the troops ashore for long periods of time. Chief among these factors were the limited shipping available, the confined waters which made it impracticable in many of the landings to use ships larger than APD's, LST's and LCI's, and the constant threat, and

actuality, of enemy air attack, with the consequent danger inherent in concentrating too much shipping in one place at one time. The result was that relatively small forces secured the beachheads, following which reinforcements and supplies were rapidly brought forward, virtually on a daily basis. For example, between 30 June 1943 and 31 July 1943, a total of 26,748 men, 4,806 tons of rations, 17,431 drums of fuel, 2,281 vehicles, 9,961 tons of ammunition and 5,323 tons of other freight were landed on Rendova and on New Georgia in 26 small echelons of shipping. During the following month 28 additional echelons moved troops and supplies to Rendova. This activity continued long after our forces had landed on Vella LaVella, the next objective. There particularly bitter air attacks were made on our several supply echelons. The LST's, later to become the familiar work-horses of the Pacific, plodded their slow way courageously back and forth, frequently suffering damage and sometimes a lost ship, through attacks by day and by night. A similar pattern wherein the support of newly established positions overlapped new landings obtained throughout the South Pacific campaign.

In addition to the normal Amphibious Force vessels, Commander South Pacific assigned all MTB's and a number of destroyers to the Commander Amphibious Force, and on occasion one or more cruisers, and entrusted him with the conduct of minor operations against Japanese "Tokyo Expresses" (destroyer raids or reinforcement operations) and against barge traffic.

Following the decisive defeats of their surface forces in October and November of 1942, the Japs could no longer risk transport and cargo ship convoys in the area to the threat of almost certain destruction by our surface forces and our greatly augmented air power. In order to supply and reinforce his positions in the Solomons, the enemy therefore undertook to move troops and cargo in barges, slipping along the shores of the various islands by night in order to avoid detection. Our PT boats based progressively on Guadalcanal and Tulagi, the Russells, Rendova, and New Georgia sortied nightly into Kula Gulf, The Slot, and Wilson and Gizo Straits to break up this barge traffic. When the destroyers became available, their combined efforts resulted in the destruction of many Jap barges and contributed materially to the success of the campaign, but not without loss to the PT boats, for not only were the Jap barges armed and armored but the PT's were constantly bombed and strafed by Jap planes and exposed to fire from shore batteries. The "Black Cats", night-prowling Catalina sea-planes, worked with the PT boats and destroyers and were invaluable in discovering and reporting targets for them.

In addition to these minor activities there were some serious engagements between our destroyers and those of the enemy. Aided by early intelligence six of our destroyers under Commander Moosebrugger made a rendezvous with four Japanese destroyers near midnight in Vella Gulf and sank all four without a scratch on his vessels. Again on last-minute intelligence Captain Walker with three destroyers, to be joined by three more, engaged a Japanese force of nine destroyers northwest of

Vella LaVella. The engagement was fought before the juncture could be made; Captain Walker sank two or more of the enemy and remained master of the field but lost one ship and sustained damages to the remaining two.

On several occasions, mine fields were laid by the light fast mine-layers, converted four-stack destroyers, operating under the Third Amphibious Force command. Buin harbor was hemmed in by these fields and a protective mine field was laid north of the Bougainville landing to trap enemy vessels reaching down from Buka to attack our beachhead. Minesweeping too in enemy waters was frequently necessary, by additional converted old destroyers.

Many operations essential to the planning and execution of the various landings were carried out under difficult and hazardous conditions. No convenient source of intelligence to be drawn on for maps, charts, photographs, etc. existed in SoPac at the time. The Intelligence Section of the Amphibious Force command had to gather and compile this material with relatively little assistance from the rear areas. It was found that the waters about many of the islands had never been adequately surveyed, and what charts were available were often old and inaccurate. These problems were met by sending out reconnaissance parties which landed on enemy-held islands and reconnoitered for information which was later incorporated in maps and charts for use in planning subsequent assaults. Submarines as well as APD's, PT's and sea-planes were effectively used in landing and evacuating these reconnaissance parties. Valuable assistance by way of aerial photography was rendered to the Amphibious Forces by Army and Navy photo-reconnaissance planes under the operational control of ComSoPac. Coastwatchers were very valuable. In some instances these were military personnel who were landed on islands forward of our positions and who combined observation and reporting of enemy movements with the establishment and operation of forward weather stations. Some of the coastwatchers were members of the Solomons Defense Force who, in civilian life had worked the plantations on New Georgia, Bougainville and other islands. These daring outposts seem to have divided their time between observing and reporting enemy movements and eluding Jap patrols sent out to catch them. For security purposes it was impossible to give them full credit during the campaign; their story should be told and their exploits recognized.

The next step in the South Pacific campaign involved the seizure of bases on Bougainville Island, so that airfields might be made available for the long-desired full-scale air assault on Rabaul. Original plans called for an amphibious operation in the Buin-Shortland Island-Choiseul area. However, detailed study showed that direct assault on Buin or Shortland would be costly and difficult to support logistically. The fact that the capture of Vella LaVella had made it necessary for the enemy to evacuate Kolombangara and Rekata Bay without a fight strongly indicated the advisability of by-passing Shortland and Choiseul and landing on Bougainville itself. It was therefore decided to land at Torokina, just above Empress Augusta Bay, where reconnaissance indicated

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that airfields could be constructed within air range of Rabaul for all types of planes. In addition it was lightly manned and was so inaccessible to established Jap positions on the island as to render it extremely difficult for the Japs to counter-attack strongly by land within a period of at least three months. A preliminary seizure of Treasury Islands, lying a short distance southward of Shortland Island, was included, to furnish a relay-station for light vessels and a supporting airfield.

During October heavy and constant air attacks were made against the Japanese fields on Bougainville, and they were rendered unserviceable before the end of the month.

In the first move of the Bougainville operation, 3,700 New Zealand and U. S. troops departed Guadalcanal between 23 and 26 October under Rear Admiral Fort, arriving off Blanche Harbor in the Treasury Islands at dawn of 27 October. The landing at Palamai met with strong opposition but our casualties were relatively light. Air attacks developed rapidly and one destroyer was heavily damaged. On Stirling Island our landing was unopposed. All objectives were taken and the mopping up virtually completed by 31 October. Like the Vella LaVella landing, this too was a hit-and-run affair, of successive landings and departures of APD's, LCI's, and LST's. This landing was notable in that it marked the first appearance of LCI gunboats, improvised in the South Pacific, later to be so extensively utilized in amphibious operations.

The Torokina landing was scheduled for 1 November 1943. In order to deceive the enemy as to the point of our main attack, a landing was made in battalion strength at Voza on Choiseul Island during the night of 27-28 October. After killing many Japs and chasing more into the jungle this battalion was withdrawn to Vella LaVella about midnight 3 November.

The initial echelon of the Bougainville expedition, consisting of three divisions of APA's, in all twelve ships, departed the forward area independently, and at 0800 October 31 rendezvoused for the approach to Empress Augusta Bay. A minesweeping group was in the van not only to sweep mines but to determine dangerous shoals in the uncharted waters, previously ably though sketchily reconnoitered by a submarine. Rear Admiral Wilkinson was commander of the expeditionary force and Commodore Reifsnider was in command of the transport group. Major General Vandegrift, Commander of the First Marine Amphibious Corps, was in overall command of the landing force, the 3rd Marine Division, itself commanded by Major General Turnage.

The landing of the assault troops was preceded by fire on pre-arranged targets by destroyers of the fire support group, and just prior to the first waves hitting the beach the landing beaches were strafed and bombed by aircraft. Landings were accomplished on schedule, between seven and eight thousand troops (over half the landing force) being put ashore in the first trip of the boats. Hardly had the boats cleared when a 100-plane air attack came in from Rabaul. The transports got

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underway and maneuvered off shore, returning when the attacking planes retired. A second equally heavy attack in at 1:00 p.m., again forcing interruption of unloading to get underway and maneuver. Both these attacks were repulsed, without damage to the ships, by the valiant efforts of our outnumbered fighter cover and the skilled work of our fighter-director teams.

That night a serious threat to the newly-landed forces, and to the retiring transports as well, was averted by the splendid action of Rear Admiral Merrill and his force of cruisers and destroyers which met and decisively defeated an equal Japanese force advancing from Rabaul toward Bougainville. Again, a force of heavy cruisers, just arrived in Rabaul from Truk and re-fueling preparatory doubtless to attacking our beach-head, was bombed and severely damaged on November 5 by aircraft from the Saratoga, which Admiral Halsey had hurried into launching position in the north Coral Sea by a high speed run.

The enemy attempted a counter-landing the following night. Troops were brought in by destroyer and landed near the Laruma River on our northwest flank. However destroyers and PT boats effectively prevented supplies and equipment getting ashore in support of these troops, which were quickly wiped out by the landing force.

The days following the landing witnessed several echelons of shipping bringing up reinforcements and supplies from Guadalcanal. These convoys were more or less constantly heckled by enemy aircraft at night (air cover by day was effective), and one APD with troops aboard was sunk. Unloading proceeded despite difficulties on the beaches caused principally by the fact that exits from the beach areas were practically nonexistent at first. The areas in the rear of the beaches were largely swamp so that equipment and supplies were with difficulty removed from the landing areas, which were congested throughout the early days of the operation. As soon as the beachhead was secured and an essential perimeter established, the 3rd Marine Division was replaced by the 37th Division and the Americal Division, and the XIV Corps Headquarters, under Major General Griswold, took over command of the area from Major General Geiger, USMC, who had relieved General Vandegrift meantime. The large convoys bringing in these troops ran the gauntlet of air attacks.

There followed a period of several weeks during which the forces ashore consolidated their positions and pushed inland while construction personnel rushed airfields to completion. The Japs continued to sneak along the coast in barges, but PT's and LCI gunboats destroyed so many of these barges that the traffic was largely ineffectual. During this period the Amphibious Forces continued to pour reinforcements and supplies into Bougainville, moving them in echelon from Guadalcanal.

(Despite their inability to bring in troops and supplies in any significant amounts, the Japanese later mounted an overland attack on our positions on Bougainville in March 1944. This attack was readily beaten off, with heavy losses. Over 10,000 enemy dead were buried on

Bougainville. The remainder of the enemy forces on the island were left isolated from reinforcement or supply and without hope of evacuation.)

With the Torokina beachhead firmly established, one fighter strip and two bomber strips were rushed to completion. By mid-January air operations from them against Rabaul were begun, and reached full scale by the end of the month. Rabaul as an enemy base was doomed.

With our forces firmly established on Bougainville, Kavieng was designated as the next objective, with a target date of 1 March 1944. This operation was to be synchronized with the seizure of Manus by the Southwest Pacific Forces in order to complete the isolation of Rabaul and the Bismarck Archipelago. In December 1943 it appeared that it would be necessary to postpone the date for Kavieng until about 1 May (later advanced to 1 April), and in order to provide an air base against Kavieng and to continue the offensive pressure Commander South Pacific decided to seize Green Islands, northward of Bougainville. The attack and garrison forces were to consist of one brigade of the 3rd New Zealand Division under Major General Barrowclough, N.Z. Army, plus U.S. Air and Construction Units.

After a reconnaissance in force on January 31, the seizure was effected on February 15. The troops and supplies were lifted in 8 APD's, 12 LCI's, 7 LST's, 6 LCT's, and 1 LSM. The force was screened by 17 DD's, 1 PC, and 1 SC and included in addition 3 YMS's, 2 tugs, 2 LCI gunboats and other minor units. The landing was unopposed by enemy ground forces. A light and ineffectual air attack was made on the convoy as it arrived in the early forenoon. On the first day, 5,800 men were put ashore. The next day the troops moved southward against the principal enemy garrison at the south end of Nissan Island. By the 19th this small garrison was wiped out and the island was secured. By the end of February, 13,098 men and 17,327 tons of supplies had been landed on Green Islands.

Manus Island in the Admiralties was seized by Southwest Pacific forces February 29. The Joint Chiefs of Staff then on March 14th directed the cancellation of the Kavieng operation. In lieu of that objective the seizure of Emirau Island was directed, to complete the encirclement of Rabaul and to furnish an air-field site within ready bombing range of Truk. Plans had been prepared in part for this operation in January, as a possible alternative to Kavieng; these plans were completed rapidly and the attack force left Guadalcanal on 17 March and seized the island on 20 March, without opposition.

The assault echelon under Commodore Reifsnider consisted of 3 LSD's, 1 APA, 6 LCT's, 9 APD's, escorted by 9 DD's. The landing force consisting of the 4th Marines, reenforced, under Brigadier General Noble. This expedition sailed approximately 820 miles through waters formerly dominated by Japanese sea and air forces from Buin, Rabaul, and from Truk. No enemy-surface, submarine, or aircraft was sighted in the entire route.

Rabaul was dead, and Truk innocuous.

This operation marked the end of assault amphibious operations in the South Pacific. There still remained the task of supplying the positions won in the previous campaigns and this activity continued as before for several weeks. Save for that, the South Pacific campaign was concluded. Admiral Halsey was detached in mid-June, and ordered to Pearl Harbor, to continue activities as Commander Third Fleet, but no longer as Commander South Pacific. Similarly the Third Amphibious Force headquarters was shifted from the South Pacific to Pearl Harbor, arriving June 11.

By 1 July 1944 the United States forces had successfully established themselves on the perimeter of the Japanese holdings in the North, East, and South. In the North the enemy position in Attu had been recaptured and he had evacuated Kiska without a fight, leaving U.S. forces in control of the North Pacific area as far west as the Kuriles. In the Central Pacific we had driven the Japs from positions in the Marshalls and Gilberts; amphibious forces had landed on Saipan in the Marianas and others were poised to assault Guam and Tinian. In the South the enemy power in the Bismarcks and Solomons was smashed and his great naval base at Truk was being subjected to neutralization by land-based and carrier air attacks. The Southwest Pacific Forces had completed the capture of Hollandia and Biak on northern New Guinea.

The Fifth Fleet under Admiral Spruance was conducting the Marianas operation. Upon its conclusion the Fleet was to be turned over to Admiral Halsey, then to become the Third Fleet. Similarly Vice Admiral Turner, commanding the Fifth Amphibious Force, and directing the amphibious attack on the Marianas, was to be succeeded by the Third Amphibious Force for such amphibious assaults as might be prescribed in the Third Fleet operations.

The first operation assigned to the Third Amphibious Force in this new phase of the war involved the seizure of the entire Palau Islands. On further study by CinCPac however it appeared that a more profitable operation would be the seizure of only the southern Palaus, Peleliu and Angaur, and of Yap, to provide airfields for the forthcoming Philippine campaign, and of Ulithi, for an advanced fleet anchorage and base. At Pearl Harbor in June, July and August of 1944 plans were made for these operations.

These plans called for the Western Attack Force (PhibGroup 5, Rear Admiral Fort) and (PhibGroup 1, Rear Admiral Blandy) to land forces on Peleliu and on Angaur; and the Eastern Attack Force (PhibGroup 3, Rear Admiral Conolly, and PhibGroup 6, Rear Admiral Royal) to capture Yap, and later Ulithi. The entire expedition was to be under the command of Vice Admiral Wilkinson, who would assume direct command of the Yap attack, with Rear Admiral Fort in charge of the Peleliu and Angaur attack. Major General Julian Smith, USMC, was Commander of all expeditionary troops. The Palau troops were the First Marine Division and the 81st Infantry Division, with Major General Geiger, now Commander

Third Amphibious Corps, in command. The Yap troops were the XXIV Corps, under Major General Hodge, of the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions.

On 3 September Vice Admiral Wilkinson departed by air for Guadalcanal, to join Admiral Fort and to be present in a supervisory capacity at the Palau assault. The Third Amphibious Force Administration remained in MOUNT OLYMPUS at Pearl Harbor. On 7 September the Western Attack Force departed Guadalcanal and proceeded to the Palaus. Heavy bombardments and air attacks by an advance force of battleships, cruisers, destroyers and escort carriers under Rear Admiral Oldendorf began on 12 September. Landings were effected on Peleliu by the First Marine Division on 15 September, and on Angaur on 17 September by the 81st Infantry Division. Stiff opposition was encountered ashore at Peleliu after the landings and a bitter and protracted fight continued for two months. The conquest of Angaur proceeded rapidly however and the island was secured on 19 September. No surface and only minor air attacks were made by the Japanese against the forces afloat, throughout this operation.

Meanwhile LST's and their screen comprising the first unit of the Eastern Attack Force (Yap) departed Pearl Harbor for Eniwetok on 11 September. They were followed on 15 September by Rear Admirals Conolly and Royal with the transports destined for Yap. The landing on Yap had been set for October 5.

Covering and supporting the Palau landings, the Third Fleet in early September had ranged far into the waters of the Philippines where Admiral Halsey had discovered that Japanese air strength was much less than had been anticipated. He therefore recommended, and the High Command approved, the advance of the date of the planned initial landings of the Philippine campaign at Leyte. The former date of 20 December was advanced to 20 October. The Yap expedition was cancelled, and the seizure of Ulithi advanced, to expedite the installation of the fleet base. A plan rapidly improvised at Peleliu arranged the departure from Angaur of Rear Admiral Blandy on 21 September with one RCT of the 81st Division and his seizure of Ulithi Atoll on 23 September. No opposition was met with.

With the abandonment of the Yap attack, the entire XXIV Corps, loaded and enroute west, became available for further operations, and was assigned to the Leyte attack. The shipping transporting the Palau force was assigned to the Seventh Amphibious Force. Both it and the Third Amphibious Force were to share in the attack, under the overall command of the Commander Seventh Fleet. Vice Admiral Wilkinson proceeded to Hollandia by air from Peleliu and collected his staff by air and commenced hurried planning. The advancing Yap expedition was diverted at Eniwetok and sent on to Manus, arriving October 3 and 4. On completion of the preparation of plans at headquarters of the Seventh Fleet Admiral Wilkinson embarked with his staff in the MOUNT OLYMPUS at Manus on 7 October 1944.

The Leyte invasion was under the overall naval command of Vice

Admiral Kinkaid, Commander Seventh Fleet, while the ground forces were commanded by the Commanding General 6th Army, Lieutenant General Krueger. The Third Fleet under Admiral Halsey afforded strategic cover and support to the landings.

The amphibious forces were divided into a Northern Attack Force under Vice Admiral Barbey, Commander Seventh Amphibious Force, and a Southern Attack Force consisting of the Third Amphibious Force under Vice Admiral Wilkinson. The latter force was further divided into Attack Group Able (Rear Admiral Conolly) and Attack Group Baker (Rear Admiral Royal).

On 11 October the landing craft of Task Force 79, the Southern Attack Force, departed Manus for Leyte. Commander Southern Attack Force, together with the Commanders Attack Groups Able and Baker with transports and cargo ships of Task Force 79 left Manus on 14 October. Rear Admiral Oldendorf with a strong advance force commenced mine-sweeping, bombardment and bombing operations on 17 October. The Southern Attack Force arrived off Leyte on 20 October and commenced landing troops of the XXIV Corps and the Seventh Infantry Division at Dulag and the 96th Infantry Division at San Jose. Simultaneously the Northern Attack Force landed the X Corps, consisting of the First Cavalry Division and the 24th Infantry Division, to the north, between Tacloban and Palo. The landings progressed rapidly with slight enemy resistance.

An interesting feature of the Southern Attack Force landing was the use of amphibious tractors, over normal beaches, for the first assault waves. The expedition had been loaded for an attack over coral reefs at Yap, which would require those craft. Although no longer necessary for Leyte, time was too short to re-load and reorganize and it was decided to land with them, rather in the orthodox fashion from transport boats. Certain advantages were apparent, such as protection of the troops from rifle fire in crossing the beaches, and the availability of the amphtracs for swamp work and river crossings after landing. Their use was so successful that all the assault troops utilized them in the attack later at Lingayen, where again normal beaches, without reefs, would have permitted use of transport boats alone.

During the next several days unloading progressed satisfactorily, in spite of sporadic air attacks which caused some damage and casualties to shipping and of mortar fire on the beaches which inflicted some damage to beached landing craft. By nightfall of 24 October all of the transports and most of the LST's had been evacuated to rear bases, for turn-around with reinforcements, and only the MOUNT OLYMPUS, one AKA and several LST's remained of the assault echelon.

The air attacks were greatly intensified on the 24th and that night and on the 25th of October occurred the greatest threats to the Leyte invasion. Powerful enemy forces of battleships and cruisers with smaller units converged on Leyte Gulf from the north and via the San Bernardino and Surigao Straits. Heavy Third Fleet air attacks on the 24th damaged but did not deter the forces in Philippine waters. One of

these forces was routed by Rear Admiral Oldendorf's force in the night action of Surigao Strait. The force from the north was crippled, and four carriers sunk, by the Third Fleet in the early morning. Another and stronger enemy force emerging from San Bernadino Strait was opposed by a few escort carriers, destroyers and destroyer escorts, which fought a gallant action until, with the punishment inflicted on him that day and the day before, and with the knowledge of the defeat of his other forces, the enemy turned back in abandonment of his attack and sought to escape.

On 26 October no ships remained under his operational control in the Leyte area, and Commander Third Amphibious Force departed Leyte for Hollandia to begin the plans for the next Philippine operation.

The vessels of the Force were occupied during the first part of November in transporting troops and equipment from various New Guinea ports to Leyte. The remainder of November and December were devoted to accumulating the shipping at loading ports, and in loading troops and equipment for the Luzon operation.

This operation envisioned landing major forces at Lingayen Gulf on the west coast of Luzon. The amphibious and support shipping to be used was much the same as in the Leyte operation, and Vice Admiral Kinkaid was again in command of the expedition. The Third Amphibious Force, now become the Lingayen Attack Force, was to put the XIV Corps ashore at Lingayen on the south central shore of the gulf, while the San Fabian Attack Force, consisting of the Seventh Amphibious Force, would put the I Corps ashore on the south eastern shore. Rear Admiral Conolly was to bring up a Reenforcement Group, to arrive on D+2. The Lingayen Attack Force was again divided into Attack Group Able (Rear Admiral Kiland) and Attack Group Baker (Rear Admiral Royal). Each group included transport types, landing craft and control units.

This Lingayen attack was a bold thrust against the principal enemy stronghold in the Philippines. It required the passage of the attack forces either around the north of Luzon, exposed to seasonal bad weather and to enemy air attack from Formosa, or through narrow central Philippine waters, subject to attack by the residual enemy air forces in the Philippines, by submarines, large and small, and by PT boats. The central route was chosen as the less hazardous. Lingayen Gulf itself presented the hazards of reported mine-fields and coast defense guns, and the terrain for the landing was unfavorable both in shallow beaches and in deployment areas behind.

It had been originally planned to execute the Luzon operation on 20 December, but slow progress in airfield construction at Leyte, and the consequent delay in effective operations of the 5th Air Force in reduction of Japanese air strength, forced a postponement of the landing date until 9 January. (Even then, the air cover for the convoys passing through the narrow waters of the Philippines was far from adequate had the enemy been able, or had he chosen, to launch attacks in strength. Extensive Third Fleet carrier operations had substantially reduced his strength.)

The XIV Corps headquarters and the 37th Infantry Division were loaded in the ships of Attack Group Able at Bougainville and the 40th Division boarded transports and landing craft of Attack Group Baker at Cape Gloucester. The fortunate delay in the target date permitted adequate upkeep and preparation of vessels prior to loading and made possible a rehearsal of the landing at Huon Gulf, about ten miles south of Lae on 18 and 19 December. Following the rehearsal the force moved to Manus arriving on 21 and 22 December; for replenishment of logistics, training, recreation and conferences.

On 27 December the slow convoy, the landing craft of Attack Groups Able and Baker, departed Manus for the objective, followed on 31 December by the transport groups. The tractor group made the movement to the objective area practically unmolested, an air attack by three fighter bombers, two of which dropped bombs, being the only enemy activity. The transport convoy had more trouble, however, several bogies being detected by radar, and at sunset on 8 January the KITKUN BAY, a CVE escorting the convoy, was severely damaged by a suicide plane.

The advance force, under Vice Admiral Oldendorf, began minesweeping and bombardment and bombing operations on January 6. It was heavily damaged by suicide planes, the first mass use of that weapon, on that day, but attacks moderated thereafter, due probably to extensive air efforts by the Third Fleet against the Philippine fields. The advance operations, despite the damages sustained, were fully carried out. No mines were found in the Gulf, and coast defense activities were minor.

The initial landings were effected at 0930 on 9 January under cover of an intense bombardment. Opposition at the beaches was virtually nil and our troops rapidly moved inland. At dusk that evening and at dawn and dusk on the following days, the transports were covered with a smoke screen which proved very effective against suicide plane attacks. Some damage was suffered at the hands of Jap small boats carrying explosive charges. The progress of the troops continued excellent during the next two days and on the afternoon of 11 January Major General Griswold, Commanding the XIV Corps, left the MOUNT OLYMPUS, moved ashore with his headquarters and assumed command.

Commander Third Amphibious Force was directed by Commander Seventh Fleet to coordinate the withdrawal of all unloaded assault shipping from the objective area. It was planned to sail one fast and one slow convoy each day, but, due to a variety of factors, this schedule could not be followed implicitly. However, with the exception of S-Day, no unloaded ships remained at the objective area overnight. The withdrawal was accomplished without loss of any ship, though two transports were hit by suicide planes and one LST was hit twice.

On 12 January Commander Third Amphibious Force left the Gulf, with the last of his unloaded transports, and arrived at Leyte on 15 January without untoward incident enroute, save for one suicide plane hit on one transport of the convoy. On 18 January, Commander Seventh Fleet released Commander Third Amphibious Force and Commander Amphibious Group Three

(Rear Admiral Conolly) and their respective flagships from further duty with the Seventh Fleet, and they proceeded that date to Ulithi enroute to Pearl Harbor. From Ulithi the two flag officers proceeded by air to Pearl Harbor via Guam. The MOUNT OLYMPUS and APPALACHIAN proceeded to Pearl Harbor direct, arriving 4 February, and leaving on 5 February for San Francisco, arriving on 11 February for sixty day overhaul periods.

With no further operations in view at the moment and with the ships previously assigned to the Third Amphibious Force now re-allocated to the Fifth Amphibious Force for the prospective Iwo Jima and Okinawa operations, the staff of the Force scattered for leave and for temporary duty, reuniting on 7 April 1945 in MOUNT OLYMPUS at San Francisco. On 11 April the flagship arrived at San Diego for a period of ten days training and indoctrination of the staff at the Amphibious Training Command, following which the ship proceeded to Pearl Harbor, the Force Commander and certain members of his staff preceding it by air.

Headquarters were established at Pearl Harbor and planning commenced for future operations, outlined at that time as either an invasion of an area in China, or an assault on Japan itself. The Force Commander and his staff remained at Pearl Harbor until 25 June 1945 when MOUNT OLYMPUS departed for Guam, Vice Admiral Wilkinson following a few days later by air. From Guam the flagship proceeded toward Manila, but enroute the ship was diverted to Leyte, from where the Admiral and the principal staff flew on to Manila to plan with Admiral Turner and with Army commands. On 3 August MOUNT OLYMPUS arrived at Manila.

This planning was ended with the Japanese capitulation on 14 August 1945, and activities incident to the occupation of Japan were undertaken.

During the period of active hostilities, operations of the Third Amphibious Force (and its predecessor, the Amphibious Force, South Pacific) took place in a vast triangular area bounded by lines drawn from Pearl Harbor to Wellington, New Zealand to northern Luzon and back to Pearl Harbor. It is estimated that assault convoys of this force traveled more than 23,500 miles in moving combat loaded troops from mounting points to objectives, one convoy alone moving over 6,000 miles from Hawaii to Leyte via Eniwetok and Manus. Much of this distance was traversed many times over by supply and reinforcement echelons.

For the initial landings in the various operations, this force lifted a total of ten divisions in their entirety, plus three regimental combat teams, one brigade, and ten units of battalion strength. Ten divisions, one brigade, one regiment, and two battalions were transported for reinforcement and garrison duty. In addition miscellaneous elements such as headquarters troops, construction units, aviation ground echelons, etc., comprising in all many thousand officers and men, moved to the objective areas aboard ships of the Force.

Equally important to the movement of troops was the transportation and landing of their supplies and equipment, and the effort necessary to

this phase of the operations paralleled that involved in putting the landing forces ashore. In all cases this cargo was landed over beaches, frequently in the face of adverse surf conditions making it difficult and slow, and often under attacks from the air which made it necessary to suspend unloading operations until the attack could be beaten off. The magnitude of the task is illustrated by cargo tonnage figures for two operations, chosen because one took place relatively early in the offensive while the other was the last major landing effected by this force. At Torokina on Bougainville during the period November 1-30, 1943, 44,430 officers and men and 40,338 tons of equipment and supplies were put ashore, an average of 9/10 ton of cargo per man. At Lingayen 50,128 officers and men and 55,992 tons of cargo were landed, an average of 1 1/10 ton per man.

The performance of the ships and personnel of this force was of a superior order throughout the war. Due to the fact that the South Pacific campaign was the first protracted amphibious offensive ever undertaken by United States Forces, it was necessary as the operations progressed to develop our technique of amphibious warfare. That this was done successfully in spite of inadequate equipment at first, of bitter and continuous enemy opposition and of adverse climatic conditions is a tribute to the courage, resourcefulness and energy of the officers and men associated in the common effort.

This type of warfare has aptly been termed "triphibious". Nowhere has this been more forcibly demonstrated than in the operations of this force, where it was apparent from the start that a high degree of cooperation between land, sea, and air forces was necessary to a successful amphibious offensive. The Force takes pride and satisfaction in the performance of all branches of our own and our allied forces. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to have been identified with an undertaking in which all Services cooperated so effectively in the achievement of the common goal.

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Report ✓

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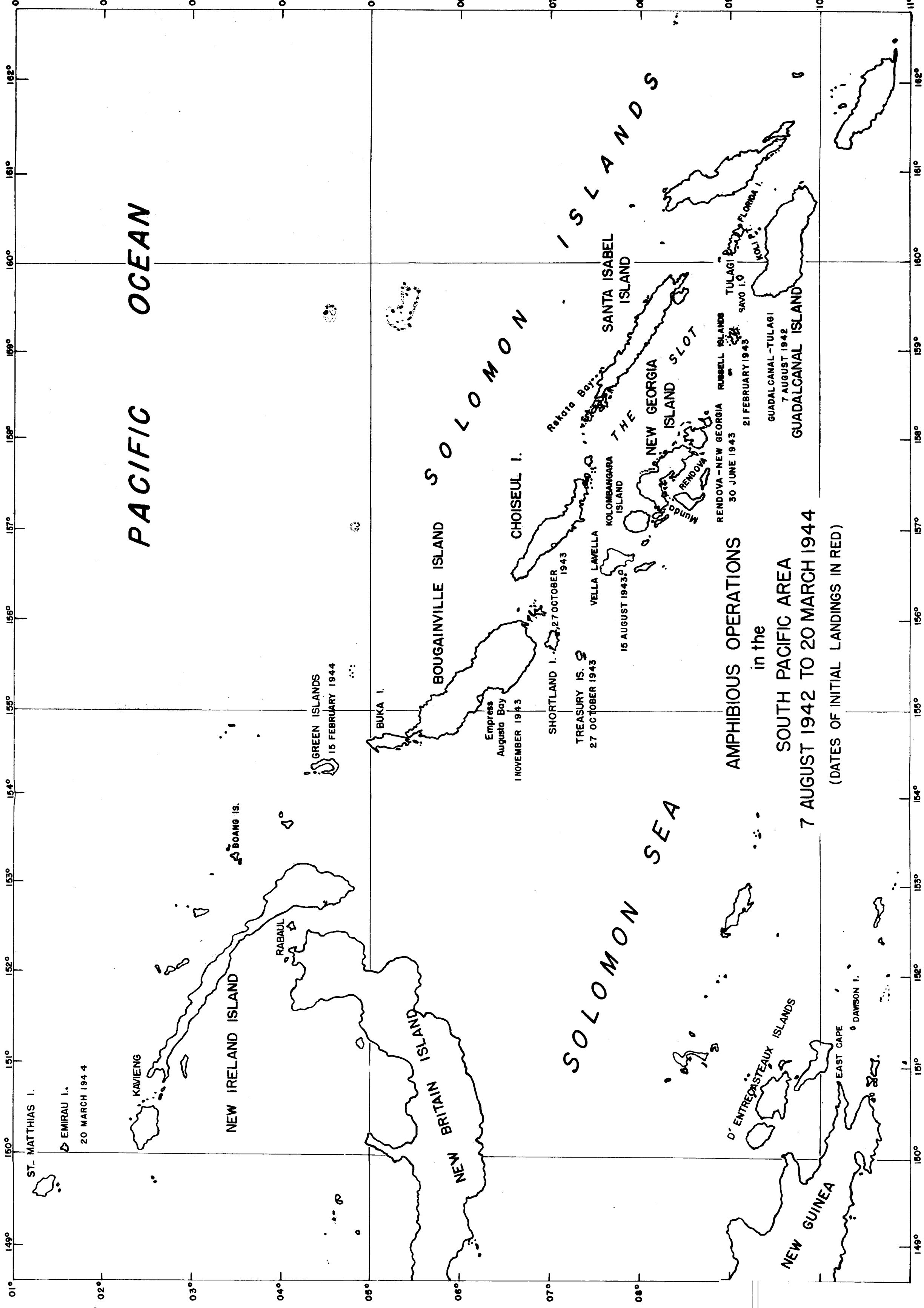
ComPhibGrp Seven

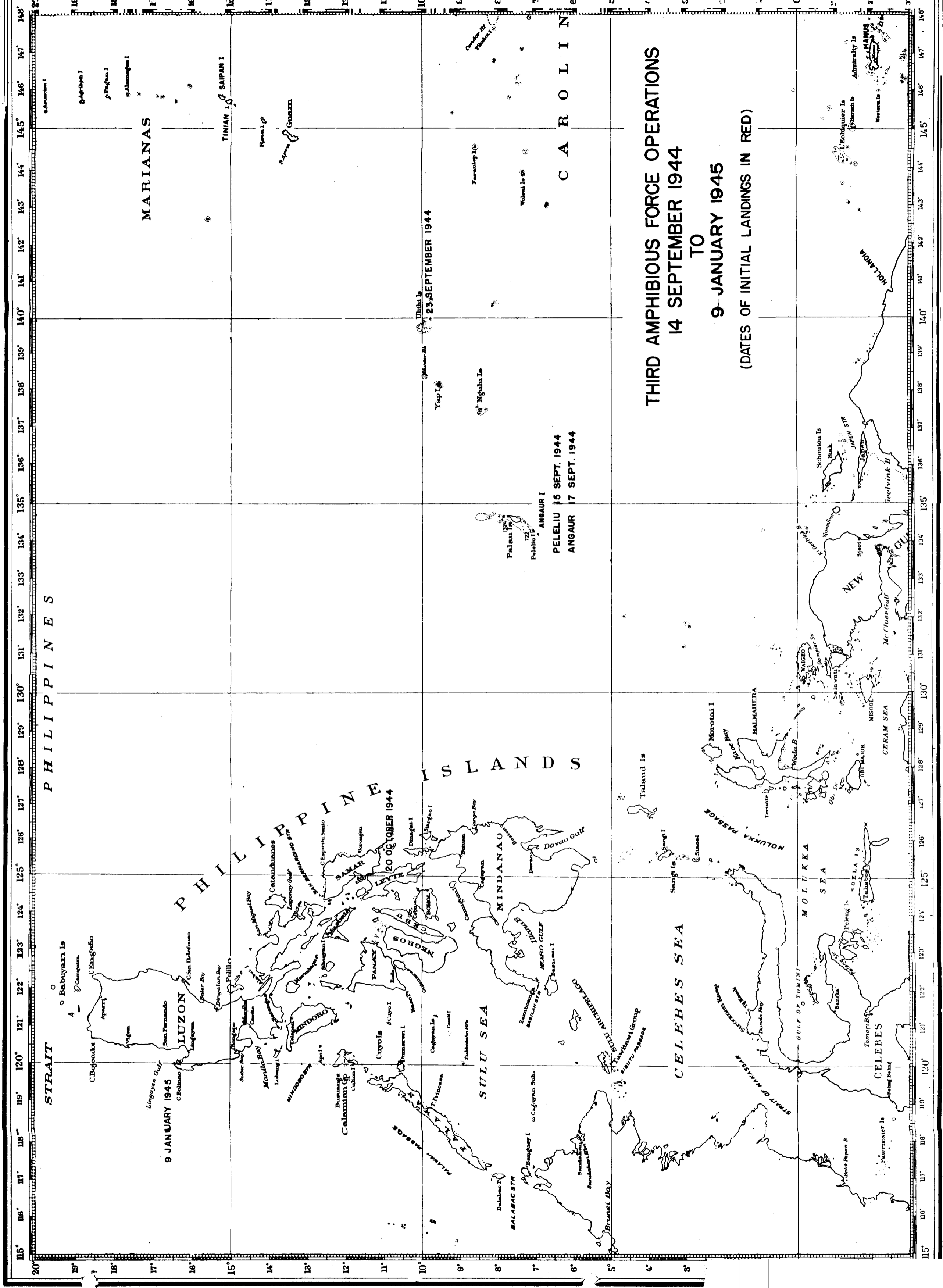
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THIRD AMPHIBIOUS FORCE OPERATIONS
14 SEPTEMBER 1944
TO
9 JANUARY 1945
(DATES OF INITIAL LANDINGS IN RED)

PHILIPPINES

PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

MARIANAS

CAROLINES

STRAIT

9 JANUARY 1945

20 OCTOBER 1944

23 SEPTEMBER 1944

14 SEPTEMBER 1944
15 SEPT. 1944
17 SEPT. 1944

LUZON

MINDANAO

SULU SEA

CELEBES SEA

MOLUKKA SEA

CELEBES

NEW GUINEA

SAIPAN I.

TINIAN I.

RANAI I.

GUAM I.

YAP I.

NGULU I.

ANGAUR I.

PELELIU I.

Palau I.

Babuyan Is.

C. Bodeadex

C. Erigadto

San Fernando

C. San Rafael

Polillo

Subic Bay

Morona Bay

Manila Bay

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Lingayen Gulf

C. Bolinao

San Fernando

C. San Rafael

Polillo

Subic Bay

Morona Bay

Manila Bay

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THIRD AMPHIBIOUS FORCE - COMMAND HISTORY

PART TWO - ORGANIZATION, AND ITEMS OF COMBAT INTEREST

(A) COMMAND ORGANIZATION

This Force has served since its inception under a variety of circumstances in the several theatres in which it has been engaged. Command organizations have correspondingly varied. Some note of these differences will be made with recommendation as to the organization which would seem preferable.

I. STATUS OF THE FORCE

In the South Pacific the Amphibious Force, South Pacific, later designated as the Third Amphibious Force, was a complete operational and administrative command, and a major task force directly under the Commander South Pacific. Such vessels of the amphibious type as were allocated to the South Pacific were automatically assigned to it both for administration and for operation. In addition from time to time combatant vessels were assigned for operational but not administrative command.

Upon detachment from the South Pacific and incorporation in the activities of the Central Pacific, the Third Amphibious Force became purely an operational command. Vessels were assigned to it for operational control for the campaign by the Commander Amphibious Forces through his Administrative Commander, but the latter retained the administrative command throughout the operation and resumed operational control upon conclusion of the campaign. While this Force was operating with the Pacific Fleet the system of alternation of the campaign command

between the Commander Third Fleet and the Commander Fifth Fleet was in effect. Similarly the Commander Third Amphibious Force and the Commander Fifth Amphibious Force alternated in the field, each utilizing the period when the other was in the field for preparation of plans for the campaign to follow.

In the Southwest Pacific the Seventh Amphibious Force had exercised combined administrative and operational command, similar to the procedure described for the South Pacific Amphibious Force. Upon joining the Seventh Fleet the Third Amphibious Force, because of this precedent and also because of the lack of contact with the Administrative Command, found it necessary to assume in part, particularly with regard to maintenance and personnel, the administrative function of the units of its Force for the Philippine campaign.

This campaign consisted of two major amphibious operations, attacks on Leyte and Lingayen, separated by two months. During these two months between the assault landings the amphibious vessels were engaged in reinforcement trips from New Guinea ports and other ports to Leyte. In this intervening period Commander Seventh Fleet pooled the vessels of the several types in both the Third and Seventh Amphibious Forces, giving the Commander Third Force the operational control of all transport types and the Commander Seventh Force that of all landing craft.

Upon consideration of the several methods noted it is believed that for a small force operating for a considerable length of time in a given limited area, as in the South Pacific, an independent command with both administrative and operational control is preferable. For a large force, however, and particularly when the very effective system of alternation, which permits continuous pressure upon the enemy, is

employed, it is believed that the command organization wherein the type commander retains administrative command throughout, and operational command except for the period of each campaign, is preferable. The type commander however should not have the additional function of an operational commander, as was for a time the case with the Commander Fifth Amphibious Force, since in that case either his operational responsibilities may be distracted by administrative troubles or his Administrative Commander will be required to exercise functions attributable only to the Type Commander.

II. INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

Where operational control only is involved, as in the campaign in the Central Pacific, this Force found it necessary only to organize by task groups and task units suitable for the operation at hand. These groups and units necessarily often comprised ships of varying types, but the proper assignment of vessels and units, based upon the character of the operation and its objective, presented no complications. The creation of Amphibious Groups, headed by a flag officer, provided adequate experienced officers for the command of major task groups.

While operating in the Southwest Pacific the necessary administrative control was slight and no specific organization for this purpose was necessary. The formation of the Force into operational task groups, each under an Amphibious Group Commander and each comprised of the several types of amphibious vessels plus combatant vessels as screen and escort, proved satisfactory for the campaign. Such minor administration as was necessary was accomplished by the subordinate commanders of the respective types within each task group (Transport Squadron Commanders, LST Flotilla Commanders, etc.) without the necessity

of establishing a combined administrative command for the Force or for any type within the Force.

In the South Pacific, where both administrative and operational command were exercised within the Amphibious Force proper, the ships of the amphibious types were organized as a specific permanent task force, of continuing constitution, Task Force 32. This was divided into two type commands, the landing craft and the transports. The Commanders of these type commands carried out the administration for their vessels and were responsible to the Commander Third Amphibious Force, but freed him from all but the most important administrative responsibilities. They might, and did, conduct routine operations within their type commands, such as supply movements in rear areas.

For the major operations and those of secondary degree in the combat area an additional task force was created, Task Force 31. This was purely an operational force, varying in constitution from time to time in accordance with the requirements of the successive tasks. Vessels or units of Task Force 32 were assigned to task groups under Task Force 31 -- from one pocket to the other of the Amphibious Force as it were -- and in addition combatant vessels for bombardment, screening, etc. were assigned by Commander South Pacific to Task Force 31. The Force Commander exercised direct command of Task Force 31 except where command for specific operations was delegated to task group commanders. The type commanders of Task Force 32 were frequently utilized to command larger task groups of Task Force 31, in order to utilize their experience and to gratify their natural desire to share in combat operations. Momentarily this assignment detracted somewhat from their continuing administrative command of their types, but since in large

operations the major part of the vessels of the Force were utilized and the type commanders were ordinarily assigned to operations employing their respective types, little detriment to administration resulted.

As has been noted under the narrative history, the combat operations of the South Pacific Amphibious Force comprised three general forms; initial assault operations, supply and reinforcement, and a continuing light craft campaign in the Central Solomons. The initial assault operations were usually led by the Commander Third Amphibious Force, except when simultaneous operations required delegation, as in the Wickham, Segi, and Treasury Islands attacks. Supply operations were led by type commanders or their subordinates, and the light craft operations led by the combatant unit commanders. All operation orders emanated from the Commander Third Amphibious Force as Commander Task Force 31.

The organizations used in the several theaters, as outlined above, seem to have operated satisfactorily, and their duplication in the future under respective parallel circumstances would appear suitable.

III. EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

The system of command of the land forces varied markedly in the three theaters.

In the South Pacific the Commander of the Amphibious Force was in direct command of the entire assault. Troops, whether Marine or Army, and the latter whether U.S. or New Zealand, were placed under the command of the Amphibious Commander, whether the Force Commander or one of his subordinates (as at Treasury Islands). The attack in all its phases was his sole responsibility under the Theater Commander. The troops when landed remained under his command until such time as they were

firmly established and supplied ashore, when by mutual agreement between the Landing Force Commander and the Amphibious Commander command of the situation ashore and of all troops and naval landing parties at the objective was passed to the Troop Commander. This transfer of command occurred usually from ten days to three weeks after the initial landing. Thereafter the Amphibious Commander remained responsible for the support of the position, but the Commander ashore reported directly to his principal Commander (Army or Marine) under the Commander South Pacific at the latter's headquarters. This system provided a complete unity of command at the objective in the critical phases of the landing. A possible objection was that command of operations on shore was vested in a naval commander unfamiliar with military operations. As a matter of practice, he interfered rarely, if ever, with the operational plans of the Landing Force Commander and no difficulties arose, but it is obvious that in case of conflicting personalities difficulties might arise.

In the Central Pacific the Commander of the Amphibious Force was designated as Commander of the Expeditionary Force, and the ranking general officer was named as Commander Expeditionary Troops. The Commander Expeditionary Force, the Amphibious Commander, retained command of the expedition as a whole, including the landing force, until the troops and the several headquarters were landed, when the Commander Expeditionary Troops immediately assumed command. During the preparatory stages, the voyage, and the landing prior to his final assumption of command, the Commander Expeditionary Troops at all times retained command of the troops and was empowered to issue orders thereto, subject however to the approval of the Commander Expeditionary Force.

This system maintained an effective unity of command up to the moment of the landing and assumption of command of the troops by the Commander Expeditionary Troops. It is conceivable however that the position might not be firmly established by that time, and the lack of unity of command and responsibility at the objective and the necessity of relying upon cooperation rather than unity of command might well prove disastrous.

In the Southwest Pacific there was no definitely created joint expeditionary force. The mission of the Amphibious Commander was not, as in the South and Central Pacific, to attack and capture an enemy position, but rather to land and firmly establish ashore the Army troops which his Force transported and protected. The troops were not assigned to him as part of his Force and he was not privileged to include them in his operation order. The troops received their orders to capture the designated objective from their Army Commander, or from the Theater Commander direct.

A transitory unity of command was vested in the Amphibious Commander, in that troops embarked remained under his command and that of his respective subordinates until landed, but this command was rather for purposes of protection on the voyage and for assurance of a regulated landing than for coordination of even initial operations ashore with those of the Amphibious Force. From the outset therefore little if any unity of command was effected in the amphibious operations of the Southwest Pacific, and it is a tribute to the cooperative spirit and efforts of the Army and Navy commanders rather than an evidence of the effectiveness of the system that the operations in that area were successful.

Surveying these three systems in the light of experience, it is

believed that the establishment and maintenance of a unity of command, from the inception of the amphibious campaign until a satisfactory military situation on the beachhead is achieved, is highly desirable. It is believed that this unity of command should be vested in the Amphibious Force Commander. He has an organized command, with established communications, and, free from immediate distractions of establishing headquarters in the face of the enemy, has a better perspective of the situation as a whole. Again, and this is seldom recognized, the actual number of personnel in his Force of transports and fire and air support units is greater, and his fire power far greater, than those of the landing force. For instance at Palau, with approximately 40,000 troops embarked, the total naval personnel at the objective engaged in the assault was over 60,000.

IV. COMMAND OF ACCESSORY FORCES

An amphibious expedition is comprised usually of one or more convoys containing the attack landing forces and of accessory combatant forces screening and escorting these convoys, and other combatant forces preparing the objective for the arrival of the convoys by bombardment, bombing, minesweeping, and clearance of beach obstacles. Other combatant forces of major character may be waging a major campaign of which the amphibious operation is a part, or may be covering and protecting that operation by relatively distant activities against enemy surface forces and enemy air bases within attacking distance of our Amphibious Forces enroute to and at the objective.

In all the areas in which the Third Amphibious Force has been engaged, the covering forces have been operated directly by a Fleet Commander. In the South Pacific paucity of combatant vessels prevented

the assignment of ships to intensive advance preparation of the objective, and the necessity of surprise due to the proximity of enemy air bases precluded such preparation. Hence no preparatory forces were allotted to the amphibious expedition.

In the Central Pacific the preparatory forces were assigned to the Commander Joint Expeditionary Force, the Amphibious Commander, who thus controlled the advance preparation of the objective and the operation of the fire support and air support forces during and after the landing.

In the Southwest Pacific the Fleet Commander designated himself as the Commander of the attack operations and utilized the majority of the combatant forces available to him directly for the preparation of the objective and the immediate support of the landing operation.

It is believed that the Central Pacific system is entirely satisfactory, wherein the Fleet Commander is in overall command of both the activities of the Fleet distant from the objective and, through the Expeditionary Force, the activities at the objective, and wherein the immediate supporting force for the preparation of the objective is placed under the command and at the disposal of the Commander Expeditionary Force. Although it is recognized that with the obligation of the major part of his Fleet to the immediate support of the landing operation, the Commander Seventh Fleet was well justified in assuming the immediate command of the attack operation on the objective, it is believed that in the main the actual amphibious attack should be controlled by and assigned to an Amphibious Force Commander, leaving the Fleet Commander in overall charge of that and of other activities of his Fleet.

V. HEADQUARTERS

Throughout its existence the Third Amphibious Force has been fortunate in that it has enjoyed the benefit of close proximity of its headquarters with those of coordinate and cooperating commands. Thus in the South Pacific immediately upon the final elimination of the Japanese from Guadalcanal, Rear Admiral Turner established his headquarters at Koli Point on that island. Commander Aircraft South Pacific was shortly thereafter located there and the Commanding General XIV Corps as well, and eventually the headquarters of the Third Marine Amphibious Corps were likewise established there. Thus all plans could be developed for the work of the landing forces, whether Army or Marines, and for the vital cooperation of the shore-based air forces, in concert with those for the Amphibious Forces proper. Personal contact between all echelons of the Staff could be and was maintained and a thorough understanding and completely integrated plans achieved in a minimum of time. Initially the headquarters of the principal subordinate commands of the Third Amphibious Force, the Transport Group and the Landing Craft, were at Noumea and in the Russells Islands, not far from Guadalcanal, respectively, but these two headquarters were also eventually set up at Koli Point, with consequent benefits. The final desideratum would have been the presence of the high command, the Commander South Pacific, in immediate proximity, but his headquarters were at Noumea, readily reached by a six-hour flight from Guadalcanal, and complete liaison was not difficult.

In the Central Pacific, in preparation for the Palau and Yap operation the headquarters of the Force were maintained at Pearl Harbor until departing for the operation, and were there in close contact with those of the Commander-in-Chief and of the Commander Third Fleet and also with

those of the designated Commander Expeditionary Forces, Major General Julian Smith, USMC, and of the XXIV Corps. Unfortunately the Third Amphibious Corps headquarters were engaged in the Guam campaign and complete contact with them could not be arranged until at Guadalcanal immediately prior to the expedition, when Rear Admiral Fort, in command of the Palau-Angaur attack, shifted his base from Pearl Harbor to the Guadalcanal area to embark the Third Marine Division and to meet there with the Third Amphibious Corps.

In the Southwest Pacific the Third Amphibious Force headquarters were established during the planning stage at the headquarters of Commander Seventh Fleet at Lake Sentani near Hollandia. GHQ of the Area Commander was there also and the Commanding General of the 6th Army and the Commander of the Seventh Amphibious Force nearby at Hollandia. This proximity enabled the rapid formulation of plans, necessitated by the advance of the Leyte operation from December 20th to October 20th, and later facilitated the preparation of the plans for the Lingayen operation in the relatively short interval between the Leyte and Lingayen attacks. The Group Commanders concerned in these two operations were likewise called, with their Staffs, to Hollandia for a brief planning period to assure complete integration of plans.

In general, headquarters were based ashore during the planning periods to provide accessibility from and to other headquarters, rather than on the flagship. In fact no definite flagship was assigned during the entire South Pacific campaign after the establishment of the headquarters ashore in Guadalcanal, and the Force Commander simply utilized the best fitted vessel, a transport or a destroyer, of the task force created for each specific operation. When, after leaving the South

Pacific, an AGC was definitely assigned, the Force Commander used her as a flagship for the final stages of preparation, including the rehearsal and for the actual operation, but normally prior to that time would proceed from point to point with the principal members of his Staff by air, the flagship following after, to avoid the loss of time and break of contact (in radio silence) with other headquarters.

On the basis of this experience, proximity of headquarters of the same echelon of command, of the Amphibious Force and of cooperating forces, is believed essential to the preparation of well integrated plans. Similarly, the presence of the principal subordinate commands of the Amphibious Force for a time at least during the planning period is highly desirable. Close contact with the high command is also very beneficial, but not as important as with the cooperating and subordinate commands. Headquarters ashore during planning periods are believed very desirable.

VI. STAFF ORGANIZATION

The Third Amphibious Force Staff comprised from its inception some Army and Marine officers as well as Naval officers, and hence was in a sense a joint Staff, although the preponderance of the officers was of the Navy. Aviation officers were also attached. In consequence, advices affecting all Services were available to the Force Commander.

The Staff initially was composed of a Chief of Staff, an Assistant Chief of Staff (Marine), whose province was military operations and logistics, an Operations Officer, and an Intelligence Officer (Marine, later Army). (All officers mentioned were of the Navy unless otherwise noted). A Transport Quartermaster (Marine), a Supply Officer, and a Medical Officer assisted the Assistant Chief of Staff. An Aviation Officer (Marine), Aerological Officer, Gunnery Officer and Communication Officer aided the

Operations Officer in the Operations Division. Assistants to these officers were supplied as necessary, and the usual Flag Secretary and Flag Lieutenant were also present.

Certain branches of the Staff required an unusual number of officers; for instance, for the extensive intelligence necessities assistants were necessary for map preparation, photo interpretation, and language interpretation; for communications a relatively large number of assistant communication officers was necessary because of the amount of coded radio traffic required to control and operate the several hundred vessels normally comprising the Force. Similarly the control of these vessels required several officers to assist the Operations Officer, one particularly in charge of the operation and maintenance of landing craft, and one the aircraft recognition officer for the promotion of recognition instruction in the Force.

Other officers normally attached to the Staff, but usually assigned to duty with vessels or with subordinate commands, were the Fighter Director Teams, and the Naval Gunfire Liaison Officers.

Later, after leaving the South Pacific theater, the Staff was maintained substantially as above but was increased by the addition of an Air Support Control Unit, technically a subordinate command but in effect a portion of the Staff, and by the addition of a Civil Engineer, a Beachmaster, a Public Information Officer, and several Beach Observers, young officers trained to observe and analyze beach and tidal conditions by aerial observations.

There was no specific planning section established in the Staff, but the principal officers in addition to their operational duties combined in working up the advance plans under the primary supervision of

the Assistant Chief of Staff and under the general direction of the Force Commander and the Chief of Staff. This system at times imposed a heavy burden upon officers who at the same time were carrying out one operation and making plans for the next, but it is believed to be in the main preferable to the establishment of a separate planning section which will not subsequently be responsible for the execution of those plans. Also it assures the application to the preparation of plans of the best experience and talent available.

(B). WRINKLES IN COMBAT OPERATIONS

Unloading

The primary attention in all amphibious assault plans is very properly given to the landing of the assault waves. A second and little less important activity is the unloading of the assault ships. Their cargo must be safely landed in order that the troops may have the munitions and equipment to fight with and the stores to sustain them. Rapid unloading is desirable to remove these essentials from their concentration on the vulnerable ships to dispersed and less vulnerable dumps ashore. Rapid unloading is further desirable in order that the ships may be removed from the danger area and the more quickly and the more surely be available to bring up reinforcement and resupply.

In the South Pacific campaign attack echelons were always exposed to frequent and repeated air attack from enemy air bases within easy flying range. Withdrawal from the objective by nightfall was necessary. Every effort was made to complete unloading in the daylight period of the assault in order that the ships might not be required to return the follow-

ing day to complete unloading. In general this was accomplished on small landings by using LST's rather than larger vessels for freight carriers; their beaching properties and the use of loaded trucks to reduce the bulk manhandled stores permitted their unloading in from 6 to 8 hours. At Bougainville, where transports and stores ships were used, eight of the twelve vessels were completely unloaded in 6 hours unloading time, the remainder of the daylight period having been absorbed in withdrawals and maneuvers to avoid two heavy air attacks. The remaining four vessels however were forced to return the following day to complete unloading. At Leyte and Lingayen heavier loads were carried and two days were necessary to unload, but fortunately the air threat was considerably less.

The utilization of cranes, tractors, and other beach gear will expedite unloading when conditions are suitable for their landing. Sole reliance however must not be placed upon them and adequate shore parties must be provided to unload the stores and to clear the beach. The best conditions will obtain when the beach is continually clear and ready to receive cargo from the ships as fast as the boats can be loaded at the ships and bring it in. That this apparently has never been achieved is no reason for not striving for it.

Experience indicates that a shore party of at least 20 per cent, and preferably 25 per cent, in number of the entire landing force is necessary for efficient operation. Rarely is more than 10 to 12 per cent provided. This shore party may be composed of engineers, prior to their field work, reserve combat troops, special labor battalions, or regularly organized shore parties such as the capable Engineer Shore and Boat Regiments of the Army. If shipping available does not permit carrying

personnel specifically designated for shore party work, then reserve troops or part of the combat troops must be assigned to and continued at this work until the supplies vital to the landing force are ashore and the ships are free to depart. It is recognized that this may result, when the total force which can be carried is severely restricted by shipping capacity, in the limitation of the combat objective because of the reduction of the available combat troops, but it is believed that a smaller position well established and well supported is preferable to a larger position inadequately supplied and lacking the means for sustained fighting effort.

Tugs

It was found most useful to have one or more tugs accompany each echelon, whether initial attack or supply and reinforcement echelon, in order to tow vessels disabled by enemy action, to remove landing craft unable to retract, and to salvage stranded vessels and boats. The first practice was to send tugs half way and have them on call, but later they accompanied the echelon throughout. At Bougainville two tugs dislodged the AMERICAN LEGION from an uncharted reef on which she had grounded; frequently tugs were able to pick up and tow to established bases ships of the amphibious echelons, or of the covering forces, which had been damaged by enemy bombs or torpedoes.

Black Cats

In the waters of the Solomons the work of the destroyers and PT boats against barges, and of the destroyers against "Tokyo Expresses", was much aided by the scouting abilities of night-flying radar-equipped Catalinas. These planes, ranging ahead of the surface vessels, with whom they were in radar contact, located and reported targets and gave

warning of approaching forces long before radar discovery by the surface vessels was practicable. They frequently spotted for destroyers on night bombardments of enemy positions. They were highly effective in all these capacities and the teamwork between them and the surface vessels was excellent.

Planes vs Surface Vessels

The usual difficulties of surface vessels firing upon friendly planes were met with at practically all objectives. No final remedies for this are apparent save increasing stress upon recognition by surface vessels and attention to approach procedures by the planes and avoidance by them, insofar as practicable consistent with the location of landing fields (the field at Tacloban was immediately adjacent to the anchorage of the Seventh Amphibious Force), of coming within gun range of the ships. IFF was not a fully satisfactory measure, as it was often out of order, or not turned on (it is understood that later the Japanese may have used it).

An unusual difficulty appeared in the Solomons however when planes on barge-hunts often mistook PT boats for their quarry and bombed and strafed them. Identification measures for the PT boats (colors, deck-marking, etc.) were not conclusive, and it became necessary to clear the PTs from the search areas by daylight. Even then one returning PT was attacked by a bomber. Although daily information was furnished air commands as to PT operating areas for the night, this information did not always reach the planes, or was not absorbed by them. The most careful coordination is necessary in such circumstances.

LCI Gunboats

This subsequently most useful type of light vessel was improvised

first in the South Pacific in the summer of 1943 by increasing the armament of the normal LCI in the endeavor to provide a vessel better equipped to combat the larger size armored barges which the Japs were beginning to use in counter to the PT boats. The gunboats were effective in anti-barge work in the fall of 1943 around Treasury Islands and Bougainville, backing up the faster but less powerful PT boats. They first proved their abilities in support of actual landings when they accompanied the boat waves at the Treasury Islands landing on 27 October 1943 and silenced effectively machine gun fire flanking the landing boats as they approached the beach.

Short Notice Operations

Frequently intelligence would be received at mid-day or later of enemy destroyers headed from Rabaul or Buka, presumably to engage in operations of reinforcement or evacuation of enemy positions in the Central Solomons. Our destroyers, when not engaged in escort of supply echelons or in anti-barge operations in "The Slot", were normally based at Tulagi or Purvis Bay and immediate departure would be necessary in order that they might intercept the enemy. They were in direct communication on a Force radio circuit with the Force Headquarters at Guadalcanal. A practice was developed of starting the destroyers by some such message as "UNDERWAY IMMEDIATELY X UP SLOT 25 KNOTS X MORE LATER", short and quickly coded and decoded. While they were getting underway and proceeding, the full operation dispatch with all available intelligence was drafted, coded, dispatched, and in turn decoded on receipt. Several hours were often gained by the use of this "more later" system.

LST Armament

In the small convoys in the South Pacific often neither the armament of the escorts nor the amount of air cover available was sufficient to prevent air attacks getting in on the convoy by day, and by night with no fighter cover the convoy was liable to air attack. In consequence the convoyed vessels required the maximum practicable anti-aircraft armament. Additional 40mm guns were procured and mounted permanently on LST's to a total of 7 per ship, later made the standard armament for that type. In addition however the 40mm guns which might be comprised in the equipment of the troops embarked in the LST's were mounted at every available position on deck on the LST, thus providing those vessels with a formidable and effective short-range anti-aircraft battery.

Smoke

The now well-established method of protecting amphibious vessels at anchor at night at an objective by a smoke pall was employed at Leyte and at Lingayen with complete effectiveness. It was found best to start the smoke an hour and one-quarter before sunrise and again twenty minutes before sunset, thus assuring complete protection (unless wind conditions were adverse) during the critical periods of first light and last light when fighter cover, even if present, was unable to determine their enemy targets but yet the enemy planes could make out the larger bulk of the ships. Smoke cover was also used at intervals of Red alerts at night, particularly during moonlight, but was not entirely satisfactory, because the time required to produce adequate coverage was greater than that required for the approach of the planes in land-locked areas such as Leyte

and Lingayen where radar discovery at a distance was impracticable. The limitations of smoke supplies prevented the desirable maintenance of smoke coverage continually throughout the night. The recently authorized conversion of small oil tanks to contain fog oil should be most advantageous in permitting the carriage of adequate supplies of smoke material for extensive use.

Smoke was used on occasion to screen LST convoys underway against night attack and in general was effective, particularly one instance where the attacking planes were unable to locate any bombing target. On one or two occasions smoke was laid between the convoy and the moon, to foil enemy planes detected by radar as approaching from the down-moon side of the convoy; the planes failed to attack, which may have resulted from the effect of the smoke in reducing the silhouette against the moon path.

Trailers

In the South Pacific, where rapidity of unloading was necessary to reduce the time on the beach and exposed to air attack from operating enemy air bases, every effort was made to increase the proportion of the LST load which could be mounted on wheels and thus readily unloaded. Trucks required too much space for their cargo capacity. A form of 20-ton flat bed trailer was procured in some quantity and promised to be of great value for such operations, but before their delivery and test in quantity under combat conditions the South Pacific campaign was terminated and the necessity of rapid unloading and the advantage of the use of these trailers was not present in later operations. Under similar conditions in the future, however, of a necessary rapid evacuation of the LST's from the beach, it is believed the

trailers would prove most valuable.

Barrage Balloons

The use of barrage balloons mounted on vessels was the subject of controversy in the South Pacific because of their disadvantage, particularly underway, in marking out targets perhaps otherwise undiscovered by enemy planes. A small number were procured, however, for use on LST's and a compromise system of use prescribed, i.e., they should be carried housed in normal cruising and elevated underway only when an attack was imminent, but they might be kept aloft when the LST's were based at a known objective. The proponents of the balloons claimed that they would distract dive bombing attacks and would dissuade if not prevent torpedo plane attacks. But few balloons were available and of these a number were lost through wind action in an LST convoy, with only a small number left for use after arrival on the beach. It was claimed, but not substantiated, that one enemy plane was brought down by them. In general, the opinion in the area was against their use, although admittedly insufficient experience was obtained to warrant final conclusions.

Beach Observations

Every attempt was made by study of vertical and oblique photographs and analysis of tide and wind conditions to predict expected surf conditions on the beach and to determine beach gradients. When advance reconnaissance of the beach by UDT's was feasible the beach gradients could be definitely found thereby. For final determination of surf conditions, however, several young officers were trained as aerial beach observers to fly over the beaches early on D-Day and report the character of the surf. Their observations were valuable and the future use of such observers is recommended.