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HEADQUARTERS, V AMPHIBIOUS CORPS,
C/O FLEET POST OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO.

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20 May 1945.

From: The Commanding General.
To : The Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Via : (1) The Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops.
(2) Commander Joint Expeditionary Force.
(3) Commander Fifth Fleet.
(4) Commander-in-Chief U. S. Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas.

Subject: Special Action Report IWO JIMA Campaign.

Enclosure: (A) Commanding General Special Action Report IWO JIMA Campaign and Annexes thereto.

1. Enclosure (A) is forwarded herewith.
2. SECRET and TOP SECRET material included in this report are hereby reduced to CONFIDENTIAL.

H. SCHMIDT.

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HEADQUARTERS, V AMPHIBIOUS CORPS,
C/O FLEET POST OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO.

13 May 1945.

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To : The Commanding General.
The Commandant of the Marine Corps.
Via : (1) The Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops.
(2) Commander Joint Expeditionary Force.
(3) Commander Fifth Fleet.
(4) Commander-in-Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas.

Subject: Special Action Report, IWO JIMA Campaign.

Enclosure: (A) Special Situation Map of IWO JIMA.

1. V AMPHIBIOUS CORPS LANDING FORCE

a. PLANNING

Information was received early in October, 1944, that the V Amphibious Corps with the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions in assault would be employed as the landing force for the capture and occupation of IWO JIMA, VOLCANO ISLANDS. The Corps Headquarters was then at Guam but proceeded to Pearl Harbor, arriving in the middle of October. At this time the 3d, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions, plus a number of miscellaneous units and garrison elements required in the assault phase, were placed under Corps control for planning, training, and operations. The 3d Marine Division was to be in expeditionary troops reserve.

The establishment of the Corps Headquarters at Pearl in the same vicinity with the Expeditionary Troops Commander, the Attack Force Commander, and higher echelons facilitated the overall planning and the adjustment of problems of interest to more than one agency. The separation of the Divisions and the bulk of the Corps elements from the Corps Headquarters obviously hampered the development of the Corps into a homogeneous combat team. This was overcome to the greatest extent practicable by frequent visits of the Commanding General and Staff to the Divisions and by visits of unit Commanders and staff officers to the Corps Headquarters.

b. TRAINING

In view of the separation of units noted above, it was necessary to delegate training of ground units largely to the subordinate commanders, although one Command Post Exercise was conducted with the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions, covering the coordination of control of air, artillery, and naval gunfire. Vessels were made available on request of subordinate units for various types of amphibious training and the Corps assisted insofar as practicable in training the new TRANSDIVS in the conduct of ship-to-shore movement.

The original target date for the operation would have necessitated beginning embarkation of units about 1 December. Full replacements had not been furnished for all units until about 1 November, therefore it was fortunate from the standpoint of the

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Landing Force that the target date was eventually postponed approximately one month which permitted the assimilation of replacements in the combat teams. The battle replacements were received very late and there was insufficient opportunity to train them in their shore party duties and to prepare them for use as replacements in the Divisions when required at the objective. In general, however, troops were in a satisfactory state of training when embarked.

Rehearsals were held in the Hawaiian Area from 11 to 18 January and were well executed. The absence of the naval gunfire ships and the air support units on other operations made it impracticable for them to participate in this rehearsal. This was overcome to some extent by a short rehearsal in the forward area. Another element that detracted from the usefulness of the first rehearsal was the absence in the forward area of certain of the amphibian tractor units that were to participate in the assault. These units, including two battalions of cargo tractors and one armored amphibian battalion, received two days training with the units to which they were attached in the forward area rehearsal.

c. ORGANIZATION

The organization for the operation was generally very satisfactory. There were adequate engineering units available to carry on the base development plan as rapidly as the tactical situation permitted, and there was little, if any, lost time at the objective in the execution of base development in spite of enemy action.

Personnel available for initial shore party functions were far in excess of any previously furnished due to the provision of a field depot of some 1,500 personnel and the 5,000 battle replacements available to the two assault Divisions, with an additional 2,300 available when elements of the 3d Marine Division landed. There were on D-Day in excess of 10,000 men available for shore party. As the battle progressed and casualties were sustained, the battle replacements were gradually transferred from shore party duty to the combat units. This was done without any important loss of efficiency of the shore party, although the arrival of garrison echelons, the unfavorable beach conditions, and the necessity for alternating between eastern and western beaches for unloading created a strain on available facilities and personnel at times.

The ground echelons of the initial air units to be employed were carried in assault shipping. These were generally adequate for their mission. Some delay, however, was occasioned

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the necessity for using every available cubic foot of space in shipping assigned to Corps and the desirability of dispersing such element throughout available shipping in order that the loss of one ship would not have completely eliminated any essential element or service at the objective.

d. TACTICS AND OPERATIONS.

There were only two beach areas available on IWO JIMA sufficient to permit the landing on a two-Division front. In view of the prevailing wind, the Preferred Plan called for landing on the southeastern beaches with an Alternate Plan for landing on the western beaches directly opposite. Only minor changes in the general scheme of maneuver were necessary to fit either plan. The landing was actually executed on the preferred beaches as planned and on schedule. As expected, heavy opposition developed immediately from the high ground on both flanks and the only substantial gain initially was direct to the front. The 4th Marine Division on the right reached the edge of Airfield No. 1, and the 5th Marine Division on the left captured a portion of the southern end of Airfield No. 1 and reached the high ground overlooking the west coast on D-Day. At nightfall gains of from 500 to 800 yards had been made with one regiment facing Mt. Suribachi to the south and the remainder of the force facing north and northwest, generally around Airfield No. 1. The assault elements of both Divisions, including reserve regiments, were landed by nightfall, plus a portion of the artillery and other supporting arms, making a total of some 30,000 men ashore that day.

The original plan based on estimates of enemy strength had provided for the 3d Marine Division to remain in floating reserve. In accordance with this plan, one regiment of the 5th Marine Division (RCT 26) had been held out for Corps Reserve. As additional information was received during the planning period indicating a continuously higher estimate of enemy strength and a large increase in the number of defensive installations, combined with a reduction in the planned naval gunfire support available, request was made on reaching the forward area to have one regiment of the 3d Marine Division (CT 21) available at the target on the morning of D-Day. This was approved and the regiment of the 5th Marine Division previously withheld in Corps Reserve was released to that Division.

On D+1 the attack was continued both to the north, and to the south against Mt. Suribachi, against heavy opposition. The beaches were continuously under fire from both flanks which hampered unloading, caused many casualties, and the loss of equipment,

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ammunition, and supplies. As it was imperative to push the attack and secure sufficient room to land supplies unobstructed and to expedite the initiation of airfield construction, the release of the 3d Marine Division, less one regiment, was requested. CT 21 of that Division had been landed on D plus 2 and attached temporarily to the 4th Marine Division. Two days later the 3d Marine Division, less RCT 3, began landing and took over the central zone of the front. By this time Mt. Suribachi had been captured which permitted the more or less unobstructed use of the southern beaches, cleared the southern end of the island for the landing of Corps and garrison elements, and permitted the release of part of the regiment that had been employed there for use elsewhere.

Thereafter a slow but steady advance was made up the island against determined resistance until on D plus 8 elements of the 3d Marine Division reached the northeast coast, splitting the enemy into two isolated groups. The northern tip of the island at KITANO POINT was reached on 16 March and as only one isolated pocket remained at that time the island was declared secured as of that date. Resistance in lesser degree continued for another ten days from this pocket and from groups that had been concealed in the thousands of caves and emerged each night to harass our units. The 4th Marine Division completed evacuation on 19 March and the 5th Marine Division on 27 March. In the meantime the 147th Infantry, the garrison regiment, had arrived, on 21 March and that regiment with the two regiments and miscellaneous units of the 3d Marine Division were passed to the control of the Island Commander together with responsibility for the defense of the island at 0800 on 26 March. Remaining units of the 3d Marine Division and Corps Service elements were withdrawn gradually as the situation permitted, the last regiment being evacuated late in April, 1945.

The cooperation of the Garrison Force was excellent throughout and the transfer of control was effected smoothly.

Our battle casualties were some 30 per cent of the entire Landing Force. In the infantry regiments, however, these casualties amounted to an average of 75 per cent in the two assault divisions and 60 per cent in the 3d Marine Division, of the original regimental strength. Furthermore, the loss in key personnel, particularly leaders, was even higher. Seven thousand five hundred (7500) battle replacements were provided, but this personnel was received too late to permit adequate training and integration into the combat units. As most of the infantry combat units involved were in contact with the enemy for total periods in excess of three weeks, the combat efficiency towards the close of the operation was very low.

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e. ENEMY TACTICS, ORGANIZATION, AND EQUIPMENT.

The enemy conducted an intelligent, passive defense from successive highly organized positions. As sufficient forces had been landed on D-Day to insure retention of a beachhead, the enemy did not attempt a major counterattack to eject our forces from the island but rather remained in position and fought to the bitter end.

The best estimate of enemy strength on the island derived from identification of units and interrogation of prisoners of war was from 21,000 to 22,000. The reports of enemy killed by subordinate units together with those reported killed or captured since completion of the occupation total over 30,000. It therefore appears that troop units reported more enemy killed from day to day than was actually the case; also that the overestimates were more or less evenly distributed throughout the three divisions. As the enemy removes his dead whenever practicable and as it is normally impossible to determine the numbers of enemy sealed in the innumerable caves, it is almost impossible to secure an accurate count of enemy dead based on troop reports.

It was found on landing that some 5,000 enemy naval troops had not been counted in any preliminary estimates of enemy strength. This underestimation of enemy strength has been true in every operation in which this Corps has participated.

f. SUPPLY, EQUIPMENT, AND LOGISTICS

Supply and equipment were generally adequate. The stubbornness of enemy resistance from blockhouses, pillboxes, and caves necessitated a heavy expenditure of artillery ammunition which, combined with considerable losses in ammunition dumps and on the beach by enemy fire, resulted in a continuing shortage. This was met in part by bringing up resupply ships and by restrictions on the amounts to be expended by subordinate units. The difficulties in unloading ammunition from cargo vessels indicates the desirability of embarking resupply ammunition in LSTs, which permits rapid unloading either directly on the beach or by amphibious vehicles. In fact throughout operations of this Corps the LST has been the best vessel available for both troops and supplies.

The ship-to-shore movement for the actual assault was executed with precision. It soon developed, however, that small craft up to LCMs could not use the beaches, and consequently reliance had to be placed on LCTs, LSMs, and LSTs, plus LVTs and DUKWs.

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As there was an inadequate number to meet all requests, it was necessary to allot such equipment by a central control. The unloading of equipment and supplies could be executed much more efficiently and with less confusion and lost time if adequate craft are available to permit each division or other separate unit to deal directly with the TRANSRON Commander concerned.

Considerable difficulty was experienced in landing reserves because of the facts outlined in the preceding paragraph and because the sea was usually rough in the transport area. It is believed this can be simplified in the future by utilizing LSTs to go directly alongside transports after they have debarked assault troops and transfer reserve elements to the LSTs directly. If enemy resistance is light and beach conditions are favorable, reserves can be landed directly on the beach from LSTs. If this is not the case, the LSTs can then return to the launching area and reembark the tractors for landing these reserves.

3. SPECIAL FEATURES.

Detailed comments and recommendations on various special features of the operation are contained in the various annexes and appendices to this report. Only those considered to be of particular importance are mentioned here. Comments relating to reports of subordinate units are covered by endorsement on those report.

NAVAL GUNFIRE

The naval gunfire on D-Day and thereafter was highly effective. The preliminary bombardment did not meet expectations because of the shortage of naval gunfire support ships and because of lost time in the preliminary bombardment due to bad weather and the interference of mine sweeping activities and UDT operations, which forced longer range fire or a diversion of available naval gunfire in support of these special operations.

AIR.

Air bombardment prior to D-Day, although continued over a long period of time, did not appear to have caused much damage. The air support on D-Day and for the two or three days following was highly effective, and the best that this Corps has received in any operation to date. Subsequent thereto the departure of the heavy carriers reduced the availability of aircraft for support of the

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ground troops to a point below that considered essential. Although land-based air was used to a certain extent after its establishment on Iwo Jima and was very effective when used, the areas open to aircraft bombing and strafing at that time were so limited as to prevent the realization of the full effectiveness of this support.

There has been a reluctance by aviation to use heavy bombs both in the preliminary and in support missions after the troop land. The destructiveness of such bombs against the type of installations found and their ability to strip camouflage and uncover enemy installations is so important as to warrant serious consideration of the use of the heaviest bombs procurable in any future attacks on well-defended positions. It is also considered that night air patrols over the objective are highly important in spite of their possible interference with identification of enemy aircraft attempting to attack.

The Landing Force Support Air Control Unit, when established ashore, proved very effective. Effective support was hampered initially to some extent by the fact that Naval Gunfire Control and Air Support Control were not in the same vessel with the Attack and Landing Force Commanders.

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND MAPS.

The maps used in this operation were prepared from aerial photographs taken several months prior to the operation and were inaccurate with respect to elevations and in many cases with respect to the types of roads indicated. These inaccuracies led to continual erroneous reporting of troop positions which, in turn, interfered with the effectiveness of naval gunfire, air, and artillery support. In order to obviate this difficulty in the future, it is recommended that successive editions of the basic maps be issued showing the latest information, in an effort to have the vertical control sufficiently accurate to permit proper reporting of front line positions and target designations.

Aerial photography should be continuous throughout the operation and particularly after important strikes by air or naval bombardment. These strikes uncover enemy installations and permit more effective subsequent attacks. Also, repeated aerial photography and interpretation will permit engaging deep support targets by naval gunfire, air, and heavy artillery and their destruction before the troops reach positions so close as to prevent this type of support.

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TANKS.

Tanks proved indispensable in this operation, particularly the flame-thrower and bulldozer tanks, which were required for the assault of close-in fortified positions. An increase in these special types of tanks has been requested. Also, tanks should be of the heaviest type available which can be lifted and which can negotiate the terrain to be expected at the objective.

AMPHIBIAN TRACTORS AND DUKW'S.

Amphibian tractors and DUKW's again proved their special adaptability to this type of warfare.

CONCLUSION.

This operation was conducted against a heavily fortified position in which there was little choice as to where to land.

It was not practicable to go around. The cost of the operation was heavy, but the present use of this base indicates that it was worth the cost. Some reduction in the number of casualties might have been effected by a more deliberate conduct of the attack and increased preparations prior to the day-to-day assaults, but time was considered to be an important factor. Other operations were pending, which required the utilization of elements released from this operation. Also, the position was exposed and there was a constant hazard of strong enemy air attacks on shipping and shore facilities at the target. These factors all indicated the necessity for rapid completion of the occupation.

The personnel of all echelons of the Corps conducted themselves in keeping with the highest traditions of the Military and Naval Service. It was a high privilege to command these troops.


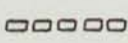
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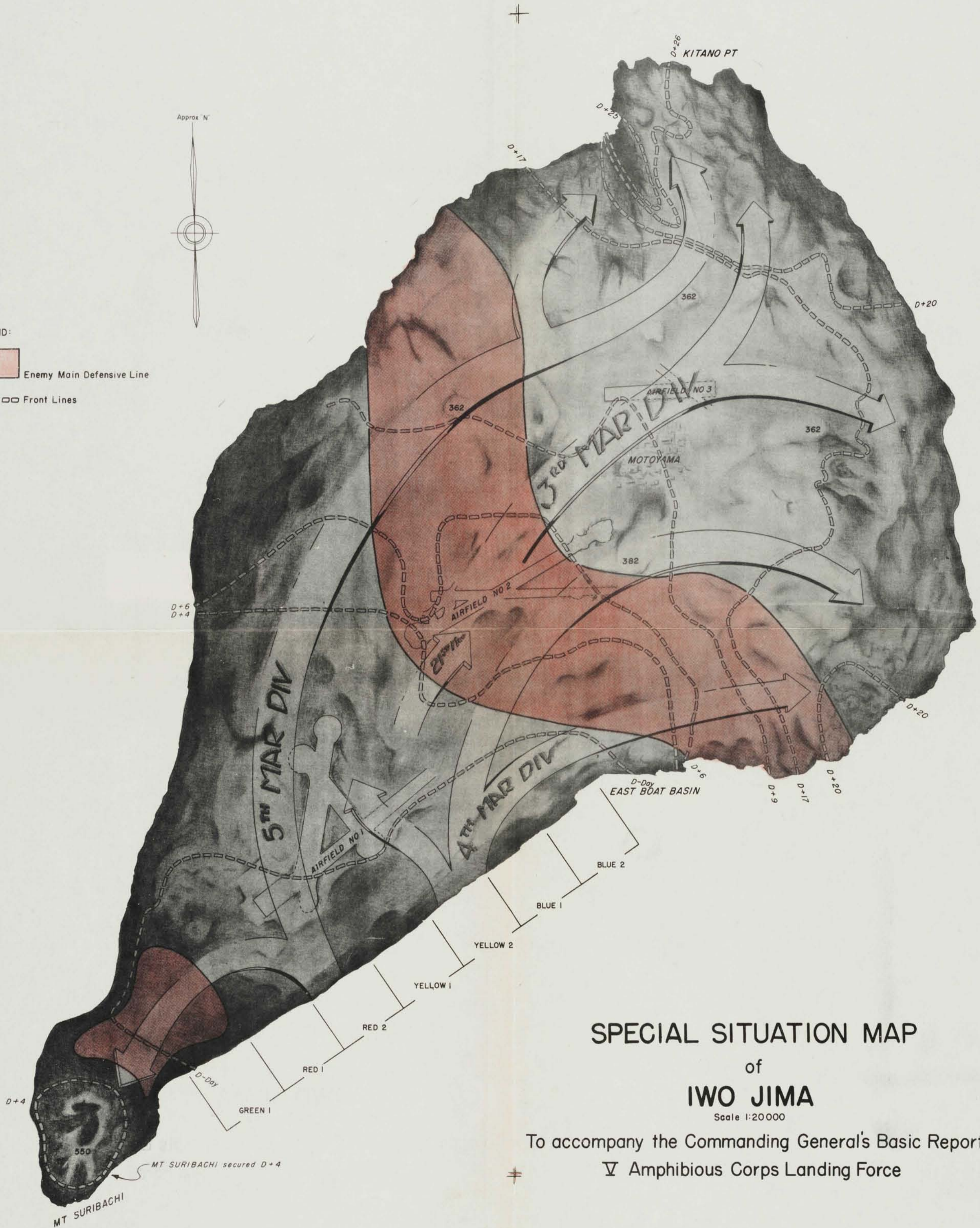
ANNEXES: ABLE - VACLF Operation Plan No. 3-44 and 4-44 and Operation Orders 1-45 to 32-45 inclusive.
BAKER - General Staff Section Reports.
CHARLIE - Special Staff Section Reports.
DOG - Report by Commanding Officer Corps.
EASY - Division Reports.
FOX - Landing Force Air Support Control Unit Report.
GEORGE - IsCom IWO JIMA Preliminary Report.

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LEGEND:

-  Enemy Main Defensive Line
-  Front Lines



SPECIAL SITUATION MAP of IWO JIMA

Scale 1:20 000

To accompany the Commanding General's Basic Report
∇ Amphibious Corps Landing Force