Shadow of the Bomb

Final Campaigns of the Pacific War
and the Atomic Decision

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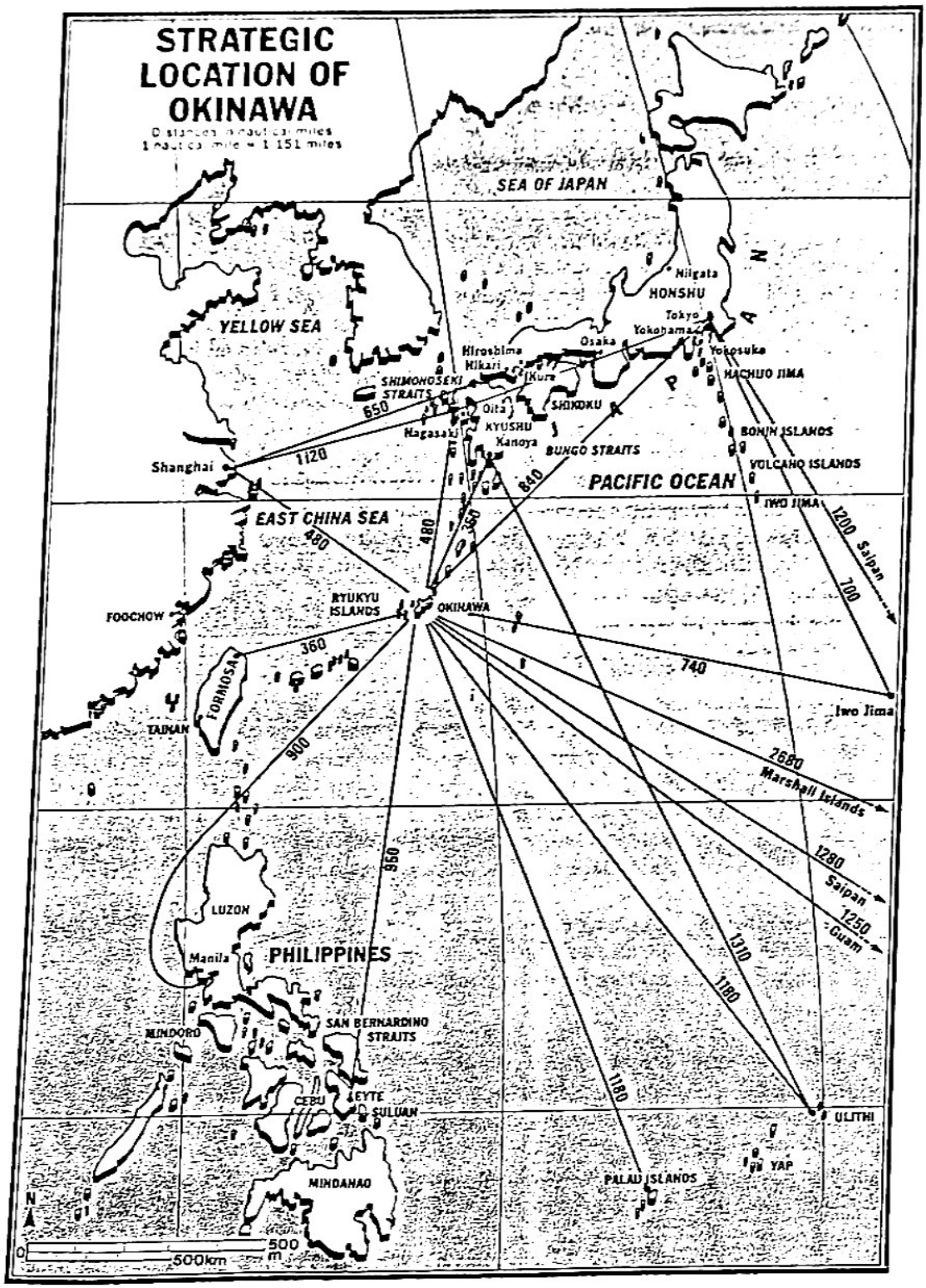
STRATEGIC LOCATION OF OKINAWA
Distances in nautical miles
1 nautical mile = 1.151 miles
SEA OF JAPAN
YELLOW SEA
EAST CHINA SEA
PACIFIC OCEAN
Niigata
HONSHU
Tokyo
Yokohama
Yokosuka
HACHIJO JIMA
Osaka
Hiroshima
Hikari
Kure
SHIMONOSEKI STRAITS
Oita
SHIKOKU
KYUSHU
Nagasaki
Kanoya
BUNGO STRAITS
BONIN ISLANDS
VOLCANO ISLANDS
IWO JIMA
Shanghai
1120
650
840
480
480
350
1200
Saipan
700
FOOCHOW
RYUKYU ISLANDS
OKINAWA
360
740
FORMOSA
TAINAN
Iwo Jima
900
2680
Marshall Islands
1280
Saipan
1250
Guam
950
1310
1180
1180
LUZON
Manila
PHILIPPINES
SAN BERNARDINO STRAITS
MINDORO
CEBU
LEYTE
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MINDANAO
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On June 18, 1945 President Truman authorized the proposed invasion of Japan. The President reluctantly gave the order after being warned by Admiral William Leahy, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that U.S. armed forces could expect to receive a 35 percent casualty rate in the invasion of Kyushu, the southern most island of the Japanese homeland. Leahy was supplying an honest casualty estimate to a proposed battle scenario. A horrific scenario it was. The invasion of Kyushu, or operation Olympic, would require a combined force of 767,000 men. According to Leahy, 268,000 of them would be killed or wounded, a number which would exceed American casualties in both theaters of World War II combined. Upon hearing such a high estimate Truman reportedly replied that he "hoped that there was a possibility of preventing an Okinawa from one end of Japan to another."[1]

On the very same day that Leahy made his grim prediction, General Simon Buckner, commander of the Tenth Army on Okinawa, was killed by enemy shrapnel as he observed troop movements on the southern end of the island. The highest-ranking American commander to be killed in the war, Buckner was one of the three thousand casualties during that week in what was to become the costliest battle of the Pacific War.[2] In the battle for Okinawa American forces exhibited an overwhelming armada on land, air and sea. Still, American forces became increasingly frustrated by the fanaticism exhibited by Japanese defenders. Frustration led to demoralization as the capitulation of Germany and the securing of Okinawa did not end the war for American

[1] Herbert Feis, *Japan Subdued*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961) p. 11

soldiers in the Pacific but brought the slated invasion of Japan closer. Unlike President Truman, the battle hardened troops in the Pacific did not need to see casualty estimates to form an opinion. First hand experience had convinced most combat veterans that the upcoming invasion most likely meant a sentence to death or dismemberment in a war that had already been won.

In reporting to Truman, Leahy drew his casualty estimate directly from the ratio produced on Okinawa, where the invasion force had consisted of well over 100,000 men. Of these, 49,151 were to be wounded and 12,520 killed in action.[3] The Japanese defenders on Okinawa, a force that had been completely cut off from any kind of reinforcement and subject to continual air and naval bombardment, held out against the onslaught for over one hundred days, seventy more than the original American estimate. While the battle became protracted on land, American servicemen on destroyers and aircraft carriers also fought desperately for their lives as swarms of Japanese kamikazes, laden with high explosives, carried out sorties from nearby Kyushu and Formosa. How much influence did the violent climax of the Pacific War have in the decision to use the atomic bomb on Japan?

Many historians view the subsequent atomic decision as having little or nothing to do with the aforementioned events. Historian Gar Alperovitz, in one of the few acknowledgments of the Okinawan campaign in his book, *The*

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[2] George Feifer, *Tennozan*, (New York: Ticknor&Fields, 1992) p. 502

[3] Major-General S. Woodburn Kirby, *The War Against Japan; Vol. V* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969) p.123

Decision to Use The Atomic Bomb and The Architecture of an American Myth, states:

> On April 1, 1945, the U.S. Tenth Army--consisting of three Marine Corps divisions and four Army divisions--landed on Okinawa, the gateway to the home islands. At this time, too, the Russians signaled the likely end of their neutrality. The Koiso government, only nine months old, collapsed. An aging admiral known for his moderation, Baron Kantaro Suzuki, took over amidst growing chaos.

In the next paragraph Alperovitz writes:

> Although most of the American public and servicemen in the field were led to envisage a long and fierce battle--and the high probability of an invasion--now, a half century later, we know a great deal more both about what was known by Washington.[4]

The divergence between the perspectives of 1945 and 1995 is clear. The conclusion of the latter is that American planners were preoccupied with something other than defeating Japan militarily. But evidence from the spring and summer of 1945 strongly suggests otherwise. During the previous three and a half years American military planners had been animated primarily by one mission alone: defeating the enemy with a minimal number of American casualties. To what extent did the final battles of the Pacific effect the decision to use the atomic bomb on Japan?

This paper will look to the final events of the Pacific war for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the factors that proved to be influential in the decision to drop the atomic bombs. The struggle for Okinawa will examined

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[4] Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use The Atomic Bomb,* (New York: Knopf,1995) p.15

in detail, since it was the last, bloodiest, and for the purpose of understanding the end of the war, most consequential battle in the Pacific. Looking to these events will allow for a brief commentary on the controversial historiography of the atomic decision.

Gray History

The nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki represent a historical convulsion of unequal proportion. Previous upheavals such as the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions had taken decades of gestation before people took notice and commented upon them. Now in less than a week in August of 1945, it seemed as if science has brought mankind to the edge of the abyss. The subsequent Cold War made it apparent that mankind's survival was dependent on control of the nuclear genie. The image of the nuclear cloud over Japan instantly became the symbol of this era.

In such a milieu it is not difficult to understand why a gigantic philosophical rift exists between the two conflicting poles which vie for the official history of the bombings. How one views the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is often inextricably tied to one's larger ideology. A complete description of the heated historiography of the last fifty years lies well beyond the scope of this paper, but a description of the general shape of the arguments will be helpful in understanding subsequent developments in the interpretation of the atomic decision.

The revisionist stance argues that the bombings were unjustified for a variety of reasons: Japan was militarily defeated and in the process of sending out peace-feelers to the Soviets, the U.S. had backed the Japanese into a corner with its insistence that the Emperor be removed form the throne, the U.S. was demonstrating its nuclear prowess to the Russians who were poised to strike in Manchuria, just to name a few. Revisionists have paid much attention to the to the inflated casualties that where cited in the memoirs of Truman and Stimson. Underlying all these arguments is the moral one: the U.S. had the obligation of keeping the moral high ground in its policy toward ending the war; the manner which total modern war had quickly degenerated into a complete moral vacuum underscored this argument.

The traditional 'establishment' history has been gradually losing ground in the last twenty years. The citing of a half a million to a million U.S. casualties as the deciding factor in President Truman's decision has been debunked among academia, but the debate over possible casualties is still the cornerstone of the argument. The establishment line maintains that only a weapon of such horrific magnitude could have hoped to dislodge the militaristic faction in Japan, who was bent upon the idea of the final and glorious battle upon the mainland. This argument is further supported by the fact that even after the Nagasaki bombing the Japanese cabinet was split three to three between the militarists and the peace advocates, an impasse that was broken only after the Emperor's sudden call for peace.

Beyond all the arguments, the establishment view holds a contempt for revisionist historians who, in their zeal to downplay the cost in lives that Americans would have to endure, exemplify a pedantic academic perversion which at its worst victimizes the Japanese and makes the U.S. the evil aggressor in the war. A recent historian best shows this contempt when writing "Perhaps only an intellectual could assert that 193,500 anticipated casualties were too insignificant to have caused Truman to use atomic bombs."[5] Historians such as Paul Fussel and William Manchester, who witnessed the horrors of combat in the Pacific War and who, at the threshold of adulthood faced the sobering possibility of a landing in Japan are the most passionate defenders of Truman's decision. The title of an essay by Fussel speaks volumes: "'Thank God for the Atom Bomb'--Hiroshima: A Soldier's View." Of course war has always been a tragic affair. What was so different about what these men experienced?

Crisis and the Turning Tide

From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the conflict in the Pacific was an atypical war. Perhaps more than any other theater of the Second World War, the war in the Pacific required a great deal of improvisation and adjustment by all participating branches of the military. The territorial gains that Japan acquired in the initial phase of the conflict left American planners facing a

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[5] Robert James Maddox, *Weapons for Victory*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995) p.60

war that offered few parallels with past experience. Geography ensured that the fighting would proceed in an incremental fashion, each island campaign offering lessons which would be employed in the next, right down to the proposed invasion of the Japanese mainland. What began as an *ad hoc* governmental and military response to the months of crisis, when the Japanese ran unchecked in the Pacific, would evolve during many difficult campaigns. What finally emerged at the end of the war was a highly specialized, informed and in many ways efficient war-making bureaucracy. Many of the assumptions that existed within this bureaucracy in 1945 were formed in the years spent rolling back the Japanese empire.

After their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese enjoyed a string of impressive victories. By the end of December 1941 the American outposts on Guam and Wake Islands were overwhelmed. British Singapore fell on 15 February 1942 and the situation in Burma quickly dissolved into a mass British withdrawal to the Indian frontier. On the Philippines General Douglas MacArthur's troops held their stronghold on the Bataan peninsula until disease and lack of supplies forced them to surrender in April 1942. The last pocket of resistance on the Philippines, the island of Corregidor, would fall on 6 May 1942.[6]

The Japanese empire, or "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" now included Korea, Manchuria, Indochina, Burma, the Philippines, as well as the entire East Indies in the South Pacific. In the South East Pacific the Japanese

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[6] John Keegan, *The Second World War*, (New York: Penguin, 1990) p.266

extended their empire to the Marshall Islands, an eastern boundary a thousand miles west of the Hawaiian Islands.[7] The Japanese Navy sailed unmolested throughout much of the Pacific. Not one of its major surface ships had been lost. Faced with such a situation, American strategy could focus on little more than a defensive policy in the South Pacific.

The Battle of Midway in May of 1942 finally changed this dismal situation. Failing in their attempt at dealing the American fleet a knockout blow, the Japanese found themselves increasingly on the defensive as America now took the initiative in the Pacific. The victory in battle for Guadalcanal in early 1943 gave the Americans another reason to breathe easier. Still, in 1943 American victory in the Pacific was by no means assured. Though the effect of American war production was beginning to have a visible presence in the field, most of the worst fighting of the war lay ahead. Increasing naval and air superiority was surely a sign of better days, but offered little comfort to the marine who faced an enemy entrenched deep within a network of underground bunkers. The trend of Japanese tenacity in the face of growing American superiority would intensify in the coming push through the central Pacific.

The Central Pacific

After Midway in the spring of 1942 the Allies launched an offensive campaign in the South Pacific under the leadership of General Douglas

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[7] John Keegan, *The Second World War*, (New York: Penguin, 1990) p.290

MacArthur. The strong Japanese resistance in the South Pacific caused the American Joint Chiefs of Staff to opt for a second thrust through the Central Pacific. American planners agreed that once the outer shell of the Japanese "minimum defense area" was cracked, the Japanese gave little priority to the evacuation of troops left in the wake of the Allied advance. Hence the concept which became the dominant American policy of the Pacific war: attacking islands which were key to the advance against Japan, while letting the remainder of the Pacific garrisons 'wither on the vine.'[8]

The shift to a two-pronged island hopping campaign represents the first major reshaping of Allied policy in the Pacific. But operations in the central Pacific, American planners soon learned, called for much more complicated maneuvers than those in the south. The small islands and archipelagoes in the central Pacific that stood thousands of miles away from any major Allied land mass posed immense problems of logistics. 'Floating' supply lines would have to be maintained entirely by sea, a process that would render the Navy precariously vulnerable to attack by air and sea once the operation was underway on land. Lives would be lost in learning the difficult lessons of amphibious warfare.

Fighting on the tiny volcanic islands of the central Pacific would be a different affair than the predominant jungle fighting that had characterized the war in the south. Physically bereft of ground to fall back on and ideologically forbidden to surrender, fierce Japanese defenders would provoke an equally

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[8] Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Two-Ocean War*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963) p.283

fierce response from American forces. The fighting in the Pacific reached a degree of savagery which quickly eradicated any vestige of chivalry. It did not take long before the soldier in the Pacific on both sides clearly understood that his own survival depended entirely upon the complete annihilation of the enemy.[9]

The U.S. invasion of Tarawa on November of 1943 was the first in the string of battles that characterized the push through the central Pacific. The campaign was anything but a smooth operation. Miscommunication caused the pre-landing bombardment to be lifted twenty minutes early, exposing the landing craft to enemy fire. An unexpected low tide caused many of the landing craft to become grounded on coral reef, forcing marines to wade ashore for hundreds of yards under heavy fire. Japanese defenders were given to hurling themselves into American positions at night in a 'death charge' rather than face the shameful possibility of being taken prisoner. The three days of fighting on Tarawa, an island of less than three square miles resulted in 1,000 dead and 2,000 American wounded. Press coverage of the battle forced many Americans to realize for the first time that the island hopping campaign could be a costly endeavor.[10]

While many of the island fortresses in the Pacific could be conveniently sidestepped, the Mariana islands had to be taken because of their proximity to the Philippines. In addition, strategists decided the islands could provide a base from which B-29's could bomb Japan. The Joint Chiefs chose Saipan as

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[9] Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun*, (New York: Free Press, 1985) p.410

the ideal site from which to mount such raids. The invasion of Saipan began on 15 June 1944. By the 20th of June most of the island was secured, except in the southern portion, where the remaining Japanese troops were entrenched in cavernous fortifications. Two eerie testaments to Japanese fanaticism occurred before Saipan was finally secured. On July 7th a huge suicide attack of 3,000 Japanese troops, many of whom carried only grenades or makeshift spears, was repulsed.[11] Then many of the remaining Japanese garrison as well as an estimated 8,000 women and children noncombatants heeded Japanese propaganda, which outlined in gruesome detail the fate of those who would be captured by the barbarous Americans, and committed suicide by jumping off Saipan's cliffs into the ocean. Of the 30,000 defenders, only 1,000 remained alive after the campaign. American casualties numbered 16,525 of which only 2,000 had taken place on the first day of the assault, the rest were incurred in the following days spent clearing the island of defenses.

By mid-August 1944, the Marianas, including Guam and Tinian were under American control.[12] Not only did the Marianas provide forward bases from which a newly formed long distance bomber command could begin an extended campaign against the Japanese mainland, but their capture also cut off the southern section of Japan's Pacific empire. American forces were now beginning to benefit from equipment which was designed specifically for the fighting in the Pacific. Japanese planes were now outclassed by new American

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[10] Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun*, (New York: Free Press, 1985) p. 266
[11] Spector, p. 316
[12] Spector, pp.317-320

designs such as the F6F Hellcat. The B-29 Superfortress, newly arrived in the fall of 1944, would soon be bombing the heart of the Japanese empire incessantly and, from 30,000 feet, relatively safely.[13] American submarines were gaining control of Pacific sea lanes and would soon cut-off Japan's ability to reinforce her empire. The final phase of the war was approaching. The question was no longer *if* America would emerge victorious, but rather when and most importantly, at what cost?

The Approach to Japan

The return to the Philippines marked the final phase of the Pacific war in more than the symbolic sense so dear to MacArthur. Beginning with the Philippines, all campaigns were expressly chosen as strategic stepping stones to the invasion of the Japanese mainland. Not only did those campaigns move closer to Japan geographically, but they involved larger armies clashing on islands which increasingly contained indigenous peoples and even large population centers, just as the projected home invasion would. Remembering the climate before the invasion of Okinawa a veteran remarked:

> They told us Okinawa would not be easy because we were getting closer to Japan proper. There were some larger cities we would have to take, more occasions when we would be up against larger concentrations of enemy troops than what we had met in the past and also more concentrations of civilians.[14]

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[13] Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p.866
[14] Gerald Astor, *Operation Iceberg*, (New York: Donald I. Fine, Inc., 1995) p.139

These campaigns would coincide with the detailed planning of the invasion of Japan. The dialogue that took place between MacArthur and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington suggests that as the central Pacific battles became protracted and costly, the question of how to best defeat Japan with the least amount of casualties gained a new sense of urgency.

This sense of alarm began soon after General MacArthur landed at Luzon, the northernmost island of the Philippines in January of 1945. The month-long fighting at Luzon would be one of the most destructive battles of the Pacific War. The fighting in northern Luzon, with its mountainous terrain would prove to be slow and frustrating. House-to-house fighting, on the scale of that seen in Europe, would decimate Manila. 100,000 civilians were killed in the crossfire, and many were massacred by the retreating Japanese outright.[15] Also, Leyte Gulf saw the first appearance of kamikaze fighters. Both of these would become themes of increasing magnitude in the months ahead.

MacArthur's force was still embroiled in fighting on the Philippines as preparations were being made for the final assaults which were to provide forward bases for the invasion of Japan itself. For the invasion of Japan the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa were viewed as essential jumping-off points. Iwo Jima, located a mere 660 miles southwest of Tokyo, was chosen because it lay directly en route of U.S. B-29's operating out of the Marianas. The island was also crucial because it harbored an early warning system which alerted the

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[15] Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun*, (New York: Free Press, 1985) p.524

Japanese to the approach of high-altitude bombers, as well as serving as a base for harassing fighters.

At this stage in the war amphibious assault, as exemplified by its most experienced practitioners, the Marine Corps, had evolved into an extremely intricate ritual. But as events on Iwo Jima were to show, even the highest quantity of firepower and degree of experience could not guarantee an easy victory when a sea borne assault clashed with heavily fortified defensive positions. The combined preliminary bombardment by the Navy and U.S. Army Air forces pounded the island for 74 days, the longest such bombardment of the war. When the Marines finally scattered out of the protective hulls of the amphtracs and into the black, volcanic ash of Iwo Jima on 19 February 1945, they encountered surprisingly light resistance. It was to be short lived, however, and by the end of the day the Marines were pinned down by murderous fire from the Japanese, who controlled the high ground of Mount Suribachi. The Japanese had modified their tactic of facing American troops directly on the beaches, since their defensive fire only served to alert American offshore gunners to exactly where enemy gun emplacements lay hidden. As American casualty statistics for Iwo Jima and Okinawa would reflect, these tactics proved highly effective for the Japanese defenders.

The fight for Mount Suribachi would last for three days, and although the raising of the American flag on the summit has come to embody the Marine Corps most hard fought victory, in keeping with past experience in island fighting, the battle was far from over. Fierce pockets of resistance would hold

out until March 16th, forcing the Marines to engage in a deadly sweep, working with satchel charges and flame-throwers from one cave to the next. Of the 21,000 Japanese defenders on Iwo Jima, only a handful were captured alive. The Marines suffered 6,821 killed and almost 20,000 wounded in the nightmarish campaign.[16]

What can these campaigns which preceded the invasion of Okinawa tell us about the general nature of the Pacific War as a whole? First, that the island hopping strategy was a process of fight, learn, and fight again. Lessons learned in each campaign influenced the next. The bounding geographical setting and highly intricate nature of amphibious assaults created a far more delineated conflict as compared to the more fluid fronts which characterized the struggle in Europe. As such, the Allied thrust in the Pacific offers examples of fierce combat followed by periods of scrutiny, planning and build-up for the next campaign. Second, the further the American fleet pushed into the Japanese Empire, the more desperate the Japanese response. Consequently American planners became more conscience of mounting casualties. When the number of American lives expended in the capture of Iwo Jima was released in the United States, reaction by the press bordered on the scandalous. In a gesture indicative of mounting war-weariness on the home front, the Hearst newspaper chain openly questioned the urgency which necessitated such losses. Finally, if there was a correlation between mounting casualties and American decision making, it must be remembered that the battle for Okinawa, the largest land-sea

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[16] Spector, p. 502

battle in history and the last campaign of World War II, would claim far more lives than any other campaign in the Pacific.

Okinawa

Ironically it was the issue of casualties that sealed the fate of Okinawa. On September 29, 1944, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander of the Pacific Ocean Area met in San Francisco with Fleet Admiral Ernest King, chief of U.S. Naval Operations in an attempt to come to an agreement for the final stages of the war against Japan. King had vehemently argued for an invasion of Formosa (present-day Taiwan) as a precursor to the invasion of the Japanese mainland. Using numbers based on casualties incurred during the invasion of Saipan, Nimitz argued that with the presence of a well-entrenched field army on Formosa, American troops could expect at least 150,000 killed and wounded-- a number, Nimitz was quick to point out, that would probably cause a great deal of dissent from the American public. Alternatively, Nimitz proposed to go ahead with General MacArthur's plan for an invasion of Luzon, with Iwo Jima and Okinawa to follow as the last major landings before the invasion of Japan.[17] The two agreed and King was off to Washington to brief the Joint Chiefs of Staff, while Nimitz headed to Hawaii to plan Operation Iceberg, the code name for the invasion of Okinawa.

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[17] Ian Gow, *Okinawa 1945 Gateway to Japan*, (New York: Doubleday, 1985) p.24

Okinawa lies in the Ryukyu archipelago of islands which stretch for 790 miles from Taiwan to Kyushu, the northern most island if Japan. In the center of these mostly uninhabited islands lies the Okinawa Group, which is comprised of about fifty islands centered around Okinawa itself. The largest of all the Ryukyu Islands, Okinawa runs 60 miles in length from north to south, and ranges in width from 2 to 18 miles. The northern half of the island is rugged, mountainous terrain while the more populous southern area is characterized by hills, ravines and ridges. The southern half of the island was where the Japanese concentrated their main defensive effort. The native Okinawans in 1945 numbered roughly 500,000. Although the Japanese considered the Okinawans inferior, they did not hesitate in conscripting a large number of them into labor groups and a home guard. An estimated 150,000 Native Okinawans would be killed in what they would later call their "typhoon of steel."[18]

On Easter morning April 1, 1945, following the largest pre-invasion bombardment in history, the combined Marine and Army units which made up General Buckner's 10th Army began its approach towards the ten-mile stretch of beach on the west coast of Okinawa. At the same time, on the southern tip of the island, a diversionary task force feigned a landing, reversing their engines at the last minute. By the first hour 16,000 troops had come ashore. To the amazement of troops who had expected the worst, resistance was light to nonexistent. For many of the first wave troops Okinawa was a second or even third landing. The fact that Okinawa was a Japanese "home island" seemed to

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[18] George Feifer, *Tennozan*, (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992) p.xii

heighten the terrifying premonition that many would not make it past the beaches. These fears were allayed in part by the end of the day when 60,000 troops were ashore and the Youtan and Kadena airfields, objectives that had been slated to be captured by the third day of the campaign, were in American possession. Surprised at seeing such token resistance, American troops reassured themselves that the campaign would be an easy one.[19]

Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima had labored hard to assure that this would not be the case. As the commander of the Japanese forces on Okinawa, Ushijima had been preparing for the defense of the island for months. With the invasion of Luzon, the Japanese correctly concluded that it was only a matter of time before the Americans began their final push into Japanese home waters. The only problem was guessing which Island would be chosen for the major staging area for an American invasion. The consensus in Japan that the landing was going to take place on Formosa led to the shipping of the entire 9th division from Okinawa to Formosa, where it was to spend the remainder of the war in isolation. This was a major blow in what was rapidly becoming a series of setbacks for Ushijima. Just before the loss of the 9th Division, a troop transport en route to Okinawa was lost and assumed to have been torpedoed with 3,700 reinforcements from Japan. Then, also in December, a huge explosion ripped through a major ammunition dump on the island, leaving

[19] Gerald Astor, *Operation Iceberg*, (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1995) p.143

ammunition depleted by half with little hope of support from the home islands, which were already stockpiling for the coming invasion.[20]

Despite these major setbacks, Ushijima's tenacity and foresight would prove a major factor in what would later be cited by military tacticians as a brilliant defense. After the destruction of the Japanese fleet at Leyte, Ushijima was quick to realize that there was no hope of relief from a Japanese task force (although much of the Japanese army, ignorant of any Japanese naval defeat during the war, would continue to cling to the hope of the mythical rescue fleet to the end.) Defeat now certain, Ushijima could only hope to delay it while inflicting the greatest number of casualties upon the invading forces. A stubborn defense would at least buy time for the build up of the home defenses.[21]

The southern half of Okinawa was ideal for a defensive holding action. Besides the natural ridges and cliffs, the Okinawan family burial shrines which dotted the island provided the Japanese with hundreds of ideal, pre-made defensive positions. Thousands of Japanese soldiers, native Okinawans as well as conscripted Koreans, labored day and night to construct well over 60 miles of underground tunnels and fortifications, some as deep as 100 feet underground. Lessons painfully learned on Iwo Jima were put to good use and heavy artillery was placed on tracks which often stretched around a protective corner, safe from offshore artillery. From their heights the Japanese lines of defense possessed the advantage of having interlocking fields of fire. Flat land

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[20] Gow, p.42

approaches could be instantly immersed in a deadly shower of artillery, mortar, machine gun and light weapons fire. When ground was gained on one of the strong points, supporting fire could be brought in from the flanking position. Every square foot of approachable land had been meticulously coordinated into a grid system for accurate fire from all positions. A Marine intelligence report summed up the southern defenses:

> 1. It affords all-around protection for infantry from naval gunfire, air strikes, and artillery fire. 2. It affords fire positions for small arms, automatic weapons, and even artillery. 3. It affords space for headquarters, storage, and barracks and makes them relatively safe. 4. It is a system of mutually supporting strong points. 5. It is a defense in depth and offers opportunities for withdrawal actions involving relatively small casualties by utilizing reverse slope or flank exits. 6. It offers good cover and concealment for individual riflemen and automatic weapons.[22]

This, of course, was written with the benefit of hindsight, after bloody attempts to take these ridges by American troops who had no idea where the deadly volume of fire was coming from. In fact American aerial reconnaissance had failed to appreciate the magnitude of the Japanese defenses. It would take numerous attacks, with advancing units getting mauled repeatedly despite being sent back in increasing strength, before the full extent of the defensive caves was appreciated.

But the first few days of the campaign did nothing to foreshadow the bloody fighting which still lay ahead. By the fourth day Okinawa was effectively cut in half. The Marines in the III Amphibious group now turned to the north

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[21] George Feifer, *Tennozan*, (New York: Ticknor&Fields, 1992), pp. 108-9
[22] Feifer, p.234

while XXIV Corps began the southern push. In the north the Marines encountered a light, guerrilla defense. But in the south hopes for a painless campaign dissipated as increasingly strong pockets of resistance were encountered. Initially, the Marines attempted to outflank such points. By mid-April this was no longer possible; it was clear that XXIV Corps had come up against a major Japanese defensive line. From 14 to 19 April the southern drive was halted while reinforcements were brought in and a major reconnaissance effort was mounted.

A major offensive in the south was underway by April 19. Despite an unprecedented bombardment by American naval guns, air bombardment and artillery barrages in which the Japanese endured an estimated 19,000 shells in a 40-minute period, American gains would still be measured in yards along many points of the front and many strong Japanese pockets remained. On one of these strong points, Kakazu Ridge, which the Japanese rushed to reinforce on 20 April, the American 27th Division became threatened by envelopment. On 20 April the 27th division suffered 506 casualties, the greatest amount suffered in one day by a single division of the entire campaign.[23]

Scenes similar to Kakazu ridge would be repeated throughout the campaign. By the end of April it was becoming clear that American supporting fire was having little effect against the Japanese fortifications, which remained effective to the end despite being hammered from the 1,766,352 rounds from

[23] Ian Gow, *Okinawa 1945 Gateway to Japan*, (New York: Doubleday, 1985) p.127

Army and Marine field guns.[24] As General Hodge, the leader of the XXIV Corps conceded, "It is going to be really tough. There are 65,000 to 70,000 fighting Japanese holed up in the south end of the island. I see no way to get them out except to blast them out yard by yard."[25]

To many observers, both among the press and the military, the slow pace was not in keeping with a war in which the enemy was supposedly defeated militarily. Inevitably General Buckner began to take heat from those who felt that the slow progress was the result of his tactics rather than a well planned and executed Japanese defense. Buckner was more inclined to fight with the less sensational Army tactics of the broad front rather than the Marine credo of constant advance. As the fighting dragged on and showed no signs of abating well past May 1, the projected date that the island was supposed to be completely under American control, the press publicly criticized the campaign. Buckner faced more immediate criticism from the Navy, which was also fighting its most deadly battle of the war. Still, Buckner held firm in his belief that his tactics would save more American lives in the final tally:

> We will take our time and kill the Japanese gradually. You will see many Japanese killed. You will see them gradually rolled back... but you won't see spectacular advances because this isn't that kind of fighting.[26]

Kamikazes

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[24] Feifer,p.236
[25] Gow, p.119
[26] Feifer, p.238

Admiral Spruance, the overall commander of the Central Pacific Task Forces in the Pacific, had a different opinion of Buckner's advance on the ground:

> 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.[27]

Admiral Spruance's opinion was not an isolated one and aptly highlights the nascent strain between the services. Admittedly, traditional antipathy had always existed between the various branches of the service. But when it became clear offshore that the terrifying waves of kamikaze fighters had more staying power than previously expected, Navy complaints about perceived Army 'foot dragging' could be heard in even the highest echelons of command.

By the time of the Okinawa campaign, kamikaze attacks had come to play a central role in Japanese defensive policy. Though the attacks never stood any real strategic chance of actually repulsing the massive American armada, for naval personnel off Okinawa this would be the most terrifying event of the war. The Navy had not been immune from the prevalent tendency of underestimating Japanese strength. Aerial sweeps across the Japanese mainland on the 6th of April led many, especially returning pilots, to believe that Japanese ability to resist in the air would be minimal. This assumption began to evaporate that very afternoon when the first massed groups of bogeys began to

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[27] Specter, p.539

appear on radar. First to know of the imminent attack were the picketing destroyers which, being positioned at intervals around the fleet as the first line of warning defense, themselves became the Kamikazes' primary target. Some 900 Japanese planes took part in the attack of April 6-7, and although most did not succeed in getting past the screen of American fighters and anti-aircraft fire, 22 ships were hit and 11 were sunk.[28]

The life-and-death struggle between Americans fighting to live and Japanese fighting to die seemed to exemplify a deep rift between the two warring cultures. Both sides had at times noticed and commented upon the enemy's peculiar approach to waging war. Just as American sailors could not understand Japanese pilots who were fighting for a chance to kill themselves, so it was with Japanese sailors who witnessed American PBY pilots risking their lives while attempting to rescue downed pilots in the midst of battle.[29] Now in the last campaign before the invasion of Japan, both American sailors and the soldiers who watched the epic air-sea battle from land became even more convinced that the Japanese would die *en masse* before opting for the shame of surrender.

The attack of April 6-7 was the first in a series of ten that hit the fleet off Okinawa. The attacks came roughly at one week intervals and lasted from two to five days apiece. But even in the days between the massed groups the fleet underwent random attack from at least one to twenty aircraft. The result among sailors, unlike in any other campaign they had experienced, was a constant fear

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[28] Feifer, p.195

which lasted for weeks on end. Adding to the tension were rumors that as the fleet was approaching the home islands the Japanese were beginning to unleash secret suicide weapons, such as a one-man rocket-propelled bomb, as well as one-man suicide torpedoes and suicide motor boats. These reports were confirmed when one of the smaller islands that was invaded prior to April 1st was shown to harbor dozens of such suicide boats and midget submarines.[30]

Constant alert lead to fatigue. At night, men patrolled the decks with machine-guns because of the fear of sabotage or suicide attacks. Remembering the jittery climate a sailor recalled, "At night anything that moved got riddled. Any sound, any sight including white caps-- we were plain scared. And when one guy opened up, everybody fired at everything. So there were lots of near misses, ricochets, accidents."[31] As was the case on land also, the combination of tired and edgy servicemen with an abundant amount of weaponry would inexorably lead to accidents. More than once sailors tense and exhausted by the long hours of squinting into the sun opened fire on friendly planes, provoking the entire fleet to follow in unison. Even after the last massed attack of June 21-22, which consisted of only 45 planes, few breathed easier. The fleet's next objective would be the waters off Japan.

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[29] Feifer, p.28
[30] Gow, p.58
[31] Feifer, p.214

Considerations

Okinawa would eventually slide into American control, though scattered pockets of defense in the south would hold out well into August. On June 23, five days after General Buckner was killed, General Ushijima committed suicide along with the surviving members of his general staff.[32] The last general order to his troops read:

> I appreciate and congratulate your brave efforts for the past three months in carrying out your duties. But now we face the end, as it has become extremely difficult to continue our efforts. Each of you should follow the orders of whoever is highest in rank in your group and continue to resist to the very end, then live in the eternity of our noble cause.[33]

An estimated 110,000 of Ushijima's men would die on Okinawa. Most of the 7,400 Japanese solider who were taken alive were too badly wounded to commit their obligatory suicide.[34]

How great was the impact of Okinawa and its predecessors in the minds of planners as they turned their attention to the invasion of Japan? The fact that Okinawa and the Japanese home islands stood in such close proximity weighed heavily upon consensus, despite many differences. Okinawa was not Japan proper, but as a traditional territory of Japan, with a relatively large indigenous population which had demonstrated its loyalty to Japan, the association between the two was an easy one to make. Now with the prospect

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[32] Gow, p.219.
[33] Feifer, p.505.
[34] Keegan, p.573.

of invading Kyushu, American planners faced the prospect of setting foot on Japanese soil. Despite the American superiority in almost every aspect, American speculation on the impending invasion seemed preoccupied with the possibility of everything from a long, tough fight to an all-out disaster.

Kyushu's accessibility made it the most obvious target in the view of both American and Japanese planners. For the first time in the Pacific War, the forces of MacArthur and Nimitz would come together in one awe-inspiring show of force and converge on one island. Once secured in operation Olympic, Kyushu was to be used as a base for both the U.S. air forces as well as a harbor for the Navy in the final assault on the Tokyo Plains in operation Coronet. Capture of Kyushu would allow the Navy to completely cut off Japan from the Asian mainland, thus preventing the Japanese from reinforcing the home island with their crack divisions of the Kwantung Army.[35]

Northern Kyushu is separated from the south by a central line of mountains. The proposed invasion sites were all backed by terrain that was similar to the hills and escarpments that had proven to be so formidable on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. An article which ran in the *New York Times* entitled, *Okinawa is a Lesson for The Invasion* on May 26, 1945 stated:

> ...the invasion of Japan and the fighting that lies ahead after the landing will be without qualification the hardest we have ever been called to face. The way the Japanese defenders of Okinawa have fought, and the definitely more skillful way in which they have handled their troops and their weapons make that certain. The

[35] Grace Person Hayes, *The History of The Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982) p.703

thing that clinches it is the topography of the main islands of the enemy empire, which is Okinawa magnified and multiplied [36]

The significance of the similarity was not lost on a U.S. Sixth Army intelligence officer either, "The cliff-like terrace fronts, the commanding heights surrounding all lowland areas, and the rugged mountains full of tortuous narrow defiles are ideal for the construction of extensive underground installations."[37] Secretary of War Henry Stimson had traveled widely in Japan prior to the war. His memories of the Japanese home islands would prove to be crucial in the decision to spare the historical city of Kyoto. In speaking of Kyushu two weeks before the Potsdam conference Stimson told President Truman that the terrain on Kyushu was "susceptible to a last ditch such as has been made on Iwo Jima and Okinawa." He warned the president that an alternative to invasion should be sought out in an attempt to avoid a campaign that would be "long, costly and arduous."[38] At the same time, while arguing for the invasion of Japan, MacArthur insisted that past analogies did not hold because unlike Okinawa, Kyushu afforded room for maneuver.

Troop estimates

Troop estimates for the invasion of Kyushu were, and remain a point of confusion and debate. An intelligence report for operation Olympic, submitted

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[36] Bruce Rae, *Oknawa Is a Lesson for Invasion of Japan*, (New York Times, May 26, 1945)
[37] Headquarters, *Sixth Army, G-2 Estimate of the Enemy Situation*, Olyimpic Operation, 1 August 1945, RG 218, WNRC.

in April stated that Kyushu contained only a single Japanese division in the south, backed up by a few reserve regiments. Combined combat troops on Kyushu amounted to only about 25,000 troops.[39] The report estimated that by November of 1945, the time that the invasion was to be under way, Japanese forces would foreseeably be reinforced with another two divisions and an armored unit. This force, which would constitute approximately 65,000 troops, would in turn be forced to split its strength in order to be able to adequately defend the three sites where the Americans were expected to land.[40] By the time of invasion it was expected that the Japanese surface navy would be reduced to insignificance. The sole threat that remained to the allied fleet would be from mines, submarines and suicide boats. As for the threat from the air, the report stated that the Japanese would probably expend the majority of their airpower on the attacks off Okinawa. The force that remained, a projected 2,500, would be further reduced by the need to protect the Kanto (Tokyo) plain. A great deal of confidence in the ability to destroy enemy aircraft on the ground was placed on the aircraft of the fast carrier groups.

By the middle of June it was obvious that the situation on Kyushu was changing drastically. The Japanese had correctly assumed that once the invasion had begun in earnest, overwhelming American superiority in the air would render troop movement all but impossible. By mid-June the Kyushu defense force had grown from two training divisions and one fully equipped

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[38] John Ray Skates, *The Invasion of Japan, Alternative to the Bomb*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994) p.237

[39] Including various support units, i.e. naval units, anti-aircraft units, supply, etc.

[40] Skates, p. 136

field division to an impressive five divisions, two brigades and another two divisions that were still unidentified. At the same time it was noted that another division was most likely en route. A month later the estimated Japanese defense force on Kyushu numbered seven divisions.[41] By the time that the J.C.S. were forced to make final recommendations, Kyushu was garrisoned by eleven divisions, or 545,000 Japanese soldiers. An intelligence report from MacArthur's Sixth Army reveals the anxious mood these troop movements created.

> These divisions have since made their appearance, as predicted, and the end is not in sight. This threatening development inherent in war, will affect our own troops basis and calls for special air missions. If this development is not checked it may grow to a point where we attack on a ratio of one (1) to one (1) which is not the receipt [*sic*] for victory...."[42]

Apparently it did not take long to realize that such developments rendered past planning all but irrelevant: "The assumption that enemy strength will remain divided in the North and South (Kyushu) compartments is no longer tenable."[43] The Japanese reinforcement of Kyushu over the summer further reinforced the notion that time was lives:

> There is a strong likelihood that additional major units will enter the area before target date; we are engaged in a race against time by which the ratio of attack-effort vis-à-vis defense capacity is perilously balanced.[44]

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[41] Skates, p. 137
[42] General Staff, *Reports of General Macarthur; Vol. 1*, (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1966) p.414
[43] General Staff, *Reports of General Macarthur; Vol. 1*, (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1966) p.418
[44] General Staff, *Reports of General Macarthur; Vol. 1*, (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1966) p. 417

In the analysis of Japanese strength on the ground and in the air there seems to have been two conflicting trains of thought. As far as the troops on the ground were concerned, it was usually stressed that a great deal of the troops that were pouring into Kyushu were underequipped and far below the status of many of the divisions that the American troops had faced in the prior campaigns in the Pacific. But at the same time military planners seemed to be extremely wary in their estimates of what a second-rate army could accomplish. Lacking effective anti-tank artillery on Okinawa, the Japanese had modified their tactics to incorporate unit charges against individual tanks. According to an intelligence report: "The enemy's answer, for anti-tank defense, has been the development of simple economical close-combat weapons of intense firepower and demolition capabilities...[and] by liberal injection of the suicide factor."[45] Until effective counter-measures were perfected by the Americans, this tactic had been effective in putting many tanks out of action. American troops countered these suicide tactics on the ground through the use of coordinated fire teams, a combination of tanks and infantry. Since the Japanese had demonstrated an increasing ingenuity in such tactics in recent campaigns, American planners remained cautious in estimating the ability of the Japanese in fighting a protracted, holding defense.

The kamikaze was the ultimate symbol of Japanese fanaticism. Here too there is evidence of a kind of dual thinking when planners set out to size up the ability of the Japanese air forces. After the battle of Okinawa, the Japanese had

[45] John Ray Skates, *The Invasion of Japan, Alternative to the Bomb*, (Columbia: University of South

all but ceased to fly sorties against the American fleet, despite its presence in waters directly off Japanese shores. It was commonly understood among planners that the Japanese had halted air attacks because of the need to husband resources for the final defense of the homeland.[45]

In June, largely because of American code-breaking efforts (*Ultra*), American intelligence in the Pacific estimated that there existed some 8,000 planes in Japan proper, and pointed out that only about half that amount were fit to fly in any kind of combat role other than kamikaze. In July *Ultra* purportedly had found "strong evidence of large scale movement of army suicide aircraft from central Honshu to southern Kyushu." But *Ultra* optimistically stated that these movements would render the Japanese planes vulnerable to attack from the air. With the termination of hostilities on Okinawa, American pilots were free to seek out Japanese aircraft where they were harbored on the ground. *Ultra* concluded that, "Other than for calculated risk of shipping damage from suiciders, the Japanese air force will probably be unable to oppose seriously our landings against any vital area in Japan proper."[47]

The reinforcement of Kyushu provoked a telling exchange between MacArthur in the Pacific and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington. Here is evidence of the fear of a long and drawn out campaign that would eventually affect opinions and decision making at the highest level. The build-up of Kyushu was enough to alarm General George C. Marshall to the point of

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Carolina Press, 1994) p.114

[45] General Staff, *Repports of General MacArthur, Vol. 1*, (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1966) p. 405

sending an urgent message to MacArthur for a "personal estimate" of the significance of the intelligence as well to inquire if there was the possibility of shifting to a landing zone that would be more lightly defended. Specifically, Marshall was beginning to wonder if it might be easier to land in northern Kyushu, or even perhaps bypass the southern island and push straight into Tokyo in the Kanto plain.[48]

MacArthur responded that the difficulties posed by invading an alternative site at that stage in the planning of the invasion would create more problems than it would solve. MacArthur also reiterated the consensus of his intelligence officers, stressing the advantage that American flyers possessed with the establishment of new airfields upon Okinawa. But the most significant point of MacArthur's reply is his stress on instances of failed intelligence that had taken place prior to the invasion of Luzon, when the Japanese threat in the air was overestimated. MacArthur was as steadfast in his advocacy of the Kyushu invasion as the Joint Chiefs of Staff were uneasy:

> In my opinion, there should not be the slightest thought of changing the OLYMPIC operation. Its fundamental purpose is to obtain airbases undercover of which we can deploy our forces to the northward into the industrial heart of Japan. The plan is sound and will be successful.

In order to get on with the invasion that he was to lead, MacArther even argued that the reports of the Japanese build-up could be the result of deception:

> Throughout the Southwest Pacific area campaigns, as we have neared an operation intelligence has invariably pointed to greatly

[47] General Staff, *Repports of General MacArthur, Vol. 1*, (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1966) p.138-9

[48] Thomas B. Allen and Norman Polmar, *Code-Named Downfall*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) p.223

increased enemy forces. Without exception, this buildup has been found to be erroneous. In this particular case, the destruction that is going on in Japan would seem to indicate that it is very probable that the enemy is resorting to deception.[49]

Actually, during the peaceful occupation of Kyushu during operation Blacklist, members of the Sixth army found that the *Ultra* estimates had *underestimated* the number of troops on the island by ten thousand.[50]

Time and time again, especially in light of the kind of damage that the Japanese had inflicted in the past with limited manpower and equipment, the overriding sentiment in intelligence analysis was that it was definitely better to err on the side of caution. The timetables for the invasion of Japan had to be constantly adjusted because of the unanticipated length of time it had taken to secure Luzon and Okinawa. Campaign after campaign had revealed the limits of intelligence, as with the-all out failure of recognizing the magnitude of the defenses on Okinawa, which had caused a major turn in events. In the planning for the invasion of Kyushu, interpretations of intelligence estimates often diverged according to different concerns. MacArthur's stoic assessment of the inevitable job that had to be gotten on with and brought to a satisfactory conclusion was much different than the cautionary sentiment in Washington, which was forced to take into account issues that were peripheral to MacArthur.

MacArthur's insistence on a hurried thrust into Kyushu was based primarily upon his understanding of military necessity. From his vantage point,

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[49]John Ray Skates, *The Invasion of Japan, Alternative to the Bomb*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994) p.143

[50] Skates, p.143

stalling to roll up rear areas and prepare for a final push only favored the enemy, since with each passing day that the American armada failed to appeared in the waters off Kyushu, tunnels had been dug, concrete poured, mines laid, and reinforcements deployed. The Joint Chiefs on the other hand had to form policy for the defeat of Japan from a different perspective. How would the American public react if Japanese civilians rushed out to meet American tanks? Even with the defeat of the militaristic government of Japan, hundreds of thousands of Japanese troops would remain on bypassed islands and, much more problematic, in China. There was no acceptable solution to the existence of an independent Japanese army that would continue to rule over much of China at the end of the war. These ambiguous scenarios inevitably led to the same question: how much war could the American public stomach?

Resolve

During the summer of 1945 the J.C.S. were still planning for at least another year of combat in the Pacific. While it was understood that operation Olympic could proceed as scheduled with the combat troops that were already on hand in the Pacific in November of 1945, operation Coronet would call for massive redeployment on a global scale.[51] Expected to be the greatest amphibious assault in history and conceivably lasting into 1947, Coronet would

[51] Grace Person Hayes, *The History of The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982) p.707

call for the redeployment of close to a million men from the European campaign to the Pacific.

A great concern in such an immense project was logistical. It was estimated that it would require 22 million barrels of fuel for the first thirty days of the invasion which called for the use of every American fuel tanker then available.[52] While material problems could be surmounted, a growing concern was the morale both among the troops overseas as well among the American people. The end of the war in Europe sparked a clamoring for the return of those who had already risked their life for the war effort. Other voices in Congress were beginning to call for a negotiated peace with Japan. The shifting opinion was real enough to cause President Truman, in commenting to the press on the defeat of Germany, to state that, "Our blows will not cease until the Japanese military and naval forces lay down their arms in unconditional surrender."[53] Ostensibly to make U.S. intent clear to the Japanese, the statement was also crafted to clarify to the American people and Congress Truman's intention of sticking to the policy of unconditional surrender as it had been articulated at the Casablanca conference in 1943.

There was also a great deal of debate in Truman's immediate circle of advisors over the prospect of amending the doctrine of unconditional surrender. Admiral Leahy had told Truman prior to Potsdam that he believed that a compromise did not necessarily mean "That we will have lost the war." In response to others in the J.C.S. who felt that a compromise at this point in the

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[52] Hayes, p.207

war would bring a "menace from Japan in the possible future", Leahy stated that he thought the only result of carrying out the possibility of unconditional surrender would be the "increase of our casualty list." Truman had sensed enough of this existing sentiment to make an emotional appeal to Congress on June 1, reminding members of the "barbarous massacres in Manila" Truman stated that a surrender at this point would be playing into the hand of the Japanese, that their leaders had "Not given up hope" that the existing U.S. weariness "will force us to settle for some compromise peace short of unconditional surrender."[54]

For the coming invasion of Japan Congressional support was the least of Truman's worries. The high losses on Iwo Jima had provoked a warning to the J.C.S. from the U.S. Office of War Information that public support at this late stage in the war was beginning to falter.[55] Increasing American reluctance to foot the bill in lives for the Pacific War was taken as further evidence of the accuracy of old assumptions regarding America's resolve. General Marshall reflected after the war that "A democracy cannot fight a seven year war."[56] This concern was just as pressing for Marshall during the war, for in April of 1945 he warned in a speech, "we are approaching one of the most difficult periods in the war," a period where the American "great impatience" could in a burst of frustration nullify gains that had been paid for in American lives.[57]

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[53] Robert James Maddox, *Weapons for Victory*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995) p.33
[54] Maddox, pp.58-9
[55] Robert P. Newman, *Truman and the Hiroshima Cult*, (Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1995) p.3
[56] Newman p.2
[57] Newman p.2

Marshall was not alone in his concern. Admiral King had worried in an interview in 1944 that "The American people will weary of it quickly, and pressure at home will force a negotiated peace, before the Japs are really licked."[58] As the fighting still raged on Okinawa, *The New York Times* ran an article by Hanson Baldwin addressing the "Let-Down Problem." The situation in the Pacific posed:

> one of the greatest problems this country has ever faced.... The Army itself will have to cope with the psychological problem of the first magnitude, which may complicate the prodigious military and logistical problem of 'redeploying' our forces for the war in the Orient.... to Americans, tired like all peoples of the bloodletting.... it might appear the best and easiest course to make a compromise peace with Japan.
>
> But if we do, our sons and our sons' sons will live to regret it.... as surely as the sun sets, twenty, thirty, fifty years from now a rearmed and perhaps far more powerful Japan-- bent on bloody revenge for her present defeats-- will war upon us again.[59]

Transferring a million men from Europe to the Pacific promised to strain Allied resources. Shipping alone, when many in Europe lacked food and shelter, posed a great problem. For the quick transfer of hundreds of thousands of men the use of ocean liners from the British and captured German ships were sought. But a renewed fighting spirit was even more difficult to attain. Rumors that many of the troops would be heading for the invasion of Japan caused morale to sag.[60] What seemed at a glance to be a simple process of discharge and redeployment was fraught with problems and inconsistencies. What would be the fairest method for choosing who would be discharged and would cause

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[58] Newman. p.2
[59] Newman p.7

the least amount of grumbling among the troops? Which units were to be deactivated, which were to be left in Europe, and which were to be redeployed? What would be the effect upon unit fighting ability and morale with the discharge of the Army's most experienced members? Public clamor to "bring the boys home" had moved the J.C.S. to assign a 12 month timetable to finishing the war in the Pacific, but after the festivities over VE-day had died down it began to look like the transfer of the troops to the Pacific alone would take that long.

The J.C.S. knew that continuance of the war ultimately depended upon American resolve to pursue it to the end, despite any unpleasantries the end might bring. The problem had been anticipated as early as 1944 when American troops were posed to make a final push into Germany. A propaganda film was commissioned and subsequently directed by Frank Capra entitled *Two Down and One to Go.* The film was stern and straightforward, telling American soldiers that the war with Japan must be continued, but as soon as the inevitable Allied victory was achieved American servicemen would swiftly be sent home.[61] To further deal with the anticipated grumblings in Europe, Henry Stimson and the War Department demobilization planner Major General William F. Tomkins on 10 May announced a point system for determining release from service. Points were determined by the months of service, with increased points for time spent overseas and combat duty. Decorations also counted for points. But the system was far from evenhanded. It was made clear

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[60] John Ray Skates, *The Invasion of Japan, Alternative to the Bomb*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994) p.61

[61] Robert James Maddox, *Weapons for Victory*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995) p.119

for example that men in key positions, usually technical, would be automatically retained for the Pacific drive.[62]

Morale dipped even lower when redeployment became plagued with delays. An Army Group Forces historian noted that "The course of events during the months before August 1945 had been such as to make to the prospects of redeployment training unfavorable in the extreme."[63] A quick sampling of the comforts of home, only to be followed by a journey to further combat training could also cause erosion of the fighting spirit. The 86th Infantry division, after receiving orders to be shipped to the West Coast to be immediately shipped out to the Pacific experienced a morale drop that was, "immeasurably low" according to the unit historian. According to the commander of the 95th Infantry Division, none were too keen on the idea of redeployment to the Pacific, "Many in the division felt that the remainder of the fighting should be done by those who had not yet spent time overseas."[64]

But if there was truly a morale problem, it was undoubtedly most manifest among the combat experienced units of the Pacific. 66 percent of the soldiers in this theater believed that after eighteen months overseas, a solider had done his fair share and deserved to be shipped home.[65] Several of the accounts of the battle for Okinawa agree that at the end of the battle there was little fanfare or celebration among the troops. It was no secret that Okinawa was the first installation in the overall battle plan for the invasion of Japan, and troops had

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[62] Skates p.64
[63] Skates p.68
[64] Skates p.69
[65] Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun*, (New York: Free Press, 1985) p.545

no illusions as to their fate as they were shipped to Guam or another Pacific base for retraining. Despite MacArthur's intelligence, consensus among the troops painted a much grimmer forecast and could draw little evidence from past experience to refute the claim that the Japanese were bent upon an apocalyptic final battle. Many of the experienced troops, had seen the daily attrition that the Japanese defenses could extract translated into the loss of friends. Having survived seemingly impossible odds in previous campaigns many could not envisage coming out of an invasion of Japan unscathed. One combat veteran in the Pacific warned, "Take it from the voice of experience, if my company makes one more invasion you had better tell the medical corps to be sure and have 42 straightjackets for there are only 42 of us left."[66]

Weapons for Life

Not only the result of the prospect for an extended conflict, morale in the Pacific further suffered because of the very nature of the fighting. The wisdom of expending thousands of Americans in the capture of far away and hitherto unknown islands was questioned from the start of the war and continued to shape ongoing debate throughout. Slightly tainted from the start, the campaign would be viewed with growing suspicion as it became alarmingly evident that Japanese fighting sprit persisted, and indeed intensified despite overwhelming American advantages in men and material. As fighting raged on Iwo Jima and

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[66] Spector p.545

Luzon the *Chicago Tribune* ran an editorial entitled *"You Can Cook Them with Gas,"* in which the author, in a pragmatic tone argued that the claim that poison gas "is inhumane is both false and irrelevant....The use of gas might save the lives of many hundreds of Americans and of some of the Japanese as well."[67] In the days ahead the same logic would be applied to the argument in favor of the atomic bombs. Faced with the coming invasion of Japan, the American public was just becoming aware of such a macabre debate. But bitter fighting and high casualties in prior campaigns had long ago forced military planners and technicians to look for alternative weapons and tactics in order to try and stem the tide of increasing casualty rates.

One example was The Sphinx project which was established in the early summer of 1945. The project, which operated under a newly formed agency called the New Developments Division, was established for the sole purpose of examining the problem that recent experience with Japanese fortifications posed. As the defensive networks on Okinawa had shown, overwhelming firepower was by no means any kind of assurance of an easy victory. A variety of tests on the kind of ordinance that would do the greatest amount of damage at close range, various calibers, fuse lengths, etc. were made in an attempt to find the best techniques for taking Japanese fortifications. Failing to find a revolutionary cure for the problems posed by invading Japan, the planners settled on codifying the assault techniques that had evolved in the taking of defensive networks on Okinawa. Because of the close combat that planners

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[67] Thomas B. Allen and Norman Polmar, *Code-Named Downfall*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995)

expected, body armor was ordered for the troops who were to take part in the invasion. A training pamphlet which outlined the techniques to be used in attacking Japanese fortifications was issued in August by the War Department stated that:

> Japanese talent for tenacity, exploitation of terrain, and camouflage has resulted in the evolution of cave warfare from a last ditch stand by fanatics into a formidable defensive doctrine.... The probability of its use as the ultimate defensive doctrine in the Japanese homeland must be considered.[68]

Because of the costly results when units would run into hidden defenses, the use of napalm for the purpose of defoliation was discussed as a means to expose camouflaged positions. Tighter coordination between the various support groups was also sought. Having proven the extreme effectiveness of flamethrowing tanks on the entrenched Japanese positions on Okinawa, the number of the now invaluable weapon was doubled.

Still, in terms of pure effectiveness, all of these precautions combined could not rival poison gas. How seriously did planners and members of the Joint Chiefs consider its use? A number of factors made the use of poison gas likely in the impending invasion. Roosevelt had been a staunch adversary of the use of poison gas, but after his death Harry Truman indicated that he might be more inclined to use harsh measures in order to hasten the end of the conflict. The defeat of Germany precluded any possibility that the German high

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p.179

[68] War Departement Training Circular No. 34, 11 Aug. 1945

command would seize upon an American use of gas as an excuse for its use in the defense of Germany.

Up to this point in the war, poison gas had been produced and stockpiled only for use in retaliation. But in the summer of 1945, in the interim between the securing of Okinawa and the planning of operation Olympic, there was a renewed debate about poison gas. In June the Strategy and Policy Group of Operations Division, at the request of General Marshall issued to the J.C.S. a report that was meant to outline the benefits of using poison gas. The study stated that: "Gas is the single weapon hitherto unused which we can have readily available and which assuredly can greatly decrease the cost in American lives and should materially shorten the war."[69] The study reiterated the difficulties that had been experienced on the struggles over the various Pacific islands. Since the stubborn Japanese solider "resists fanatically down to the last individual, burrowing into the ground and forcing our troops to engage in costly, time consuming.... diversionary tactics," gas would allow U.S. troops on Japan "to move rapidly forward, as we have done in Europe." The study stated that like Japan, the U.S. was not bound by the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning the use of poison gas, and that considering the nature of defenses that had been encountered, and in light of the type of defenses that were expected in the final invasion, "we can be prepared to use gas at the same

[69] Allen & Polmar p.178

time that we start operation OLYMPIC, which is militarily the sound time to take this action."[70]

In July of 1945 the Chemical Warfare Service conducted tests using chemical weapons. The tests concluded that "for attack on caves and underground fortifications gas is superior to all other weapons tested." For the men who were forced to run through open territory, in an attempt to get close enough to a target to hit it with a satchel charge or a burst from a flame-thrower, the opportunity to have the chance at killing from afar would certainly be a welcome one, "a few rounds of H- (mustard) or CK- (cyanogen chloride) filled howitzer shells in the mouth of a cave will reduce it without question."[71]

That a general involved in the New Developments Division like William W. Borden, would favor the use of poison gas is not as surprising as some of the other leading figures who favored the proposal. The rationale among those who favored its use was that for the purpose of killing the enemy poison gas was no less humane or horrific than flame-throwers or phosphorous. Commenting upon the coming invasion of Japan, Joseph W. Stillwell, who assumed command of Okinawa after the death of General Buckner, concluded that: "Consideration should be given to the use of gas. We are not bound in any way not to use it, and the stigma of using it on the civilian population can be avoided by restricting it to attack on military targets."[72] George Marshall argued that the use of poison gas would be justified as a life-saving expediency for the

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[70] U.S. Chemical Warfare Policy 14 June 45, OPD 385 TS RG 165, NARA
[71] John Ray Skates, *The Invasion of Japan, Alternative to the Bomb*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994) p.240
[72] Allen &Polmar p.179

American troops. Writing to Henry Stimson in a document labeled "Methods of concluding the war with minimum casualties" Marshall remarked that he saw the utility of using poison gas "merely against these last pockets of resistance which had to be wiped out but had no other military significance." Thus according to Marshall, grueling weeks of mop-up operations could be avoided by having U.S. troops simply, "saturate an area, possibly with mustard, and just stand off."[73]

While the final decision awaited invasion, preparation for the use of gas got underway. During the summer of 1945 stockpiles of chemical munitions were brought forward from Australia and new Guinea and gas masks from Europe and the Mediterranean were shipped to the U.S. in preparation for Olympic. It was stipulated that two shiploads of chemical ammunition were to be held ready for use by the Air Corps in the first five days of the invasion, with additional amounts allotted for the subsequent days of the campaign. Another shipload of 85 tons of chemical artillery munitions was to be held in waiting offshore in floating reserve.[74] Ground troops involved in the invasion were to be equipped with the necessary protective gear. Poison gas, an expedient had been unthinkable the previous year, was by the summer of 1945 expected to be used in the invasion of Japan. Previous experience in the central Pacific was the impetus for this shift in opinion.

Poison gas was not the only horror weapon that was being considered for the invasion of Japan. From early on, tactical use of the atomic bomb was

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[73] Skates, p.243

discussed as part of an overwhelming juggernaut of force that would have the effect of shocking the Japanese into submission. In 1957 George C. Marshall told his biographer that following studies made at Alamagordo, "it was decided then that the casualties from the actual fighting would be much greater than might occur from the after-effects of the bomb actions." According to Marshall's recollection, "There were supposed to be nine more bombs.... and they would be largely in time for the first landings in the southern tip of Japan."[75] Six of them were to be ready for use in softening up the defenses in the landing zones, the most precarious phase of amphibious assault, and the additional three were to be held for use against the massive influx of reserve forces that were expected to pour in from northern Kyushu.[76]

The military preparations which took place prior to the invasion of Japan indicate an overriding concern among military planners that the forces that were to undertake the invasion would face fierce opposition. The serious consideration of, and preparation for the use of poison gas shows a deep concern with the possibility of becoming bogged down in a war of attrition. Had military planners seen any evidence from past battles that American forces faced a defeated army (e.g. low morale, large-scale surrendering) it is doubtful that these considerations would have been pursued at such length. But as Marshall's willingness to use atomic bombs in tactical support of the invasion further demonstrates, those with responsibility for the coming invasion refused

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[74] Skates, p.242
[75] Skates, p.242
[76] Skates, p.243

to take the Japanese Army lightly. Despite MacArthur's reassurances that the invasion of Kyushu would be a routine landing, the preparations that military planners undertook indicate opposite expectations.

Decision: Key Players

Two weeks before the Potsdam conference with Great Britain and the Soviet Union, President Truman sent a memo to his chief of staff, Adm. Leahy, requesting an assessment of the crucial issues of the Pacific War. The memo read:

> The President today directed me to inform [you] that he wishes to meet with the Chiefs of Staff in the afternoon of the 18th, in his office, to discuss the details of our campaign against Japan.
>
> He expects at this meeting to be thoroughly informed of our intentions and prospects for his discussion with Churchill and Stalin.
>
> He will want information as to the number of men of the Army and Ships of the Navy that will be necessary to defeat Japan.
>
> He wants an estimate of the time required and an estimate of the losses in killed and wounded that will result from an invasion of Japan proper.
>
> He wants an estimate of the time and the losses that will result from an effort to defeat Japan by isolation, blockade, and bombardment by sea and airforces.
>
> He desires to be informed as to exactly what we want the Russians to do...
>
> It is his intention to make his decisions on the campaign with the purpose of economizing to the maximum extent possible in the loss of American lives.
>
> Economy in the use of time and in money cost is comparatively unimportant.[77]

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[77] Robert P. Newman, *Truman and the Hiroshima Cult*, (Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1995) p.9

The memo indicates that President Truman, with the final say in the Pacific, was undoubtedly immersed in the broad concerns of the war effort. Assuming that the memo is reflective of Truman's priorities at the time, it seems that even at the highest level casualties were of paramount concern.

It has been postulated that the use of the atomic bomb was never really in doubt even long before it was certain that it would work. This theory tends to de-emphasize the heavy fighting that took place prior to the bombings. Secretary of War Henry Stimson is central to this interpretation since he had been involved with the project from its infancy. But Stimson had a genuine interest in seeing the war come to the quickest conclusion possible with the least possible casualties. Upon pondering the thorny issue of unconditional surrender and the retention of the Emperor, an issue that many historians assert lies at the heart of the eventual use of the bomb, Stimson remarked that the lesser of two evils should be considered in order to save "us from a score of bloody Iwo Jimas and Okinawas."[78] Summing up some of the conclusions that the Interim Committee had reached for President Truman, Stimson started out by stating the first and foremost concern for the U.S.: ending the war without arousing, "fanatical resistance."[79]

George C. Marshall was the chief advocate of a one year timetable for victory over Japan. Having spent much time in the planning of the Normandy invasion, Marshall well understood the intricacies of large-scale invasion. The

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[78] Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun*, (New York: Free Press, 1985) p.556
[79] Elting E. Morison, *Turmoil and Tradition*, (Boston: Riverside Press, 1960) p.636

dangers of becoming bogged down at this point in the war was a fear that Marshall often voiced to Truman.

> We had gone through a bitter experience at Okinawa. [This had been preceded] by a number of similar experiences in other Pacific islands, down north of Australia. The Japanese had demonstrated in each case they would not surrender and they would fight to the death. And even their civilians would commit suicide rather than be taken under the control of the American forces. With this knowledge, particularly of Okinawa, I think, where we killed 120,000 Japanese without a surrender (I think there were several badly wounded that we picked up but literally not a surrender), it was to be expected that the resistance in Japan, with their home ties, would be even more severe. We had the terrific [conventional] bombing. We had 100,000 people killed in Tokyo in one night [by] bombs and it had had seemingly no effect whatsoever. It destroyed the Japanese cities, yes, but their morale was affected, as far as we could tell, not at all. So it seemed quite necessary, if we could, to shock them into action....[80]

Much more than planners in the Pacific, who were chiefly occupied with the tactical questions that the invasion of Kyushu posed, the men in Washington were convinced that the battle for Kyushu would be a long and costly campaign.

Casualties

The central question to all parties, whether political or military, was the issue of casualties. Even today the issue of casualties is a constant theme that runs throughout the volatile debate over the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What can be made of these disputes in light of the above discussion? Most important would be the fact that in 1945 *there was no real*

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[80] Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman*, (New York: Viking, 1987) p.19

consensus on possible casualties. It had always been tacitly understood that military estimates were a risky affair. Projections on paper and experience on the ground were usually two different entities entirely. The most recent campaigns in the Pacific added a new emphasis to this old maxim. Drawing from past experience for parallels to the coming invasion of Kyushu, Marshall cautioned that "it would be wrong" to give too much weight to such projections since "It is a grim fact that there is not an easy, bloodless way to victory in war."[81] With a long list of examples of the variables that could cause timetables and estimates to go awry in battle, casualty estimates were considered anything but scientific.

This is not to say that military intelligence did not attempt to gather what it could from statistics. But in contrast to many revisionist histories, the military tables of casualties were often followed by a cautionary note. The two major studies that were prepared for Truman prior to Potsdam illustrate impact of past experience. The first states:

> Casualties. The cost in casualties of the main operations against Japan are [sic] not subject to accurate estimate. The scale of Japanese resistance in the past has not been predictable. Casualty expectancy rates based on experience in the Pacific vary greatly from the short bloody battle of Tarawa to the unopposed landing at Lingayen [Luzon]. It would be difficult to predict whether Jap resistance on Kyushu would more closely resemble the fighting on Okinawa or whether it would parallel the battle of Leyete.[82]

The second report states:

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[81] Thomas B. Allen and Norman Polmar, *Code-Named Downfall*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) p.203

[82] Allen and Polmar, p.206

> Casualties: Our casualty experience in the Pacific war has been so divisive as to throw serious doubt on the validity of any quantitative estimate of casualties for future operations. The following data indicate results of experience.

Drawing from previous experience the first report put the number of casualties for the invasion of Japan at 220,000; the second at 31,000, hardly a consensus. The only statistic that swayed the Joint Chiefs was not an intelligence prediction, but rather a summation of past experience:

> As for casualties, one of the chief arguments against attempting to invade the islands of Japan, the planners made no estimates. They pointed out, however, that in seven amphibious campaigns in the Pacific the casualty rate had run 7.45 per thousand per day, whereas in the protracted land warfare in the European Theater of Operations it had been only 2.16. From this they concluded that amphibious operations should be limited.[83]

Previous experience had shown the dangers involved in any military estimate. Fighting in Manila continued for a month the date slated for MacArthur's triumphant victory parade. Due to the heavy fighting in the Philippines, American landing forces at Iwo Jima lacked a good number of the heavy battleships that had originally been slated for the preinvasion bombardment. Subsequently, Marines were ordered to land after only three days of shelling rather than the originally planned ten. Iwo Jima was the first battle in which American casualties outnumbered Japanese deaths.[84]

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[83] Grace Person Hayes, *The History of The Joint Ciefs of Staff in World War II*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press) pp.702-3

[84] Gerhard L. Weinberg, A World at Arms, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1994) p.868

On Okinawa, American intelligence had failed to appreciate the magnitude of Japanese defense networks, a ring of underground defenses which caused the American advance to become bogged down for a number of weeks despite an absolute superiority in firepower. For the first time in any previous joint campaign, naval casualties were so high as to be comparable to those killed on the ground.[85] Casualty listings were published in newspapers along side the news of the defeat of Germany, forcing planner for the first time to estimate America's resolve to fight a war on the Japanese mainland. Most importantly, Okinawa laid to rest forever any remaining hope that Japanese morale would eventually falter.

Conclusion

The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the result of the bitter Pacific War. An understanding of the war is imperative to an understanding of the decision. This context has gradually lost ground as historians have tunneled through post-war memoirs and haggled over hypothetical casualty figures. Such myopia is misleading. Speaking to the American Association for the Advancement of Science Gar Alperovitz states:

> Although there were three months before a *small* (italics added) landing was scheduled (on Kyushu), and six months before the "planned" invasion available to test the various options offered without losing lives in an assault, official policy makers passed up all opportunities to end the war without the atomic bomb.[86]

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[85] Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Two-Ocean War*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963) p.556
[86] Patterson, p.51

Without an understanding of the hardships that led to the proposed invasion of Kyushu, the statement seems reasonable. But when placed in context with the difficulties of the Pacific War, problems arise. Alperovitz relegated an invasion force that was to dwarf the Normandy invasion in size and logistics to that of a training exercise. By the summer of 1945 it was clear to both sides that the enemy planned to stake its remaining forces on a winner-take-all battle for Kyushu. Alperovitz's statement is also misleading in a more subtle manner. It suggests that rather than being preoccupied with the banalities of planning a major invasion policy makers were negligent for not pursuing theory and trial balloons instead. The difficulties and timetables involved in large scale amphibious warfare, to say nothing of the dangers of appearing to balk in the face of the final assault, when absolute resolve would be required not only from the troops who were to land, but of American sentiment at home, renders such an assertion problematic.

This is not to say that there were peripheral, diplomatic concerns which had an influence over the policy makers in 1945. An exploration of these components is perfectly justified, but to downplay the significance of the final Pacific campaigns in order to buttress such arguments inevitably leads to a distorted picture. Describing the final weeks of the war John Keegan wrote:

> By July 1945, when American land and sea forces were still hundreds of miles from the Japanese home islands, the American air forces had burnt out 60 per cent of the ground area of Japan's sixty largest cities, and the country hovered on the brink of economic collapse. Two million people were employed digging up the roots of pine trees, from which a primitive form of aviation

> fuel could be distilled; the fleet had no fuel for offensive missions, and inter-island ferry traffic had been halted by American submarines, which roamed the inland sea at will.[87]

The quote can be useful as a microcosm of how the end of the war can be presented in a larger history of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yet without a treatment of the prior months a crucial element is missing. Keegan continues, "A rational government would have conceded defeat. The country was on the brink of starvation. Disaster stared it in the face. "'Face,'" however, in the Japanese sense, prevented it from accepting reality."

The final battles of the Pacific War had demonstrated that despite being defeated militarily, Japanese resolve to fight was far from broken. Intelligence from Kyushu was both debatable and constantly changing. Past experience had undermined the credibility of intelligence. In this ambiguous atmosphere the specter of past experience could not be shaken, and gave root fears such as Truman's premonition of "an Okinawa from one end of Japan to another." These factors were of major consequence for the fate of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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[87] John Keegan, *The Battle for History*, (New York: Vintage, 1995) p.27

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