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Amphibious Miracle of Our Time

Our amphibious advances are in reality part of one great Asiatic-Pacific pincers operation in which the Allies will hit their targets from all directions. *By Lt. Gen. Alexander A. Vandegrift*

JUST two years ago—a scant, incredible two years ago—we embarked on the first American ground offensive of the war. We undertook on a shoestring, so to speak, an amphibious operation against an enemy who, on the record, was the world's amphibious master of the day. Guadalcanal was a gamble, and no one knew it better than those of us who went in. But the gamble at Guadalcanal has swelled into the sure thing at Normandy and Guam. From our do-or-die beginning we have developed a great amphibious machine, the power of which has amazed the warring world.

At Guadalcanal we concentrated our total effort on the single objective and still were outnumbered and outgunned by the enemy on land, in the surrounding sea, and in the air. We moved in for the fight not with fear but with abundant anxiety. Less than two years later we threw overwhelming forces against both of our enemies almost simultaneously in amphibious attacks on opposite sides of the earth, and we moved in for both fights with utter confidence. There can remain no doubt anywhere, least of all in Germany and Japan, as to who now calls the amphibious tune and wields the weapons of decisive might.

Dare Japs to Interfere

Normandy and Saipan have brought the realization home where it hurts most and with graphic effect. Japanese war lords who not long ago were strutting in the glory of their Pacific conquests have been ousted from power. The Fuehrer who assured his armies they would never have to fight two fronts now faces insurrection of ominous scope among his own disillusioned armed forces.

Little did the enemy realize on Aug. 7, 1942, that the day of the turning point had come. Even as our men poured ashore to confront the surprised garrisons on Tulagi and Guadalcanal, the Japanese High Command expressed genuine confidence that we could be dislodged. Let us contrast what we threw against them then with what we can throw now, and we shall see why.

The Japanese commanders knew our covering fleet was relatively meager, but they did not know it was so sparse that after the battles off Guadalcanal in November, 1942, Admiral Halsey had only one aircraft carrier (which had been hit),

one battleship, one cruiser, and some destroyers. The Japanese knew that we lacked sufficient carrier-based planes and land-based planes to hold a continuous cover over our ground operations, and in the early stages they made vicious use of that advantage. But at Normandy and in the latest Pacific operations our naval and air forces have maintained complete domination over the battle areas and have been seriously challenged at sea only once in twenty months—at Saipan.

One Damaged Carrier Guards Island

At Saipan, as Secretary Forrestal has pointed out, a great supporting fleet boldly stood guard off the island for more than one month, daring the enemy navy to attempt to interfere. Even though the fleet was 1,200 miles from its nearest base and 3,250 miles from Pearl Harbor, carrier-based aircraft held an ironclad umbrella over the invasion throughout the month of hostilities. Obviously the number of aircraft carriers taking part was large. It has been announced that we have at least one hundred carriers operating in the Pacific. And in November, 1942, Admiral Halsey was defending Guadalcanal with one damaged carrier.

Our amphibious troops at Guadalcanal were well trained, as well trained as any assault troops of this war. The Marine Corps has traditionally been the land arm of the Navy, and so we had studied the techniques of ship-to-shore attack and had equipped and trained our men for just such a task before this nation went to war. However, the number of men thus trained was not large and while our equipment was the best at that time, it was rudimentary in many ways compared with what we have now.

Develop Great Variety of Craft

Wooden ramp boats and tank lighters were the major means of carrying men and equipment to the beaches. Tanks were few. Heavy equipment came in slowly. There were times, after we moved inland, when we could have used more supplies and ammunition than we had at hand.

In the past two months we have smitten the Axis with thousands of superbly trained amphibious troops in four big offensives which, in terms of coordinated pressure, were practically concurrent—Normandy, Saipan, New Guinea and Guam. In no instance has a force been put ashore which was not wholly adequate in size for the job. This, of course, takes into account the fact that the

← American invaders board landing barges to open drive at Empress Augusta Bay.

French invasion was a combined British-Canadian-American strike.

In the two years since Guadalcanal an amazing variety of special landing craft has been developed to meet the needs of transporting men and material in these massive seaborne invasions. Tracked landing vehicles now carry waves of assault troops over offshore reef formations on which the Japanese had depended to make long stretches of their island coastlines safe. The garrison on Saipan might well have expected us to avoid the southwestern coast of the island because of the treach-

erous reefs which fenced it in. But our forces went ashore there and while the securing of the beach-head was far from easy, it was firmly done before the defenders could mass the strength necessary for a major attempt to break our grip.

Tracked vehicles—amphibious tanks and tractors, armed and unarmed, bearing both men and material—have become increasingly important in our ship-to-shore pushes, especially in the Pacific. Large amphibious craft which can carry men and machines from the embarking point over sea directly to the objective have come into wide use.



Two years of advance in the Pacific. Highlights of the offensive against Japan are shown on map. Dates indicate start of campaigns, numbers show successive order.

Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) and Landing Craft Tanks (LCT) are two of many types of such vessels. Their shallow draft enables them to push their snouts so close to the beach that their disgorged men can wade and vehicles can roll from ship to shore. When the terrain permits, it is usually desirable to send tanks ashore as early in the landing as possible. From these large craft a surprisingly comfortable number of tanks can be put to work on enemy emplacements in a surprisingly brief period of time.

Those of us who watched the pre-invasion shelling and bombing of Guadalcanal thought we were seeing a deluxe show of fireworks, but actually we were seeing only a sample of the mighty bombardments to come. The relentless seventeen-day softening-up recently applied to Guam was beyond comparison in the books of amphibious attack. We had ships and planes and shells and bombs for the job in such quantities as the Japanese never believed possible a few months ago.

Infantry for K.O. Punch

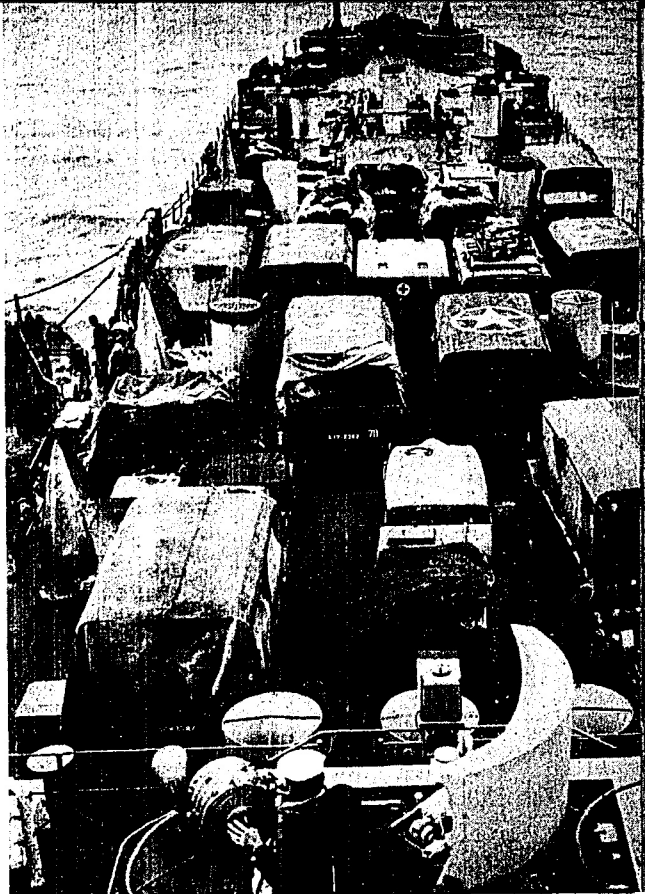
There are many who seem to think it the duty of a pre-invasion bombardment to knock out all defending personnel, guns, and emplacements so completely that the invading troops need only walk in and run up the flag. I will say that never once in the Pacific war to date has a pre-landing bombardment failed to do all that the Marine commanders expected it to do. But we have never yet taken the objective without a ground fight when there were troops there to defend it.

Bombardments will take out the large gun positions; but, no matter how long or intense, they will not take out all machinegun positions and mortars. They cannot. It is the same in a wholly ground operation. You have heard of artillery being lined up hub to hub and fired until the enemy lines seemed pulverized, as at El Alamein, St. Lo, and numerous times in Russia. Yet when the infantry went forward they were invariably met by machinegun fire. They found part of their enemy had survived and had come out of their holes, shaken but very much alive, ready to man their guns.

Obviously no two landing operations are exactly alike. But, broadly speaking, there have been two general types in this war—landings on large land masses such as the French coast and the larger islands of the Pacific, and on small land masses, such as Betio atoll at Tarawa.

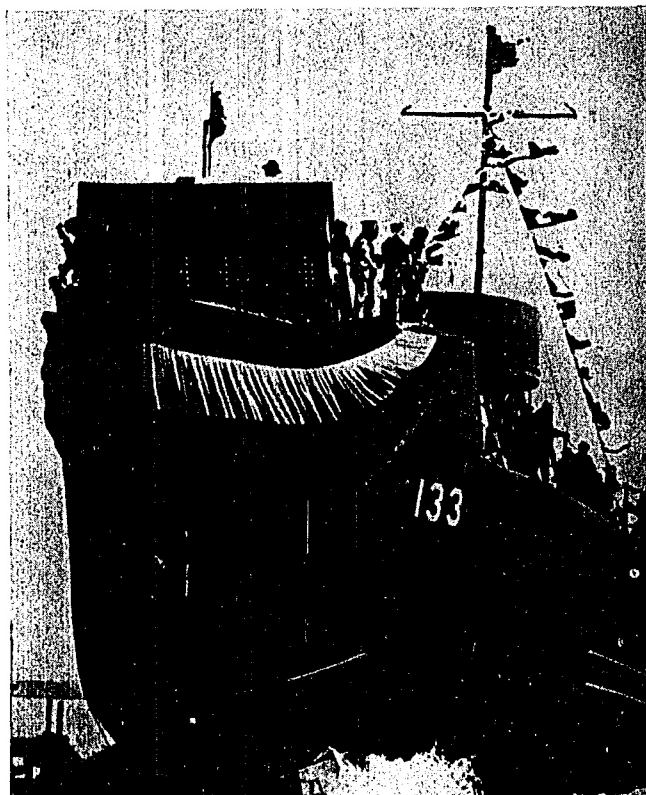
Losses Depend on Tactics

The large land mass has a coastline extensive enough so that you can exercise some discretion as to where to land, while the people defending it cannot be strong at every point. You land where strategy and tactics show you should land, and then, if you are there just to seize certain parts of the mass you let the enemy come to you. If



Landing ship tanks carries rolling stock on spacious deck for invasion of France.

New LSM (landing ship medium) joins fast growing fleet of American invasion ships.



you are there to drive him out, you go toward him.

On Bougainville, for example, our purpose was to seize a place and make an airfield and keep the enemy out of that area. We established a perimeter defense and held it, and American troops are still holding it. On Guadalcanal and Saipan we wanted to rid the island of the defending people altogether, and so the landing was only the first of many steps in our plan.

If you are able to hit where the coast is not heavily fortified and set yourself up before the defenders can get reserves into position, your initial losses will not be unduly heavy. In the south and southwest Pacific the jungle, although causing much grief after the fighting has moved inland, has been of more than a little help in masking landings and preventing the enemy from firing on the incoming troops.

The atoll, on the other hand, is very small. The

possessors are able to concentrate their whole defending force with the sole purpose of beating off the incoming troops at the beach. The invasion therefore generates into what is purely and simply assault. By assault we mean the last stages of an attack. The operation becomes assault from beginning to end.

Starting Point for Big Push

The atoll is barren—no jungle to screen you. You come in, and your foe is right there. He meets you with all his firepower; there are no lapses. He cannot withdraw to new positions; he must stop you there or never. The fighting is much more severe from the outset and casualties may be relatively heavy, but ownership of the smaller land mass is gained in much shorter time. Betio was ours in seventy-six hours.

Our operations at Guadalcanal, while called

American invaders storm ashore through the shallow surf onto a Norman beach on D Day, just



the first American land offensive of the war, were also defensive in nature. We knew then that if we succeeded we would have a foothold from which we could push up through the Solomons toward the goal of tearing loose the enemy's grip on the south and southwest Pacific. But if we failed the Japanese would be in better position than ever to extend their advance through the New Hebrides and New Caledonia, thereby doing much to deprive us of sea lanes to our indispensable bases in Australia and New Zealand. Moreover, coupled with the enemy positions on New Guinea, this advance would lay Australia and New Zealand open to actual invasion.

Guadalcanal also was our vital technical test. If our amphibious principles and our jungle-fighting techniques had proved unsound and unsuccessful against the Japanese at Guadalcanal our plight would then have been—and very probably

would now be—extremely grave. As events proved, they were sound. They were not flawless; no one expected them to be. But the general success of the operation generated a store of confidence which gave impetus to subsequent amphibious offensives in every Allied theatre of action.

Yanks Not Content to Wait

From Guadalcanal we were able to carry out our plans to move up through the door of the Solomons toward the major lines of Japanese defense. New Georgia and its airfield at Munda were seized to become stepping-stones to the northernmost island of Bougainville.

At about that time we began to hear great moans emanating from many quarters. "Island-hopping" became a phrase to view with alarm. Our line of battle from Hawaii to Australia, it was said, was separated from Japan by some 10,000

two years after the Yanks switched from the defensive to a non-stop drive against the foe.



islands. Guadalcanal was taken in six months, but even granting that we could move at the rate of one island a month, it was reasoned, we would be 10,000 months, or 833 years, in the process of reaching Japan.

Perhaps the Japanese could constrain themselves to wait that long for the outcome; but being Americans, bustling and impatient, who built a nation in one-fifth that time, we could not. We were fortunate in that even while the deploring of "island-hopping" was in full swing, a strategy of island-maneuvering was being devised which would commit us only to the capture of a relatively few key island bases along the routes to the enemy's homeland.

Airfields on Bougainville, lined with the seizure of the southern portion of New Britain Island, the Admiralties, the Green Islands, and others in

the Bismarck Sea, effectively sealed off the big base at Rabaul and other hostile centers in the south Pacific and left the way open for our forces to drive northward along New Guinea and westward toward our main objective.

After Tarawa and Makin, when our repeated aerial bombings hinted that we might have designs on the Marshalls, the Japanese logically could have expected us to hop our way up from our bases in the Gilberts through the nearest Marshall atolls—Mille, Maleolap, Wotje, and Jaluit. Those atolls were heavily and expectantly defended.

But confidence in our experience and accumulating power asserted itself in the conception of a strategy which bypassed those strongpoints and carried us straight to the heart of the Marshalls chain to smash successfully at the Kwajalein group. Now blockaded, suffering air raids almost daily,

Julia the alligator crawls through the sea off Saipan to deliver her load of American invaders on the beach, part of an offensive that hasn't hesitated since 1942.





Ducks, alligators, and landing barges strike hard at the beaches of Tinian; large scale invasion met stiff Jap resistance which was soon crushed by American power.

starved and out of physical contact with their homeland or advanced bases, the remaining Japanese in the Marshalls face certain extermination

Today, because of our amphibious superiority in the Pacific, the forces of the United Nations dominate the Solomons, the Bismarck Sea, New Guinea and the islands immediately beyond, and the central Pacific to a point within 1,000 miles of Japan itself. Strongholds not seized have been neutralized by blockade and attrition.

The amphibious successes of North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and France may or may not be the whole of seaborne operations necessary to the reduction of the Reich. But of this we can be sure: if or when further amphibious operations take place, the enemy will be as incapable of stemming the flood of Allied power as he was on the beaches of Normandy.

There can be no doubt that amphibious operations in the Pacific will continue until the day of final Japanese collapse. The Secretary of the Navy has openly acknowledged that our main objectives now are the Philippines, the China coast, and the Japanese home islands. It must be remembered

that our amphibious advances are in reality part of one great Asiatic-Pacific pincers operation, in which the Allies will converge on the main targets from all practicable directions.

In each succeeding ship-to-shore operation to date we have thrown more physical weight against the enemy's fortifications than before. There is no reason to believe this will not continue.

If he is unable to stop us now what can he expect to do as our ever-increasing power drives his fleets from the seas, his armies from the land, and his planes from the skies? His dilemma is complete: he dares not stand up and fight us toe to toe, but the longer he waits the stronger we become.

Japan's war lords expected to win the war in the Pacific by amphibious supremacy; Hitler's gang believed that Allied troops never could return by sea to the soil of western Europe. Today—two swift years after Guadalcanal—seaborne Allied forces are striking straight for the heart of Germany and the vitals of Japan. This is the amphibious miracle of our time.—From *New York Times*, August 6, 1944.

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