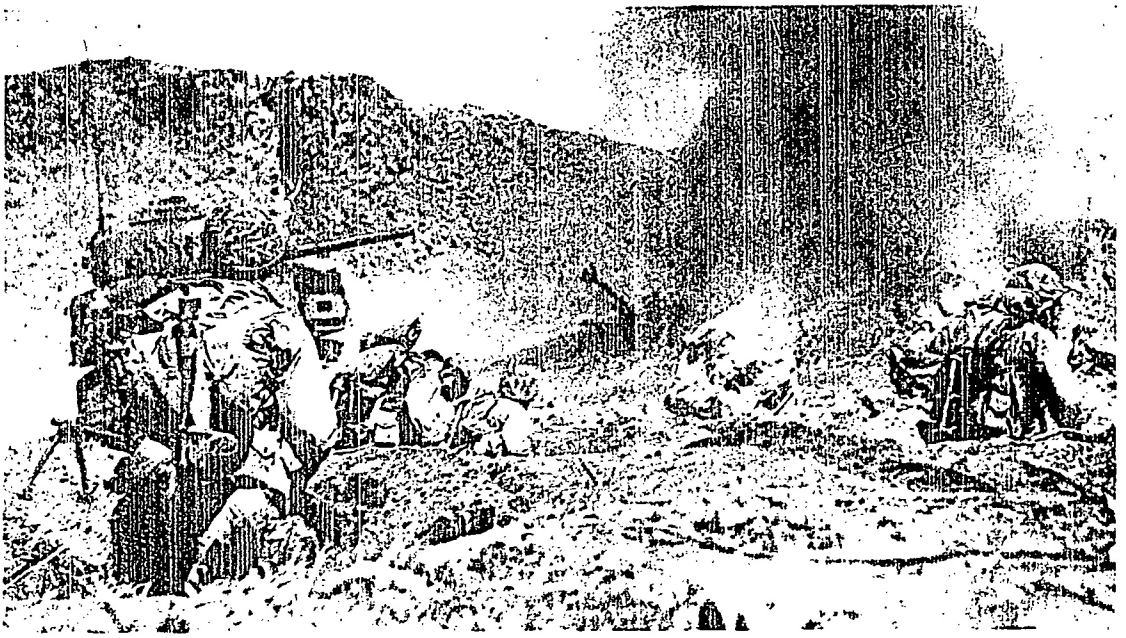


Supported by tanks, Marines stage a frontal attack on Jap positions in northern Iwo. Blasts shown in the center are enemy mortar shells meant for the tank.

Tanks on Iwo

By Major John L. Frothingham

In a letter accompanying this article the author says: "This article is composed and sent under the rigors and handicaps here. In keeping with censorship regulations it has been confined to personal experiences. Reference to tactical or strategic movement has been omitted. The use of tankers' language may be garbled, for the author, trained as an artillery officer, is inclined to call companies batteries at the slightest provocation. For this, apologies to all tank officers."

ON IWO JIMA the three companies of our Tank Battalion were free to fight as tanks. The companies were trained to shoot their 75-mm guns in indirect fire, but before we came on this operation we knew enough about terrain and defenses to leave almost all our indirect fire control equipment with the rear echelon. It proved its worth there and artillery using it did a wonderful job.

Before the operation it was decided that liaison of tanks with our infantry units would be quite essential. As we had only one liaison officer listed and carried on the TO, we used for liaison some officers whose customary jobs were not considered essential for the first few days ashore. Some of these officers went ashore with the fifth and sixth waves to relay back to the Battalion HQ information about mine-free routes on the beach.

There was some question as to how our three-company Tank Battalion would land. With all parties semi-satisfied and none completely satisfied, the tanks finally were boated in three Landing Craft Tanks (LCTs) and six Landing Ships Mechanized (LSMs).

* * *

"Able" Company under Captain John "Davey" Jones landed its tanks in the seventh wave and immediately experienced difficulties in getting on and then off the beach. All tanks were landed, but the Company Executive, Lieutenant Hank Morgan, lost his tank in 10 feet of water while trying to get off the beach. Several tanks were hit by mortar and artillery fire while attempting to find a route from the beach up the steep, four to six-foot terraces. However, a good three-fourths of "Able" Company soon was supporting the attack of Colonel T. Mornham's two assault battalions. The reserve battalion of this combat team, under Colonel Robertson, was called in as the attack proceeded inland, and Captain Paul Svoboda came ashore as tank liaison officer. The Tank Battalion CP, with the Bn-3 Lieutenant George Moore in charge, came ashore in the fourteenth wave just before noon. With him came the Bn-2 section under Lieutenant Lou Miller, the Bn-4 section under Captain Bob Barton, and the Medical and Ordnance sections under "Doc" Hill and Warrant Officer Sorenson.

* * *

By this time the enemy had recovered somewhat from the preliminary air and naval bombardment. Their mortar and artillery fire was falling with

regularity on the beach. It was apparent that the two remaining tank companies needed guides and assistance in landing, so the Battalion CP stepped in to fill that bill.

The landing of "Baker" Company was held up too long for "Able" Company to receive much assistance. By the time "Baker" landed, "Abel" had pushed across and severed the island along with Major Antonelli's Second Battalion of the 27th.

That night the Battalion CP was in the unfortunate position of being located adjacent to an artillery battalion and directly behind the 27th Regiment CP. It was under continual mortar and artillery shelling from the enemy. During the night, four men were killed in their holes and as many wounded. Much radio gear and equipment was destroyed.

* * *

The next morning all available tanks jumped off in support of the attack. Company maintenance sections began the back breaking work of repairing disabled tanks under the untiring direction of the maintenance officers, Lieutenants Overski, Smackhammer, and "Dirty" Dalton.

* * *

Only after five or six days of fighting did the entire battalion get together in one area. When they finally met at a rendezvous, their experiences upon comparison proved similar. They had flushed infiltrated snipers from their bivouac areas each morning before the day's work could begin. Tank crewmen became infantrymen so they could "heat a bit of hot Joe," and accounted for 12 snipers in the first six days.

* * *

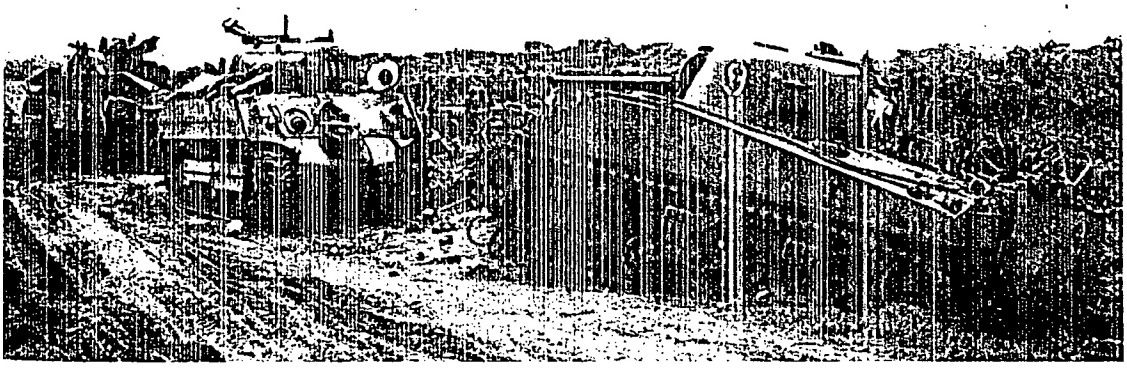
"Charlie" Company, working with Colonel Liversedge's 28th Marines in the attack on Mt. Suribachi, more or less fought a war of its own, aided by the able work of our liaison officer, Lieutenant "Vic" Ebaugh. The Battalion CP was temporarily knocked out, so that communication with them was very meager. Rumors came back from their zone of action, however, that the caves were so large that Lieutenant "Dusty" Blake had led his platoon in one end of a cave and out of the other end, still firing. "Dusty" has been noncommittal about these rumors, but there is no doubt that the caves were large.

It was in one of the skirmishes as infantry that an attached Naval lieutenant (j.g.) and the battalion's old Master Gunnery Sergeant, with 27 years' service, were killed . . . Colonel "Rip" Collins, when we finally heard his story, reported being annoyed by several pillboxes on D-day. He had shot at but not destroyed them on the first try. When they shot at his tank from the rear as he was leaving, he was forced to return and demolish them, as later reconnaissance on foot showed.

* * *

As the attack progressed to the north, past Airfield Number One, the tanks continued to support the attack in the areas where they were most needed and where the terrain was most operative. These sectors were the ground between the west beach terraces and high ground on the airfield. As the terrain and sectors widened, more tanks were employed on the front, and the work of the maintenance officers kept the number of operating tanks well over 50 per cent in spite of constant damage being done to our vehicles.

When a tank was knocked out beyond repair, it quickly became a "hangar queen." Some confusion resulted when trophy hunting non-tankers got busy, but our repair crews were soon "cut in on the scoop" and began work immediately on hurt tanks. Crews of disabled tanks harassed unit commanders to be allowed to "go up and get our tank." Repair and salvage was carried out as close as 100 yards from the front lines and under small arms and mortar fire. Very few tanks were lost behind enemy lines and those few were destroyed by our own fire after the crews had been evacuated. There were not more than three such instances during the operation.



At this spot leading to the 3rd Division front, Japanese mortars and artillery were registered, and a barrage was laid down when tanks, troops, and supplies moved up.

Beyond Airfield Number One, the enemy began his use of harassing smoke against our tanks. Although it proved annoying and slightly nauseating, it did not impair the fighting or operational efficiency of our crews to any great extent. In fact, we found that rainstorms imposed a more serious limitation on visibility.

When the first stalemate developed, Colonel Collins enlisted the assistance of the third and fourth Tank Battalions and, after a scrap, a breakthrough was made around Airfield Number Two. Three tanks of "Able" Company were knocked out in this push, and we had our first serious casualties when one platoon leader and three men were killed as their tank hit what must have been a huge land mine. The platoon leader had the day before courageously evacuated Lieutenant Stemkowski from a disabled tank.

* * *

Initially the battalion supply problem was almost impossible, but as things became organized the amphibious tractors came to our aid. They worked wonders. Telephone communication was established through the efforts of our "Comm O," Lieutenant John Ostby, with the cooperation of artillery's Major Hank Smart. This proved invaluable on about the fifth day, when artillery fire was brought to bear on key points as the tanks and infantry made a coordinated attack. Much of the intense and accurate AT and artillery fire our people had been receiving was rendered inoperative by this artillery support, and the attack of that morning went according to plan. When this doctrine proved worthy, more and more coordination with the artillery was sought and received. Around Airfield Number Three, where the tanks had to cross a particularly open flat table top, artillery fire covered both our approach and withdrawal.

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As the battle progressed the enemy used more and more mines, and the cooperation of the infantry's attached engineers to clear routes for us was continually sought. Tank people wanted to be in on the fight with the infantry, but it became increasingly annoying when our tanks were destroyed by mines behind the front lines.

Planes played a vital part in the taking of Iwo, and worked closely with ground troops.

Air Support on Iwo

By Corp. B. W. von Wettberg

It was D-day off Iwo Jima. In a matter of minutes it would be H-hour. The assault waves were in boats awaiting word to head into the beaches. Warships were still pounding the island with high explosive projectiles. Overhead planes were scuttling back and forth dropping bombs and firing rockets.

Deep in the superstructure of a transport, the Fourth Marine Division's Air Office was the scene of great activity. In a far corner of the radio-lined room, Lt. Colonel William R. Wendt, Division Air Officer, was carrying on a two-way conversation with our air observer. Beside him a non-com, Sergeant Yancey C. Sims, monitored the Fifth Division's air observer. Another enlisted man, Stf. Sergeant G. M. Torgerson, logged the requests for air support as they came in from the assaulting regiments.

Captain Lyford Hutchins was on watch as filter officer, moving quickly back and forth from position to position, receiving and passing on messages from Operations, and spotting enemy positions and movements of our troops on a large map of Iwo Jima. The rest of the watch audited Naval gunfire circuits, handled outgoing messages to the Chief of Staff and the Commanding General, kept records of requests, and filed various memoranda coming in from the other Division offices aboard ship.

Two facts became quite evident by the end of the second week. First, the war was hard on our Battalion Staff officers. Lieutenant Lou Miller was hit in the foot with a mortar fragment while working liaison with the infantry, and Captain Svoboda, on a similar mission, was hit in the hand by sniper fire while talking into a telephone. Second, every time we moved the Battalion CP we were in for a downpour, and the enemy would replenish his supply of drinking water. Had the Tank Battalion been able to stay put, the enemy would have run out of essential water sooner, but the war had to move and we with it.

* * *

Our final CP location was adjacent to a huge sulphur blowhole studded with numerous caves that soon proved a great hunting place for Japs and souvenirs. At least 50 flags, and numerous other items were flushed out. Higher echelon used a loudspeaker in an attempt to get the human occupants to come out but to no avail. Pfc. Ackley, of H&S company, used his own version of Jap-American conversation when he heard activity while hunting in one of the many caves. The reported and verified conversation of Pfc. Ackley with the hidden Japs ran as follows:

Jap: "O.K.?"

Ackley: "O.K."

Japs (chorus) "O.K."

Ackley (impatiently) "O.K.***O.K.***O.K.!!!"

Pfc. Ackley was more successful than the interpreters. The Japs gave up.

* * *

"Charlie" company rejoined the battalion when the flag had been raised on Suribachi, and was immediately thrown into the scrap to the north. Platoon Sergeant McIntire of this company got his tank bellied up on some rocks forward of our lines. It was inoperative and could not be evacuated, as the Japs immediately began to swarm the tank in spite of protective fire from the other tanks of his platoon. Lieutenant "Dusty" Blake radioed:

"Don't be afraid Mac—open your hatch and drop a grenade on them!"

"But I am afraid, Mr. Blake," replied Mac tersely but evenly. Nevertheless he opened his hatch and dropped several. Then he radioed back:

Over the speaker the Fourth's air observer reported the progress of the assault. The tension in the room grew.

"First wave 300 yards from Red One . . . landing on Red One at 0859. . . . First wave landing on Green One, time 0900 . . ."

The Naval gun fire control officer cut in on his circuit with the order:

"Move fire back 400 yards."

The air observer continued:

"Landings on Yellow Two at 0902. . . . Lead waves, Blue One at 0906 . . ."

A moment later an officer with the First Battalion, Twenty Third Regiment, which hit Yellow One reported:

"Enemy fire from terraces above beaches heavy. Send strafing mission at once."

At 0910 the laconic report came in: "Mission completed."

A few minutes later, a message came in which Captain Hutchins read to all hands. "Our troops are moving inland. At Yellow One they are in 125 yards; 200 yards at Yellow Two and Blue One. They have not negotiated the terraces." It was evident that this was going to be no pushover.

At 0930 this realization was strengthened when the first ambulance boat was dispatched.

At 0955 the 27th Regiment of the Fifth Marine Division was reported by our air observer as crossing the lower edge of Motoyama Airfield Number One. More strikes were called for. More missions were reported completed.

Major General Clifton B. Cates, Commanding General of the Fourth, entered the rooms. Capt. Hutchins alone paid him any attention. The rest were too busy. General Cates leaned against a radio transmitter, wrote out a note on a scratch pad, and handed it to Lt. Col. Wendt. Without looking up the Colonel nodded his head affirmatively and called our observer:

"Two tanks reported bogged down on Yellow Beach One. Report."

You could almost see the plane swing about and pass over the beach area. Back came the reply:

"Only one tank on beach. Appears to be bogged down."

The General said: "Right. Thank you." Smoking his cigarette with nervous puffs, he left the room.

The 25th Regiment, holding the right flank, requested a bombing mission against an enemy point ahead of their lines. They had located a concentration of mechanized equipment and a dump in the vicinity of some wrecked houses. The requested mission was completed. Our air observer swept over and reported.

On patrol our air observer noted enemy fire coming from several areas on the north end of the island. His reports were logged and turned over to the scheduling officer who decided which point to strike. Planes came in from station on assignment and hit enemy strong points. More positions were found, more strikes made. Minutes passed into hours. Lt. Col. Wendt drank coffee and ate sandwiches but stayed at his post. The others stayed, too, until time for the new watch.

"He shouldn't bother us now. I blew the S.O.B.'s head off."

This sufficiently cleared the area of forces of the Imperial Army to enable Mac and his crew to abandon the tank in reasonable safety. Mac then bothered his CO, Lieutenant "Swede" Nelson, continually until he and his crew were permitted to salvage the tank.

* * *

The infantry liked to have the tanks work with them except when they brought down enemy mortar and artillery fire. Cooperation from our brothers-in-arms was remarkable. To get where they were going, tanks were needed. . . . One bold lad began to lead the platoon of Lieutenant Barker of "Baker" Company over ground that he himself had to climb over on hands and knees.

As operating terrain began to run out in the rocky cliffs in the north tank support became limited to support by fire, with passage up to the front lines limited to dangerous, narrow routes of approach. Trophy hunting came into vogue and the sulphur blowhole and caves got a severe working over by resting members of the company. The early placing of one post of the battalion guard at that spot paid dividends when it was found that many Japs had holed up there. When activity there became annoying we drove a tank to the edge and sealed the openings with well placed rounds of the 75 gun. There were more holes, however, than we had time or ammo to seal in this fashion.

We never blamed our infantry for calling us even when we were unable to get into places where we were needed. They did a magnificent job of cleaning out pockets we couldn't reach without support.

The Three Rs of Invasion

SHIPBOARD schooling of combat teams fighting in the Pacific today has stemmed from the realization that in modern warfare, and particularly in amphibious warfare, a platoon cannot be stronger than its weakest man. Beaches must be seized, consolidated, and the attack continued under a multitude of confusing and hostile circumstances. It is an unfortunate platoon in which the men must look to their officers for information or instruction every time they are confronted with a doubtful situation.

In the past, a colonel once discovered that many of his men did not know the real name of the island they had invaded, believing the code name to be the correct one. Enlisted personnel frequently lived a law unto themselves in battle, without knowledge of their flanks, without a clear idea of their objective, or the enemy capabilities.

Current shipboard briefing practices have changed this situation. As much shipboard time as practicable now is utilized in indoctrinating all personnel with the "three Rs" of invasion: (1) the general plan of the operation; (2) the specific plan for thier division, regiment, battalion, and company, and (3) information about the enemy situation and the target.

In the invasion of Iwo Jima, one landing team schooled its men for a minimum of four hours a day for more than two weeks. Lifeboats and sections of the deck were set off as "classroom." Officers from attached units, such as the tanks and artillery, acted as roving lecturers, and frequent quizzes were given to measure the progress of the men. The use of visual aids was an important part of the program. Not only were maps, overlays, and aerial photographs used, but charts detailing statistical information. Officers used the operations orders and annexes as a "textbook," and passed on every pertinent fact that their men—privates as well as non-coms—might have to know.

Under the first "R," the general plan of the operation, the men were apprised of the overall scheme, preferred and alternate, of the attack, which involved two divisions in assault and one in reserve. They were given complete information on the support they would get from naval gunfire and aerial bombardment. They knew that the Japanese homeland would be under carrier attack before they landed, and that every available heavy and medium land based bomber in the area would "soften up" the island prior to D-day. They knew, down to the last shell, how much naval gunfire would be dumped on the beaches. They saw aerial photographs taken a few days before D-day and flown to their ships at the final staging area.

The second "R," specific plans for their unit, was dealt with in exacting detail. Here are some sample facts: platoons, companies, and battalions that would land on either flank; distance from the beach to the first phase line; direction of attack after the landing; types of communications available to their unit; code names of all officers; meaning of pyrotechnic displays; passwords and countersigns; a list of Japanese phrases (which had to be memorized) useful in combat.

The third "R," the enemy situation, included knowledge of the terrain gained from a study of aerial photographs and relief maps; climatic conditions; number and disposition of enemy troops; type of defense, location of all pillboxes, blockhouses, and trenches observed in their zone of action; probable location of minefields; direction of expected counterattacks; number of enemy tanks on the island; enemy air capabilities.—S/Sgt. David Dempsey.