

COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE U.S. TENTH ARMY  
DURING THE BATTLE OF OKINAWA

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## ABSTRACT

COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE U.S. TENTH ARMY DURING THE BATTLE OF OKINAWA, by Major Paul E. Cunningham II, 122 pages.

From 1 April 1945 to 21 June 1945, the United States Tenth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner, Jr., executed Operation Iceberg--the seizure of Okinawa for use as a staging base for the expected invasion of Japan. The Tenth Army, which included the U.S. Army's XXIV Corps and the U.S. Marines Corps' III Amphibious Corps, executed an amphibious assault on Okinawa against the Japanese 32nd Army. The Japanese defenders allowed the Tenth Army to land virtually unopposed, preferring to fight a battle of attrition from strong fortifications. The Tenth Army rapidly seized the lightly defended northern end of the island, but became quickly bogged down against the main Japanese defensive belt on southern Okinawa. Japanese air power repeatedly assaulted the supporting Allied naval force with massed *kamikaze* attacks, resulting in heavy casualties. Ultimately, Lt. Gen. Buckner committed both corps to a frontal attack on the Japanese defenses in southern Okinawa and the campaign lasted some eighty two days before the final collapse of the 32nd Army. This thesis examines the effectiveness of Buckner and his staff's command and control of the Tenth Army. Buckner and his staff succeeded, but flaws in Buckner's generalship and his staff's failure to provide him with an accurate battlefield picture prolonged the campaign.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Large military operations are complex, multilayered undertakings in which groups of men and equipment collide in the violent pursuit of tactical, operational, and strategic objectives. No human endeavor imposes a greater burden upon leaders, whose actions dictate success and failure, life and death. Military leaders direct their troops in battle through the exercise of command and control. This thesis examines one such leader, Lieutenant General Simon B. Bolivar Buckner, Jr., and his staff, exploring their successes and shortcomings in the command and control of the United States Tenth Army during the Battle of Okinawa.

#### Prelude to Iceberg

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 drew the United States into war against the Japanese Empire. The Japanese scored numerous early victories in the war, including the invasion and occupation of the Philippines and the capture of Attu and Kiska in Alaska's Aleutian Island chain. However, after the American victory at the Battle of Midway in June 1942, the tide had turned against the Japanese. The Allies, backed by the weight of the United States' fully mobilized industrial capacity, began an inexorable march toward Japan.

In late September 1944, Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas, met with the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest King, in San Francisco to discuss the next moves in the war against the Japanese Empire. Admiral King favored the invasion of Formosa as a prelude to the ultimate assault upon the

Japanese home islands. Nimitz held a different position. After consulting with his staff and senior commanders, Nimitz had concluded that an invasion of Formosa was not feasible due to resource limitations and the Japanese strength on the island. Nimitz made his case to King, recommending the seizure of Iwo Jima, followed by the invasion of Okinawa, in the Ryukyus Islands. Nimitz believed that, if the main purpose of the Formosa operation was to acquire air bases from which to bomb Japan, that it could be achieved at a lower cost in men and resources by capturing positions in the Ryukyus.<sup>1</sup> The Ryukyus offered a naval anchorage at Okinawa and were within medium bomber range of Japan, with planners estimating that seven hundred eighty bombers and the necessary number of fighters could be based there.<sup>2</sup> Nimitz outlined his arguments convincingly, swaying King to his point of view.

King subsequently recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff the adoption of Nimitz's course of action, in conjunction with the invasion of the Philippines by General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area forces. On October 3, 1944, the Joint Chiefs ordered Nimitz to seize Iwo Jima and Okinawa. The projected Okinawa campaign, along with the Philippines and Iwo Jima operations, were "calculated to maintain unremitting pressure against Japan and to effect the attrition of its military forces."<sup>3</sup> The operation to invade Okinawa received the codename, Iceberg.

### The Ryukyus and Okinawa

The Okinawa group of approximately fifty islands is part of the Ryukyus Islands archipelago, located southwest of Japan and northeast of Formosa and the Philippines. The main island of Okinawa lies less than four hundred nautical miles from the Japanese home islands. The main island is surrounded by smaller islands, including the Kerama

Islands and Ie Shima. The island of Okinawa is approximately sixty miles long and has a maximum width of eighteen miles. At the Ishikawa Isthmus, which separates the island into two distinct regions, Okinawa is only two miles wide. North of the isthmus, approximately two thirds of the island's total area, the terrain is mountainous and heavily wooded, with peaks rising up to fifteen hundred feet. Below the isthmus, the terrain features mostly rolling, lightly wooded country, broken by ridges and ravines. The peaks in the south rarely exceed five hundred feet, rising above mostly arable land. Okinawa's tropical climate is characterized by hot summers, moderate winters, high humidity, and heavy annual precipitation, with the heaviest rains occurring from May through September.

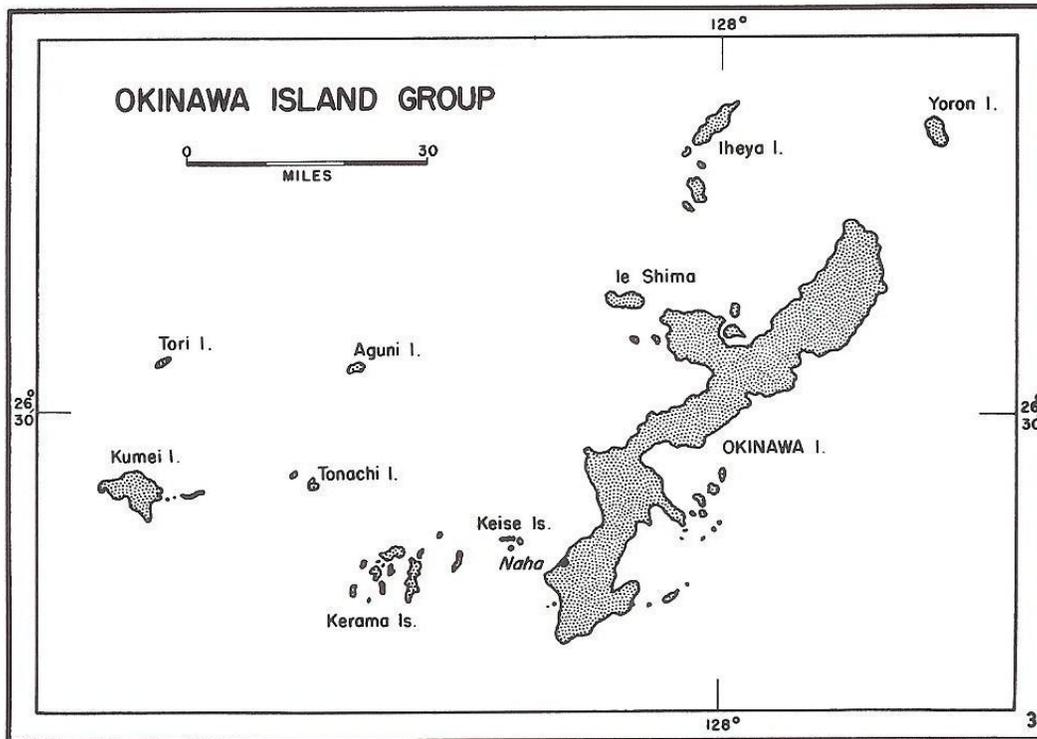


Figure 1. The Okinawa Island Group

Source: Roy A. Appleman, et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948), 6.

In 1940, Okinawa had a population of nearly five hundred thousand people.<sup>4</sup> Most of the people lived on the southern third of the island and led an agrarian existence. The two largest cities, both located in the south, were Shuri and Naha. As a prefecture of Japan, Okinawa fell firmly under Japanese control. Although the Japanese dominated the island, applying a thin veneer of Japanese culture to the natives, the Okinawans retained their own culture, religion, and form of ancestor worship, characterized by the lyre-shaped tombs dotting the countryside.<sup>5</sup> The Japanese citizens residing on Okinawa kept the native islanders in a position of inferiority, spawning resentment amongst the Okinawans. The Japanese government also imposed mandatory military service on Okinawan men.

#### The American Forces

Admiral Nimitz assigned the principal mission of seizing Okinawa to Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, Commander of the U.S. Fifth Fleet and the Central Pacific Task Forces. Admiral Spruance's forces consisted of naval covering forces (Task Force 50), which he personally commanded, a Joint Expeditionary Force (Task Force 51), commanded by Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, and the Expeditionary Troops (Task Force 56), consisting of the U.S. Tenth Army, commanded by Army Lieutenant General Simon B. Bolivar Buckner, Jr. (see figure 2).

Since Operation Iceberg required a field army to engage in prolonged ground combat on a large island close to mainland Japan, Nimitz found it necessary to clearly define the relationships between Army and Navy commanders during successive phases of the operation.<sup>6</sup> He designated the initial chain of command for the amphibious operations phase of the campaign as Buckner reporting to Turner, who reported to

Spruance. Once Admiral Spruance determined the amphibious phase of the operation was complete, Buckner would assume command of all forces ashore, reporting to Spruance as he defended and developed the captured positions. Nimitz planned that Buckner would eventually take complete control of all forces in the Ryukyus and report directly to him.

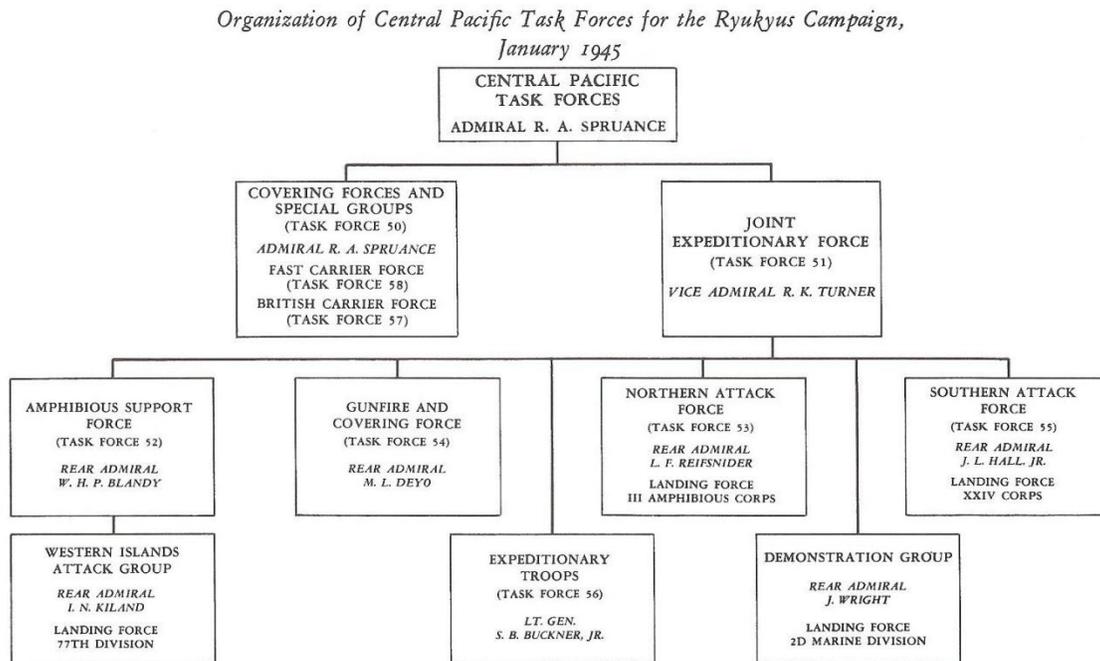


Figure 2. Central Pacific Task Forces Organization

Source: Roy A. Appleman, et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948), 22.

The United States Tenth Army was activated on Oahu, Hawaiian Islands, in June 1944, with Buckner officially assuming command on September 4, 1944. Buckner's Tenth Army not only included the assault troops for the attack on Okinawa, but also a tactical air force, a naval force, and an Island Command, which would oversee the base

development of the islands for use in the ultimate push against the Japanese home islands. Buckner's main ground combat elements consisted of the U.S. Army's XXIV Corps, commanded by Major General John R. Hodge, and the U.S. Marine Corps' III Amphibious Corps, commanded by Major General Roy S. Geiger. Each of these formations contained two divisions. Additionally, Buckner would have control of three other divisions, one Marine and two Army, in reserve (see figure 3). Buckner would command a total of 183,000 troops during the assault phases of the operation. Approximately 154,000 of these troops made up the ranks of the seven combat divisions, which were reinforced with tank battalions, amphibian truck and tractor battalions, joint assault signal companies, and numerous other attached service units.<sup>7</sup>

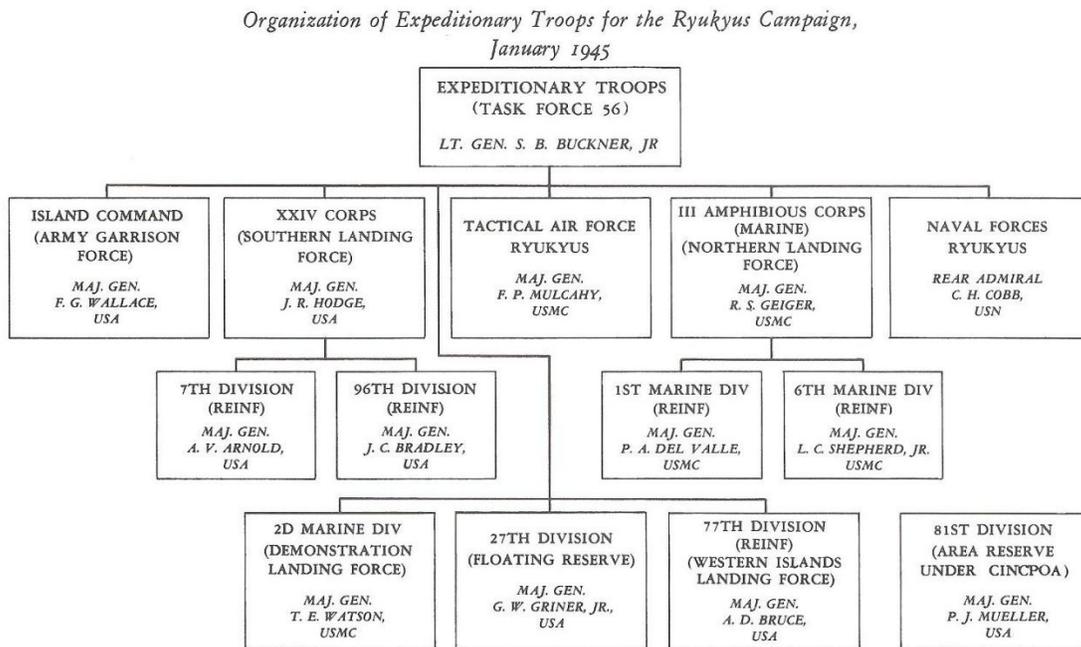


Figure 3. Tenth Army Organization

Source: Roy A. Appleman, et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948), 24.

## The Japanese Forces

The defense of the Ryukyus rested with the Japanese 32nd Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima. The 32nd Army, initially commanded by Lt. Gen. Masao Watanabe, was activated in April 1944. Ushijima assumed command in August 1944, after Watanabe was bedridden and sent back to Japan due to chronic gastroenteritis.<sup>8</sup> Ushijima commanded an infantry group in Burma early in the war and assumed command of the 32nd Army after serving as the Commandant of the Japanese Military Academy at Zama. Ushijima was a calm, capable, and professional officer who inspired confidence among his men.<sup>9</sup> Keeping faith with long-standing Japanese military tradition, Ushijima generally entrusted all operational details to his subordinates but always assumed full responsibility for the outcome.<sup>10</sup> With Ushijima came his chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Isamu Cho, a colorful and charismatic officer. Cho was well known within the Japanese armed forces as a result of his decisive, forceful personality, and his aggressive spirit. He cared greatly for his subordinates, although he was known to occasionally defy his superiors, and was even rumored to have thrown punches at senior officers during drinking parties.<sup>11</sup> Upon arrival on Okinawa, Ushijima and Cho proceeded to reconstitute the staff, filling it with bright young officers from the Japanese Imperial Headquarters. The only holdover from the previous staff was Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, a reputedly brilliant tactician, who served as the senior staff officer in charge of operations.<sup>12</sup> With “Ushijima’s mature judgment, Cho’s supple mind and aggressive energy, and the shrewd discernment of Yahara,” the 32nd Army was in capable hands.<sup>13</sup>

With Ushijima and his staff firmly established, the Japanese Imperial Headquarters finished assigning units to the 32nd Army. The force was composed

primarily of four divisions, five mixed brigades, and one artillery regiment, with total Japanese strength in the Ryukyus reaching a peak strength of approximately 180,000 troops.<sup>14</sup> On the main island of Okinawa, the Japanese strength, including native Okinawans conscripted into service, was likely between 95,000 and 100,000 troops.<sup>15</sup> The main Japanese fighting units on Okinawa included the 24th and 62nd Infantry Divisions, the 44th Independent Mixed Brigade, the 27th Tank Regiment, and various artillery and mortar units.<sup>16</sup> The 9th Division was originally part of the 32nd Army on Okinawa, but the Imperial Headquarters sent it to the Philippines in November 1944, and later to Formosa, leaving the 32nd Army at an even greater numerical disadvantage to the attacking Americans.<sup>17</sup> Although not part of the 32nd Army, another prominent player in the defense of Okinawa was the Japanese Navy's Special Attack Corps--also known as the *Kamikaze*.

### The American Plan

To facilitate planning, Admiral Nimitz's staff conducted a comprehensive study of Okinawa and the surrounding islands. This joint staff study provided the basis on which the major participating commands began their planning. The American planners divided Operation Iceberg into three phases. The first phase consisted of the seizure of southern Okinawa, the Kerama Islands (known as the Kerama Retto), and Keise Shima. The Americans would also initiate base development operations during the initial phase. The Kerama Retto provided an anchorage and logistics base for the naval forces supporting the operation, and Keise Shima would permit field artillery to support the amphibious landings at Hagushi. The second phase consisted of the seizure of Ie Shima and the northern portion of Okinawa. The third phase planned for the seizure and

development of additional islands in the Okinawa area.<sup>18</sup> The day for the landing of the main assault force on Okinawa, set for April 1, 1945, was ironically designated as L-Day, or Love Day, in the military parlance of the time.

To set the conditions for the invasion, carrier and land-based aircraft would operationally isolate Okinawa to facilitate the movement forward of the amphibious forces to the objective area. The 77th Infantry Division would land and seize the Kerama Retto and Keise Shima six days prior to L-Day, and the naval gunfire and covering forces would pave the way for amphibious forces to approach the beaches and land the troops. The Tenth Army planners selected the Hagushi beaches on the west coast of Okinawa as the primary landing beaches. Once the assault forces landed on Okinawa, the naval forces would provide naval gunfire and air support for the land operations of Buckner's Tenth Army. Also on L-Day, the 2nd Marine Division would conduct an amphibious feint at Minatoga on the southeast coast of Okinawa.

On L-Day, the Tenth Army's assault forces, consisting of the XXIV Corps and the III Amphibious Corps, would land abreast on the Hagushi beaches. Maj. Gen. Geiger's III Amphibious Corps would land in the north, with Maj. Gen. Hodge's XXIV Corps landing in the south. Tenth Army would isolate the southern part of the island by seizing the Ishikawa Isthmus to prevent enemy reinforcement from the north, followed by XXIV Corps attacking to the south to clear the entire southern portion of Okinawa of the Japanese defenders.<sup>19</sup> Buckner and his commanders hoped to use maneuver to the utmost, cutting across the island quickly, moving rapidly south, and breaking up the Japanese forces, bypassing strong points, and mopping up remaining resistance at their leisure.<sup>20</sup> In case the landing on the west coast was not feasible due to enemy

dispositions or weather and surf conditions, Tenth Army developed an alternate plan for landing on the southeast coast of Okinawa.

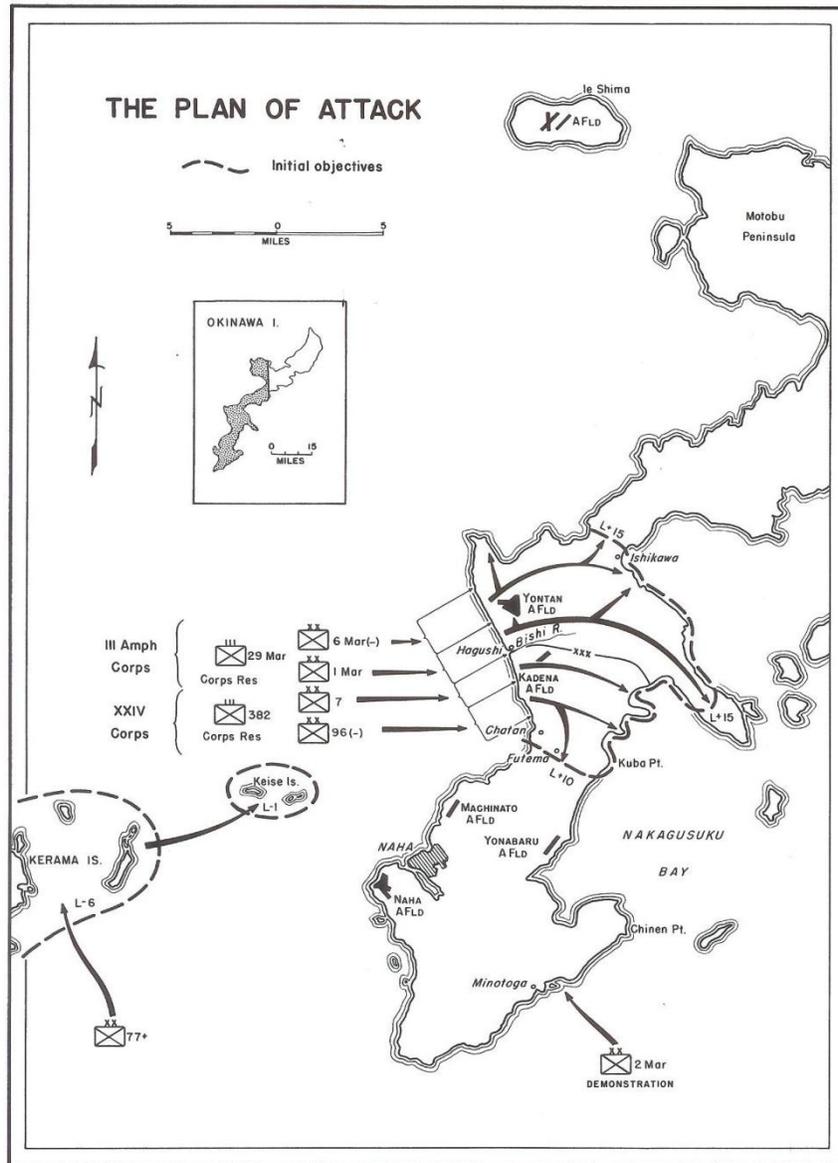


Figure 4. U.S. Tenth Army Attack Plan

Source: Roy A. Appleman, et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948), 30.

## The Japanese Plan

The Japanese Imperial Headquarters considered Okinawa to be a focal point in the defense of their home islands.<sup>21</sup> At this point in the war, they intended to delay the inexorable advance on Japan by all means, dealing the heaviest possible cost to the Allies in the process, and buying time to avert total defeat. The original battle plans designed by the Japanese Imperial Headquarters called for Japanese air power to be the decisive element in defeating an American attack against Okinawa, with 32nd Army playing a supporting role.<sup>22</sup> Japanese aircraft would destroy the American invasion forces while it was aboard ship, before the invading troops could land. The plan for this massed air attack on the amphibious forces, using both conventional bombs and *kamikaze* attacks, was designated Operation Ten-Go.<sup>23</sup>

In light of this overall strategy, the 32nd Army staff began their planning. After considering several options, Col. Yahara favored concentrating the majority of the defenders in the most tactically defensible terrain on the southern third of the island. This course of action called for a battle of attrition, representing a stark contrast to the usual Japanese doctrine of decisive battle in close combat.<sup>24</sup> Maj. Gen. Cho endorsed this course of action, and Lt. Gen. Ushijima approved its implementation. As the plan evolved, the 32nd Army staff harbored serious doubts that Japanese air power could interdict the American invasion force. They minimized offensive planning and sought to shorten the 32nd Army's lines, settling on a vigorous defense in depth of only the southern eighth of the island, leaving the Hagushi beaches and their adjacent airfields virtually uncontested.<sup>25</sup> The 62nd Division would occupy the northernmost defensive positions, with the 24th Division occupying the southernmost positions. The 44th

Independent Mixed Brigade would defend at the Yonabaru Peninsula on the southeastern coast of the island. A small, two-battalion force would defend at the Motobu Peninsula on the northern part of the island and a small force would defend Ie Shima.

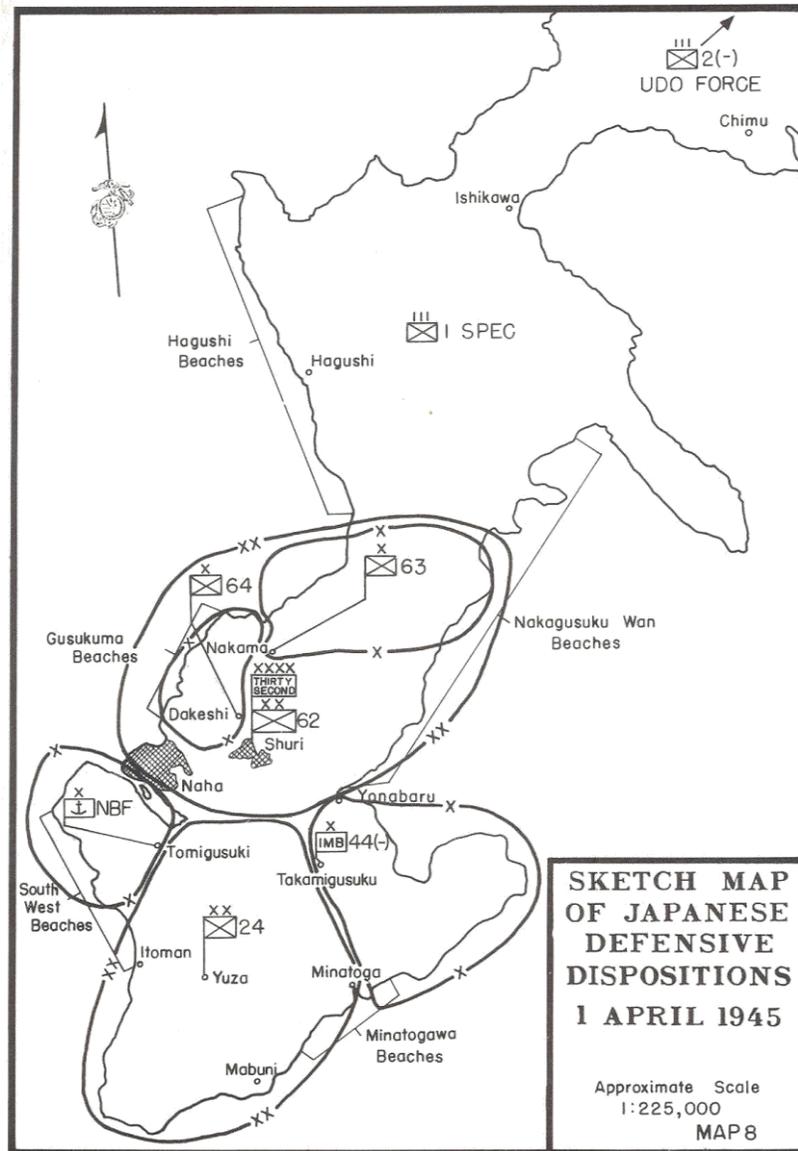


Figure 5. Japanese 32nd Army Defensive Plan, Southern Okinawa  
 Source: Chas S. Nichols, Jr. and Henry I. Shaw, Jr. *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch U.S. Marine Corps, 1955), 61.

In developing their plan, the 32nd Army staff carefully analyzed the anticipated force and firepower ratios between themselves and the expected American invasion force. They calculated that the Americans would land six to ten divisions, with twelve times the overall ground firepower of the Japanese, not including airpower and naval gunfire. Yahara argued that the 32nd Army could defeat the Americans' numerical and technological advantage through the use of robust earthen fortifications, taking advantage of the numerous natural caves on Okinawa. With Cho's approval he prepared and distributed a pamphlet called "The Road to Certain Victory," which communicated the necessity of constructing stalwart defensive positions.<sup>26</sup> The units of the 32nd Army proceeded to vigorously construct, mostly by hand, a dazzling network of caves and tunnels from which to mount their defense while withstanding the massive bombardment sure to be unleashed by the Americans.

#### Setting Conditions for L-Day

Preparatory operations for the invasion of Okinawa began on 18 March, when Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher and the carrier-based aircraft of his Task Force 58 attacked airfields on the Japanese home island of Kyushu. Task Force 58 continued operations against mainland Japan until shifting its focus to the Ryukyus on March 23, when it conducted pre-landing bombings of Okinawa. On 27 and 31 March, American B-29 bombers attacked airfields on Kyushu, causing enough damage to close down these air bases for several days for repairs.<sup>27</sup> The damage to these airfields hindered the ability of the Japanese aircraft to carry out their wishful plan of interdicting the American amphibious forces prior to their landing on Okinawa.

By 23 March, the transports loaded with the 77th Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Andrew Bruce, arrived in the vicinity of the Kerama Retto. The Japanese Imperial Headquarters misread the air attacks as harassment strikes and incorrectly dubbed the transports near the Keramas a diversion.<sup>28</sup> On March 26, the 77th Infantry Division landed on the Kerama Retto, completing the capture of the islands against light resistance by March 29, thereby providing anchorage for the supporting fleet. American artillery units occupied Keise Shima on March 31 and were quickly prepared to provide indirect fire support to the L-Day landings.

The U.S. Navy spared no expense in its preparatory operations prior to L-Day. To pave the way for the main invasion force, minesweeping ships trolled the seas around Okinawa in the two weeks leading up to L-Day, covering some 2,500 square miles of ocean, discovering six Japanese minefields, and destroying one hundred eighty four mines.<sup>29</sup> In the days just prior to L-Day, carrier-based aircraft and naval gunfire pounded known and suspected Japanese positions on Okinawa. In the seven days prior to L-Day, naval guns fired over 13,000 large-caliber (six-inch to sixteen-inch) rounds at ground targets, expending more than five thousand tons of ammunition.<sup>30</sup> As March 31 drew to a close, the conditions were set for Tenth Army's amphibious landings on the main island of Okinawa. The massive invasion fleet, totaling one thousand six hundred seagoing ships, closed in around Okinawa.<sup>31</sup> H-Hour was set for 0830, April 1, 1945.

### Love Day

Just before dawn on L-Day, the naval gunfire support force began its pre-landing bombardment of the beaches, firing the heaviest ever naval gunfire concentration in support of an amphibious assault.<sup>32</sup> Lt. Gen. Ushijima and his commanders stood atop

Mount Shuri, observing the landing forces, marveling at the “earthshaking bombardment, vast and oddly magnificent in its effect.”<sup>33</sup> Carefully choreographed waves of landing craft swept onto the Hagushi beaches, disgorging the soldiers and marines of XXIV Corps and III Amphibious Corps. With the 32nd Army following its plan of allowing the landings to proceed unopposed, the Tenth Army’s landings went largely according to plan, with little confusion and disorganization.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the 2nd Marine Division executed its amphibious feint off the southeastern coast of Okinawa, above Minatoga. An estimated 50,000 troops landed on the Hagushi beaches during the first eight hours on L-Day, establishing the beach head against muted Japanese resistance, pushing up to five thousand yards inland.<sup>35</sup>

Colonel Yahara proudly observed the landings from Mount Shuri, knowing that events proceeded exactly according to his painstakingly conceived defensive plan. Yahara surmised that the American invaders, meeting no resistance at the beaches, “must be thinking gleefully that they have passed through a breach in the Japanese defense. They will be wrong.”<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately for Yahara and the 32nd Army, Japanese aircraft failed to make anything more than a token appearance on L-Day, prevented from launching large *kamikaze* attacks against the massed amphibious forces on the sea because of the late March attacks on the Kyushu airfields by Task Force 58 and the Army Air Force.<sup>37</sup> As L-Day drew to a close, the real fighting for Okinawa had yet to begin.

### Encountering the Shuri Line

The first several days of the invasion of Okinawa proceeded much like L-Day. XXIV Corps and III Amphibious Corps quickly succeeded in reaching the east coast, cutting the island in half and isolating southern Okinawa. On April 3, XXIV Corps

turned its movement to the south, advancing with the 7th Infantry Division in the east and the 96th Infantry Division in the west. The corps advanced steadily south, meeting increasing resistance as it passed through the 32nd Army's defensive outposts. On April 5, the Japanese resistance to the XXIV Corps' advance markedly increased. Japanese units fought tenaciously in the defense of their outposts, inflicting more than fifteen hundred battle casualties on the XXIV Corps.<sup>38</sup> By April 8, the XXIV Corps advance ground to a halt against the Kakazu Ridge and the outer ring of the 32nd Army's main defensive position, the Shuri line. Meanwhile, the III Amphibious Corps encountered little resistance in the north and was ordered by Lt. Gen. Buckner accomplish the Phase II task of seizing the northern end of the island, ahead of the planned schedule.

#### *Kamikaze Attacks*

Japanese air power failed to interdict the American invasion fleet before and during the initial amphibious landings on Okinawa, but they finally joined the action with a vengeance on April 6. The Imperial Headquarters launched Operation Ten-Go, initiating a desperate assault of wave after wave of *kamikazes*, targeting the supporting American fleet around Okinawa. On April 6 alone, the Japanese attacked with more than four hundred aircraft from Kyushu.<sup>39</sup> Throughout the campaign, the Japanese conducted numerous massed *kamikaze* attacks, totaling thousands of aircraft, inflicting significant damage and casualties on the naval forces in the waters around Okinawa. A dramatic example of the ferocity of the *kamikaze* attacks occurred on April 16, when the Japanese attacked with one hundred sixty five aircraft. The USS *Laffey*, a radar picket ship, was attacked twenty two times over an eighty-minute period, sustaining six *kamikaze* hits, and

suffering the loss of thirty one crewmen killed in action.<sup>40</sup> Miraculously, the ship remained afloat.

The Japanese surface fleet also joined the fighting, launching an attack group, including the super-battleship *Yamato*, from the East China Sea toward Okinawa. American submarines detected the movement of the group, and American carrier aircraft intercepted the group well before it reached Okinawa. The aircraft attacked the group on April 7, sinking the *Yamato*, a cruiser, and four destroyers.<sup>41</sup> The Japanese Navy mounted no other significant threat for the rest of the campaign.

#### XXIV Corps Continues the Attack

From April 9 to 12, the 96th Infantry Division mounted determined assaults upon the Japanese defensive positions on the Kakazu Ridge, a line of hills on the outer ring of the Shuri line. The Japanese defenders mounted a fierce resistance and the fighting bogged down into a stalemate, with the Americans unable to continue the advance, and the Japanese unable to drive them back. Simultaneously, the 7th Infantry Division on the eastern flank of the corps attacked the 32nd Army's defensive positions, with little success. By April 12, the momentum of the attack dissolved across the entire corps front.

Bowing to pressure from his fiery chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ushijima ordered a limited counterattack by elements of the 62nd and 24th Divisions. On the night of 12-13 April, these forces attempted to infiltrate through American lines in hopes of negating the effects of American fire support.<sup>42</sup> The Japanese attack met defeat, failing to dislodge the Americans and resulting in an estimated five hundred Japanese troops killed.<sup>43</sup> By April 14, the Japanese reverted to the defensive and the line stabilized in the XXIV Corps sector.

### Conquest of Northern Okinawa

After Lt. Gen. Buckner's order of April 5, the III Amphibious Corps advanced rapidly to the north, encountering limited resistance against scattered Japanese forces. By April 7, the marines began probing the Japanese defenses on the Motobu Peninsula, the only point of determined defense on northern Okinawa. On April 14, the 6th Marine Division attacked, systematically overtaking the Japanese positions in difficult mountain terrain, breaking the enemy defenses on 18 April. The Japanese forces suffered heavy losses as they finally withdrew from their positions on the Motobu Peninsula. The Japanese troops retained enough force to conduct organized guerilla operations, and the 6th Marine Division spent the next two and a half weeks patrolling and reducing remaining Japanese pockets of resistance.<sup>44</sup>

At the urging of Admiral Spruance, Lt. Gen. Buckner ordered Maj. Gen. Bruce and his 77th Infantry Division to seize the island of Ie Shima, off the Motobu Peninsula, ahead of schedule. Ie Shima, part of the Phase II portion of Operation Iceberg, had value because of its large airfield. The division landed on Ie Shima on April 16 and proceeded to clear the island against determined Japanese resistance over several days of hard fighting. Maj. Gen. Bruce declared Ie Shima secure on April 21, after his division killed nearly five thousand Japanese troops while suffering over one thousand killed, wounded, and missing of their own.<sup>45</sup>

### The First Shuri Defensive Ring Falls

On April 19, the XXIV Corps, now reinforced by the 27th Infantry Division which landed at Hagushi on April 10, mounted another attack on the initial defensive ring of the Shuri line. Maj. Gen. Hodge and his troops planned and prepared for the attack for

more than a week and hoped that a strong assault by three divisions abreast would smash the Shuri line.<sup>46</sup> The attack conspicuously failed, gaining no breakthroughs across the front and costing XXIV Corps more than seven hundred casualties in a day's fighting.<sup>47</sup> The 32nd Army was executing its battle of attrition with the utmost of effectiveness. The 7th, 27th, and 96th Infantry Divisions renewed their attacks over the next several days, finally forcing the stubborn Japanese defenders to withdraw from their defensive positions on April 23. By April 24, the first ring of the Shuri defensive line fell to XXIV Corps.

#### XXIV Corps Reinforced

After the first ring of the Japanese defense dissolved, Lt. Gen. Buckner reinforced the battered XXIV Corps with the 77th Infantry Division and the 1st Marine Division, while rotating the 96th and 27th Infantry Divisions off the front line. Although some of his subordinate commanders suggested mounting an alternate amphibious landing at Minatoga, behind the Japanese defenses, Buckner forged ahead with his plan to press the attack with XXIV Corps against the Shuri line. XXIV Corps continued its attack to the south, making meager, painstaking gains against the furiously defended 32nd Army positions. Much hard fighting lay ahead in southern Okinawa.

#### The 32nd Army Counterattacks

During the first month of the battle, Lt. Gen. Ushijima's 32nd Army tenaciously executed its defense in depth, just as Col. Yahara's strategy had entailed. The Japanese defenders exacted a heavy toll on the American attackers for the taking of the first Shuri line. At a conference in the 32nd Army command cave on April 20, Maj. Gen. Cho and

other members of the staff believed the time had come to strike a decisive blow at the Tenth Army. Cho pushed for aggressive action, convincing Ushijima to endorse a massive counterattack. Col. Yahara, holding firm to his defensive plan, opposed the attack as premature, but was overridden.<sup>48</sup> Careful planning proceeded for a counterattack against the XXIV Corps lines, scheduled for May 4. The Japanese skillfully concealed their attack preparations, repositioning artillery and logistics to support the offensive.<sup>49</sup>

The 32nd Army began its counterattack at dawn on May 4. They launched a small amphibious assault south of the Hagushi beaches, only to be cut to pieces, losing five hundred to eight hundred men and all of their landing craft.<sup>50</sup> The Japanese 24th Division attacked the 7th and 77th Infantry divisions along the front lines, suffering horrendous casualties and making little headway. The 32nd Army, exposed to superior American firepower, lost approximately 5,000 troops killed in action during the counterattack, wasting precious combat power that they would sorely miss as the battle wore on.<sup>51</sup> By the evening of May 5, Ushijima, recognizing the utter failure of the counterattack, summoned Yahara. The general admitted that Yahara's judgment and prediction of failure of the attack were correct, telling him "from now on I leave everything up to you...my instructions to you are to do whatever you feel is necessary."<sup>52</sup> Maj. Gen. Cho assumed full responsibility for the failure of the counterattack, losing all hope for success in future operations.<sup>53</sup> Under Yahara's direction, the 32nd Army reverted to its war of attrition for the remainder of the battle.

### III Amphibious Corps Joins the Attack on the Shuri Line

In late April, Buckner decided to move the entirety of the III Amphibious Corps to join the attack on the Shuri defenses. The 27th Infantry Division relieved III Amphibious Corps of its security responsibilities on northern Okinawa. III Amphibious Corps moved south to join XXIV Corps in the fighting, regaining control of the 1st Marine Division and assuming responsibility for the western portion of the front line. As III Amphibious Corps moved into southern Okinawa, the Tenth Army staff prepared plans for a two-corps attack to break the Shuri defenses, scheduled for May 11. The plan was a double envelopment of Shuri by the Marine divisions on the right (western) flank, and by the Army divisions on the left (eastern) flank, with a fixing attack in the center.<sup>54</sup> The offensive began, as scheduled, on May 11, initially coordinated across the entire front. However, the attack soon devolved into a group of distinct battles at key points along the line. Soldiers and marines fought vicious, prolonged battles against resolute Japanese defenses at places like Conical Hill, Sugar Loaf, Dakeshi Ridge, the Wana Draw, and Chocolate Drop Hill. By May 22, the Tenth Army had penetrated the inner ring of the Shuri line, but the Japanese line still held and the fighting broke down into yet another stalemate. During the final week of May, the rains came to Okinawa, creating ample mud that bogged down heavy equipment and hindered the ability of Tenth Army to continue the attack. The 77th Infantry Division made no progress in the middle of the line at Shuri. However, the flanks experienced small gains, including the 6th Marine Division entering the city of Naha on the west coast.

### The Shuri Line Falls

Deep under the ancient Shuri castle, the 32nd Army staff and the chiefs of staff from the 62nd and 24th Divisions convened a meeting within the 32nd Army command cave to determine where they would make their last stand. Col. Yahara submitted several courses of action for consideration, including holding at Shuri, withdrawing to the Kiyon Peninsula on the southern tip of the island, or withdrawing to the Chinen Peninsula on the southeastern coast of the island.<sup>55</sup> Yahara, who supported a withdrawal to the south in keeping with his attrition strategy, solicited opinions from the staff and the division representatives. Yahara carefully laid out the pros and cons of each course of action, deftly steering the debate in favor of his desire to make the final stand on the Kiyon Peninsula.<sup>56</sup> Lt. Gen. Ushijima approved this course of action and the 32nd Army made careful preparations for a withdrawal from the Shuri line that had served them so well.

Soon after, Japanese units began withdrawing from the Shuri line, leaving forces in place to cover their withdrawal. The 32nd Army executed their withdrawal skillfully, in an organized fashion, preventing their retreat from turning into a Tenth Army pursuit and rout of the Japanese forces. Tenth Army, recognizing the Japanese withdrawal at the end of May, advanced along the front, seizing the Shuri castle. After so much bloodshed on both sides, the Shuri line fell, but the battle for Okinawa continued for three more bloody weeks.

In early June, Tenth Army resumed its advance southward, but not before the 32nd Army established its final defensive line on the Kiyon Peninsula, defending from caves on the coral escarpments of Yuza-Dake and Yaeju-Dake. On June 5, the lead elements of the Tenth Army reached the Japanese positions. At this point, the 32nd

Army had approximately 11,000 infantrymen remaining, and about 20,000 non-infantrymen and conscripted Okinawans manning the defenses.<sup>57</sup> Tenth Army began a general offensive against this defensive line, fighting fierce battles until mid-June, when the 32nd Army finally showed signs of weakening.<sup>58</sup> On June 10, Buckner sent a message to Ushijima, offering terms of surrender. The message finally reached the 32nd Army headquarters cave on 17 June, but he gave no response to Buckner, as the surrender offer represented an affront to Japanese tradition.<sup>59</sup> The 32nd Army quickly descended into an uncoordinated mass of troops who, though willing to fight to the death, no longer executed an integrated defense against the Tenth Army advance.<sup>60</sup>

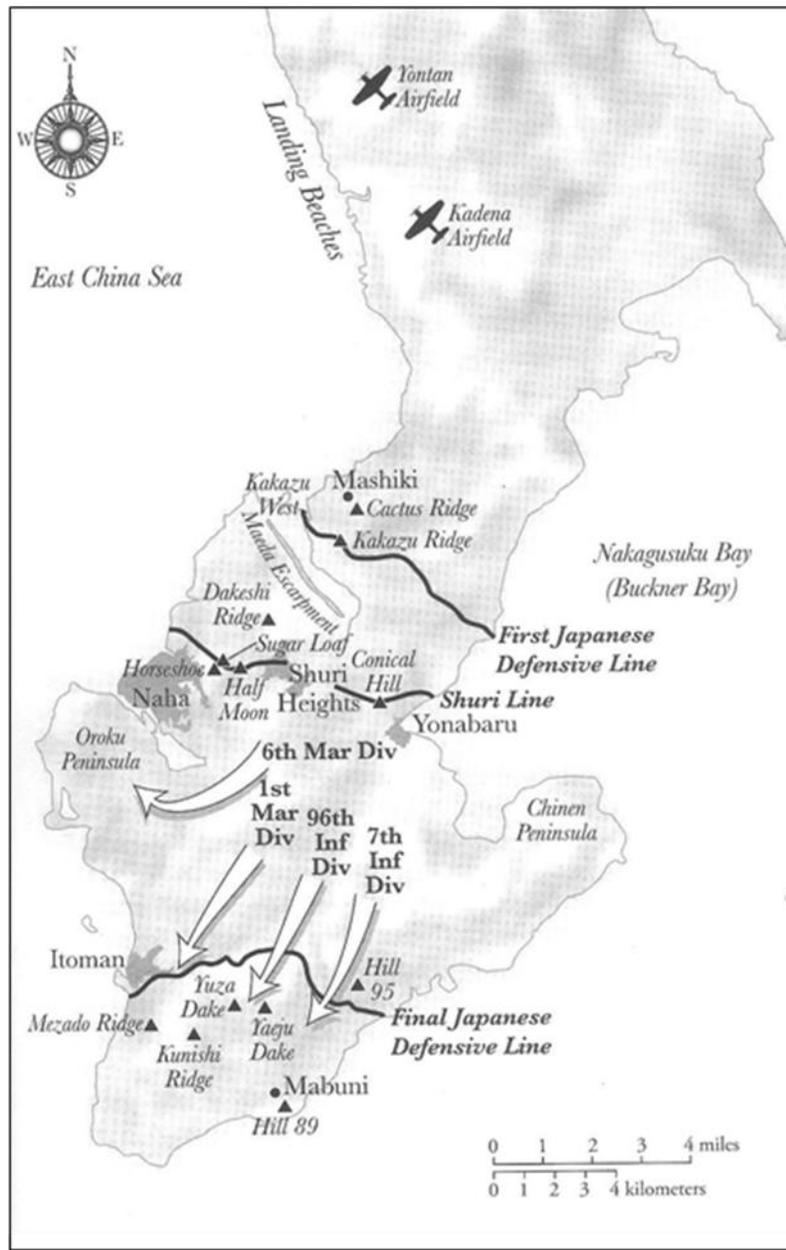


Figure 6. Battle for Southern Okinawa

Source: Bill Sloan, *The Ultimate Battle* (New York.: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 75.

### The Battle Concludes

By June 17, the 32nd Army collapsed into a disorganized mob, its morale and discipline weakened by nearly eighty days of fighting and the loss of their last defensible positions.<sup>61</sup> Many Japanese soldiers and terrified Okinawan civilians committed suicide rather than surrender to the advancing American forces. Tenth Army pressed the attack, mopping up the last vestiges of the Japanese defense. On June 18, Lt. Gen. Buckner was killed by Japanese shellfire while observing an attack. Maj. Gen. Geiger assumed command of Tenth Army and declared Okinawa secure on June 21. Gen. Joseph Stilwell arrived at Okinawa and assumed command of the Tenth Army on June 23. Ushijima, Cho, and Yahara realized the end had finally arrived. Ushijima ordered Yahara to escape from Okinawa, return home to Japan, and render a report to Imperial Headquarters. On June 23, Ushijima and Cho committed *hara-kiri*--Japanese ritual suicide. Yahara attempted to make his escape, dressing as a civilian and mixing with a group of natives until he could secure a way off the island. The Tenth Army ultimately captured him and discovered his identity. The Americans continued to mop up small, isolated pockets of Japanese resistance until June 30. The battle for Okinawa was over.

The human cost of Operation Iceberg was high. The Japanese 32nd Army suffered approximately 100,000 deaths, including Okinawan conscripts. The Tenth Army lost more than seven thousand troops killed in action and the U.S. Navy lost nearly five thousand.<sup>62</sup> Although the exact number is not known, at least 140,000 Okinawan civilians are believed to have perished during the campaign.<sup>63</sup> The butcher's bill for Okinawa undoubtedly factored into President Harry Truman's decision to unleash the

devastation of the atomic bomb in hopes of ending the war and avoiding an even higher cost for an invasion of the Japanese home islands.

### Terms Defined

This thesis will examine the conduct of Lt. Gen. Buckner and the Tenth Army staff during the planning, preparation, and execution of Operation Iceberg. In doing so, some terms must be defined. The traits and skills required of senior military field commanders are numerous and varied. One such skill is a commander's ability to exercise command and control over his forces. The term "command and control" first entered the U.S. Army's lexicon during World War II.<sup>64</sup> The present day United States Army defines command and control as the exercise of authority and direction by a commander over his forces in the accomplishment of a mission.<sup>65</sup> In exercising command and control, commanders must provide leadership. That is, they must influence people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission.<sup>66</sup> Commanders must also make analytical and intuitive decisions during planning, preparation, and execution. Commanders make decisions based on their knowledge, experience, and the information at hand. With the assistance of their staff, they must process, analyze, and understand large volumes of information. Information about enemy forces, friendly forces, and the terrain come together to form a picture of the battlefield, giving the commander situational awareness. The analysis of this information, whether hasty or deliberate, leads to the commander gaining situational understanding. Situational understanding allows a commander to make battlefield decisions. A commanding general's staff officers assist him in this endeavor by enabling him to visualize the battlefield, by anticipating decisions the commander will have to

make, and by recommending courses of action to the commander. Successful commanders use their talent and experience to bring together the art of command (leadership and decision making) and the science of control (attaining situational awareness and understanding, and directing the actions of subordinate units).

A unique aspect of the Tenth Army was its inter-service organization. Because the Tenth Army included units from all services and reported to a higher headquarters from the U.S. Navy, it faced more challenges in operating with the other services than any American field army during World War II. The joint nature of the Tenth Army and of the entirety of Operation Iceberg call for a close examination of how Buckner and his staff exercised command and control in a joint environment. The terms “joint” and “inter-service” will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis when referring to operations or forces consisting of two or more U.S. military services (the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Army Air Force). With these concepts of command and control and joint operations in mind, the effectiveness of the command and control of the Tenth Army at Okinawa can be analyzed in terms of the commanding general, the Tenth Army staff, and from a joint operations perspective.

#### Assertions

The Tenth Army’s commanding general shouldered tremendous responsibility in leading his field army through Operation Iceberg. Lt. Gen. Buckner performed exceptionally well during the planning and preparation for Iceberg, but his limitations surfaced during the battle itself. He was overcautious and tactically unimaginative. He showed strong personal leadership, but only average generalship on the battlefield. Buckner had supreme faith in the decisiveness of overwhelming firepower,

underestimating his opponent's ability to withstand that firepower and mount a skillful defense in depth. He misread the 32nd Army on several occasions, believing that he had reached a tipping point in the battle when he, in fact, had not. Buckner succeeded during Operation Iceberg, ultimately sacrificing his own life in the effort, but could have brought the battle to a speedier and potentially less costly conclusion if he had been more audacious in his tactical thinking.

The Tenth Army staff, like their commanding general, succeeded, but could have performed to a higher level. Despite a lack of combat experience, they did well during the planning and preparation for Iceberg, though some intelligence failures during planning led to poor situational awareness and understanding during execution. During execution, they failed to correctly read the enemy situation, providing an inaccurate picture to Buckner. They recommended no tactical changes during the battle, moving through the campaign in tactical unanimity with their boss. The Tenth Army staff, like their commanding general, can claim success and victory in the battle for Okinawa, but they could have done better.

The Tenth Army performed well as a joint force. Buckner did his best to limit inter-service friction, desiring to avoid the tension he had previously experienced and had observed elsewhere in the Pacific Theater. Tenth Army's operations were the culmination of all the joint experience gained throughout the war in the Pacific. The personalities of Buckner and his two corps commanders limited inter-service friction within Tenth Army. Buckner's personality and determination to work with his naval superiors minimized joint tension outside of Tenth Army. The largest source of joint strife resulted from the U.S. Navy's perception of the pace of Buckner's tactics in relation

to large, costly *kamikaze* attacks on the supporting fleet. U.S. news media reports critical of Buckner's tactics also stoked the embers of inter-service tension, but Buckner maintained the backing of Admiral Nimitz and the loyalty of his subordinate commanders. Operation Iceberg represents an amazing feat of joint warfare and Tenth Army shares the credit for its success in this regard.

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<sup>1</sup>Roy A. Appleman, et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948), 3-4.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>4</sup>Chas S. Nichols, Jr. and Henry I. Shaw, Jr. *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch U.S. Marine Corps, 1955), 8.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup>Appleman, et al, 23.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>8</sup>Hiromichi Yahara, *The Battle for Okinawa* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 18.

<sup>9</sup>Appleman, et al, 85.

<sup>10</sup>Yahara, 18.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>12</sup>Appleman, et al, 84-85.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>14</sup>Yahara, 15.

<sup>15</sup>Nichols and Shaw, 304.

<sup>16</sup>Appleman, et al, 484.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas M. Huber, *Japan's Battle of Okinawa, April-June 1945* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, 1990), 5-6.

- <sup>18</sup>Appleman, et al, 19.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., 33.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup>Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol XIV: Victory in the Pacific* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1960), 93.
- <sup>22</sup>Yahara, xiii.
- <sup>23</sup>Morison, 93.
- <sup>24</sup>Huber, 7.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., 10-11.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., 11.
- <sup>27</sup>Morison, 101.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., 115.
- <sup>30</sup>Appleman, et al, 64.
- <sup>31</sup>Robert Leckie, *Okinawa: The Last Battle of World War II* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995), 49.
- <sup>32</sup>Appleman, et al, 69.
- <sup>33</sup>Yahara, xi.
- <sup>34</sup>Appleman, et al, 74.
- <sup>35</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, *Tenth Army Action Report, Ryukyus, 26 March-30 June 1945* (LaCrosse: Brookhaven Press, 1945), 7-III-2.
- <sup>36</sup>Yahara, xii.
- <sup>37</sup>Morison, 154.
- <sup>38</sup>Appleman, et al, 113.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., 98.
- <sup>40</sup>Morison, 235-236.

<sup>41</sup>Appleman, et al, 99.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>43</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 7-III-9.

<sup>44</sup>Appleman, et al, 148.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 184.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>48</sup>U.S. Tenth Army G-2, Prisoner of War Interrogation Report, August 6, 1945, 8. This report appears as an appendix in the book, *The Battle for Okinawa*, by Hiromichi Yahara.

<sup>49</sup>Appleman, et al, 285-286.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 289.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Yahara, 41.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>54</sup>Appleman, et al, 311-312.

<sup>55</sup>Yahara, 68-69.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>57</sup>Appleman, et al, 436.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 454.

<sup>59</sup>Yahara, 136.

<sup>60</sup>Appleman, et al, 455.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 456.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 490.

<sup>63</sup>Bill Sloan, *The Ultimate Battle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 296.

<sup>64</sup>United States Army, *Field Manual 6-0, Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2003), xii.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, Glossary-4.

<sup>66</sup>United States Army, *Field Manual 6-22, Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006), 1-1.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE COMMANDING GENERAL

#### Introduction

The burden of commanding the U.S. Tenth Army during the Okinawa campaign fell on the shoulders of Army Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. Buckner was a forceful, strong-willed leader who led the Tenth Army with a firm belief in the use of overwhelming firepower to defeat the Japanese defenders. Buckner and his staff expertly planned their portion of Operation Iceberg and prepared the Tenth Army for the coming battle. During planning and preparation, Buckner demonstrated exceptional organizational skills and the ability to harmoniously coordinate the efforts and actions of his large, widely dispersed force.

During the execution of the operation, however, Buckner proved to be tactically unimaginative and inflexible. His misreading of the enemy withdrawal from the Shuri line coupled with his obsessive reliance on overwhelming firepower and frontal attacks prolonged the campaign. Nevertheless, Buckner must be given due credit for the victory in the Okinawa campaign--a victory that ultimately cost him his life. His battlefield leadership was energetic, forceful, and visible to his troops, but Buckner's battlefield decision-making demonstrated a want of tactical agility and flexibility. He consistently held to his philosophy of a slow, supported advance against the main enemy defense, which he believed would result in fewer casualties in the long run. Despite the suggestions of both subordinates and superiors, he tenaciously clung to his plan--a plan which ultimately succeeded, but took more than twice amount of time (eighty one days) than originally estimated (forty days) and came with a high cost in American blood.

## General Buckner's Background

Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr., was the son of Confederate Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, who is perhaps remembered most for surrendering Fort Donelson to Ulysses S. Grant in 1862. The younger Buckner attended the Virginia Military Institute prior to his acceptance at the United States Military Academy at West Point, from which he graduated in 1908. He was commissioned as an infantry officer and saw duty along the border with Mexico and in the Philippines. In 1917, he qualified as an aviator, but spent little time in the air.<sup>1</sup> He saw no combat during World War I and attended the Infantry School, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, and the Army War College. He also served as an instructor at each of those schools, as well as at West Point. While attending and teaching at these schools, Buckner became fully immersed in the Army's doctrine, which emphasized the decisive role of artillery in bringing overwhelming firepower to bear against an enemy in a head-on confrontation.<sup>2</sup> Buckner served two tours as an instructor at West Point, also serving as the Commandant of Cadets from 1933-1936. In the late 1930s, he commanded the 23rd and 66th Infantry Regiments and served as the chief of staff of the 6th Infantry Division, attaining the rank of colonel in 1937.

In July 1940, as a colonel, he took command of the Alaska Defense Command. Upon his arrival in Alaska in 1940, Colonel Buckner quickly realized the magnitude of the task of defending Alaska. He anticipated the distinct possibility of war with Japan in the near term and immediately took action to prepare his command. Buckner consistently hounded the War Department, which regarded him as a pest, for resources.<sup>3</sup> He clamored for air and sea power to support his defensive plan. He understood well the austerity of

Alaska and requested funds to complete the necessary construction to support his plan. Buckner speedily orchestrated complex preparations, including the construction of bases, infrastructure, and airfields. Despite supply problems, unforgiving weather, and numerous other challenges, Buckner's leadership, energy, and vision changed the appearance of the military effort in Alaska virtually overnight.<sup>4</sup>

Buckner prominently displayed his strong personality and force of will while in Alaska. He was physically tough, taking up skiing at the age of fifty four and spending his first winter in Alaska sleeping in a tent.<sup>5</sup> He was a large, striking man with a booming voice. Buckner exuded boundless energy and enthusiasm. He was dubbed "the Silver Stallion of Alaska" and endlessly circulated throughout Alaska, visiting his troops, exhorting them to get things done. In his book about World War II in Alaska, *The Thousand Mile War*, Brian Garfield described Buckner as "the battling great swaggerer, the performing extrovert, he pushed his men harder every day. Ebullient, crusty, bellicose, he had a resonating impact."<sup>6</sup>

Buckner was not known for tact, but at times displayed an unexpected subtlety in attacking problems and gaining resources for his command.<sup>7</sup> He was also not afraid of bending rules to achieve desired results. The Navy had, for a time, opposed Buckner's defensive strategy for Alaska, and Buckner did not have the authority to build air bases in Alaska. He built airfields anyway, with authorization coming after the fact, with funds diverted from other projects.<sup>8</sup> Buckner despised bureaucratic obstacles and proved adept at cutting through red tape to achieve objectives.

After the outbreak of American involvement in World War II with the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor, Buckner found it easier to acquire resources. By the summer of

1943, his command had expanded to include 150,000 troops and had successfully ejected the Japanese from their occupation of the Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska.<sup>9</sup> Buckner achieved results and consequently rose to the rank of Lieutenant General by mid-1943. In June 1944, his hard work was rewarded with the command of the newly formed U.S. Tenth Army.



Figure 7. Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr.  
*Source:* Chas S. Nichols, Jr. and Henry I. Shaw, Jr. *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch U.S. Marine Corps, 1955), 18.

### Planning and Preparation for Iceberg

Buckner departed Alaska for his new headquarters in Hawaii, where planning for future operations began. Tenth Army had little cohesion, with units drawn from multiple

services and disparate locations. Buckner took on the challenge of forging this diverse group of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines into a cohesive fighting organization. General Buckner and his staff originally expected to plan and execute an invasion of the island of Formosa. After the October 1944 conference in San Francisco at which Admiral Nimitz convinced Admiral King to defer the Formosa invasion in favor of seizing Iwo Jima and Okinawa, Buckner and his staff turned their energies on planning the invasion of Okinawa and his Tenth Army began to take shape.

General Buckner's two most important subordinates were his corps commanders, who had both achieved great success and combat experience during the war in the Pacific. Army Major General John R. Hodge commanded the XXIV Corps. Hodge was commissioned through the Reserve Officers Training Corps from the University of Illinois in 1917, serving in France during World War I. He attended the requisite Army schools and had combat experience as the assistant division commander of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal, as commander of the 23rd Infantry Division at Bougainville, and as XXIV Corps commander during the Leyte campaign in 1944.

Marine Major General Roy Geiger commanded the III Amphibious Corps. Geiger was a qualified aviator who had enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1907. Commissioned as an infantry officer two years later, he served in China, Central America, and elsewhere. He attended the Army's Command and General Staff School--where he met and became friends with Buckner--and later attended the Naval War College. After commanding the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing at Guadalcanal and serving as the Director, Division of Aviation at Marine Corps Headquarters, he assumed the

command of an amphibious corps which he successfully led on Bougainville, Guam, and Peleliu. Geiger and Hodge had worked together on both Guadalcanal and Bougainville.

During the planning phase, Buckner's Tenth Army staff was augmented by Marine and Navy officers to facilitate the planning of amphibious operations. Among the officers who joined Buckner's staff was Marine Brigadier General Oliver Smith, who would serve as the Marine Deputy Chief of Staff. Smith found Buckner to be a man of character and integrity, but felt his methods and judgments were somewhat inflexible.<sup>10</sup> Smith admired Buckner, with whom he had much in common, and noted Buckner's excellent physical condition.<sup>11</sup> Smith felt, however, that Buckner went a bit too far with his mandatory physical training program for the staff officers, which resulted in broken bones and other orthopedic injuries, particularly among the older officers.<sup>12</sup>

Buckner's plan for Okinawa relied heavily on Army doctrine, with its emphasis on the relentless use of superior force to defeat an enemy. Although the Marines' III Amphibious Corps fell under Buckner's command, he defaulted to Army doctrine in his plan for the land campaign on Okinawa after the amphibious landings.<sup>13</sup> Tenth Army had to seize Okinawa and some of the smaller islands in the Ryukyus chain so that the Allies could use them as a base from which to launch the anticipated invasion of the Japanese home islands. The plan called for generous amounts of Naval gunfire to support the landings and the subsequent campaign to secure the island. Buckner also planned to mass field artillery from within his combat formations and air power from his Tactical Air Force against the Japanese fortifications. Nimitz and Spruance also charged Buckner with the responsibility of developing the Ryukyus as an operational base, a task for which Buckner was particularly suited in light of his Alaska experience. Buckner's logic in

planning was sound and he and his staff were methodical, thorough, and detailed. The resulting plan enjoyed consensus from the supporting naval and air forces, after some compromise. Throughout the planning and preparation, Buckner displayed the same personal style that he had shown during his tenure in Alaska. Buckner visited his far flung subordinate units to the extent possible and was able to observe an amphibious rehearsal by the XXIV Corps on Leyte in March 1945.<sup>14</sup>

### Early Decisions During the Battle for Okinawa

General Buckner succeeded in planning, preparing, and moving his Tenth Army to Okinawa for the invasion. Throughout this time period, he had demonstrated the same organizational skill and drive that had won him success in Alaska. However, Buckner had yet to be tested as a battlefield commander. He had not directly commanded the operations to retake the Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska, and was eager for his first taste of combat. Buckner's thoughts on the eve of battle indicated confidence and optimism that he and his troops would succeed. In his diary entry on March 31, 1945, he wrote: "Tomorrow is Easter Sunday, my father's birthday and the day of my first battle. I hope that I shall be able to look back upon it with the same degree of enthusiasm with which I anticipate it."<sup>15</sup>

The campaign began on April 1, 1945 and the marines and soldiers of the Tenth Army encountered little resistance at the outset, as the Japanese forces allowed them to land on Okinawa virtually unopposed. Buckner later would hypothesize that the Japanese had left the landings unmolested for one of two reasons: Lt. Gen. Ushijima was convinced the Americans would land on the southeastern part of the island and had defended the beaches there, or he realized that his best chance of victory was to engage

the Tenth Army in heavily fortified zones, avoiding the possibility of being outmaneuvered in the open areas behind the invasion beaches.<sup>16</sup> The second reason proved to be correct. On the first day, they captured the Kadena and Yontan airfields and created a beach head on the western side of Okinawa that was 15,000 yards wide and 4,000 to 5,000 yards deep.<sup>17</sup>

Buckner made a modification to his plan based on the early progress of the campaign. Marine Major General Geiger's III Amphibious Corps encountered little resistance in the first few days of the operation as it began its advance north from the invasion beaches. Recognizing that Ushijima had chosen to put his main defensive effort in the south, Buckner ordered the Marines, on April 5, to execute a vigorous reconnaissance northward and to prepare to attack to destroy enemy forces on the northern portion of the island--a task that was originally to be accomplished after the southern portion of Okinawa had been secured.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, the Marines advanced quickly and reached the northern end of the island on April 13.

The early success prompted Buckner to make another early modification to his attack plan. According to the plan, Buckner intended to seize the island of Ie Shima and its airfield after southern Okinawa was secured. The Japanese defenders' light resistance on the first few days of the operation prompted Admiral Spruance to pressure Buckner, as early as April 2, to move up the seizure of Ie Shima.<sup>19</sup> Spruance's naval forces had already been stung by Japanese *kamikaze* attacks. Thus, the Admiral became keenly interested in bringing the campaign to a swift conclusion, enabling him to move his fleet away from Okinawa and the suicide attacks.<sup>20</sup> Buckner initially resisted, not wanting to commit the 77th Infantry Division to the fight when they might be needed elsewhere. He

ultimately agreed, assigning the mission to Major General Andrew Bruce's 77th Infantry Division, which subsequently landed on Ie Shima on April 16 and declared the island secure on April 21.

General Buckner made sound decisions to secure the northern portion of Okinawa and Ie Shima ahead of schedule, based on an accurate reading of the enemy situation. With these decisions, he exploited the early success of the landings, seizing objectives planned for later phases of the campaign. However, his other major tactical decision during the battle for Okinawa proved to be controversial, reflecting Buckner's cautious approach, a lack of flexibility and aggressiveness, poor situational understanding of enemy dispositions, and his dogged determination to adhere to his well-laid plans. Buckner's decision to mount a two-corps frontal attack into the teeth of the Japanese defenses, rejecting a proposed amphibious landing on southeastern Okinawa to envelop the enemy main defense, stirred great debate during the battle and for many years afterward.

#### Rejection of a Second Amphibious Landing

During the planning for Operation Iceberg, General Buckner and his staff had considered landing on the beaches at Minatoga, on the southeastern coast of Okinawa. These beaches were ultimately rejected in favor of the Hagushi beaches on the west coast. Tenth Army planners deemed the Minatoga beaches sub-optimal for the operation because of dangerous reefs, insufficient beach area for combat forces and logistical support, and adjacent key terrain that permitted the Japanese defenders to dominate the beach outlets.<sup>21</sup> Instead, the 2nd Marine Division conducted an amphibious feint at Minatoga on L-Day to prevent Japanese forces from massing against the actual invasion

beaches at Hagushi. As the campaign unfolded, circumstances caused Buckner and his staff to reconsider a landing at Minatoga.

After seeing only light resistance in the first few days of the battle, elements of XXIV Corps began to encounter significant resistance during their drive south from the invasion beaches. By April 9, the XXIV Corp's advance had all but ground to a halt as it made contact with the enemy's main defensive belt, the Shuri Line. XXIV Corps made no significant progress until defeating the first ring of the Japanese defense of the Shuri Line on April 24. Meanwhile, the supporting Allied fleet in the waters around Okinawa was continuously dogged by *kamikaze* attacks, sustaining significant losses. The Japanese had prepared their defenses well and it would be tough, slow going for the Tenth Army.

On April 11, Maj. Gen. Bruce, commander of the 77th Infantry Division, urged Buckner to consider employing his division by an amphibious landing on southeastern Okinawa, behind the main Japanese defensive line.<sup>22</sup> Bruce knew that his division would be committed to the main fight on Okinawa after securing Ie Shima, and saw the opportunity to outflank the Japanese defenses. Buckner rejected the idea based on several considerations. He felt that the beaches were not suitable for the reasons that had been identified during planning. His chief logistics officer, Brigadier General David Blakelock asserted that he could not supply the ammunition to support such a landing.<sup>23</sup> Buckner also blanched at a Minatoga landing because any landing force would not be within a mutually supporting distance from XXIV Corps and its artillery, potentially resulting in "another Anzio, or worse."<sup>24</sup> Allied forces had landed at Anzio in January 1944 in hopes of outflanking the Axis defense and seizing Rome, but the operation turned

into a bloody stalemate, draining men and materiel and failing to achieve its objectives. Buckner would not support a Minatoga landing unless he could be assured of a rapid linkup between XXIV Corps and the landing force.<sup>25</sup>

Another issue factoring into Buckner's decision was force availability. The 77th Division would soon become occupied with the Ie Shima landings and would not be available for an assault on southern Okinawa. However, the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions were available after the fighting for northern Okinawa had been all but completed. The 6th Marine Division assumed the security mission on northern Okinawa, but Buckner did not consider the 1st Marine Division available because he had been ordered on April 13 to keep III Amphibious Corps free from significant commitment so that it might be used to reinforce the V Amphibious Corps' attack of the island of Miyako, north of Formosa, scheduled to occur after the fall of Okinawa.<sup>26</sup> This order remained in effect until Admiral Nimitz rescinded it on April 26. Little, if any, thought was given to using the Tenth Army's floating reserve, the 27th Infantry Division, for such an operation. The 27th Division was under-strength after suffering significant losses on Saipan and had already been committed to reinforcing XXIV Corps, landing at Hagushi on April 9. The 2nd Marine Division, which had conducted the feint at Minatoga on L-Day, had returned to Saipan, but Buckner did not ask for the commitment of this unit to reinforce Tenth Army, because it was scheduled to invade Kikai Shima, north of Okinawa, in July.<sup>27</sup>

Regardless of force availability, Buckner rejected the idea of a landing at Minatoga primarily for logistical reasons, beach suitability, and for his fear of an Anzio-like situation. Instead of mounting a landing, Buckner employed another amphibious feint at Minatoga with a regiment of the 77th Infantry Division on April 19 in support of

the XXIV Corp offensive against the Shuri Line. Once Buckner had set his mind against an amphibious landing at Minatoga, he refused to reconsider it, even when prompted by subordinates or superiors. The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alexander Vandergrift, visited Okinawa with Nimitz on April 23 and offered Buckner the 2nd Marine Division for use in a landing at Minatoga. Vandergrift asserted that the 2nd Marine Division still had its shipping, thirty days of supply, and could be underway from Saipan in six hours.<sup>28</sup> Buckner was unmoved, having made his final decision against an alternate amphibious landing sometime between April 17 and 22.<sup>29</sup> Nimitz sided with Buckner in the discussion, supporting his tactics “provided they produced results.”<sup>30</sup>

Buckner based his decision against another landing on valid reasons--logistics, beach unsuitability, and the enemy's ability to influence any landing. However, he later failed to reconsider the idea even when offered the use of the 2nd Marine Division and when the enemy situation had dramatically changed on the battlefield. He had made up his mind and considered the plan for an alternate landing a dead issue, no longer worthy of discussion. Even after the Japanese 32nd Army conducted its disastrous counterattack against XXIV Corps on May 4, Buckner failed to see an opportunity for decisive action. Buckner's prediction “of hard, but not overly hard victory was based on the optimism of ignorance” and he compared a secondary attack plan to a navel, stating, “You'd look totally stupid without one, but it serves no purpose.”<sup>31</sup> He demonstrated a lack of tactical imagination and excessive caution in failing to even reconsider an alternate landing as a means to bring the Okinawa campaign to a swifter conclusion.

### Reinforcement of XXIV Corps

Instead of executing an amphibious assault on southeastern Okinawa, General Buckner chose to reinforce the XXIV Corps on the Shuri Line. First, he committed the 77th Infantry Division, once it had completed its operations on Ie Shima, to join XXIV Corps in attacking the Shuri Line. Following the XXIV Corps' victory over the first defensive ring of the Shuri Line on April 24, Buckner consolidated and reorganized his battered forces to prepare for a continuation of the frontal attack in the south. After Nimitz ordered the indefinite postponement of Phase III of Operation Iceberg, thereby freeing up III Amphibious Corps for further use by Tenth Army, Buckner decided to commit marine units to assist XXIV Corps with the fighting in southern Okinawa. On April 21, III Amphibious Corps received a warning order from Tenth Army to be prepared to detach the 1st Tank Battalion of the 1st Marine Division to the 27th Infantry Division in southern Okinawa. Maj. Gen. Geiger was not pleased with this potential order, and convinced Buckner to use the whole division instead.<sup>32</sup> Buckner took his suggestion, attaching the 1st Marine Division in its entirety to XXIV Corps for operations in the south. The 1st Marine Division relieved the 27th Infantry Division, and the 96th Infantry Division was relieved by the 77th Infantry Division. These changes on the line were completed by April 30.

For the next week, Tenth Army made little progress, although they crushed the Japanese 32nd Army's counterattack of May 4. By May 11, Buckner had repositioned III Amphibious Corps to the south and launched a two-corps frontal attack against the Shuri defenses, taking more than three weeks, finally occupying the city of Shuri on May 31. The Japanese successfully withdrew from the Shuri Line, establishing a new defensive

line further south. The fighting would continue for another three weeks, without General Buckner making any tactical changes. He persisted with two corps abreast, conducting frontal attacks until the conclusion of the campaign. Had Buckner better understood the disposition of the Japanese 32nd Army, he may have called for bolder, decisive action to bring the fighting to a swift conclusion.

### Misreading the Enemy

Several times during the campaign on Okinawa, General Buckner misread the 32nd Army's disposition and intentions. As a result of the ferocity of the Japanese defense along the Shuri line, Buckner assumed that the 32nd Army would fight to the death along this line. This incorrect assumption led to a failure to read the signs of the 32nd Army's withdrawal from the Shuri line in late May. Buckner believed that the fall of the Shuri line would be the end of organized Japanese resistance. He held to this belief despite III Amphibious Corps reporting on May 26 of "enemy troops in considerable strength moving on various roads to the south."<sup>33</sup> Buckner responded to these reports with an order to each corps on May 27:

Indications point [to] possible enemy retirement to new defensive position with possible counter-offensive against our forces threatening his flank. Initiate without delay strong and unrelenting pressure to ascertain probable intentions and keep him off balance. Enemy must not repeat not be permitted to establish himself securely on new position with only nominal interference.<sup>34</sup>

Only on May 29 did Buckner realize for certain that the Japanese had made the decision to withdraw.<sup>35</sup>

Once struck with this realization, Buckner again misread his enemy. He believed that Ushijima had made his decision to withdraw too late, and that the coming days would prove his assessment correct.<sup>36</sup> Colonel Yahara, Ushijima's Senior Staff Officer,

believed that Buckner had underestimated the 32nd Army: “Our high command had been insightful about the move from the Shuri battle line. We had decided on our retreat plan a week before it began. We were smarter than the enemy thought.”<sup>37</sup> The 32nd Army had, in fact, begun to withdraw as early as May 22 and withdrew the bulk of their force from May 29 to June 4.

Ushijima’s troops superbly executed their retrograde operation, taking advantage of Buckner’s invalid assumptions and poor weather that limited aerial observation of their movements southward. Buckner and his staff misinterpreted reports of their movements until it was too late. Buckner also incorrectly believed the poor weather conditions, muddy roads, inadequate transportation assets, and deteriorating communications would severely hamper the Japanese retreat.<sup>38</sup> Buckner--not Ushijima--had, in fact, delayed for too long. Buckner missed an opportunity to annihilate the retreating enemy force, though the monsoon weather at the time was atrocious and would have made any decisive action difficult, if not impossible. Tenth Army had allowed Ushijima to make an organized escape from Shuri and establish a new defensive line.

Buckner believed that the 32nd Army, despite its withdrawal, would be unable to mount an organized defense. On May 31, Buckner assured correspondents that “it’s all over now but cleaning up pockets of resistance.”<sup>39</sup> He underestimated the enemy again in this regard. The 32nd Army mounted a determined, organized defense, inflicting numerous casualties on the Tenth Army for another three weeks before finally disintegrating, with Ushijima and his chief of staff committing ritual suicide.

### Buckner's Tactical Approach

Throughout the Okinawa campaign, General Buckner doggedly held to his tactical approach, which emphasized the use of overwhelming firepower in support of frontal attacks on the enemy's defensive works. Buckner believed that this approach, though more time consuming, saved lives in the long run. Buckner asserted that Tenth Army "was relying on our tremendous firepower and trying to crush [the Japanese defenders] by weight of weapons."<sup>40</sup> Buckner felt no need to rush the campaign and believed that he was "greatly reducing casualties by a gradual and systematic destruction of their works."<sup>41</sup> Only after his Navy superiors pressured him did Buckner feel the need to push his subordinate commanders to speed up the campaign. The admirals understandably wanted to move their fleet out from under the withering *kamikaze* attacks occurring frequently in the waters off Okinawa. During their meeting on April 23, Admiral Nimitz went so far as to threaten Buckner with relief from command if he failed to get the line moving within five days.<sup>42</sup> Buckner responded by pressuring his subordinates to press the attack more quickly.

Buckner certainly felt the pressure from his superiors, but made no changes to his tactics to bring about a swifter conclusion to the fighting. Buckner did not doubt ultimate victory on Okinawa and was principally concerned with minimizing friendly ground troop losses. Buckner was "eager to get this island completely cleaned up so as to move on to other battlefields, but it can't be hurried without heavy losses."<sup>43</sup> Even as the campaign wore on through May, Buckner held to the belief that his tactics were correct, in contrast to those employed by the Marines on Iwo Jima. On May 22, Buckner stated that "our system is working well and our losses in proportion to the Japs killed are far

less than at Iwo Jima although the Jap defenses are much stronger.”<sup>44</sup> Statistically, Buckner proved to be correct. The final totals at Iwo Jima were 6,825 Americans killed to 22,000 Japanese killed or captured, for a ratio of 3.2 Japanese killed or captured for every American death.<sup>45</sup> The final casualty totals at Okinawa, including naval losses, were 12,281 Americans killed to 117,000 Japanese killed or captured, for a ratio of 9.5 Japanese killed or captured for every American death.<sup>46</sup> Buckner deemed that his men “were too valuable to be sacrificed by impatience,” and was resolute in his tactical approach.<sup>47</sup>

Though Buckner believed in his tactics, he overestimated the effectiveness of field artillery, naval gunfire, and air strikes on the Japanese defenses. The amount of firepower brought to bear on the Japanese defenders was staggering--nearly 600,000 rounds of naval gunfire and over 1.7 million rounds of field artillery.<sup>48</sup> The tactical air force and carrier aircraft flew more than 25,000 sorties of close air support.<sup>49</sup> The Allies pounded the Japanese fortifications from land, sea, and air, in an intense concentration of firepower in a small area. Buckner intended this firepower to be decisive, allowing his infantry to easily overrun the pulverized Japanese defensive works. However, General Ushijima’s troops had constructed a fantastic network of fighting positions, trenches, tunnels, and caves which negated much of the effectiveness of the American firepower. The 32nd Army was able to house all of its 100,000 men in these undergrounded spaces, which included sixty miles of tunnels.<sup>50</sup> Although they provided unpleasant living conditions, the fortifications kept the Japanese troops alive to stubbornly resist the Tenth Army’s advance, yard by yard. The firepower mostly served to limit the Japanese freedom of movement above ground. Any Japanese movement over open ground was

suicidal, as Ushijima and his troops discovered during their ill advised counterattack on May 4.

Throughout the campaign, Buckner made no significant change to his tactics. He resigned himself to fighting a slow, methodical campaign in which “strong [enemy] positions are gradually pinched out.”<sup>51</sup> The ineffectiveness of firepower resulted in Tenth Army having to clear every Japanese position with infantry, leading to “blowtorch and corkscrew” tactics, which took time and cost casualties. Buckner’s approach not only irked his naval superiors, but other observers also questioned his methods. During an early June visit to Okinawa, General Joseph “Vinegar Joe” Stilwell, who would later assume command of Tenth Army after Buckner’s death, made pointed comments about Buckner. Stilwell observed “NO tactical thinking on push [emphasis in original]. No plan was ever discussed...to hasten the fight or help the divisions.”<sup>52</sup> Stilwell quickly grew irritated with the Tenth Army commander and his attitude and unwillingness to entertain ideas about changing his tactics. Stilwell stated, “Buckner is tiresome. I tried to tell him what I had seen, but he knew it all. Keeps repeating his wise-cracks. ‘The Lord said let there be mud,’ etc. etc.”<sup>53</sup> Stilwell also observed that Buckner rarely took suggestions of his subordinates, noting that “Buckner laughs at [Maj. Gen.] Bruce [77th Division commander who originally suggested to Buckner a second landing at Minatoga] for having crazy ideas...It might be a good thing to listen to him.”<sup>54</sup> Buckner had set his mind and no one would move him from his tactical line of thinking.

The Japanese defenders also assessed Buckner’s tactics. During the course of the battle, Colonel Yahara and other staff members came to correctly recognize that Tenth Army was committed to taking Okinawa while minimizing ground casualties.<sup>55</sup> Buckner

tried to keep his casualties as low as possible, while the 32nd Army tried to inflict as many casualties as possible on the Tenth Army. With the benefit of hindsight, Colonel Yahara agreed that Buckner's policy was "probably wise, insofar as it reduced total casualties, although more aggressive action would probably have shortened the campaign appreciably."<sup>56</sup>

### Personal Leadership

During his command in Alaska, Buckner had proven himself to be a tireless, energetic leader who constantly went to the action and "never seemed to be more than ten paces from anything."<sup>57</sup> On Okinawa, Buckner continued this leadership style, demonstrating fighting spirit and personal courage. Every day, he circulated the battlefield, visiting units on the front line and observing their attacks on the Japanese positions. He slept aboard ship until April 18, when the Tenth Army command post was established ashore. He was visible to his troops and his visits to the front reinforced his belief in the correctness of his deliberate tactics. His insistence on being close to the fighting cost him dearly in the end. On June 18, Buckner went to the front, stopping at a forward observation post of the 2nd Marine Division, which had come ashore and joined the fighting in early June. Japanese artillery fire hit the position and General Buckner was struck in the chest by coral and rock fragments. Within minutes he died, becoming the senior American officer killed in action during World War II. The battle of Okinawa was the only one in the Pacific war during which the senior commanders of both sides died.

## Conclusion

Observers, participants, and historians of the Okinawa campaign are divided as to the quality of Simon Buckner's generalship. Brig. Gen. Oliver Smith, Tenth Army's Marine Deputy Chief of Staff, though he originally favored a second amphibious landing, held that Buckner made the correct decision in committing Marine units from northern Okinawa directly into the fighting in southern Okinawa, because a second amphibious landing on southeastern Okinawa was not timely enough. Smith held that "Tenth Army, in my opinion, did a magnificent job and made a major contribution toward winning the war."<sup>58</sup> Admiral Spruance's biographer asserts that Army tactics were most suitable to the fighting on Okinawa and that Spruance's deprecation of Buckner's tactics "was unfair and motivated by his growing impatience and his concern over his continuing loss of ships."<sup>59</sup> Historians Williamson Murray and Allan Millett are less kind to Buckner. They brand his generalship as flawed, asserting "he was hardly fit to command a corps, let alone a field army" and that his World War I tactics against the Shuri line increased the carnage during the campaign.<sup>60</sup> General Douglas MacArthur expressed his low opinion of Buckner to Gen. Stilwell, and informed Stilwell that he desired Buckner's relief from command after Okinawa and for Stilwell to replace him.<sup>61</sup> The greatest criticisms against Buckner involved his decision to eschew a second landing in southeastern Okinawa as a means of bringing the campaign to a speedier conclusion, accusing him of excessive caution.

Buckner's decision not to launch a second landing prior to Japanese counterattack was sound. The controversy was overblown due to the fleet taking so many losses from *kamikaze* attacks. However, his failure to reconsider such a landing after the Japanese

counterattack or after the collapse of the Shuri line demonstrated the rigidity of his tactical mind and his failure to accurately read the enemy situation. He was bound to his tactical approach and this adherence, combined with a poor reading of the enemy situation, painted Buckner into a tactical corner of his own creation. A second landing on southern Okinawa after the Japanese counterattack on May 4, perhaps in conjunction with the XXIV Corps offensive of May 11, probably would have shortened the campaign. In all fairness to General Buckner, his opponent deftly executed a magnificent defense in depth, from fortifications that proved nearly impervious to the Americans' tremendous firepower.

While in command in Alaska, Buckner was adamant and forceful in making things happen quickly, demonstrating a willingness to take risks, and to occasionally circumvent regulations and bureaucracy to accomplish his objectives. These attributes and the success they produced likely earned Buckner the privilege of commanding the Tenth Army. Once the battle at Okinawa was joined, Buckner became risk averse, forsaking the principle of maneuver in favor of mass. Buckner proved that he was no great combat general by fighting the campaign with a closed mind, even when conditions on the battlefield changed. His bravery, character, and dedication to his duty are beyond question, but did not acquit himself as a daring or gifted tactician. General Buckner led his Tenth Army to ultimate victory on Okinawa, but at a terrible cost.

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon L. Rottman, *Okinawa 1945: The Last Battle* (Elms Court: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 33.

<sup>2</sup>Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. and Joseph Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, ed. Nicholas Evan Sarantakes (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>3</sup>Brian Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), 52.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>10</sup>Oliver P. Smith, "The Tenth Army and Okinawa," *Personal Papers of General Oliver P. Smith, USMC*, (Washington, DC: Personal Papers Collection, History and Museums Division, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps), 3.

<sup>11</sup>Clifton LaBree, *The Gentle Warrior: General Oliver Prince Smith, USMC* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2001), 71.

<sup>12</sup>Smith, 7-8.

<sup>13</sup>George Feifer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992), 238.

<sup>14</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 23.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>17</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, *Tenth Army Action Report, Ryukyus, 26 March-30 June 1945* (LaCrosse: Brookhaven Press, 1945), 7-III-2.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 7-III-4.

<sup>19</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 30.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas B. Buell, *The Quiet Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 387.

<sup>21</sup>Roy A. Appleman, et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948), 259.

<sup>22</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 37.

- <sup>23</sup>Appleman, et al, 259.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., 260.
- <sup>27</sup>Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Victory and Occupation: History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1968), 196.
- <sup>28</sup>Alexander A. Vandergrift and Robert B. Asprey, *Once a Marine* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1964), 290.
- <sup>29</sup>Appleman, et al, 262.
- <sup>30</sup>Potter, *Nimitz* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1976), 375.
- <sup>31</sup>Feifer, 241-242.
- <sup>32</sup>LaBree, 85.
- <sup>33</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 7-III-24.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., 7-III-24-25.
- <sup>35</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 65.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup>Hirohichi Yahara, *The Battle for Okinawa* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 108.
- <sup>38</sup>Ian Gow, *Okinawa 1945: Gateway to Japan* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 172.
- <sup>39</sup>Feifer, 411.
- <sup>40</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 11.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup>Potter, 375.
- <sup>43</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 57.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>45</sup>Wikipedia, "Battle of Iwo Jima," Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Iwo\\_Jima](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Iwo_Jima) (accessed 26 March 2009).

<sup>46</sup>Appleman, et al, 489.

<sup>47</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 6.

<sup>48</sup>Appleman, et al, 498-500.

<sup>49</sup>Chas S. Nichols, Jr. and Henry I. Shaw, Jr. *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch U.S. Marine Corps, 1955), 263.

<sup>50</sup>Thomas M. Huber, *Japan's Battle of Okinawa, April-June 1945* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, 1990), 47.

<sup>51</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 6.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>55</sup>U.S. Tenth Army G-2, Prisoner of War Interrogation Report, August 6, 1945, 11. This report appears as an appendix in the book, *The Battle for Okinawa*, by Hiromichi Yahara.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>Garfield, 51.

<sup>58</sup>Smith to Gen. Harry J. Malony, USA, 30 July 1946, Personal Papers of General Oliver P. Smith, USMC, (Washington, DC: Personal Papers Collection, History and Museums Division, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps), 5-6.

<sup>59</sup>Buell, 387-388.

<sup>60</sup>Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 514-515.

<sup>61</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 82.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE TENTH ARMY STAFF

#### Introduction

Throughout the planning, preparation, and execution of Operation Iceberg, Lt. Gen. Buckner's staff played a crucial role. The Tenth Army staff conducted detailed analysis, developed courses of action, and prepared plans and orders for the operation. They assisted Buckner with the oversight and execution of the Tenth Army's pre-battle training and movement to Okinawa. Once the battle began, the staff played an essential part in the command and control of Buckner's army. They managed information, conducted analysis, provided recommendations to the commanding general, and provided resources to the subordinate units within the Tenth Army. Operating from Oahu, Hawaii, onboard the USS *Eldorado*, and finally on Okinawa itself, the staff assisted Buckner in understanding his the terrain, the enemy, and the status of his own forces.

The Tenth Army staff performed well during the planning and preparation for the operation. They developed a complex battle plan, massive in scale, synchronizing units and resources, and coordinating with multiple staffs from multiple services. They performed similarly well during the execution of Operation Iceberg, particularly in light of the ferocious and adroit Japanese defense. However, their performance was not without its shortcomings. On several occasions, the staff failed to accurately read the enemy situation, contributing to the loss of several opportunities to bring the operation to a more rapid conclusion. They incorrectly believed that Lt. Gen. Ushijima's 32nd Army would make its last stand on the Shuri line. They also failed to see the opportunity for decisive action after the crushing defeat of the large Japanese counterattack on 4 May.

The Tenth Army staff believed as Buckner did in the decisiveness of overwhelming firepower and failed to present the commanding general with any options other than frontal attacks into 32nd Army's main defensive belt. Like Buckner, the staff overestimated the effectiveness of firepower on Ushijima's superb fortifications, and became fixated on a single line of tactical thought.

### Staff Composition

When Lt. Gen. Buckner was assigned to command the Tenth Army in June 1944, he naturally desired to populate his staff with officers he knew, trusted, and with whom he felt comfortable. Some of the officers were reassigned to Tenth Army from the European Theater of Operations.<sup>1</sup> Buckner selected many individuals who served under him during previous assignments, especially from his most recent tour of duty as the commanding general of the Alaska Defense Command.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, a large number of the officers on Buckner's staff had no combat experience. There had been little ground combat in Alaska, with the exception of the battle for the Aleutian island of Attu in May 1943, an operation which Buckner and his staff had only observed, not directly commanded. This lack of combat experience concerned some of Buckner's subordinate commanders, many of whom had considerable combat experience.<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 1944, the Tenth Army staff began to take shape, assembling on Oahu, Hawaii. The senior officer on the staff was Army Brigadier General Elwyn D. Post, Buckner's Chief of Staff. Post and Buckner had served together previously at West Point and in Alaska. The even-tempered Post's extensive service with Buckner had resulted in a close, father-son relationship with Buckner, and enabled him to forecast the commanding general's reactions to any situation.<sup>4</sup> Post's experience with Buckner

allowed the staff to anticipate Buckner's desires and to take the initiative in all staff activities.

Post had two Deputy Chiefs of Staff, one from the Army, and one from the Marine Corps. Brigadier General Lawrence E. Schick was the Army deputy. He was a West Point graduate who began his career in the cavalry and had later transferred to the adjutant general corps. He served with Buckner in Alaska. The Marine deputy, Brigadier General Oliver Smith assessed Schick as "a small wiry man, quick of speech and action. There was always a snap in his eyes....he was the finest staff officer with whom I ever had the pleasure of serving. He had his finger on every detail of the administration of the Tenth Army."<sup>5</sup> Smith had been assigned to the Tenth Army due to the joint nature of the force, with both an Army corps and a Marine amphibious corps serving under Buckner. Smith was a rising star in the Marine Corps and had attended the Field Officer's Course at the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and the *Ecole de Guerre* in France. During World War II, he served in Iceland and at Headquarters Marine Corps before being assigned to combat duty in early 1944. Unlike Post and Schick, Smith possessed recent combat experience in the Pacific in the 1st Marine Division as the division chief of staff, a regimental commander, and assistant division commander. Smith found the Tenth Army staff officers to be competent and professionally well qualified, but did harbor some concerns about their lack of combat experience.<sup>6</sup>

The Tenth Army staff was organized according to the standard U.S. Army doctrine of the day, composed of "G" sections for each staff function. Although the Tenth Army was a mixed force, with Marine and Navy units, the officers on the staff

predominantly came from the U.S. Army. Among these were Buckner's adjutant (G-1), Colonel Kirby Green; intelligence officer (G-2), Colonel Louis B. Ely; his operations officer (G-3), Brigadier General Walter A. Dumas; the logistics officer (G-4), Brigadier General David H. Blakelock; and the artillery officer, Colonel Edmund B. Edwards. In all, more than three hundred Army officers occupied billets on Buckner's staff.<sup>7</sup> At Buckner's request, an additional sixty officers (approximately thirty each from the Navy and Marine Corps) were assigned to the staff. These officers were integrated into Tenth Army's existing staff structure and did not form separate Marine or Naval staff sections.<sup>8</sup> Brig. Gen. Smith, who arrived at the Tenth Army headquarters after the addition of the Navy and Marine officers, found that the initial number of Marine officers assigned was too high for the number of duties anticipated. After considerable discussion among the staff, Smith got the number of Marine officers reduced from forty eight to thirty four, which he still considered excessive.<sup>9</sup>

Among the Navy officers assigned to the staff was Lieutenant Robert N. Colwell, who Buckner hand-picked to serve as his Chief of Photo Intelligence, under his G-2, Col. Ely. Buckner personally explained to Colwell that he wanted a naval officer in charge of photo intelligence because of the importance of selecting the best beaches for the amphibious phase of the operation. Colwell's joint photo intelligence section consisted of thirty five officers and seventy enlisted men, mostly from the Army.<sup>10</sup> Buckner's insistence on Naval and Marine officer augmentation of his staff indicated his recognition of the joint nature of his command.

### Planning Begins

As the Tenth Army formed, the staff occupied its headquarters at Schofield Barracks on Oahu and began planning for the Tenth Army's first operation. The staff initially focused its efforts on planning the invasion of Formosa. As planning progressed, senior officers, including Buckner and Nimitz, deemed the Formosa operation too costly. Nimitz convinced Admiral King to shelve the Formosa operation in early October 1944 in favor of gaining a foothold in the Ryukyus as a stepping stone to the ultimate invasion of the Japanese home islands. The staff adjusted and focused their efforts on planning an amphibious assault and subsequent clearance of the Japanese forces on Okinawa. As they set about planning the invasion of Okinawa, the staff borrowed numerous details from the Formosa plan in order to save time and effort.<sup>11</sup>

### Intelligence Planning

Before the Tenth Army staff could develop a plan of attack, the intelligence (G-2) section undertook the tasks of analyzing the terrain of the Ryukyus and determining the enemy composition, disposition, strength, and capabilities of the Japanese forces. The initial level of information concerning the enemy forces on Okinawa was meager, at best.<sup>12</sup> Tenth Army G-2 closely coordinated with the Pacific Fleet's Amphibious Force, deriving most of their intelligence from the analysis and interpretation of aerial photographs.<sup>13</sup> Obtaining photographs of the Ryukyus was difficult because the distance of the target from the nearest base (1,200 nautical miles). This factor limited photographic reconnaissance missions to B-29 bombers, which took pictures only at high altitude, and to carrier based aircraft, the use of which had to coincide with scheduled carrier strikes.<sup>14</sup> The large target area and the frequent cloud cover over Okinawa also

contributed to difficulty in obtaining the required photographs for a detailed study of the enemy and the terrain.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the Tenth Army G-2 section did not receive enough intelligence photographs early enough in the planning process.<sup>16</sup>

In developing their estimates, Tenth Army intelligence officers utilized a target map of Okinawa, scale 1:25,000, based on photographs from September and October 1944 reconnaissance flights. As a consequence of limited photographic reconnaissance, this map was incomplete, lacking in topographic detail in many areas.<sup>17</sup> Tenth Army estimates of the Japanese forces' disposition on Okinawa also suffered from the paucity of photographs. American planners initially estimated, in October 1944, that 48,600 enemy personnel were present on Okinawa.<sup>18</sup> The Tenth Army G-2 issued numerous estimates of the enemy situation on Okinawa between October 1944 and March 1945, finally settling on an estimate of 66,000 Japanese defenders expected to be present by the 1 April amphibious landing.<sup>19</sup> They underestimated the strength of the Japanese defense. Post-battle estimates put the 32nd Army's strength on the main island of Okinawa at up to 117,000 troops.<sup>20</sup> In their post-campaign action report, the Tenth Army G-2 staff admitted that their enemy strength estimates fell far short of the enemy's actual strength on Okinawa.<sup>21</sup> This underestimation of enemy troop strength would play a role in Tenth Army's misreading of the enemy situation during the fighting.

Tenth Army intelligence officers studied Japanese tactical doctrine and their tactics during recent battles, comparing them with available photography and other intelligence information. Based on this analysis, they considered possible courses of action that the Japanese forces might undertake in the defense of Okinawa. Aerial photographs indicated three main defensive areas on Okinawa: the Hagushi beaches on

the west coast, the Yonabaru-Nakagusuku Bay area on the east coast, and centered in Naha on the southern portion of Okinawa.<sup>22</sup> They determined the most likely enemy course of action to be a vigorous defense in depth of the southern third of the island, retaining a significant number of troops as a mobile reserve.<sup>23</sup> They believed only a small force was present on the northern portion of the island. They anticipated that the Japanese would mount a significant counterattack with their reserves once they determined the landing force's dispositions.<sup>24</sup> They also posited that the Japanese reserves, alerted by preliminary operations in the area prior to L-Day, would be in position to launch a counterattack against the invasion beaches on the morning of the landings.<sup>25</sup> The G-2's estimate of the Japanese defensive plan proved fairly accurate, with the exception of the expected counterattacks near the beaches. This resistance adjacent to the landing area did not materialize and the Japanese did not launch a major counterattack until May 4--more than a month after the landing.

### Operations Planning

At the outset of planning, the Tenth Army operations officer (G-3), Brig. Gen. Dumas, believed he had three main tasks to accomplish: preparing troop lists, preparing the tactical plan for the operation, and training the units assigned to the Tenth Army.<sup>26</sup> In the fall of 1944, the G-3 staff identified the main combat units that would fight under Tenth Army during the campaign. Tenth Army enlarged the initial troop list by 70,000 personnel to include more combat support and service units.<sup>27</sup> With this troop list and the G-2's proposed enemy course of action, the operations staff developed the attack plan. Their efforts bore two main courses of action. The primary course of action, called "Plan Fox," called for the amphibious landing to occur on the Hagushi beaches on Okinawa's

west coast, with a feint amphibious landing on the southeastern coast. Aerial photography had convinced the Tenth Army planners that the Hagushi beaches were the most suitable for the amphibious landings. After the landings, the nearby airfields would be seized and the island split in two, with XXIV Corps attacking south, and III Amphibious Corps seizing the northern end of the island.

An alternate course of action, called “Plan Baker,” called for the amphibious landing to occur on two separate beaches in southeastern Okinawa. Buckner and his staff preferred Plan Fox because of Plan Baker’s disadvantages: the presence of several small islands that would interfere with fire control, the absence of a nearby airfield, and the fact that the two corps would not be mutually supportive of each other because of the distance between the landing sites.<sup>28</sup> The Tenth Army settled on Plan Fox after a compromise with Admiral Turner and his staff, who preferred Plan Baker. Turner agreed to Plan Fox with the caveat that Tenth Army would seize, prior to the main landing, the Kerama Retto, which would serve as a naval logistics base for the campaign. The date for L-Day was also shifted from 1 March to 1 April 1945. Plan Baker would serve as the backup plan in case poor weather conditions or other factors made Plan Fox untenable.

However, Brig. Gen. Smith was “convinced that in the event of bad weather on the west coast, landings would have been delayed rather than resort to the east coast landings as provided in the alternate plan.”<sup>29</sup> This aversion to a landing on the east coast would later factor into staff recommendations that influenced Buckner’s decision making during the fighting.

## Logistical Planning

The logistical support of Tenth Army's attack plan presented a daunting challenge to Brig. Gen. Blakelock, Tenth Army's chief logistics officer (G-4). Tenth Army's lines of communication would extend from Okinawa all the way to the west coast of the United States--a distance of over six thousand miles. The G-4 staff salvaged and adapted much of their logistical plans for the aborted Formosa operation to support Iceberg.<sup>30</sup> They developed a logistics estimate, forecasting supply needs, including food, fuel, and all types of ammunition. Matching up the necessary shipping assets with the required troop list was a major undertaking for Blakelock and his subordinates. Shipping availability and beach capacity were both limiting factors to the size of the invasion force. Naval commanders feared that Tenth Army planners might not appreciate the limits of naval shipping assets. With these considerations in mind, Admiral Nimitz specifically asked Brig. Gen. Smith, who had a wealth of experience moving Marine units on Navy vessels, to do all he could to limit the manpower requirements of the Tenth Army.<sup>31</sup> Early in the planning, Blakelock and his planners discovered the requirements of the troop list far exceeded the capacity of available shipping. Consequently, they reduced the allowable tonnage for some units, and completely eliminated other units from the assault echelon, bumping them to follow on landings.<sup>32</sup> The thirty-day delay in L-Day agreed upon in November 1944 allowed the G-4 planners to revise their initial logistics estimates in all areas of supply, making detailed forecasts for all supply requirements, based on the detailed troop list and the ground tactical plan.

Armed with knowledge of previous battles on Japanese-held islands in the Pacific, the Tenth Army medical planners anticipated significant casualties during the operation.

They developed casualty treatment and evacuation plans based on detailed casualty forecasts. They foresaw 6,600 troops killed in action, and 23,400 troops wounded in action, after sixty days of combat.<sup>33</sup> The battle would prove their estimates to be low by only about eight hundred killed in action, but low by over eight thousand troops wounded in action.<sup>34</sup> They also estimated sustaining 54,395 non-battle casualties due to illness and injury, after eighty days of combat.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, they overestimated, as Tenth Army incurred 26,211 non-battle casualties after ninety one days in the Ryukyus.<sup>36</sup> They estimated a high number, believing that Okinawa was a disease-ridden island that would threaten the health of the troops. This belief proved to be inaccurate.<sup>37</sup> A significant number of the non-battle casualties resulted from combat stress, manifesting as severe exhaustion, anxiety and startle reactions, severe tremors, profound amnesia, severe hysteria, and active psychotic reactions. Of the most severe psychiatric cases, eighty percent were returned to duty in ten days, although about half of those individuals required reassignment to non-combat duty.<sup>38</sup>

With the medical section's casualty estimates as a basis, the Tenth Army G-1, Col. Green, and his staff developed the personnel replacement plan for the campaign. Unfortunately, the XXIV Corps came to Tenth Army already short of personnel, hitting the beaches on L-Day under its authorized strength by nearly four thousand troops.<sup>39</sup> The G-1 planned for 1,200 replacement soldiers to arrive in the first echelon, with an additional total of 15,000 replacement soldiers, scheduled to arrive in subsequent echelons.<sup>40</sup> These totals fell short of both the casualty estimates and the actual number of casualties suffered by Army troops during the campaign.<sup>41</sup> The Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, planned for and furnished replacements for III Amphibious Corps, with similar

shortages encountered.<sup>42</sup> Replacement shortages resulted from availability from the services and through no fault of planning of the Tenth Army staff or the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

Brig. Gen. Blakelock and his staff not only had prepare the logistics plan for the invasion itself, but also for the development of the Ryukyus as a base for future operations against the Japanese home islands. Admiral Nimitz assigned this responsibility to Lt. Gen. Buckner, who further delegated the responsibility to Island Command, Okinawa, commanded by Maj. Gen. Fred Wallace. The garrison troops of Wallace's command were scheduled to arrive at Okinawa in seventeen echelons, timed to land based on the unloading capacity at the Hagushi beaches.<sup>43</sup> The staff designated the following as the priority tasks for base development after the landings on 1 April: airfield repair and activation, construction of bulk fuel storage facilities, and development of waterfront installations.<sup>44</sup> The staff planned for base development to proceed concurrently with the ground campaign against the 32nd Army.

The Army staff also developed thorough, detailed plans for the military governance of Okinawa. A Military Government section was formed within the Tenth Army headquarters to plan and oversee this function.<sup>45</sup> The main responsibility of the Military Government was to feed and provide emergency medical care for the approximately 300,000 civilians on Okinawa. To facilitate the handling of civilians, each combat division was supplied with 70,000 civilian rations and medical supplies.<sup>46</sup> The staff requested one hundred Japanese-speaking interpreters to assist in Military Government operations. They ultimately received one hundred ten, only to discover this number to be far too low for the actual requirements undertaken during the campaign.<sup>47</sup>

The plans for military governance developed by the Tenth Army staff proved more than sufficient during the campaign, as the civilians were cooperative once under Tenth Army control. Similarly, the medical situation proved more favorable than anticipated, and an ample supply of food for the civilians was procured early in the battle.<sup>48</sup>

### Preparation for Combat

After weeks of planning, Buckner and the staff issued the tentative operation plan to the subordinate units on 6 January 1945. The staff assisted subordinate units by providing maps and terrain models to facilitate their planning and rehearsals. They distributed 2,500 maps (1:25,000 scale) to each division, as well as a number of three dimensional plastic and rubber terrain models.<sup>49</sup> Corps and division planning and preparation proceeded concurrently with Tenth Army. In March 1945, the Tenth Army staff conducted a command post exercise aboard the USS *Eldorado*, utilizing the actual message traffic from the first day of the assault on Iwo Jima. Buckner felt the exercise “was an excellent way to shake down the staff and teach them what to expect.”<sup>50</sup> Driven by Buckner, the staff had worked hard and effectively to produce a detailed, coordinated, and synchronized battle plan. The effectiveness of their planning effort would be put to the test in the fire of combat.

### Command and Control During the Battle

When the operation began, the Tenth Army staff operated from the main command post aboard the USS *Eldorado*. A forward staff element, which sailed to Okinawa aboard the USS *Montauk*, landed at the Hagushi beaches on L-Day plus three and began establishing the command post ashore. This forward element established

liaison with XXIV Corps and III Amphibious Corps and prepared the command post for the arrival of the commanding general and the staff.<sup>51</sup> In addition to radio and wire communications, Tenth Army established a message relay post on one of the Hagushi beaches to facilitate ship to shore communication between the Army command post and both corps headquarters.<sup>52</sup> The command post remained in operation aboard the USS *Eldorado* until moving ashore on April 18. In addition to radio, wire, and message traffic, Lt. Gen. Buckner spoke with his commanders face to face, making frequent visits to the front to gain firsthand impressions of the fighting.

### Intelligence

As the battle unfolded in early April, it became evident that the 32nd Army, in contrast to the enemy plan anticipated by the Tenth Army G-2, would not conduct a major counterattack against the beach landing areas. The battlefield was eerily quiet in the first several days after the landing, in contrast to the American experience at Iwo Jima and other islands. Buckner and his staff realized the distinct possibility that Ushijima had chosen to hold his reserves for use in the heavily fortified zone on the southern third of the island, rather than risk their destruction in the open ground near the invasion beaches.<sup>53</sup> This assessment was correct and in no way unhinged the Tenth Army plan, but still came as a surprise to most participants in the operation.

As the XXIV Corps moved south and encountered the main enemy defense at the Shuri line, the Tenth Army intelligence staff made their first major error in reading the enemy situation. Buckner and his staff believed that Ushijima would make his last stand on the Shuri line.<sup>54</sup> The extensive fortifications, the determined defensive actions by the Japanese units, and the 32nd Army's large counterattack of May 4 served to reinforce this

belief. Because the G-2 had underestimated Ushijima's personnel strength on Okinawa during the planning process, the reports of significant numbers of Japanese casualties, particularly after the 4 May counterattack, led the staff to believe that the 32nd Army did not have enough troops to establish a new defensive line south of the Shuri line. They painted an inaccurate picture of the enemy for their commanding general, who held firmly to his original plan, believing that, once the Shuri line was broken, his troops would only have to mop up of isolated pockets of resistance.

This view also contributed to the staff and Buckner's rejection of a second amphibious landing at Minatoga to envelop the Japanese defenses. In early April, Ushijima and his staff feared an American landing at Minatoga, feeling it could be accomplished relatively easily and would enable the Tenth Army to cut the 32nd Army in two and defeat it in detail.<sup>55</sup> Pressed by his superiors and urged by some of his subordinate commanders, Buckner ordered the staff to consider a landing at Minatoga. Subsequently, the staff recommended against a second landing, leading Buckner to conclude that such an operation was neither tactically nor logistically feasible.<sup>56</sup> Buckner also believed that a second landing was unnecessary because he thought could break the Shuri line, which he believed to be the last line of the Japanese defense. He knew his men had inflicted considerable casualties on the 32nd Army--casualties that his staff subtracted from their pre-battle estimate of Ushijima's total personnel strength. Had he realized the 32nd Army's true combat strength, Buckner may have made a different decision. He subsequently chose to reinforce XXIV Corp's offensive against the Shuri line by repositioning III Amphibious Corps from northern Okinawa.

Since Buckner and his staff persisted in believing Ushijima would fight to the death along the Shuri line, they made another major intelligence error. The staff misinterpreted reports which indicated an enemy withdrawal from the Shuri line in late May 1945. On 22 May, the G-2, Col. Ely, held to his belief that the “Japs will hole up in Shuri.”<sup>57</sup> As late as 25 May, Tenth Army intelligence estimates pointed toward a defense of the Shuri area “to the last.”<sup>58</sup> In actuality, the Japanese had decided firmly on 22 May to withdraw from the Shuri line, in order to prolong their battle of attrition against the Tenth Army. From 22 May until early June, cloud cover and heavy rain limited the aerial observation of the 32nd Army’s rear area. However, some aerial observation, as well as ground observation, resulted in reports of southward movement from the Shuri line. Groups of individuals were observed moving south on 22, 24, and 25 May. The staff believed these personnel were civilians because they had been reported as wearing white, just as civilians had been instructed by leaflets that were previously dropped behind the Japanese lines to prevent American aircraft and artillery from accidentally targeting civilians.<sup>59</sup> Other reports of enemy movement, both northward and southward, confused the situation even more. The staff also considered the possibility that Ushijima was moving reserves forward or rotating troops out of front line positions for rest.<sup>60</sup> The staff realized too late that Ushijima was withdrawing from the Shuri line, losing an opportunity for decisive action. Not until May 30 did the staff realize that the 32nd Army was extricating itself from the Shuri line.<sup>61</sup>

During planning, the Tenth Army G-2 had heavily relied on aerial photography in developing intelligence estimates of the terrain and enemy. During execution, they continued to rely on this collection method. The G-2 estimated delivering 30,000 tactical

photographs to subordinate units during the first twenty five days of the battle.<sup>62</sup> The 1st Marine Division lauded the Tenth Army's plan for aerial photography coverage, noting that the regular distribution of photographs contributed to positively to operations.<sup>63</sup> However, the G-2 also identified a deficiency in the training and qualifications of their photographic interpreters, which may have contributed to some of the misreading of the enemy during the fight.<sup>64</sup> The intelligence staff also relied on information gathered from the interrogation of civilians. The G-2 staff reported to have identified three hundred forty potential targets, resulting in one hundred five fire missions or airstrikes, based solely on information gained from civilian interrogations.<sup>65</sup>

### Operations

The Tenth Army G-3, Brig. Gen. Dumas and his staff, made significant recommendations that possibly contributed to the prolonged length of the campaign. The major recommendation was in opposition to a proposed second landing at Minatoga, which might have shortened the campaign by enveloping the Japanese defenses. Dumas recommended against such an operation based on the terrain adjacent to the beaches favoring the Japanese, among other reasons. Instead, the staff recommended reinforcing XXIV Corps, continuing with frontal attacks against the Shuri line. This recommendation was not necessarily incorrect, and was certainly linked to the intelligence picture painted by the G-2. Buckner concurred with the staff's recommendation. The staff prepared plans and issued orders, moving III Amphibious Corps to the south and launching a two-corps frontal attack against the Shuri line.

The staff, like their commanding general, failed to recognize the limitations of artillery, naval gunfire, and airpower against the 32nd Army's heavily fortified positions.

Brig. Gen. Smith, who had personal experience in dealing with Japanese fortifications, advised the staff of this limitation prior to a major attack by XXIV Corps against the Shuri line. Smith observed that, at the time, “the staff did not believe it. Even after the failure of the attack..., I am not sure that the staff was entirely convinced.”<sup>66</sup> The staff did come to recognize the difficulty in locating and destroying enemy cave fortifications. The 32nd Army fought from numerous and extensive fortifications, which negated many of the effects of firepower. In one reported instance that demonstrated the sophistication of the Japanese defenses, an artillery battery fired a direct hit inside a cave mouth on the Kakazu Ridge with a round of white phosphorous, and smoke was observed rising from forty adjacent holes.<sup>67</sup> Despite the massive firepower unleashed against the Japanese defenses, advancing infantry encountered numerous caves and positions which remained undamaged.<sup>68</sup> One Marine commander noted that firepower, despite its liberal application, was not decisive:

We poured a tremendous amount of metal on [the Japanese] positions. Not only from artillery but from ships at sea. It seemed nothing could possibly be living in that churning mass where the shells were falling and roaring but when we next advanced Japs would still be there, even madder than they had been before.<sup>69</sup>

The staff noted that naval gunfire was most effective against enemy counterattacks, when the Japanese forces moved over open ground.<sup>70</sup> The staff deemed it impossible to accurately judge the effect of naval gunfire because artillery and airpower serviced many of the same targets as the seaborne guns.<sup>71</sup> In any event, the staff’s evaluation of the effectiveness of firepower did not drive any recommendations to Buckner to change tactics.

## Logistics

The Tenth Army staff encountered a number of logistical problems during the battle. The most significant problem concerned artillery ammunition. On April 6, the Japanese succeeded in sinking three ammunition-bearing ships, resulting in the loss of 14,800 short tons of ammunition.<sup>72</sup> The heavy fighting along the Shuri line initially resulted in a greater daily consumption of artillery ammunition than originally planned. Brig. Gen. Blakelock and his staff succeeded in maintaining awareness of the consumption of artillery ammunition as well as the daily movement of ammunition from resupply ships across the invasion beaches. On 13 April, they reported to Lt. Gen. Buckner that only six hundred forty tons of ammunition had crossed the beaches in the previous twenty four hours--a number not nearly enough to resupply the guns at the current rate of consumption. This information triggered Buckner to give immediate priority to artillery shells, resulting in three thousand tons brought ashore daily--more than enough to meet the demand.<sup>73</sup>

Tenth Army also placed restrictions on the consumption of artillery ammunition until the supply situation could be remedied. Unfortunately, the ammunition situation first reached a critical stage during the second week of April, when XXIV Corps was mounting a major attack on the Shuri line. Maj. Gen. Hodge delayed his corps attack, in part to allow time to accumulate sufficient stocks and reserves of artillery ammunition.<sup>74</sup> The loss of the three ammunition ships, coupled with the operation lasting longer than anticipated during planning, contributed to the ammunition resupply complications. Brig. Gen. Blakelock requested that ammunition reserves be sent from Oahu and the Marianas.<sup>75</sup> The problem arose largely as a result of slow throughput of ammunition

across the beach and out to the units. In the end, the expenditure of large-caliber ammunition (75-mm and larger) was, on average, within one percent of the overall requirements estimated during the planning phase.<sup>76</sup>

Other logistical shortages during the campaign included aviation gas and replacement tanks. Although the aviation fuel available on Okinawa usually bordered on critical, no air missions were canceled as a result.<sup>77</sup> Tenth Army lost tanks during the fighting at a much higher rate than the planners anticipated. Tenth Army lost one hundred fifty one tanks during the campaign, with no replacements arriving from Oahu before the battle's end.<sup>78</sup> Tenth Army encountered no other significant logistical challenges that negatively affected the conduct of the campaign.

Blakelock's most notable recommendation during the battle was his advice against a second amphibious landing at Minatoga because he could support it with food, but could not sufficiently support it with ammunition.<sup>79</sup> In light of the over-the-beach supply flow problems encountered with ammunition on the Hagushi beaches, Blakelock's recommendation is not surprising, given the staff's assertion that the Minatoga beaches were less suitable than those at Hagushi. Overall, Blakelock's concept of logistical support worked. Available evidence indicates that he and his staff performed well throughout the campaign, maintaining situational awareness of on-hand supply and keeping supplies moving across the Hagushi beaches to the fighting units. The logistical effort at Okinawa symbolized the industrial might of the United States in supplying its war machine, far from American shores.

The high numbers of casualties and insufficient replacements caused problems for the Tenth Army on Okinawa. By the end of April, Tenth Army had established six Army

field hospitals and one Marine evacuation hospital, with a total capacity of three thousand beds.<sup>80</sup> Because of the high number of casualties versus the number of available beds, Tenth Army instituted a policy of evacuating to the Marianas casualties that required two weeks or less hospitalization. This policy resulted in casualties who would be fit for duty after a short hospitalization to be lost to their units for a considerable amount of time.<sup>81</sup> Tenth Army later adjusted the policy, requiring the hospitals to hold these casualties to the limit of their bed capacity, and each corps established convalescent camps so that soldiers and marines could heal on Okinawa and quickly return to their units.<sup>82</sup> The Tenth Army medical staff closely tracked casualties, controlling their flow to prevent overload at the field hospitals, which occurred on several occasions resulting in the transfer of a number of surgical patients to another hospital.<sup>83</sup> On the whole, the Tenth Army G-1 and medical staff maintained situational awareness of the casualty and replacement situation, resulting in no major unanticipated problems in these areas during the campaign.

### Conclusions

Operation Iceberg was a tremendous challenge for the Tenth Army staff to plan, resource, and execute. The staff prepared a detailed, tactically and logistically sound battle plan for the invasion of Okinawa. The staff worked efficiently, following established doctrinal planning procedures. They coordinated well with the staffs of adjacent, subordinate, and superior units, resulting in a plan which garnered a wide consensus. Despite suboptimal aerial photography, the G-2 succeeded in making a fairly accurate read of the enemy situation prior to the battle, with the exception of underestimating the 32nd Army's strength. Consequently, the tactical plan was sound,

focusing on objectives which supported Admiral Nimitz's end state of using the Ryukyus as a staging area for the invasion of the Japanese home islands. They accounted for, in great detail, the base development and military governance aspects of the operation. Throughout planning and preparation, the staff skillfully and successfully choreographed the buildup and movement of units and supplies to the target area. The Tenth Army staff's planning effort for Operation Iceberg is a fine example of deliberate, joint planning. The staff placed the Tenth Army in a position to achieve success during the campaign.

In the execution of Operation Iceberg, the staff performed well in controlling the army. They received reports and issued orders from well-run command posts. They provided Lt. Gen. Buckner with a clear picture of the status of his own forces throughout the fight, both tactically and logistically. Their main shortcomings during execution were a failure to accurately read the enemy situation and a rigid adherence to the original plan. The G-2 section incorrectly predicted that Ushijima would make his last stand at Shuri. They convinced themselves of this assertion to the point they misread clear signs of an organized enemy withdrawal to new defensive positions, until the opportunity for decisive action had passed.

Buckner and his staff seemed unwilling to change the basic concept of the plan. Buckner personally selected many of his staff officers, quite a few of whom had worked for him in Alaska. Consequently, The Tenth Army staff was predisposed to think like Buckner. They were likeminded in their faith in the basic plan, their belief in the supremacy of overwhelming firepower in accordance with the U.S. Army doctrine of the day, and their desire to minimize American casualties, regardless of how much time the

campaign consumed. In the case of a proposed second landing, Buckner took his staff's recommendation over those of subordinate commanders like Maj. Gen. Geiger, Maj. Gen. Bruce, and his own Marine deputy chief of staff, Brig. Gen. Smith. Like Buckner, the staff proved adept at administering the Tenth Army during planning and preparation, but lacked a measure of tactical agility during the fight.

As with any unit in combat, the Tenth Army staff was imperfect, but their labor ultimately bore the fruit of success on Okinawa. Brig. Gen. Smith, somewhat of an outsider on Buckner's staff, assessed his colleagues as "well grounded professionally, and, considering their initial lack of cohesion and their lack of combat experience, they did a very creditable job."<sup>84</sup> Naturally, the enemy played a significant role in the course of the battle. The Tenth Army staff was matched against a talented, professional group from the 32nd Army. Lt. Gen. Ushijima and his staff expertly planned, prepared, and executed their battle of attrition, giving Tenth Army all it could handle. Having persevered through an arduous struggle with a determined foe, the Tenth Army staff can rightly claim victory in the final major battle of the Second World War.

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<sup>1</sup>Roy A. Appleman, et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948), 25.

<sup>2</sup>Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. and Joseph Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, ed. Nicholas Evan Sarantakes (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Oliver P. Smith, "The Tenth Army and Okinawa," *Personal Papers of General Oliver P. Smith, USMC*, (Washington, DC: Personal Papers Collection, History and Museums Division, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps), 3.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Clifton LaBree, *The Gentle Warrior: General Oliver Prince Smith, USMC* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2001), 76-77.

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, *Tenth Army Action Report, Ryukyus, 26 March-30 June 1945* (LaCrosse: Brookhaven Press, 1945), 1-9.

<sup>8</sup>Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Victory and Occupation: History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1968), 62.

<sup>9</sup>Smith, 25-26.

<sup>10</sup>Robert N. Colwell, "Intelligence and the Okinawa Battle," *Naval War College Review* 38 (March-April 1985), 82.

<sup>11</sup>James H. Belote and William M. Belote, *Typhoon of Steel: The Battle for Okinawa* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970), 35.

<sup>12</sup>Frank and Shaw, 78.

<sup>13</sup>Chas S. Nichols, Jr. and Henry I. Shaw, Jr. *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch U.S. Marine Corps, 1955), 19.

<sup>14</sup>Appleman, et al, 14.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-II-3.

<sup>17</sup>Appleman, et al, 14.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>19</sup>Nichols and Shaw, 21.

<sup>20</sup>Appleman, et al, 485 and 489.

<sup>21</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-II-6.

<sup>22</sup>Appleman, et al, 16.

<sup>23</sup>Frank and Shaw, 80.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>25</sup>Appleman, et al, 17.

<sup>26</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-III-1.

- <sup>27</sup>Appleman, et al, 27.
- <sup>28</sup>LaBree, 78.
- <sup>29</sup>Smith, 30.
- <sup>30</sup>Frank and Shaw, 69-70.
- <sup>31</sup>LaBree, 75.
- <sup>32</sup>Appleman, et al, 37.
- <sup>33</sup>Tenth Army, 11-XV-1.
- <sup>34</sup>Roy A. Appleman, et al, 490. Differences between the Tenth Army casualty estimates and the actual number of casualties were derived from the casualty table.
- <sup>35</sup>U.S Tenth Army, 11-XV-2.
- <sup>36</sup>Appleman, et al, 490.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., 415.
- <sup>38</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-XV-20.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., 10-I-1.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., 11-I-16.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., 11-I-19.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., 11-I-16 and 11-I-21.
- <sup>43</sup>Appleman, et al, 39.
- <sup>44</sup>Frank and Shaw, 75-76.
- <sup>45</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-XXVII-1.
- <sup>46</sup>Appleman, et al, 39.
- <sup>47</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-XXVII-2-3.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., 11-XXVII-3.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid., 11-II-5.
- <sup>50</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 26.

- <sup>51</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 6-O-3.
- <sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-XII-10.
- <sup>53</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 31.
- <sup>54</sup>Appleman, et al, 387.
- <sup>55</sup>Nichols and Shaw, 142.
- <sup>56</sup>Appleman, et al, 262.
- <sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 387.
- <sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>60</sup>Jon T. Hoffman, “The Legacy and Lessons of Okinawa,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (April 1995), 68.
- <sup>61</sup>Appleman, et al, 392.
- <sup>62</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-II-12.
- <sup>63</sup>First Marine Division, “Special Action Report, Okinawa, Nansei-Shoto,” 438.
- <sup>64</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-II-7.
- <sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-II-15.
- <sup>66</sup>Smith, 83.
- <sup>67</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-VI-41.
- <sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-VI-8.
- <sup>69</sup>Wilbert S. Brown, oral history interview, transcript, U.S. Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC, 214-215. This quote was used as cited in Ronald Spector’s book, *Eagle Against the Sun*.
- <sup>70</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-V-7-8.
- <sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-V-15.
- <sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-IV-61.

<sup>73</sup>Robert Leckie, *Okinawa: The Last Battle of WWII* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995), 122.

<sup>74</sup>Appleman, et al, 410.

<sup>75</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-IV-21.

<sup>76</sup>Roy A. Appleman, et al, 411.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 412.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 414.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 11-XV-10.

<sup>84</sup>Smith, 25.

## CHAPTER 4

### TENTH ARMY--A JOINT PERSPECTIVE

#### Introduction

Operation Iceberg was perhaps the U.S. Armed Forces' most "joint" operation of World War II. The Okinawa campaign culminated more than three years of war in the Pacific, incorporating hard lessons learned about joint warfare from previous campaigns and operations against the Japanese. The mix of the forces from all services, coupled with the scale and complexity of the operation, presented Tenth Army and its commander, Army Lieutenant General Simon B. Bolivar Buckner, Jr., with significant challenges. The Tenth Army controlled units from the Army, Navy, Marines, and the Army Air Force and was further supported by the Navy and the Army Air Force. Though not without some difficulties and controversy, Tenth Army planned and fought well as a joint force, and as part of a larger joint force under naval command, overcoming inter-service squabbling and rivalries to bring the campaign to a victorious conclusion.

For Operation Iceberg, the Tenth Army fell under the command and control of Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner's Joint Expeditionary Task Force 51. Tenth Army, which controlled all land operations, was designated as Task Force 56. The two main land formations under Buckner's command were the Army's XXIV Corps, commanded by Army Major General John R. Hodge, and the Marine Corp's III Amphibious Corps, commanded by Marine Major General Roy S. Geiger. Tenth Army was assigned a tactical air force, which consisted of both Marine and Army Air Force squadrons and was commanded by Marine Major General Francis P. Mulcahy. Tenth Army also had a naval task force, commanded by Rear Admiral C. H. Cobb. Tenth Army would govern and

develop the island through its Island Command, under Army Major General Fred C. Wallace. Two additional Army divisions and one Marine division constituted a deception force, a reserve, and an additional landing force for some of the islands west of Okinawa.

### Joint Planning and Preparation

The first challenge facing General Buckner and the Tenth Army was planning. After Tenth Army formed and planning for Iceberg began, Buckner quickly understood the nature of his command as a joint force. Consequently, he requested that Admiral Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas, authorize Marine and Naval augmentation of the Tenth Army staff to facilitate joint planning and execution. Nimitz granted this request, assigning approximately thirty Marine and thirty Navy officers, and enlisted assistants to the Tenth Army staff.<sup>1</sup>

Marine Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, who served as the Marine Deputy Chief of Staff, observed that his reception by the Army officers on the staff was “cordial and sincere,” as Buckner had made it known that he wanted Tenth Army to function without inter-service friction.<sup>2</sup> Buckner had reason to fear that inter-service tension might have negative effects within his command. Throughout the war in the Pacific, there had been rankling between the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and the Army Air Force over various issues and service agendas. Buckner had his own experiences with inter-service friction during his tenure as commander the Alaska Defense Command. He and the commander of the North Pacific Force, Rear Admiral Robert Theobald, never achieved mutual cooperation and their clash of personalities hindered inter-service communication, increasing the costs of operations in time, effort, and even lives.<sup>3</sup>

However, Buckner never publicly blamed the Navy for his problems and worked well with some of the Navy personnel in Alaska. He got along particularly well with Captain Ralph Parker, commander of the Navy's Alaska Sector, who presented him with an honorary commission as a "Brevet Brigadier Admiral."<sup>4</sup>

Between the Army and Marine Corps, one incident in particular had sown discontent. In June 1944, during the Saipan campaign, Marine Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith relieved Army Major General Ralph Smith from command of the 27th Infantry Division for poor performance during combat operations. This relief caused considerable public and private bitterness between the Army and Marine Corps.<sup>5</sup> Buckner declared in his diary that he "deplored the whole matter and harbored no inter-service ill feelings."<sup>6</sup> Buckner's prominent effort to promote joint harmony even ruffled feathers within the Army. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, at times known for discordant relations with other services, once remarked that "if [Buckner] ever comes under him, he would bust him because he has sold out to one of our sister services."<sup>7</sup>

Fortunately, the personal and professional relationship between Buckner and his old friend Maj. Gen. Roy Geiger, commander of the Marine III Amphibious Corps mitigated much of the tension between the Army and Marines within Tenth Army. Buckner and Geiger had attended the Army's Command and General Staff College together in the 1920s and had kept in touch ever since, holding one another in high professional esteem.<sup>8</sup> Buckner and Geiger saw eye-to-eye in their approaches to problem solving, and Buckner placed the highest trust in Geiger by naming him to succeed him in command of the Tenth Army in the event that Buckner became a casualty during Operation Iceberg.<sup>9</sup> In February 1945, Buckner sent an official letter to Admiral Nimitz

asking that Geiger be first in the succession of command. Buckner, well aware of inter-service prejudices harbored by many senior leaders of the time, noted that Nimitz's "reaction will be entertaining since he mortally fears and distrusts the Marines."<sup>10</sup>

Geiger had a reputation of working well with the Army. During the campaigns on Bougainville, Guam, and Peleliu, Army divisions had served under III Amphibious Corps and Geiger insisted that his staff treat all units impartially, whether Army or Marine.<sup>11</sup> During his prior campaigns, "there had been a notable lack of friction between [the Army and Marine units], particularly at the higher echelons, for Geiger would under no circumstances condone any unnecessary inter-service rivalry nor did he play favorites, and his attitude in those respects was common knowledge."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, he maintained strong and positive relations with the Navy amphibious task force commanders who brought him ashore.<sup>13</sup>

The Tenth Army staff, freshly integrated with Navy and Marine Corps officers, also seemed to rise above inter-service rivalries, in accordance with Buckner's guidance. Staff officers came to respect one another, despite service differences. The two Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Tenth Army, USMC Brig. Gen. Oliver Smith and Army Brig. Gen. Lawrence Schick, became fast friends, gaining each other's professional esteem. Smith noted that Schick "was intensely proud of the Army, as I was of the Marine Corps, and we had many heated though friendly arguments."<sup>14</sup>

Buckner was committed to maintaining harmony between the services both internally and externally to Tenth Army. During a press conference in March 1945, Buckner placed "long emphasis on equal publicity for all services."<sup>15</sup> In another instance while planning for Operation Iceberg was ongoing in Hawaii, Brig. Gen. Oliver Smith

learned that he had been awarded the Legion of Merit for previous actions during the war. Normal protocol dictated that General Buckner should present Smith with the award. However, Marine General Holland Smith, who had signed the award citation, was also present on Hawaii, commanding the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Smith and Brig. Gen. Lawrence Schick, the Tenth Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Army forces, discussed the matter and recommended to Buckner that Holland Smith should present the award. Buckner readily agreed, demonstrating his desire to promote inter-service cooperation and harmony, despite Holland Smith's infamy within Army circles over the relief of Ralph Smith on Saipan.<sup>16</sup>

The joint nature of the Operation Iceberg demanded extensive coordination between the services during planning in all matters of operations and logistics. Joint conferences were convened to work out the details on all manner of issues, such as troops lists, shipping, supplies, and operations.<sup>17</sup> The Corps commanders, Generals Geiger and Hodge, coordinated directly with their associated naval task forces while planning amphibious landings.<sup>18</sup> Tenth Army and Admiral Turner's staff conferred about the optimal beaches on Okinawa for the amphibious operations, considering numerous factors. Admiral Turner was particularly concerned about landing on the western beaches at Hagushi because of the Japanese mine and submarine threat, and because of the potentially unfavorable weather that historically prevailed in March (the landing was originally scheduled for March 1, 1945).<sup>19</sup>

Another issue that arose during the planning was the Navy's desire to establish a logistics base to support the naval forces involved in the operation. After much discussion, debate, and negotiation with the Navy, the initial plan generated by Tenth

Army for the operation, Plan Fox, was revised to include the seizure of the Kerama Retto and the Keise Shima prior to the main landing for the purposes of establishing a naval supply base.<sup>20</sup> The date of the landing was also slipped to April 1 based on the Navy's weather concerns. On the whole, Tenth Army and its Navy higher headquarters cooperated well during the planning for Iceberg, creating a detailed and comprehensive plan that effectively incorporated the capabilities of all the services.

The joint planning effort was also aided by Tenth Army's close proximity on Oahu to the other major commands involved in the operation. Tenth Army's headquarters was located only minutes away from Headquarters, Pacific Ocean Areas; HQ, Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas; HQ, Army Air Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas; HQ, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific; and HQ, Amphibious Forces, Pacific.<sup>21</sup> After the campaign, Tenth Army declared that "the inter-service relationships were excellent [and] the fullest cooperation and the most harmonious relations prevailed at all times" during planning.<sup>22</sup> Tenth Army was able to publish its tentative campaign plan on January 6, 1945, a mere ten weeks after the receipt of Admiral Nimitz's operational directive.<sup>23</sup>

The next challenge faced by Buckner was the training and rehearsals of his units for the seizure of Okinawa. The subordinate units of his command were separated by great distances. Additionally, limited preparation time was available once the plan was completed. These factors precluded Army-level training and rehearsals of the amphibious assault. However, the two corps and their divisions engaged in individual training, combined arms training, and special training in amphibious, cave, and mountain warfare.<sup>24</sup> The two corps and the divisions also conducted amphibious landing rehearsals with their Navy amphibious task forces. The III Amphibious Corps was able to conduct a

combined rehearsal with the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions at Guadalcanal from 2-7 March 1945.<sup>25</sup> XXIV Corps conducted an amphibious rehearsal with the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions on 17-19 March 1945.<sup>26</sup>

### Joint Execution

During the execution of the campaign, Tenth Army maintained, for the most part, the spirit of cooperation with the other services that had developed during the planning and preparation phase. Joint cooperation in matters of fire support and the sharing of tactics, techniques, and procedures between Army and Marine units was particularly noteworthy. However, several instances of inter-service tension arose from tactical disagreements. The pace of Tenth Army's operations in clearing the island, and Buckner's decision about whether to attempt an envelopment of the stout Japanese defenses with an additional amphibious landing, were the most notable moments of inter-service strife.

The Tenth Army and the Navy cooperated considerably in the area of naval gunfire. The Navy expended 41,543 rounds of five-inch to sixteen-inch ammunition in support of the seizure of the Kerama Retto and in preparatory fires on Okinawa prior to the amphibious assault. In support of the amphibious landings on April 1, the Navy expended another 44,825 rounds. Throughout the rest of the campaign, the Navy expended 513,650 rounds in support of Tenth Army.<sup>27</sup> The Navy employed naval gunfire longer and in greater quantities at Okinawa than in any other battle in human history.<sup>28</sup> By mid-April, approximately two weeks after the initial landings, naval gunfire settled into a pattern that was steadily maintained for the length of the campaign. Each regiment was assigned two ships, one a destroyer for night illumination; each division was

assigned a cruiser or battleship with organic air spotters; and each corps had one or two heavy ships assigned for bombarding targets developed by corps artillery.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of this fire was less than desired due to the formidable Japanese fortifications, but it clearly demonstrated that the Navy's resolve to support the ground forces, despite regular *kamikaze* attacks on the fleet.

The Tenth Army also succeeded in the joint integration of field artillery. Artillery battalions from XXIV Corps and III Amphibious Corps fired 1,766,352 rounds in support of the infantry.<sup>30</sup> "Coordination between Marine and Army units was exceptional, and a pervading spirit of cooperation placed the protection and support of the infantryman ahead of all other considerations."<sup>31</sup> During the attacks on the Shuri Line, there were many instances where Marine artillery supported Army infantry and Army artillery supported Marine infantry. Buckner's tactical philosophy relied heavily on the use of firepower to support assaults by infantry. Like Naval gunfire, field artillery proved to be largely ineffective against the Japanese fortifications on Okinawa.

Tenth Army also effectively coordinated the use of air support during the campaign. The Tactical Air Force assigned to Tenth Army, which consisted of both Marine and Army Air Force fighter and bomber squadrons, was responsible for several missions in support of Tenth Army. The Tactical Air Force established a Combat Air Patrol (CAP) to defend the island against enemy air attacks. It also attacked and destroyed local enemy air bases within the Ryukyu islands, and Japanese air bases on their home island of Kyushu.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the Tactical Air Force assisted in protecting the fleet against enemy air attacks and provided close air support to the infantry on Okinawa. However, sixty percent of the close air support missions flown in support of

the Tenth Army were executed by carrier-based Navy aircraft, which flew more than 15,000 close air support missions during the campaign.<sup>33</sup> Despite the good coordination of air support within Tenth Army and with the Navy, close air support was largely ineffective against the Japanese fortified positions.

Antipathy existed between the Army and Marine units within the Tenth Army among the troops and at the lower levels of command. This acrimony was not unique to Okinawa, having evolved throughout the history of the two services and during the war in the Pacific. Buckner's use of Army and Marine units interchangeably in his protracted campaign against the 32nd Army was somewhat unique and perhaps uncomfortable to some marines. Many marines viewed themselves as superior to Army soldiers and were distressed when they discovered the conventional role they had to play during the campaign.<sup>34</sup> Marines tended to view themselves as amphibious troops and were irritated by the apparent misuse of their elite status--a style of combat they cynically described as "processing."<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the "muddy boots" level, the Marine and Army generals within Tenth Army cooperated favorably, exhibiting unity of purpose and effort during the campaign.

Despite animosity at the lower levels, the Army and Marine Corps units within Tenth Army learned much from each other during the course of the battle. During the hard fighting to clear the Japanese from their heavily fortified positions, the Marines of III Amphibious Corps developed what Buckner described as "blowtorch and corkscrew" tactics. This tactic of using flame-throwing tanks and traditional tank and infantry teams to close with the enemy positions was further developed by the Army units.<sup>36</sup> Companies of the Army's 713<sup>th</sup> Armored Flamethrower Battalion, the first of its type to see sustained

action, elicited the highest praise from Army and Marine infantry alike for a “consistently outstanding record of performance.”<sup>37</sup> Whatever discord existed between the Army and Marine infantry units within Tenth Army, it did not preclude their sharing tactics, techniques, and procedures. The desire for victory outweighed inter-service rivalry and also reflected Buckner’s well known desire for cooperation between the services.

Some observers looked at Buckner’s spirit of inter-service cooperation with a jaundiced eye. Gen. Joe Stilwell, during his June visit to Okinawa, observed that “Buckner is obviously playing the Navy. He recommended Geiger as army commander. Nimitz is perfect. His staff is perfectly balanced. Cooperation is magnificent. The Marine divisions were wonderful. In fact, everything was just dinky.”<sup>38</sup> Stilwell refused to believe that all joint cooperation was as rosy as Buckner indicated. Throughout the campaign, Buckner remained adamant in his promotion of inter-service accord.

The coordination and cooperation between the services during the Okinawa campaign was not without problems. Press coverage of the campaign threatened inter-service harmony. Throughout the war in the Pacific, the services jostled for media coverage of their actions, harboring animosity toward each other if they perceived unfair apportionment of the glory. Maj. Gen. Hodge, commanding general of XXIV Corps, complained about the news coverage in a four-page memo, citing little mention of Army troops fighting in the battle. He complained “these [stories] get back to soldiers from their families and make for bitterest feeling toward the Marine Corps where there should be and normally is a feeling of great friendliness and mutual respect between individuals of the two services.”<sup>39</sup> Press coverage favoring one service or another tended to exacerbate existing inter-service churlishness.

Buckner, in his unshakeable desire for good relations between the services, was annoyed by a “newsmap” published by Lt. Gen. Robert Richardson, the commander of the US Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas. The newsmap failed to mention “anything but the major *Army* units and their commanders. [I] wrote him an official letter urging him to give due credit to my *Marines* [emphasis in original]. Richardson is always a menace to good relations between the services in the Pacific.”<sup>40</sup>

Buckner did not cultivate good relationships with the press during the Okinawa campaign. Despite the fact that his father had been a newspaper editor for a time after the Civil War, Buckner saw the press as a nuisance and put forth little effort in developing his relations with correspondents.<sup>41</sup> His attitude toward the press may have contributed to some instances of negative publicity about his decision not to attempt an additional amphibious landing on southeastern Okinawa.<sup>42</sup> The greatest media controversy occurred when a reporter for the New York Herald Tribune accused Buckner of poorly running the land campaign on Okinawa, roundly criticizing his generalship, announcing friction between the Army and Marines on Okinawa, and even calling for an investigation of Buckner’s conduct.<sup>43</sup> Buckner, exasperated, believed the offending reporter was “seeking to raise a newspaper controversy. The enemy should be pleased by his services for them.”<sup>44</sup> In response to growing media criticism of Buckner and the campaign, Admiral Nimitz addressed the situation to a gathering of seventy six correspondents on Guam, praising the Army’s tactics and calling the Okinawa campaign a “magnificent performance.”<sup>45</sup>

As the progress of the campaign moved along slowly after the XXIV Corps encountered the main enemy defenses on the southern part of the island, General Buckner

felt increasing pressure from the Navy to speed up the progress of the campaign.

Admirals Spruance and Turner were dismayed by the numerous and ferocious *kamikaze* attacks targeting the supporting fleet around Okinawa. The fleet was vulnerable to these attacks and paying a heavy price in blood and materiel, losing 26 ships sunk and another 164 damaged by suicide planes during the course of the campaign.<sup>46</sup> The longer the ground campaign lasted, the longer the supporting fleet would have to remain in the area as targets of a suicidal enemy.

While visiting Buckner on Okinawa on April 23, Admiral Nimitz mentioned the need to conclude operations more quickly in order to release the supporting fleet. Buckner responded by pointing out that this was a ground operation, implying that tactics on Okinawa was strictly Army business and that the Navy should keep its opinions to itself, revealing “a persistent and irritating inter-service resistance to clearly established lines of authority.”<sup>47</sup> Nimitz responded that he was “losing a ship and a half a day. So if this line isn’t moving within five days, we’ll get someone here to move it so we can all get out from under these stupid air attacks.”<sup>48</sup> The Admirals disagreed with Buckner’s tactics of massively supported frontal attacks against the Japanese fortifications because they consumed too much time. Understanding that Buckner’s tactics were intended to not unnecessarily waste the lives of ground troops, Admiral Spruance remarked in a letter to an old friend:

I doubt if the Army’s slow, methodical method of fighting really saves any lives in the long run. It merely spreads the casualties over a longer period. The longer period greatly increases the naval casualties when Jap air attacks on ships is a continuing factor. However, I do not think the Army is at all allergic to losses of naval ships and personnel.<sup>49</sup>

Spruance's concern was understandable, as they Navy suffered more casualties and lost more ships at Okinawa than during any other battle in its history.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alexander Vandergrift accompanied Nimitz on the same visit and also had misgivings about Buckner's tactics. Upon returning to Washington, he reported to Admiral Ernest King, the Chief of Naval Operations, stating that Buckner's tactics were time-consuming and unnecessarily exposed the Navy to repeated attacks by *kamikazes*. Admiral King responded that he would attend to the matter.<sup>50</sup> Inter-service differences were rearing their ugly heads on Okinawa because of these tactical disagreements, with both sides arguing valid points in support of their positions.

The next significant inter-service disagreement--perhaps the most significant of the campaign--concerned the possible execution of an amphibious assault on the southern end of Okinawa. The intent of such an operation was to envelop the enemy main defensive line, which ground the Tenth Army's offensive to an excruciating crawl. During the April 23 visit, General Vandergrift had also offered the suggestion to Buckner that he use the 2nd Marine Division, which was in reserve and currently positioned in Saipan, to conduct an amphibious landing behind enemy lines in southern Okinawa to relieve the pressure on the XXIV Corps in the attack.<sup>51</sup> Buckner was opposed to the idea for a number of reasons, including logistical concerns, and desired instead to reinforce his frontal attacks against the main Japanese defenses.<sup>52</sup> Buckner was the commander on the ground, and his decision won the day, but became the subject of much debate that continues today. Some historians have asserted that Buckner eschewed a second landing because of service parochialism, but his deliberate efforts to foster inter-service harmony

throughout his tenure with Tenth Army refute this assertion.<sup>53</sup> Buckner never appeared to play favorites in his command, using Marine and Army divisions interchangeably, and would not allow increased casualties to merely ensure glory for the Army.

### Conclusions

Tenth Army conducted itself well as a joint force. General Buckner and his staff exerted genuine efforts to minimize inter-service friction and worked together to execute an exceedingly complex plan. Planning and preparation proceeded smoothly and the campaign began well, with Tenth Army effectively synchronizing its maneuver forces and supporting assets, from all services. Tactical disagreements between Buckner and his naval superiors were the main source of discontent. These disagreements arose mainly from the unprecedented pressure placed on the supporting fleet by persistent *kamikaze* attacks. Had the Navy not experienced such a heavy volume of Japanese suicide attacks, the controversy about frontal attacks versus amphibious envelopments may not have arose at all. For his part, Buckner probably failed to fully appreciate the impact that his deliberate approach had on the Navy, which suffered greater losses at Okinawa than at any other single campaign of the war in the Pacific.

The greatest inter-service strife took place after the campaign concluded, with most of the debate centered on Buckner's decision not to launch a second amphibious assault to envelop the Japanese defenses. The debate on this subject has continued to the present day. Sadly, Buckner's death in battle on June 18, 1945, prevented him from weighing in on the debate after the war. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur lambasted Nimitz's handling of the operation, stating that the whole island did not need to be taken to achieve the objective of providing a staging base for the invasion of Japan,

and that thousands of soldiers had been needlessly sacrificed.<sup>54</sup> Ultimately, Operation Iceberg provided a magnificent example of joint service operations during World War II. Marine Corps historian Joseph Alexander asserts that the battle “represented joint service cooperation at its finest. This was General Buckner’s greatest achievement....Okinawa remains a model of inter-service cooperation to succeeding generations of military professionals.”<sup>55</sup> Buckner adamantly promoted joint rapport in the Tenth Army and his efforts contributed to the ultimate victory.

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<sup>1</sup>Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Victory and Occupation: History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, U.S. Marine Corps, 1968), 62.

<sup>2</sup>Clifton LaBree, *The Gentle Warrior: General Oliver Prince Smith, USMC* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2001), 71-72.

<sup>3</sup>Brian Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), 15.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>5</sup>Harry A. Gailey, *Howlin' Mad vs. The Army: Conflict in Command, Saipan 1944* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1986). This book details the June 1944 incident in Saipan in which USMC Lt. Gen. Holland Smith relieved Army MG Ralph Smith of command of the 27th Infantry Division. This incident caused significant bitterness between the Army and Marine Corps.

<sup>6</sup>Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. and Joseph Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, ed. Nicholas Evan Sarantakes (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>7</sup>Robert L. Eichelberger, *Dear Miss Em: General Eichelberger's War in the Pacific, 1942-1945*, ed. Jay Luvaas (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1972), 230.

<sup>8</sup>Roger Willock, *Unaccustomed to Fear: A Biography of the Late General Roy S. Geiger* (Princeton, Roger Willock, 1968), 285.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>10</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 19.

<sup>11</sup>F. P. Henderson, “Roy S. Geiger: The First Air-Ground General,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (April 1995): 80.

<sup>12</sup>Willock, 287.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Oliver P. Smith, “The Tenth Army and Okinawa,” Personal Papers of General Oliver P. Smith, USMC, (Washington, DC: Personal Papers Collection, History and Museums Division, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps), 3.

<sup>15</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 21.

<sup>16</sup>LaBree, 79.

<sup>17</sup>Roy A. Appleman, et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948), 27.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Frank and Shaw, 64.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>U.S. Tenth Army, 10-III-1.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>Chas S. Nichols, Jr. and Henry I. Shaw, Jr. *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch U.S. Marine Corps, 1955), 281.

<sup>24</sup>Appleman, et al, 39.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>26</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 23.

<sup>27</sup>Appleman, et al, 500.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>29</sup>Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol XIV: Victory in the Pacific* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1960), 240.

- <sup>30</sup>Appleman, et al, 498.
- <sup>31</sup>Nichols and Shaw, 271.
- <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 261.
- <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 263.
- <sup>34</sup>Craig M. Cameron, *American Samurai: Myth, Imagination, and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941-1951* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 175.
- <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.
- <sup>36</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 6.
- <sup>37</sup>Nichols and Shaw, 272.
- <sup>38</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 75.
- <sup>39</sup>Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, "Inter-Service Relations: The Army and the Marines at the Battle of Okinawa," *Infantry* (January-April 1999), 15.
- <sup>40</sup>Buckner and Stilwell, 45.
- <sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 5-6.
- <sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 77-78.
- <sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 78.
- <sup>45</sup>E. B. Potter, *Nimitz* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1976), 376.
- <sup>46</sup>Appleman, et al, 489.
- <sup>47</sup>Potter, 374-375.
- <sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 375.
- <sup>49</sup>Thomas B. Buell, *The Quiet Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 387.
- <sup>50</sup>Potter, 375-376.

<sup>51</sup>Derrick Wright, *Pacific Victory* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2005), 213.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>Robert Leckie, *Okinawa: the Last Battle of World War II* (Viking Penguin, 1995), 155.

<sup>54</sup>D. Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur: Volume II, 1941-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), 733.

<sup>55</sup>Joseph H. Alexander, *The Final Campaign: Marines in the Victory on Okinawa* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps), 51-52.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Aftermath of the Battle of Okinawa

As the battle for Okinawa ended, the Allies shifted their focus to the next step in the war against Japan. Admiral William “Bull” Halsey replaced Admiral Spruance in command of the Central Pacific Task Forces. General Joseph “Vinegar Joe” Stilwell assumed command of the Tenth Army, replacing some of the army staff with handpicked officers from elsewhere. Lt. Gen. Buckner was interred at a military cemetery on Okinawa shortly after his death and was later moved to a family burial plot in Frankfort, Kentucky. The gymnasium at Fort Richardson, Alaska, and the field training camp at West Point, New York, bear Buckner’s name. In 1954, an act of Congress posthumously promoted Buckner to general. The remains of many of the Americans and Japanese who fought on Okinawa still rest there today.

The Japanese 32nd Army essentially ceased to exist. Only 7,400 troops surrendered, many of whom were conscripted Okinawans.<sup>1</sup> For several months afterward, surrendering Japanese troops came out of caves on both northern and southern Okinawa, raising the prisoner total to over sixteen thousand by the end of November 1945.<sup>2</sup> Col. Yahara, the senior surviving member of the 32nd Army, failed in his escape attempt and was captured by the Americans and interrogated about the Japanese defense of the island. While in American custody, Yahara cooperated and received good treatment from his captors, but his mind was consumed by thoughts of suicide and escape. Yahara decided that suicide was pointless, preferring instead to risk death during an escape attempt.<sup>3</sup> The Japanese surrendered before he made any such attempt, and he

was repatriated to Japan, arriving at Tokyo Bay on January 7, 1946.<sup>4</sup> In the years following the war, Yahara remained silent but was haunted by Okinawa, shameful of his own survival, and angry at the overall Japanese strategy for Okinawa and at 32nd Army's disastrous counterattack of May 4, which he had opposed.<sup>5</sup> He broke his silence in 1973, publishing a book about the battle.

The base development of Okinawa proceeded at a breakneck pace, and forces began to assemble in the Ryukyus in preparation for Operation Downfall--the ultimate invasion of the Japanese home islands. Allied planners divided Operation Downfall into two successive operations, Olympic and Coronet. Operation Olympic, the invasion of Kyushu, was planned to commence in November 1945, but preparations halted when the Japanese surrendered on August 14, 1945. The bloodshed in the Pacific, and in the Second World War, finally came to an end.

#### Significance of the Battle of Okinawa

Although not intended to be, the battle for Okinawa was the last great clash of World War II. The Allies, led by the United States, planned Operation Iceberg as yet another step on the path to defeating the Japanese Empire. The Ryukyus provided an excellent staging base for the ground troops, naval shipping, and aircraft intended to execute Operation Downfall. The bitter, prolonged fighting on Okinawa gave the Allies a mere taste of the bloodbath that awaited them in Japan. To the joyous relief of the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines preparing on Okinawa, the end of the war intervened, expedited by President Truman's order to use the atomic bomb. The human cost of the battle for Okinawa--American and Japanese alike--undoubtedly influenced Truman's decision to drop the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Operation Iceberg represented a massive joint undertaking and an amazing display of power projection by the United States. The Americans succeeded in bringing together an incredible number of troops, ships, aircraft, and supplies, with a line of communication extending from the west coast of the continental United States to Okinawa, spanning a distance of over six and a half thousand miles. Operation Iceberg represented the finest in American inter-service cooperation, as the culmination of more than three years of war in the Pacific. Unfortunately, the different services retreated to parochial corners after World War II and would have to repeatedly relearn how to operate jointly during future conflicts. Iceberg symbolized the industrial and military might that thrust the United States into the role of superpower following the war. Okinawa also demonstrated the Allied will to achieve uncompromising victory while the Japanese showed the apparent will to commit national suicide rather than surrender.

Both sides fought courageously, enduring the horrors of sustained ground combat and performing their duty with courage. The Tenth Army saw its great effort and sacrifice come to fruition, despite the tenacious and skillful Japanese defense. Admiral Spruance's naval forces persevered under the intense pressure of seemingly endless *kamikaze* attacks. The 32nd Army fought desperately against overwhelming odds, although Lt. Gen. Ushijima, Maj. Gen. Cho, and Col. Yahara knew the outcome would be ultimate defeat, especially after the Tenth Army landed on Okinawa unmolested by Japanese airpower. Thomas Huber correctly noted in his tremendous work about the 32nd Army's defense of Okinawa that "ultimately, brave men and overwhelming firepower will always defeat brave men alone."<sup>6</sup> Despite their best efforts, the isolated,

outgunned, and outnumbered 32nd Army went down to defeat, and Japan would soon follow.

### Tenth Army Command and Control

Lt. Gen. Buckner and his staff planned, resourced, and executed a successful Operation Iceberg. With great dedication and effort, they accomplished their mission, leading and directing the Tenth Army to ultimate victory. They deserve great credit, but hindsight reveals room for improvement in their command and control of Tenth Army during the fighting.

Buckner proved himself an excellent administrator and a brave, charismatic leader. However, his generalship during combat was unremarkable. He rigidly clung to U.S. Army doctrine and to his original plan. Buckner hoped to maximize maneuver prior to the campaign.<sup>7</sup> However, he nearly abandoned maneuver altogether during the battle, persisting in frontal attacks against the Japanese defenses in southern Okinawa. Buckner and his staff developed the situation on Okinawa, but misread the enemy's intentions. Students of the battle can only speculate whether a second amphibious landing at Minatoga would have shortened the campaign or resulted in fewer total American casualties. Ironically, Buckner persisted in his tactics in part because of his desire to minimize casualties among his troops. Buckner was certainly no George Patton. A bit of Patton's audacity might have served Buckner well on Okinawa.

The Tenth Army staff performed admirably during planning and preparation and they executed command post functions well during the campaign. Their greatest flaw manifested itself in their analysis of the enemy situation during the fight. They underestimated the 32nd Army's initial strength, failing to accurately update their

estimate once the battle was joined. This inaccuracy led to the staff misreading Ushijima's intentions at the Shuri line, especially after the 32nd Army's counterattack on May 4. The picture the G-2 painted for Buckner showed the 32nd Army nearly out of combat power and determined to fight and die on the Shuri line. Consequently, Buckner forged ahead with his plans for a two-corps frontal attack, believing the end was at hand when, in fact, the 32nd Army still had a lot of fight left.

Buckner and his staff excelled in the area of joint cooperation and interoperability. Tenth Army skillfully integrated Army and Marine maneuver and artillery units, and maximized the effective use of naval gunfire and air support. Buckner's insistence on joint harmony within Tenth Army and with his Navy superiors permeated his staff and subordinate commands. His prior relationship with Maj. Gen. Geiger prevented tension between Army and Marine commanders on Okinawa. He refused to become embroiled in inter-service controversy, nearly giving the impression that he believed no tension between the services existed. However, Buckner failed to appreciate the magnitude of the pounding the Navy sustained from *kamikaze* attacks and did not appreciably change his tactics to bring the campaign to a more rapid conclusion, thereby relieving the pressure on Spruance's sailors. He was far more sensitive to casualties sustained by his own troops.

With the benefit of plans and accounts from both Allied and Japanese sources, historians can view the Battle of Okinawa with far more clarity in hindsight than the participants did during the event itself. The Japanese 32nd Army performed exceptionally well in planning, preparing, and executing their defense in depth on the main island of Okinawa, despite dwindling support from Imperial Headquarters in Japan.

The Japanese troops toiled well, constructing their amazing network of fortifications and fighting with courage, ferocity, and discipline. Like their American counterparts, Ushijima and his staff also erred during the battle. Their most notable blunder was launching the ill advised counterattack of May 4, which left the 32nd Army vulnerable to decisive action and hastened the 32nd Army's ultimate demise. History should not be too unkind to Buckner and his staff regarding the cost of Operation Iceberg--no plan, tactics, or battlefield agility would have resolved the issue without great cost to the Tenth Army and the supporting fleet.

#### Relevance for Today's Military Professional

Officers in the United States Army of the early Twenty First Century are intimately familiar with the concept of the After Action Review (AAR). The AAR is a tool designed to enable military units to see and understand events and actions, with the benefit of hindsight. AARs help determine why events transpired the way they did with respect to friendly forces, enemy forces, and the terrain, and what actions should be sustained or improved for the next time the particular mission or situation is encountered. In the modern U.S. Army, even greatly successful missions are picked apart and scrutinized to find areas for improvement. Lt. Gen. Buckner and the Tenth Army staff should be viewed in this light. In the final analysis, Operation Iceberg was a great, albeit costly, success, but the battle still contains lessons in command and control for today's military professional.

Staffs and commanders must take care not to fall in love with their plans, regardless of how much time, effort, and intellectual energy went into their creation. Commanders should not be afraid to modify or abandon plans when battlefield conditions

change. In the same vein, staff officers must not hesitate to recommend dramatic changes in plans or tactics if the situation warrants. In order to make good recommendations, staff officers must constantly update their appraisal of the situation within their area of expertise without becoming trapped by preconceived notions or self-fulfilling prophecies. Commanders and staff officers should not forget that Clausewitz's "fog of war" is a real phenomenon and should not be surprised or uncomfortable when the enemy does something unexpected. Buckner and his staff became enamored with their plan and their tactics, failing to adapt them to unexpected enemy actions.

Another lesson the contemporary military professional should draw from Okinawa is to avoid viewing technology as a panacea. Buckner and the Tenth Army staff viewed their overwhelming firepower advantage as decisive. Through ingenuity, resourcefulness, and determination, the 32nd Army negated much of the effect of Buckner's field artillery, air power, and naval gunfire, contributing to the protracted length of the campaign. Many months before the Americans landed on Okinawa, the Vice Chief of the Japanese Imperial Headquarters Army Department cautioned Col Yahara: "If a poor man fights like a rich man, he is sure to lose."<sup>8</sup> The Japanese recognized their technological disadvantage and took steps to minimize the Americans' firepower dominance. Twenty First Century adversaries have proven their ability to find low-technology countermeasures to high-technology weapons and tactics. The U.S. Armed Forces possess fantastic technology, but leaders must understand that flexibility and adaptability are decisive on the asymmetric battlefield.

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<sup>1</sup>Roy A. Appleman, et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948), 489.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 489.

<sup>3</sup>Hiromichi Yahara, *The Battle for Okinawa* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 191.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 195-196.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas M. Huber, *Japan's Battle of Okinawa, April-June 1945* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, 1992), 122.

<sup>7</sup>Appleman, et al, 33.

<sup>8</sup>Yahara, 12.

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