



*History of the
4th Marine Division*



1943 - 2000

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World War II

Saipan and Tinian - 1944

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History of the 4th Marine Division 1943 - 2000

by

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**2nd Edition
2000**

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From the Commanding General, 4th Marine Division

The history of the “*Fighting Fourth*” Marine Division is a very proud and distinguished one. Its honors and lineage are a narrative to the dedication and sacrifice of Marines and Sailors that, woven together, chronicles this most distinguished combat division of the United States Marine Corps. This second edition closes the gap in the written history of the division and updates the landmark work begun by my predecessor Brigadier General Frederick Lopez. Its story begins with the division’s activation for war in 1943, looks at the Reserve issues in the 1950’s and 1960’s, follows the reactivation and organization for war after Vietnam and combat in Southwest Asia. This work ends in 2000 with the 4th Marine Division, a proud and powerful contributor to the Total Force and a critical link in America’s warfighting capability for the 21st century.

With the end of the cold war and the subsequent downsizing of America’s armed forces, the traditional view of the reserve and the 4th Marine Division, in particular, has changed. The combat capability of the United States, more than ever, depends on the strength and readiness of our Reserve. Today’s “*Fighting Fourth*” must remain the most ready, at the least cost, with the most value. While still providing a ready source of individual and small unit augmentation of the Active force in peacetime and a significant daily contributor to community events, the division maintains highly ready warfighting forces to augment and reinforce the combat power of the United States Marine Corps at any level.

Concurrent with its warfighting mission, the Division is proactive in our local communities, reaching out where needed and informing citizens about the missions of the Marine Corps. From rendering military funeral honors, to Toys for Tots, to color guards, to drug demand reduction efforts, the 4th Marine Division leads the way. These missions call for Marines of extraordinary ability with a dedication and zeal that stands as a proud demonstration of our core values of Honor, Courage and Commitment.

As it prepares for the challenge of the new millennium, the Division focuses on rapid and seamless integration with active forces at any level of combat and increased assistance with current operations. The Division’s most important responsibility is to win our nation’s battles. The 4th Marine Division will continue to meet its warfighting and readiness goals.

The History of the Fourth Marine Division 1943-2000 stands as a tribute to all those Marines and Sailors, past and present, who have served in the division. We owe them our profound thanks and respect for their sacrifice to Corps and Country.

Semper Fidelis

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arnold L. Punaro". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Major General Arnold L. Punaro
Commanding General
4th Marine Division

Acknowledgements

This second edition of the History of the Fourth Marine Division 1943-2000 is driven by MGen Arnold L. Punaro, Commanding General. His goal is to communicate the proud lineage and tradition of the "*Fighting Fourth*" Marine Division to as many Marines and citizens as possible.

The original project was inspired in 1995 by BGen Frederick Lopez. From inspiration to publication, the book was aided and sustained by Division staff members Col. Dick Wenzell, Col. Harry Williams, Col. Richard Van Horne and Maj. Dave Elwing. A special thanks goes out to the Marine Corps Historical Center at the Washington Navy Yard, its Director, Col. Mike Monigan, former Chief Historian, Mr. Frank, and the current Chief Historian, Mr. Charles Melson. Among the Historical Center's current and former staffers, the following were notable in their support of the project: LtCol. Leon Craig, Capt. Mark Schroeder, 1stLt. Donald and SSgt. Myrna Thomas; on the civilian side, thanks to librarian Ms. Englander, researchers Mr. Crawford, Mr. Aquilina, Ms. Kaljot, archivist Ms. Cohen, Mr. Graboske, editor Mrs. Renfrow, art curator Mr. Dyer, oral historian Mr. Long and graphics head Mr. Struder. LtCol. Charles Cureton and members of the Combat Historian, IMA Detachment, were always available for consultation and support.

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Oral history interviews and unit contributions were critical to the factual information and historical perspective contained in this edition. Each separate command in the division took part in providing the centerpiece for the information contained in this second edition. The insight, candor and cooperation of those units as well as MGen Wilkerson, MGen Libutti, MGen Richard, BGen Lopez and MGen Punaro are greatly appreciated.

Obviously, a great deal of thanks goes to the writers and editors of the original edition including. Col. John McGill, USMC (Ret.) and his staff at MTU CA-4 wrote a scholarly, unpublished history of the division in 1977 covering the period from 1962 to 1977. Their dust covered manuscript was found in New Orleans in 1995 and came to life as our primary document source for the division during that period.

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Finally, thanks to Vincent J. Martinez from Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, Washington, DC. As the Visual Information Specialist and Art Director of the Graphic Section, he designed and produced the final product you now see before you.

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Chapter I

Creation - World War II: 1941-1945

When the United States entered World War II in December 1941, the Marine Corps had an authorized strength of only 45,000 men.¹ The Corps had only two operational divisions, the 1st and 2d, and they had been in existence less than a year. A few months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, both of these divisions were in combat, engaged in desperate jungle fighting on the islands of Guadalcanal and Tulagi. The 3d Marine Division, which was formed in September 1942, was immediately marked for combat operations in Bougainville, in the northern Solomon Islands. Additional combat divisions would be necessary if the Marine Corps was to support the projected amphibious operations in the Pacific envisioned by Navy and Marine Corps planners. By July of 1943, the active duty strength of the Marine Corps had risen dramatically to 21,938 officers and 287,621 Marines, allowing the Commandant to order the formation of an additional division and air wing.²

4th Marine Division: Activation and Training

The World War II Marine Corps did not create its new divisions from whole cloth, but started them from a core of existing units, staffing them, as much as possible, with veteran combat Marines. New enlistees, draftees, and reservists then filled out the ranks. The nucleus for the new 4th Marine Division was the 23d Marines, under the command of Colonel Louis R. Jones. This regiment had been activated on July 20, 1942 as part of the 3d Marine Division but was detached on February 15, 1943 and assigned to the 4th Division. The following month, the 24th Marines was activated and also assigned to the new division. The final rifle regiment, the 25th Marines, was formed in May 1943 from elements of the 23d Marines. That same month, the 4th Service Battalion, the Ordnance Company, the Divisional Headquarters Company, and the 4th Signal Company were all activated.³ In June, the 14th Marines was reactivated to provide artillery support and the 20th Marines was formed to become the Division's engineer element.⁴

Still just a division on paper, these newly created combat units of the 4th Marine Division were not even assigned to the same base. The 24th Marines, the 4th Tank Battalion, the 2d Battalion, 14th Marines, one battery and four other headquarters and support companies had formed at Camp Pendleton, California while the remainder of the Division was three thousand miles away training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

The East Coast units of 4th Marine Division traveled west from Camp Lejeune to Camp Pendleton starting on July 9, 1943. The 25th Marines traveled to the West Coast aboard transport ships through the Panama Canal. The remainder of the East Coast Echelon traveled to California by train. The Division was formally activated at Camp Pendleton under the command of Brigadier General James L. Underhill on August 16, 1943. Two days later, the former Assistant to the Commandant, Major General Harry Schmidt, assumed command of the Division, with Brigadier General Underhill serving as his assistant division commander.⁵ By September, the last units had arrived from the East Coast and the entire division was together for the first time.⁶

Conditions at the recently created Camp Pendleton were primitive. Established on the vast Santa Margarita cattle ranch, the huge California amphibious training base had only been in existence since March

1942. Because the base was only intended to serve as a temporary facility, it was built to minimum standards throughout.⁷ Faced with the pressing demands of the looming Pacific campaign, priority was given to the construction of training areas, a hospital, a boat basin, and the installation of water and sewer lines. Little consideration was given to the comfort of Marines who would train there. The Marines of the 4th Marine Division lived in hastily constructed tent camps, had no messhalls, and washed and shaved in cold water.⁸ Few roads had been built. The ones that existed were unpaved and so were muddy when it rained and dusty the rest of the time. Crowded training schedules and limited transportation ensured that there were few opportunities for liberty. The austere living conditions and demanding training unknowingly proved ideal to prepare the 4th for the rigors of combat which lay ahead.

The 4th Division began training as a complete unit in September 1943. Elements of the Division trained in the vicinity of the beaches and canyons of Camp Pendleton during the remainder of 1943. Assault elements focused on combat drills, ship-to-shore movement, demolitions, pillbox clearing, and coordination of supporting arms. The new division held its first division level amphibious landing exercise on Aliso Canyon beaches on December 14 and 15th, 1943.⁸ The division held a final rehearsal for upcoming amphibious combat operations on San Clemente Island off the coast of Southern California on January 2nd and 3rd, 1944. Under live supporting fire, the Marines landed and “*captured*” the island the first day, reembarked aboard their ships and repeated the entire operation the next day.⁹ Although few knew it at the time, the 4th Marine Division’s training had been geared toward preparing them for a specific amphibious operation that awaited the Division in the Pacific. The Division’s amphibious training would soon be put to the ultimate test.

Within days of the completion of their training, the 4th Marine Division, now fully equipped and numbering 17,086 men, was combat-loaded aboard ships of Task Force 53 in San Diego harbor. The 4th was no longer in training but was a fully operational Marine Corps amphibious division off to war in the Central Pacific as part of the 5th Amphibious Corps. In all of World War II, the 4th Marine Division would have the distinction of being the only Marine division that was mounted out and staged into combat directly following training in the continental United States.¹⁰

For most of the men, this was their first time at sea, an introduction to the discomforts and tedium commonly found aboard naval transport ships which were crammed with men and equipment. The Division left San Diego on January 13, 1944, stopping in Lahaina Roads, Maui on the 21st to refuel before sailing to the Marshall Islands the next day. The 4,400 mile sea voyage from California to the Marshalls required 25 days to complete. Shipboard days were filled with physical conditioning, letter writing, weapons cleaning, sleep, card playing, and, of course, thoughts of what lay ahead.

Roi-Namur: Kwajalein Atoll

Even before the 4th Marine Division had completed their training in California, its first combat assignment had been determined. By mid-October 1943, Admiral Chester Nimitz, the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Area (CinCPOA), selected the 4th Division to participate in the upcoming Operation Flintlock.¹¹ The 4th Division was designated as the Northern Landing Force and traveled west aboard ships of Task Force 53 under the command of Rear Admiral Richard L. Conolly.

The Division’s assault objectives were the heavily defended Japanese occupied twin islands of Roi-Namur in the Kwajalein Atoll of the Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific. Roi-Namur were two tiny islands

in the northern part of the atoll. The island of Roi was the site of a major Japanese three-runway airbase. The airbase's hangers, machine shops, and other supporting facilities were located on the island of Namur. The two islands were so close to each other they were connected by a narrow strip of sand and a 500 yard long causeway. Some 2,100 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor, the Roi-Namur islands were important objectives in the American drive across the Pacific. This Japanese airfield threatened vital lines of communications in the area. Nearby Kwajalein island to the south served as the major Japanese naval base in the Marshalls. That island, and Ebeye island, would be the objective of the Army's 7th Infantry Division, veterans of the Aleutians campaign. The 22d Marines and the Army's 106th Infantry Regiment, of the 27th Division, were held in reserve.

If the principal islands of Kwajalein atoll were captured, the United States would not only be displacing the Japanese from valuable air and naval bases, but it would also secure a strategic staging point for the continued prosecution of the war to the Marianas and through the rest of the Central Pacific. The assault on Kwajalein Atoll would represent the first time the United States attempted to capture territory which the Japanese had controlled before the war.

The Japanese gained possession of the Kwajalein Atoll, with its 97 islands and islets, from Germany in 1914. As the largest atoll in the world, approximately 65 miles long and about 18 miles wide, Kwajalein had an expansive lagoon. Japanese ownership of Kwajalein was formalized under the Covenant of the League of Nations shortly after the end of the First World War. Under the provisions of Article 22 of the Covenant, the atoll was not to be used for military or naval installations. In all likelihood, however, the Japanese began militarizing the islands sometime after 1935, when they left the League.¹² By the time World War II began, the atoll had become the major Japanese base of operations in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. It was the headquarters for the Japanese 6th Base Headquarters and was the hub of all Japanese military activity in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. To those who controlled the islands, the atoll had the potential to be an outstanding forward naval base. Wrestling control of the islands from the Japanese would not be easy.

In the Kwajalein Atoll, Roi-Namur were the most heavily defended islands. Armaments included four 12.7cm twin-mounted dual-purpose guns, four 37mm guns, nineteen 13.2mm single-mount dual-purpose guns, and ten 20mm anti-aircraft guns. The Japanese defenders had skillfully employed their weapons; which were protected by more than fifty pillboxes, machine gun nests and rifle pits. These defensive positions in turn were improved by barbed wire and antitank ditches.¹³ In Japanese tradition, the 3,500 to 3,800 man garrison on Roi-Namur, most belonging to the 24th Naval Air Flotilla and the 4th Fleet Construction Department Detachment, had been ordered to defend the island to the last man.¹⁴

At the time of the American attack on the Kwajalein atoll, Japanese island defense doctrine still dictated that an amphibious assault was to be resisted violently when it came ashore and then counterattacked during the initial vulnerable stages of the landing.¹⁵ These defensive tactics were intended to prevent the Americans attackers from establishing a secure beachhead. The costly amphibious assault on the tiny Betio Islet in the Tarawa Atoll by the 2d Marine Division, just a few weeks before the planned assault on Kwajalein, demonstrated the bloody price these Japanese tactics could exact. The 76 hour Battle of Tarawa cost the Americans well over three thousand casualties, including 1,085 dead. Tarawa's appalling casualty figures had a sobering affect on Navy and Marine Corps planners working out the final details for Operation Flintlock. Before the landing, Admiral Turner predicted that Roi-Namur would be more difficult than the Tarawa landing.¹⁶ Roi-Namur appeared to be no easy assignment for any Marine division. It appeared especially difficult for one like the 4th which was going into combat untested.

One of the lessons learned from Tarawa was the need for greater and more accurate fire support before and during all phases of the amphibious assault. Japanese defenders on Roi-Namur were, therefore, subjected to a withering rain of fire from the sea, the air, and from neighboring islands. The new battleship North Carolina, with her nine 16-inch guns, fired on Roi on January 29 and 30, 1944.¹⁷ For two days before the planned invasion, naval gunfire from the aging battleships Maryland, Tennessee, and Colorado, along with five cruisers and nineteen destroyers, systematically bombarded targets on Roi-Namur. Approximately 25,000 shells of all sizes rained down on the beleaguered islands before and during the assault. Carrier based naval aircraft and Army B-25 medium bombers flying from the Gilbert Islands contributed bombs and heavy machine gun fire to the pre-invasion devastation.¹⁸

Units of the 14th Marines landed on neighboring islands, Mellu, Ennuebing, Ennubirr, Ennumennet, and Ennugarret. The artillerymen emplaced their 75mm and 105mm howitzers to provide additional fire support on Roi-Namur. Rockets blasting off from off-shore LCI(G)'s (Landing Craft Infantry, Gunboats) added further noise and fury to the withering pre-invasion bombardment of the Japanese held islands.

The 4th Marine Division's primary assault on Roi-Namur began on February 1, 1944. Slightly before noon, the 23rd and 24th Marines each landed two battalions abreast on the beaches from the lagoon side of the islands, where Japanese defenses were believed to be less well developed.¹⁹ The 23d Marines attacked Roi while the 24th Marines landed on Namur. On Roi, initial Japanese resistance was so light, the 23d Marines had to purposely slow down its advance to keep from advancing into their own supporting naval gunfire. The commander of the 23d Marines reported by radio, "*No opposition near the beach.*"²⁰ The first four waves of Marines assaulting Roi landed and advanced standing up.²¹ Marine M4 medium tanks raced ahead of the infantry and maneuvered through and around Japanese defenses to reach the northeast corner of the island by early afternoon. By evening, Roi was firmly in the possession of the 4th Marine Division.

On Namur, Japanese resistance was better organized and considerably stronger than it had been on Roi. Still the 24th's progress was steady, if not as rapid as the 23rd's advance on the open and lightly defended Roi. In addition to having the majority of the Japanese defenders and more natural obstacles, Namur had been better prepared with anti-tank ditches and several heavily reinforced blockhouses. Compared to Roi, Namur was also heavily overgrown with vegetation including palms, breadfruit trees, and shrubs.²² Fortunately for the Marines, the furious naval bombardment of the island, coupled with aircraft strikes and artillery barrages from the 14th Marines, had so weakened the Japanese defenders, that the Marines were able to move steadily forward. An after-battle assessment later concluded that between 50 and 70 percent of the Japanese defenders had been killed by the pre-invasion bombardment.

Many of the Marines who died in the assault on Namur were killed when one of their demolition charges ignited a Japanese munitions bunker that contained aerial bombs and torpedo warheads. The blast killed 20 Marines and wounded another 100.²³ The massive explosion occurred at 1305 on February 1, 1944 and temporarily halted the advance. The blast made the entire island shudder and produced a cloud of black smoke that rose a thousand feet into the air. The force of the explosion was so great that it knocked an artillery spotter aircraft from the 4th Battalion, 14th Marines, out of the air.²⁴ Major Charles F. Duchein, an assistant operations officer for the 4th Division, who was in another aircraft over Namur exclaimed, "*Great God Almighty! The whole damn island has blown up.*"²⁶ As the dust settled and the smoke cleared, the dug in Japanese defenders resumed their tenacious defense of the remainder of the island.

Spirited fire fights continued as the Marines moved steadily northward. As night fell, the Marines dug into defensive positions and waited for the inevitable nighttime Japanese counterattacks. After an eventful

night of Japanese attacks and hand-to-hand combat, the 24th Marines advanced the next day. The island was secured by 1215 on February 2, 1944.

Brief as the battle for Roi-Namur islands was, 199 Marines died in battle and another 547 were wounded. Four members of the 4th Marine Division were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions in the battle. Japanese dead and captured numbered 3,563.²⁵ In addition to capturing assigned objectives, Marine casualties were considered remarkably low when compared to other amphibious assaults.

American naval and Marine commanders also learned many valuable new lessons about amphibious warfare including the role of air and naval artillery support. The Battle of Kwajalein demonstrated that, done correctly, amphibious warfare could secure fortified objectives quickly and with a minimum loss of life. Amphibious battles did not have to be protracted affairs, as they had been in the Guadalcanal, Bougainville, and Cape Gloucester campaigns. Nor did an amphibious assault have to result in the prohibitive casualties associated with landings like Tarawa. Much of what had been learned at Kwajalein by the 4th Marine Division and other participating units would be applied in future combat in the Pacific.

The American victory at Kwajalein cost the Japanese some of their most valuable bases in the Central Pacific. The loss of these bases cut Japanese communication with Wake Island. Japanese garrisons on Mille, Wotje, Maloelap, and Jaluit had been bypassed and isolated. The United States, in turn, gained both a forward air base within striking distance of the Japanese stronghold of Truk and excellent fleet anchorage in the atoll's 60-mile-long lagoon. The conquest of the Kwajalein Atoll had been considered so rapid and successful that a planned future assault on Eniwetok, planned for May, 1944 was moved up to the middle of February, 1944.²⁶

The battle for Kwajalein Atoll bloodied the 4th Marine Division and forever transformed it from an untested green unit to a combat veteran in one engagement. Major General Holland M. Smith, commanding general of the 5th Amphibious Force, said, that before the Marshall Islands campaign the 4th had been "*a new, untried division,*" and that after the battle, "*it now takes the place with the First, Second and Third Marine Divisions.*"²⁷ The 4th Marine Division's quick success with Roi-Namur, however, could not have prepared them for what they would face in their next major combat operation, the invasions of Saipan and Tinian.

Camp Maui

Before returning to combat, Marines of the 4th Division needed time to join replacements for the Division's casualties on Kwajalein Atoll, reequip themselves, and train for their next amphibious assault. In February 1944, surviving veterans of the Division arrived at the sleepy port of Kahului, on the northern shore of Maui in the Hawaiian Islands. At this point in the war, their new Pacific forward base was still in the preliminary building stage with little more than muddy roads and half-finished tent foundations amid green fields of pineapples and sugarcane.²⁸ Still, Maui did offer the 4th Division a place to rest, relax and rebuild prior to their next battle. While at their forward camp on Maui, the 4th Division also held formations to present awards, mostly Purple Hearts, which had been earned during the battle for Roi-Namur. As the Division recovered from battle, training continued with renewed emphasis on attacking fortified positions.²⁹ In May, 1944, the 4th Marine Division embarked aboard ships for their next operation. This time their objective would be in the Mariana Islands deep within the Japan's inner defensive perimeter.

Saipan and Tinian

The Mariana Islands, including Saipan and Tinian, were more than 3,200 miles from Pearl Harbor but only 1,250 miles from Tokyo. Possession of these islands, along with Guam, would provide the United States with naval and air bases from which it could control the Marianas and the surrounding ocean. The islands were also big enough for airfields that could support the Army Air Force's new long-range B-29 Superfortress heavy bombers coming into service in mid-1944. Early attempts to base B-29s at remote and primitive bases on the Chinese mainland failed because of insurmountable logistical and maintenance problems.³⁰ Marianas based B-29s, however, could be easily supported by sea and would be able to bomb military and industrial targets on the Japanese mainland. Not surprisingly, the Japanese were zealously committed to their defense.

The island of Saipan was a linchpin in the Japanese defense of the Central Pacific. It was the headquarters for the Japanese Central Pacific Fleet, the 31st Army, and the Northern Marianas Defense Force. Given its importance, the island was defended by an impressive force including Japan's 43d Division (reinforced), the 47th Mixed Brigade, a tank regiment, an infantry battalion, an antiaircraft regiment, two regiments of engineers, and two transportation companies. In all, the Japanese Army had 22,702 combat troops on Saipan at the time the 4th Division was to attack. The Japanese Navy also had substantial forces on Saipan, including the 55th Naval Guard Force and the 1st Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force which, along with miscellaneous other units, totaled 6,960 men. The total Japanese military force defending Saipan was a formidable 29,662 men, entrenched in well-prepared defenses.³¹ To make an amphibious assault even more difficult, Saipan also had several towns and a civilian population of about 20,000.

The Saipan landing was part of a larger American assault on the Marianas. Along with Saipan and Tinian, Guam was also to be captured by a total American landing of more than 165,000 troops. These Marines and soldiers were supported by some 800 ships belonging to the United States 5th Fleet under the command of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance. The American amphibious assault plan for Saipan called for three full divisions: the 4th and 2d Marine Divisions landing eight battalions abreast on a 4,000 yard stretch of the island's southwestern beaches, and the U. S. Army's 27th Division, a former New York National Guard unit, as a floating reserve. The 4th, still under the command of Major General Schmidt, was responsible for the capture of the airfield at Aslito, outside the town of Charan Kanoa, on the southern portion of the island. The 23d and 25th Marines were the primary assault elements and the 24th Marines was assigned as the division reserve.

Using the lessons learned at Roi-Namur, intensive pre-invasion naval bombardments and air strikes on Japanese positions began on June 11, 1944. To one Japanese defender, the American invasion fleet, "*looked like a large city had suddenly appeared offshore.*"³² The American attackers began landing across the southwest beaches of Saipan at 0840 on June 15, 1944. 8,000 Marines were ashore within twenty minutes.³³ At the time of the landing, the 24th Marines conducted a demonstration landing from the north to draw Japanese forces away from the real landing beaches in the south. Marines storming ashore were immediately met with intense and accurate fire from Japanese mortars, howitzers, and antiboat guns. Enemy resistance proved far more spirited and deadly than it had on Roi-Namur and, very quickly, commanders decided to land the reserve 27th Infantry Division.

During the first 24 hours of the landing, the 4th Marine Division had its hands full getting Marines and equipment ashore while simultaneously fighting off determined Japanese counterattacks and infiltration attempts. By June 17, 1944, the beachhead was secured so that the 4th Marine Division, supported by the

newly arrived 27th Infantry Division, launched an offensive against Aslito Field. On June 18, 1944, the combined (Army and Marine) force had captured the field and reached the eastern side of the island, cutting Japanese defenses in two. On June 20th, the 4th and 27th Divisions joined with the 2d Division and turned northward toward the bulk of the remaining Japanese forces. During this phase of the advance, the 4th Division was responsible for moving up the eastern side of the island and capturing the Kagman Peninsula.

As the island narrowed to the north, the final assault was conducted by the 27th Infantry on the left, the 4th on the right, with the 2d now in reserve. On July 4, 1944 the northern towns and ports had been recaptured by a fierce Japanese banzai charge that broke through the Army positions. This setback prompted the decision to reintroduce the 2d Marine Division into battle. Saipan was finally secured on July 9, 1944. The Japanese took their orders about fighting to the end literally. Of the 43,682 Japanese defenders on the island at the beginning of the assault, 41,244 died in the battle.³⁴

The Battle of Saipan cost the 4th Marine Division 5,981 casualties and left the survivors in need of rest and reorganization.³⁵ They would have little time for either, however, since the Division had already been scheduled to conduct another amphibious assault on Tinian, a little more than three miles away, on July 24, 1944. The surviving Marines of the Division received a new commander, Major General Clifton B. Cates, on July 12, 1944. The Division completed mopping up on Saipan on July 16, 1944 leaving only a week for them to get ready for their amphibious landing on Tinian. Fortunately for the Marines of the 4th Division, Tinian was smaller in size and reportedly less well-defended than Saipan had been. Japanese defenses, however, could not be under-estimated. The island was defended by the Japanese 50th Infantry Regiment. In all, there were about 9,000 Japanese defenders dug in on Tinian.

The 4th Marine Division was selected to lead the American assault on Tinian with the 2d Marine Division following in trace. The Army's 27th Infantry Division would remain on Saipan as the reserve. Starting on July 11, 1944, the defenders of Tinian experienced the terror of the now familiar pre-invasion naval gun fire and aerial bombing and strafing. Napalm incendiary bombs were used for the first time against Japanese fixed positions on Tinian. After the fall of Saipan, American field artillery from the island was added to the destructive barrage. Army Air Force P-47 fighter-bombers of the 194th and 73d Squadrons, based at Isley Field on Saipan, unloaded their ordinance on Japanese defensive positions on Tinian. The rain of steel and explosives built to a crescendo as H-hour approached.

Before the first elements of the 4th Marine Division stepped onto the beach, Tinian's Japanese defenders came under the fire of eleven battalions of shore-based artillery, two battleships, a heavy cruiser, and two destroyers. The landing beaches were so obscured by smoke from the incoming fire, that guide planes had to lead the first waves of landing craft ashore. This overwhelming preparatory fire proved extremely effective. Assault elements of the 24th and 25th Marines met only limited small arms fire when they reached the beach at 0750 on July 24, 1944.³⁶

By day's end, it was apparent that the landing was successful. The entire division was ashore, units established communications with one another, supplies were arriving, and enemy resistance remained weak.

With nightfall, however, came the expected Japanese counterattacks. In heavy, continuous, and coordinated assaults that lasted from 0200 to 0700 on July 25, 1944, the Japanese attacked the Marine positions with furious Banzai charges, tank assaults, artillery barrages, and infiltration attempts. Yet when morning came, the 4th Marine Division's lines remained unbroken. The bodies of 1,241 dead Japanese along Marine lines evidenced the ferocity of the previous night's assaults.³⁷ The loss of so many Japanese troops so early in the battle made the Japanese's continued defense of the island very difficult.

As the Marines moved inland, they discovered that Tinian was far better suited to offensive operations than Saipan had been. The terrain was flatter and the roads were better, making the Marine's mechanized operations more effective. Best of all, Japanese resistance was greatly weakened. On July 27, 1944, the Marines advanced 1,800 yards. The following day, the Marines advanced an additional 6,000 yards and captured one of the island's airfields. With the backs of the Japanese defenders to the sea, their resistance stiffened. Using recent training at Camp Maui to good affect, 4th Division Marines employed flame throwers, demolition charges, and automatic weapons fire to route Japanese soldiers out of caves, bunkers, and other defensive positions on the southern portion of the island. One of the most difficult aspects of the final phase of the battle was convincing surviving Japanese soldiers and the thousands of civilians on the island to surrender. As had happened on Saipan, however, many chose suicide rather than to surrender.

In many ways, the Marianas campaign signaled the beginning of the end for Japan. In addition to losing the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, the Japanese also suffered a crushing defeat at sea when remaining units of their fleet vainly attempted to fight off the American assault on the Marianas. In the epic Battle of the Philippine Sea, the largest carrier battle in history, the Japanese lost three fleet aircraft carriers. Also during the battle, in what has been called the "*Great Marianas Turkey Shoot*," the Japanese lost approximately 480 aircraft. After the battle, Prince Higashikuni, Commander in Chief of Home Defense Headquarters, testified that, "*the war was lost when the Marianas were taken away from Japan and when we heard the B-29's were coming out.*"³⁸

Within a few months, the islands of Tinian, Saipan, and Guam were transformed into major air bases that would support the 20th Air Force's campaign against Japanese industry and cities. Guam also became the site of an advanced submarine base and the headquarters for Admiral Nimitz and his staff. The loss of the Marianas created a major crisis within the highest levels of Japanese government. Prime Minister Hidetoki Tojo, who had declared that Saipan was "*an impregnable fortress*" and was the original architect of Japanese aggression in Asia and the Pacific, was forced to resign and was replaced by a more moderate government headed by General Kuroha Kiyotaka.

Return to Camp Maui

By August 14, 1944, the 4th Marine Division had put the Marianas campaign behind it. Once again, the Division needed time to recover before being committed to battle again. The landing on Tinian cost the Division 290 dead, 1,515 wounded and 24 missing. Counting the casualties from Saipan, more than a quarter of the 4th Division had been killed, wounded, or declared missing during the Marianas campaign. For their action on Saipan and Tinian, the Division was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. More appreciated at the time, however, was the period of rest the Division had earned at the now familiar Camp Maui. The camp itself became more civilized as the war progressed. By this time it offered a post exchange, movie screens, stages, buildings for officers and tents for enlisted Marines, libraries, officer and non-commissioned officers (NCO) clubs, chapels, electric lights, and a public address system.³⁹

In addition to rest and reorganization, the 4th Marine Division's stay at Camp Maui provided them with an opportunity to begin training for their next combat operation, the landing and seizure of Iwo Jima. The beach at Maalaea Bay was used to practice amphibious landings. The island's rugged terrain was ideal for conditioning hikes and tactical field problems. Marine and Army units on the island constructed elaborate training areas, including all sorts of weapons ranges, a jungle fighting center, a village fighting course, a cave fighting course, an infiltration course, a demolition area, and even an area to train motor transport drivers.⁴⁰

Iwo Jima

The fourth and final amphibious assault the 4th Marine Division would participate in during World War II was the monumental Battle of Iwo Jima in February 1945. Iwo Jima was only 750 miles from Tokyo and was their next major objective on the way to the Japanese mainland. The island itself had little to recommend it, a barren and waterless volcanic rock that had largely been ignored by history before World War II. Possession of the strategically located island by the United States, however, would shorten the war.

Iwo Jima had three airfields, two which were operational and one which was under construction. The Japanese used these to launch bombing raids against the new American bases in the Marianas and fighter attacks against the B-29 formations traveling to and from Japan's mainland. However, under American control, Iwo Jima's airfield could be used to provide an emergency landing strip for B-29s that were either damaged or low on fuel after flying. The island airstrips could also be used to station long-range P-51 Mustang fighters to escort the bombers to their targets. The Japanese were painfully aware of the strategic importance of Iwo Jima and had prepared extensive and formidable defenses.

The American attack on Iwo Jima began in August 1944 when B-24 Liberator bombers, of the newly formed Strategic Air Force, Pacific Ocean Areas, first bombed the island defenses. Many more bombing raids followed. From December 8, 1944 until the Marine landing on February 19, 1945, Iwo Jima was bombed every day by American warplanes taking off from Saipan. Naval bombardment also added to the devastation of explosives falling on the island fortress. In all, even before the landing force arrived off the island, the Navy fired some 23,000 rounds of naval gunfire, ranging from 5-inch to 16-inch shells.

The impacting bombs and shells might have been more effective had it not been for the foresight and thoroughness of the 23,000 Japanese defenders. Under the command of Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, the Japanese troops had dug themselves into the island's steaming black volcanic soil and rocky base. The Japanese commander fully appreciated the importance of his mission when he wrote his son, that *"this island is the gateway to Japan."*⁴¹

In addition to the island's many natural caves which the Japanese defenders pressed into service as underground shelters, they also added coastal gun emplacements. The defensive positions consisted of more than 240 light and heavy antiaircraft weapons, at least 434 blockhouses, covered artillery positions, and pillboxes.⁴² The Japanese also had twelve light and twelve heavy tanks, huge mortars, and rocket launchers, some of which could fire eight inch projectiles weighing 200 pounds.⁴³ One historian wrote that Iwo Jima's defenses were, *"in all probability the most elaborate in construction, the most numerous in density, and the best integrated of any in the Pacific, if not in all World War II."*⁴⁴ While the air and naval bombardment would certainly smash some of these defenses, most would have to be individually captured or destroyed by Marine infantry.

By now a veteran division with several amphibious landings behind it, the 4th Division was assigned, along with the 5th Marine Division, to land in the first assault wave. The 3d Marine Division was held in reserve. Altogether, the Marine landing forces within the 5th Amphibious Corps, numbered 70,647 troops and were under the command of 4th Division's first commander, Major General Harry Schmidt.⁴⁵ The 23d and 25th Marines would lead the Division with the 24th utilized as the division reserve. The 23d Marines, commanded by Colonel Walter W. Winsinger, was ordered to seize the critical Motoyama Airfield Number 1 and then turn northeast toward the Motoyama Airfield Number 2. The 25th Marines, under the command of Colonel John R. Lanigan, was to protect the landing's right flank, support the 23rd Marines in the capture of Airfield Number 1, and seize additional landing beaches on the islands southeast coast.

Early on the morning of February 19, 1945 under the umbrella of air strikes and naval gunfire, the amphibious tractors and landing craft of the first wave started toward the beaches of Iwo Jima. Initial Japanese resistance was light as they waited for the beaches to become congested with men and supplies. As soon as the American naval gunfire lifted, the Japanese defenders opened up with intensive and accurate mortar, artillery, and small arms fire on the beaches and incoming boats. High seas and heavy surf made getting men and equipment ashore even more difficult and dangerous. The sand of the island itself contributed to the Marines' problems as the loose volcanic soil made movement off the beaches difficult even for tracked vehicles.

Still the 4th managed to overcome these obstacles, getting tanks ashore by 0950 and two battalions of artillery on land by 1500.⁴⁶ By nightfall of February 19, 1945, the 4th and 5th Divisions were in full contact with each other and had secured a beachhead 3,000 yards long and about 1,500 yards deep. The cost was steep at 2,300 casualties.⁴⁷ Some units were particularly hard hit. Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 3/25 lost a staggering 50 percent of its men.⁴⁸

By 1600, February 20, 1945, the 23d Marines had made good progress capturing its first major objective, the Airfield Number 1 in the central part of the island. For the 25th Marines, progress was slower and more difficult. The rugged terrain it encountered, coupled with mines, prevented the use of tanks. The Japanese defense continued to make the 4th Division Marines pay a heavy price for every yard they advanced. By the end of the second day, the 4th had suffered an additional two thousand casualties.⁴⁹

During daylight, the Marines commenced preparatory artillery barrages and launched attacks against the seemingly endless array of mutually supported minefields, dug-in tanks, pillboxes, blockhouses, and machine gun emplacements. By night, the Japanese attempted to infiltrate the American lines and launched determined counterattacks.

By the night of February 21, 1945, the continuous brutal fighting had reduced the 4th's combat efficiency to 68 percent.⁵⁰ Still they continued forward, advancing, on average, 150 to 250 yards a day against fanatical resistance. By the end of February 22, units of the 4th Marine Division had reached their second major objective, the Airfield Number 2. Fighting did not, however, become any easier as progress was made. The Japanese had expertly organized their defense so as the 4th Division's Marines advanced, they found themselves faced with one heavily defended line after another.

Although the 4th Marine Division steadily advanced, it was experiencing horrific casualties. On March 3, the 25th Marines lost so many men in action that it had to be relieved. That same day, the 4th's overall combat efficiency had fell to a dangerously low 50 percent. Still, the 4th continued its pressure on the Japanese defenders, forcing them out of their defensive positions and into making costly and futile counterattacks. By March 11, the Division had succeeded in crossing through the center of the island. It battled through the heart of the Japanese defenses to reach the southeast coast of the island. With the exception of a few remaining small pockets of resistance, the 4th Marine Division had crushed the resolute and entrenched enemy in its zone of action in only twenty days. The entire island was declared secured on March 16, 1945. Three days later the Division returned to its ships and left Iwo behind.

Remarking after the Battle of Iwo Jima, Admiral Raymond Spruance concluded that *"in view of the character of the defenses and the stubborn resistance encountered, it is fortunate that less seasoned or less resolute troops were not committed."*⁵¹ Fleet Admiral Nimitz noted, that, *"among Americans who served on Iwo Island uncommon valor was a common virtue."*⁵²

The Battle of Iwo Jima cost the 4th Marine Division 9,090 casualties, including 1,731 killed in action.⁵³ Casualties in this one battle represented more than 40 percent of the division. The cost of the human sacrifice was not in vain. Before the war ended, more than 20,000 American airmen in crippled planes landed safely on Iwo Jima's airfields.⁵⁴ In recognition of its contributions and sacrifices in the Battle of Iwo Jima, the 4th Division was awarded both a Presidential Unit Citation and a Navy Unit Commendation.

After Iwo, the 4th returned to its home base at Camp Maui, to once again rest and reorganize for future combat. At this point in the war, the 4th Division was preparing for what was expected to be its most difficult and costly combat to date, Operation Coronet. This final battle was to have been the second stage of the invasion of the Japanese mainland that was planned to land on Honshu's Tokyo Plain in March 1946. Once again the Division went through its familiar cycle of rest, reorganization, resupply, and training. Individual replacements from the United States filled the billets of those killed or wounded on Iwo Jima. New equipment arrived to replace what had been damaged or destroyed in combat. Fortunately, however, this preparation turned out to be unnecessary when the Japanese government finally surrendered after B-29s, taking off from the island of Tinian, destroyed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs.

Return to Camp Pendleton and Deactivation

When the Japanese finally announced their willingness to surrender, on August 14, 1945, the 4th Division was selected to be the first Marine division to be sent back to the United States, with the first units arriving on October 6, 1945. As the first of 4th Division's units arrived in San Diego, they traveled by truck to Camp Pendleton for demobilization. The 25th Marines was billeted in 16 Area while the rest of the Division was assigned to 17 Area.⁵⁵ On November 9, 1945, Major General Cates and the "rear echelon," of the Division, including 52 officers and 846 enlisted Marines, arrived in San Diego Bay aboard the escort aircraft carrier *Kassan Bay*.⁵⁶ Once again, the Division was re-united at the place it had been originally activated.

On November 28, 1945, the 4th Marine Division was officially deactivated. Career Marines and those with time remaining on their enlistments were reassigned to other units while many Marines, who had accumulated enough points for discharge, were sent to separation centers and returned to civilian life. Many former members of the 4th Marine Division retained an affiliation with the Marine Corps by staying in the active Reserve.

In its short but eventful two years, three months, and 13 days of wartime activation, the 4th Marine Division participated in four of the most significant amphibious assaults of World War II -- Roi-Namur, Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima. Created as an amphibious fighting force, the Division spent approximately five months at sea traveling to and from its battles. Its artillery regiment, the 14th Marines fired almost 350,000 rounds of artillery fire.⁵⁷ Eight members of the division earned Medals of Honor and the Division itself was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation Streamer with One Bronze Star (Saipan and Tinian; Iwo Jima), a Navy Unit Commendation Streamer (Iwo Jima), the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Streamer with Four Bronze Stars, and the World War II Victory Streamer. In the course of its brief existence, 3,298 members of the 4th Division were killed in action and another 14,424 were wounded.

Notes

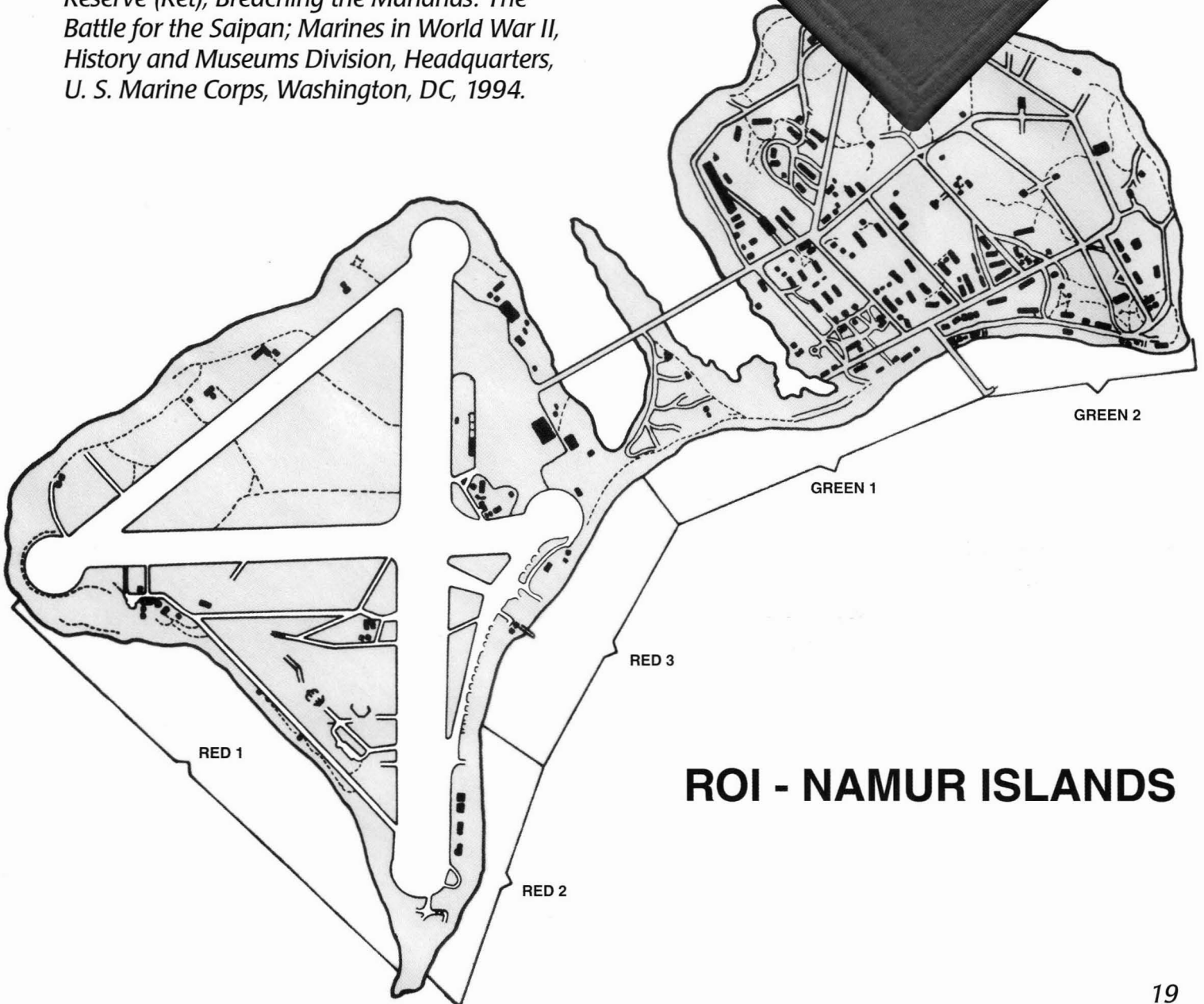
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The 4th Marine Division Patch

Worn on Saipan, it had a gold "4" on a scarlet background, the official colors of the U. S. Marine Corps. The emblem was designed by SSgt John Fabion, a member of the Division's Public Affairs Office before the Marshalls Campaign. His commanding officer was astonished to find that when the Division attacked Roi Islet in Kwajalean Atoll in the Marshall Islands (January 1944), the layout of the runways on the airstrip there were an exact replica.

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ROI - NAMUR ISLANDS



Sniper hunting on Roi Islet airfield during the first battle test of the 4th Marine Division.



4th Marine Division Marines pinned down on the beach at Namur, during the Battle of the Marshalls.



Many Marines died in the assault on Namur when one of their demolition charges ignited a Japanese munitions bunker that contained aerial bombs and torpedo warheads. The blast killed 20 Marines and wounded another 100.



A half-track rumbles forward over splintered trees and rubble, heading for battle on Namur.



BGen. S. C. Cumming, Assistant Division Commander, 4th MARDIV (left) discusses observations from near Hill 500 on Saipan (June 1944) with 25th Marines Commanding Officer, Col. M. Batchelder.



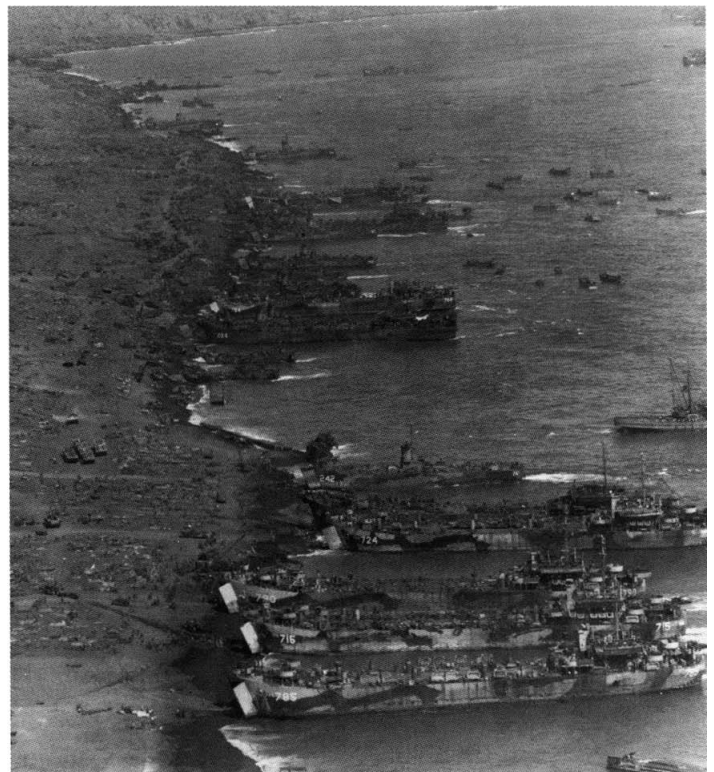
Marine infantryman and light tank move up Namur Island, while communications men (right) set up to keep in touch with headquarters that was established on beachhead.



Marines from the 25th Marines are pinned down as they hit the beach at Iwo Jima on D-Day. Making their fourth assault in 13 months, the veteran fighters are ready to secure the beachhead's right flank



General Cates with executive staff and regimental commanders in final conference aboard ship before landing on Iwo Jima, February 1945.



Telephoto view of U. S. supplies moving in on Iwo Jima beach's, from volcano Suribachi.



Marine flame-throwing tank goes into action, along with Marine snipers from the 4th Marines, as the battle for possession of Iwo Jima rages on.



D plus 4, 24th Marines waiting for tanks to move forward to blast pillboxes. G Company has 40% casualties already.



4th Marine Division Marines charge the beaches on Iwo Jima.



Despite the battle, the mail goes through to the front lines on Iwo Jima.



Dinah Might, a crippled bomber makes the first emergency landing on Iwo Jima as the fighting still rages on.



1987 reunion of the 3rd & 4th Marine Division Navajo code talkers at Iwo Jima's commemoration ceremonies at Camp Pendleton, California.



U. S. Navy cruiser lays down salvo on Tinian as Marines from 4th Marine Division head for the beach in amphibious tractors. This teamwork of shelling and manpower took the island in nine days.

Chapter 2

Reactivation & Designation

Adapting to Peace and the Cold War

In 1945, with the unconditional victory over Japan and Germany at the end of World War II, a war-weary United States demobilized its military forces with speed and little initial thought about the future national security requirements of terrorism. Since the United States had, at the time, a monopoly on nuclear weapons and there was no immediate threat on the horizon, many believed that there was little need for the enormous numbers of military personnel that filled the ranks during the war.

From a wartime manpower peak of more than twelve million men and women on active duty, the American military shrunk to less than 1.6 million members by 1947.¹ The number of active duty Marines fell from a wartime high of nearly half a million to fewer than 75,000 by 1950. Three of the Marine Corps' wartime divisions, the 4th, 5th, and 6th, were deactivated entirely and one, the 3d, was reduced to brigade strength. This left only two divisions and two aircraft commands divided between Camp Lejeune, Camp Pendleton, and Guam. Of these units all were dangerously undermanned.² The Marine Corps Reserve experienced similar reductions in force, from a wartime high of more than three-hundred thousand to fewer than ten-thousand members of the Organized Reserve in 1947.³

Along with the demobilization, a general reorganization and unification of all of the military services was also carried out during the years right after the end of World War II. Taking into account the dramatically changed international situation, new developments in weapons technology, and the lessons of World War II, American national security policy-makers had to address questions of what would be the future requirements and roles of the military. Many people even openly questioned the continued need for the Marine Corps at all. Some concluded that the existence of nuclear weapons, and long-range strategic bombers to carry them, made the prospect of the classic amphibious assault as outmoded and useless as horse calvary or wooden warships. International events in the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, clearly demonstrated the inherent limitations of nuclear weapons and the continued need for strong and flexible conventional capabilities, including the Marine Corps specialty, amphibious operations.

The peace that followed the end of World War II turned out to be a very uneasy one. Germany and Japan had been unconditionally defeated and were no longer a threat, but an aggressive and militarily powerful Soviet Union quickly rose to challenge American leadership in the world. Troublesome Soviet actions in the late forties included the blockade of West Berlin, the continued military occupation of Eastern Europe, the development of nuclear weapons; their support for international communist movements in the Third World, and their leaderships' bellicose anti-American rhetoric, all appeared to directly threaten the security of the United States and its democratic allies in Western Europe. The successful communist revolution in China, the outbreak of the Korean War, and the ever increasing Soviet military aid to surrogates in the Third World also served to demonstrate the communist bloc's willingness to use conventional armed forces to advance their hegemony around the world. The United States responded with a policy of containment supported by multilateral collective-defense alliances, nuclear deterrence, economic and military aid for allies, and a limited commitment to conventional forces that offered flexible alternatives to full-scale nuclear war.

Fortunately for the Marine Corps, its continued existence through these turbulent years was assured by public and congressional support that led to the passage of the National Security Act in 1947.⁴ The Marine Corps was further strengthened on June 28, 1952 when Public Law 416 guaranteed that the Marine Corps would consist of at least three combat divisions and three aircraft wings. The law also gave the Commandant co-equal status with the members of the Joint Chiefs in matters related to the Marine Corps.⁵

Although suffering the same sorts of dramatic manpower reductions as the active duty Marine Corps, the Reserve maintained an important mission to integrate “into the Fleet Marine Force (peace strength) to bring that Force to war strength.”⁶ The wisdom of retaining the Marine Corps, and its Reserve, quickly became evident as the Cold War erupted into open warfare. The Marine Corps’ traditional commitment to readiness and adaptability served it and the country well in the military confrontations of the Cold War, starting with its unexpected employment on the mainland of Asia.

Korean War: Marine Reserve Mobilization

When the North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) unexpectedly invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, the United States and the United Nations had to meet a conventional threat with conventional forces of their own. A strategic nuclear strike against Moscow, Beijing, or P’yongyang was not deemed to be an appropriate reaction to tanks and infantry rolling across the 38th Parallel into South Korea. Conventional ground, air, and naval forces had to be employed much as they had been during World War II.

The Marine Corps in particular demonstrated its value in this first major military confrontation of the Cold War both because it was combat ready and because it had the tactical expertise to maneuver decisively in the Pusan Perimeter and to conduct a difficult amphibious landing on Inchon.

Certainly one of the principal reasons for the Marine Corps’ success in Korea was its ability to rely on the Reserve to rapidly and effectively reinforce its undermanned active duty units in a time of crisis. When planning began for the Inchon landing, the Camp Pendleton based 1st Marine Division had only a fraction of its peacetime authorized strength, just 3,386 officers and men.⁷ General Douglas MacArthur requested a wartime strength Marine division to spearhead his Operation Chromite, the Inchon landing. In order to meet this need, the 1st Division required a massive infusion of combat-ready Marines to bring it up to a wartime strength of around 20,000.

In addition to being undermanned, the inflexible operational schedule meant that there would be little time to train any new arrivals before the division embarked for combat. This was an especially difficult situation since the 1st Division would have to execute one of the most complex and challenging of all military operations, an amphibious assault against a prepared enemy in a large urban area. Reassigning Marines from other active duty Marine Corps units, was impractical because those units would be unable to meet their own operational commitments elsewhere. While the draft could fill the Marine Corps ranks eventually, the obvious answer to the immediate need for trained Marines was to draw on the nearly 130,000 Marines in the Reserve.⁸

Mobilization of the Marine Corps’ “Minute Men of 1950” was authorized on July 19, 1950. Approximately 21,000 members of the Organized Reserve were ordered to immediately report to Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton and another 5,800 to Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune as the first wave.⁹ By July 31, 1950, the influx of reservists began to arrive at Camp Pendleton and, by the end of the first week, 13,703 had report-

ed aboard. Reservists continued to arrive in such numbers that, by September 11, 1950, 33,528 members of the Organized Reserve, or more than 90 percent of its total strength had come on active duty. The Volunteer Reserve provided an additional 51,942 Marines for active service. In addition to the impressive numbers of incoming reservists, the quality of these citizen-Marines was also generally very high. The overwhelming majority of reservists called to active duty, 99 percent of the officers and 77.5 percent of the enlisted, were veterans of World War II.¹⁰ Approximately half of these Marine reservists were classified as “combat-ready,” either by virtue of their training status in the Reserve or by past active duty experience, when they reported aboard.¹¹ Many of the recalled Marine reservists went directly from civilian life to the combat-bound 1st Marine Division. Others filled active duty billets elsewhere in the Corps to relieve active duty Marines so that they could be reassigned to the division or to other combat missions. Wherever they served, the Marine reservists were largely responsible for meeting the critical manpower needs of the Marine Corps during initial stages of the Korean War.

By March 1951, the Marine Corps had tripled in size since the start of the war and reservists accounted for 45 percent of that growth. In Korea, 38 percent of the officers and 48 percent of enlisted Marines in Korea were reservists.¹² Major General Oliver P. Smith, Commanding General of the 1st Marine Division, reflected on the contributions of the Marine Corps Reserve when he commented that, “without reservists, the Inchon landing on September 15 would have been impossible,” and that the reservists, “needed no particular refresher course to renew the amphibious skills they had learned during World War II.” He continued, “Reserves were quickly integrated into the division and they all became Marines with as splendid a Marine spirit as the regulars.”¹³

The mobilization of combat ready reservists for the Korean War demonstrated not only the need for a strong and effective Marine Corps Reserve, it also brought to light a number of serious problems with existing Reserve policy. While the Reserve call-up eventually did fill out the ranks of the Marine Corps, the mobilization had not been as rapid nor as smooth as it should have been. As Reserve units and individual reservists arrived by the thousands at Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton, they had to be billeted, classified, medically examined, and assigned to units as quickly and efficiently as possible in the limited time available. Consequently, there was little time to review training records, perform interviews, or conduct tactical training. Only those individual Marines who were quickly determined to be “combat-ready” when they arrived could be assigned to the 1st Division. The rest had to be assigned additional training or non-combat billets.

As reservists arrived for active duty, Reserve units were disbanded. Individual Marines were hastily assigned where ever they were needed most. Some reporting reservists were not uniformly qualified for immediate combat employment. Many of the incoming reservists, who were not World War II veterans, had not been properly trained within the Reserve establishment and were of little use when ordered to active duty.

At the time, Organized Reserve drill meetings were held one evening a week and summer camps were not well attended and offered little realistic training. New enlisted recruits were not even required to attend boot camp.¹⁴ Volunteer Reserve members were not required to participate in any organized training program. Fully half of the reservists coming on active duty were deemed not “combat-ready.”* Approximately 18 to 20 percent of the incoming reservists were so deficient in training that they were assigned to the Recruit Class. The problems of properly classifying incoming reservists was made even more difficult since many of them had incomplete or missing records.¹⁵ Of all of the thousands of reservists called to active duty, only 2,891 were assigned to the combat-bound 1st Marine Division.¹⁶ As it had in World War II, the Marine Corps was eventually forced to rely on draftees to fill out its ranks during the Korean War.

*Combat-ready reservists were those who had served ninety days on active duty or who had been members of the Organized Reserve for two years and had attended one summer camp and seventy-two drills or two summer camps and thirty-two drills. All others were considered non-combat-ready.

As bad as the Marine Corps problems were with the Korean War mobilization, they would have been far more acute had it not been for the large numbers of World War II veterans who were still in the Reserve. The Reserve structure itself was simply not producing the sort of self-sustaining, combat-ready force to augment the active duty Marine Corps that was expected of it. Addressing the reserves in all the services in 1953, the National Security Training Commission reported to the president that *“our present reserve system is unsatisfactory.”*¹⁷ Clearly, the Marine Corps and all of the services had to do a better job to meet the future challenges.

Post-Korean War Reorganization of the Reserve

Even before the Korean War was over, Congress and the Marine Corps began a series of major reforms designed to correct some problems that became evident during the mobilization and to make the Reserve a truly combat ready force. While fighting was still going on in Korea, Congress passed the Universal Military Training and Service Act of 1951. This law reaffirmed the principal of universal military obligation for all young men. The Armed Forces Reserve Act of 1952, required each of the services to commit themselves to establishing strong reserve forces organized into three components, a Ready Reserve, a Standby Reserve, and a Retired Reserve. In an effort to rebuild reserve manpower levels and to provide for long-term planning, these acts obligated new members of the military to a combined eight year commitment of active duty and reserve participation and affiliation. The legislative branch was not alone in initiating Reserve reforms.

Elected to the presidency in 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower initiated a *“New Look”* at American defense policy with an eye toward *“security with solvency.”* The new president wanted to meet the Soviet threat in the long-term while keeping the American domestic economy strong through decreased defense spending.¹⁸ Eisenhower believed that *“the foundation of military strength is economic strength,”* and did everything in his power to keep money in the economy and out of the defense budget. Central to this policy, was the reduction of expensive active duty units as much as possible, while placing greater reliance on nuclear weapons, allied ground troops, and American Reserve forces. National Guardsmen and reservists were especially attractive to Eisenhower’s *“New Look”* defense policy. It was estimated that ten reservists cost about the same as a single active duty serviceman.¹⁹

On August 9, 1955, citing the *“essential need to build strong reserves,”* President Eisenhower signed the Reserve Forces Act of 1955, which called for even greater readiness, increased the reserve manpower ceiling from 1.5 million to 2.9 million, and gave the president the option to order up to one million Ready Reservists to active duty on his own authority.²⁰ As an incentive for young men to join the dramatically expanding reserves, volunteers could enlist directly into the service Reserve of their choice, serve two years on active duty, and then complete their obligation with three years in a reserve unit. They could also serve from three to six months on active duty and serve out the remainder of an eight year obligation as a reservist.²¹ Being in the reserves also meant that they could not be drafted, a measure that would have a profound affect on the Vietnam-era Reserve, a decade later. The Marine Corps leadership embraced the law’s reemphasis on Reserve training and readiness.

Permanent Organized Marine Corps Reserve staff groups were created and headquartered at each Marine Corps District. Throughout the second half of the 1950s, training opportunities increased in both quantity and variety for both the Ready Reserve and the Volunteer Reserve. Category A units, those required to have the highest state of readiness, were authorized forty-drill periods a year and a fifteen day

annual training period. Along with the growth and reorganization of the Ready Reserve, the Volunteer Reserve also played an increasingly important role. In July of 1955, the Volunteer Reserve included more than twenty-thousand officers and more than one-hundred thousand enlisted reservists. In all, there were 133 Volunteer Training Units (VTUs). As much as possible, reservists increasingly had the chance to receive the same types of training their active duty counterparts received.

Reactivation of the 4th Marine Division: Background

The early 1960s were another period of profound change for the nation's defense policy, and for the Marine Corps and its Reserve. International communism showed no sign of dying. Indeed it appeared to once again be on the march, seizing control of Cuba, only ninety miles from the American mainland, and threatening other Third World countries in Latin America, Africa, and especially Southeast Asia. The Berlin crisis of 1961 reminded American policy-makers of the Soviet Union's tendency to opportunism when it saw unpreparedness and any lack of will on the part of the West. Also during this period, rapid developments in the destructive power of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons increasingly made their use in war an unthinkable option, thus forcing American security policy makers to put even more faith in their conventional military forces.

The early 1960s was also a period of significant change in the political leadership of America. With the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960, the steady and experienced hand of President Dwight D. Eisenhower had been replaced by a younger Commander-in-Chief who also proffered new ideas about defense policy and the importance of conventional forces.

While Eisenhower had consistently favored the deterrence value of strategic nuclear weapons, cut conventional military spending, and warned the nation about the dangers of a growing "*military-industrial complex*," President John F. Kennedy promised to revitalize the American military in the face of serious external threats. In a bit of campaign speech, President Kennedy characterized the Cold War as nothing less than "*a struggle for supremacy between two conflicting ideologies: freedom under God versus ruthless, godless tyranny.*"²² In the face of this serious and unambiguous threat to the United States, Kennedy not only wanted to "*close the missile-gap*," a promise he had made during his campaign, but he also wanted to insure that the West had the ability to employ strong and effective conventional forces in wars short of all-out nuclear exchanges.

A doctrine of "*massive retaliation*," based on a devastating nuclear counter-attack on the Soviet Union, dominated American foreign policy during the 1950s. This deterrence policy, however, was only useful when the security of the United States or its closest allies was directly and immediately threatened by a Soviet nuclear attack. In the early 1960s, Kennedy, his advisors, and his successors developed and articulated a doctrine of "*flexible response*" to deal with lower level conflicts.²³

This new national security doctrine relied on a proportional response to aggression with a full spectrum of military power, from the limited use of conventional forces to the all-out use of strategic nuclear weapons. The president warned that "*any potential aggressor contemplating an attack on any part of the Free World with any kind of weapon, conventional or nuclear, must know that our response will be suitable, selective, swift and effective.*"²⁴ For this new policy to work, the United States had to reinvigorate its conventional forces. With its long history of adaptability and readiness, the Marine Corps, including its Reserve, was exceptionally well suited to the demands of the new policy.