

The Last Days, June 1945

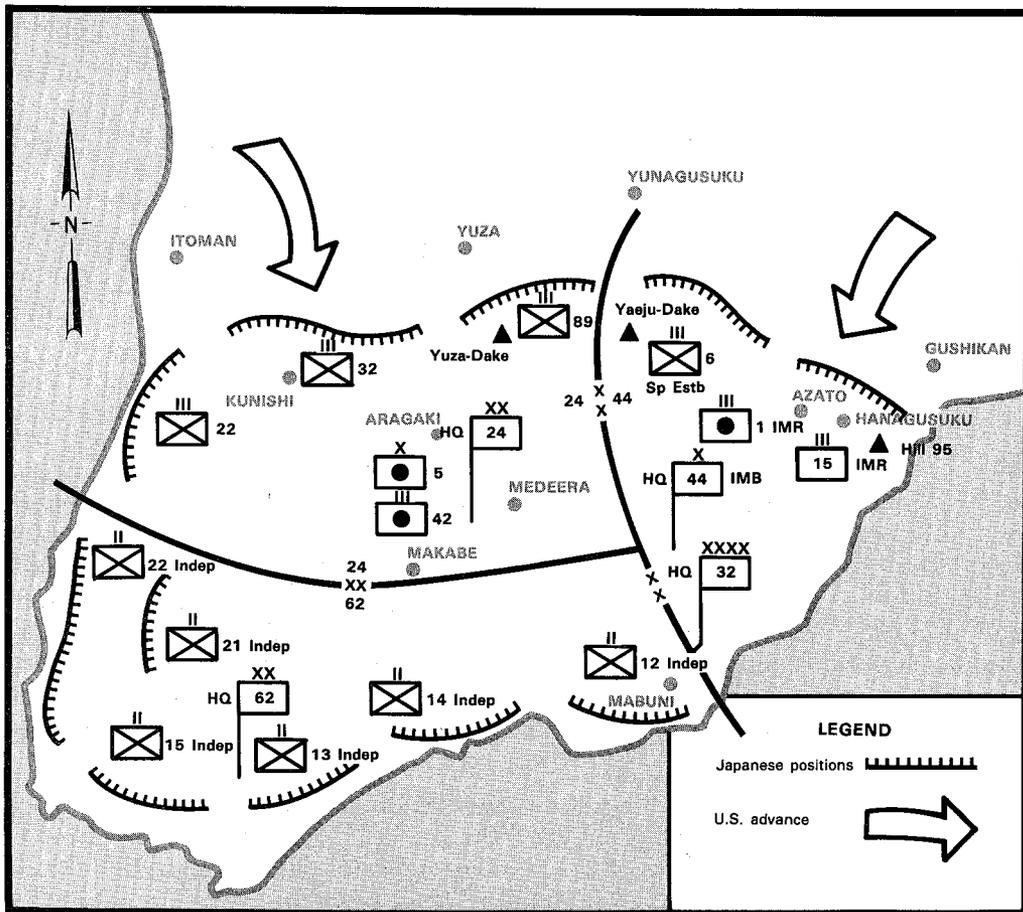


The IJA's new Kiyau Peninsula line was largely in place by 3 June. The American forces had formed a line opposite it by 6 June and began their probing attacks on the east flank. The American forces did not reach the west part of the line until 9 June, being reluctant to move forward until the Oroku pocket was isolated, and did not attack in the west until 12 June, when the Oroku fighting had finished. The Americans had formed a continuous line, though the west end of the line did not approach the Japanese western positions until several days after contact had been made in the east. The Americans' advance was deliberate and cautious, so that they reached the Japanese line with the full benefit of their organization and firepower.¹

The Japanese position was about five miles across and four miles deep. It was anchored along a line running from Kunishi Ridge in the west through Yuza-Dake and Yaeju-Dake peaks, to Hanagusuku village and Hill 95 on the east (see map 14). Manning this line from Kunishi to Yaeju-Dake were the 24th Division's 32d and 89th Regiments. The 24th Division set its headquarters at Medeera and held its 22d Regiment in reserve at nearby Makabe. Manning the line on the east, from Yaeju-Dake to the sea, were the 44th IMB's newly formed 6th Specially Established Regiment and the 15th Independent Mixed Regiment (IMR). The 44th IMB headquarters was placed above the coastal cliffs at Mabuni. Remnants of the 62d Division were held as a reserve at the southernmost tip of the peninsula. The 32d Army located its new headquarters at Mabuni near that of the 44th IMB.²

The arithmetic of units was now becoming crucial for the 32d Army Staff, because they were simply running out. The U.S. Infantry 7th Division pushed hard at the two ends of the 44th IMB position, at the Yaeju-Dake end and at the ridge running northeast from Hill 95. From 9 to 11 June, the Americans made a concerted attack against the center around Azato village and against Hill 95 on the east, resulting in their capture of Hill 95 on 11 June.³

On the night of 11–12 June, the 3d Battalion of the U.S. 17th Infantry Regiment accomplished a night infiltration that ejected the IJA 6th Special Regiment from the eastern foot of Yaeju-Dake. The 6th Specially Established Regiment was untried and had few combat soldiers in it. It had occupied



Map 14. The IJA Kiyon line, 4 June 1945

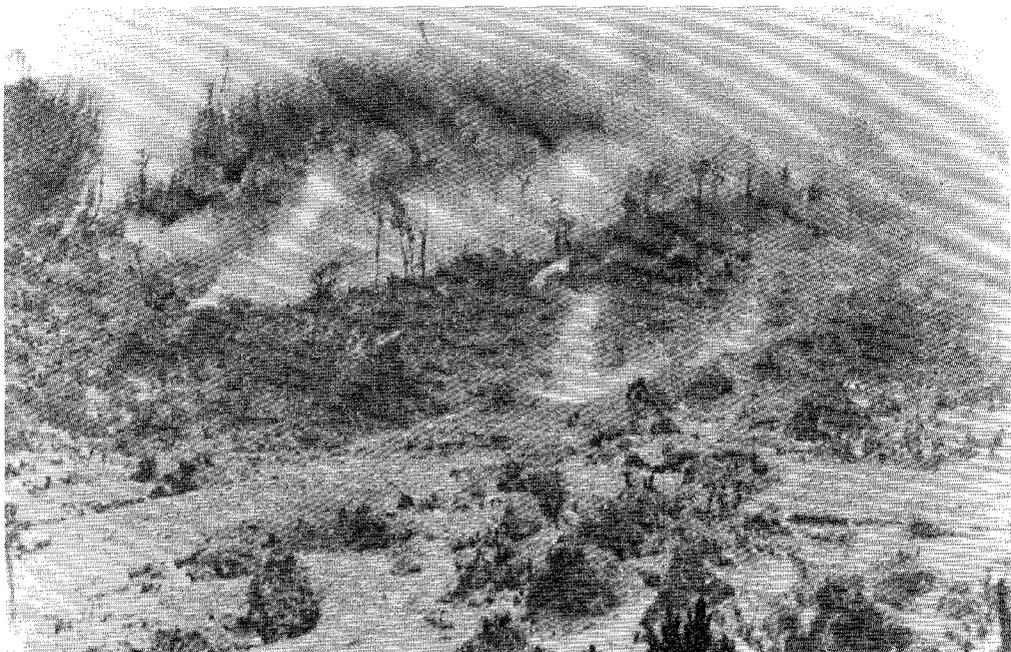
the eastern foot of Yaeju-Dake rather than the summit, as ordered, because it could obtain no water on the summit.⁴

By 12 June American forces had penetrated both flanks of the 44th IMB portion of the Kiyon line, thus threatening also the east flank of the 24th Division's part of the line. Under these circumstances, the 32d Army Staff hastened to send in its last reserves to stem the American advance. On 11 June, soon after the American attacks began in earnest on 9 June, the 32d Army Staff had already rushed some reinforcements to the critical Yaeju-Dake area. These were assorted small units, equal to about six companies, that 32d Army headquarters had on hand. They were drawn from the 5th Artillery units, a signal unit, and a field fortification unit. Unfortunately, because these troops were "equipped poorly as well as inadequately trained," they suffered heavy casualties on contact, and their efforts were "as ineffective as throwing water on parched soil."⁵

After the fall of Yaeju-Dake to the Americans on 12 June, the commander of the 24th Division made urgent pleas to 32d Army to recapture it



Yaeju-Dake as seen by approaching U.S. forces



Yaeju-Dake under U.S. preparatory fires

and so secure 24th Division's exposed right flank. Therefore, on 13 June, the 32d Army ordered the 15th Independent Infantry Battalion to drive the Americans out of the Yaeju-Dake area and the 13th Independent Infantry Battalion to attack the Americans on the extreme right, in the vicinity of Hill 95. Both of these battalions belonged to the 62d Division, the 32d Army's last reserve. These attacks, however, had almost no success. The 13th Independent Infantry Battalion promptly moved up to the line on the extreme right but lost more than half of its fighting strength on the first day. This was in part because the Americans had already taken Hill 95, leaving little terrain cover to the advancing 13th.⁶

The 15th Independent Infantry Battalion was not able even to reach the front expeditiously. The 24th Division commander protested the delay, and Operations Officer Yahara gave a direct order from the 32d Army to the 15th Independent Infantry Battalion commander to attack immediately. This kind of order, outside the chain of command, was almost unheard of. Even so, the 15th Independent Infantry Battalion was unable to advance. It encountered American tanks as it tried to move out of its reserve area toward Yaeju-Dake and did not have a single antitank gun. The commander, Major Iizuka, was himself wounded, and he commanded from a stretcher. The upshot was that the Americans secured their hold on Yaeju-Dake beyond retrieval.⁷

By 15 June, with both flanks already staved in, the 44th IMB's line was broken into fragments. Therefore, the 32d Army ordered the remainder of the 62d Division reserve force into the 44th IMB's zone. The 62d Division's commander, Lieutenant General Nakajima Gen, was given command of the 44th IMB as well as his own division. By 16 June the remainder of the 62d Division had made very slow progress toward the east, however, because of "unfamiliar terrain, darkness, and furious enemy shelling." Meanwhile, the extreme right flank unit of the 44th IMB, the 15th Independent Mixed Regiment, had lost contact with other units, and its headquarters was under attack by American tanks.⁸

By 17 June, the 44th IMB had fallen back to a new line running southeast from Yuza-Dake to the sea. This was held more thinly than the Yaeju-Dake—Hanagusuku line, but was at least a continuous line. The 62d Division intended to form a line behind this point, then advance to it. But the 62d Division had still made so little progress that it was ordered directly by 32d Army to advance its line as far as Mabuni, that is, up to within a half mile of where the 44th's line was. Only on 18 June was this movement accomplished. The 62d Division's 64th Infantry Brigade held the sector running from Yuza-Dake southeast to a point east of Medeera, and 63d Infantry Brigade held the sector running from a point east of Medeera to a point east of Mabuni and the sea.⁹

While the 44th IMB's front was being pushed back to Yuza-Dake—Mabuni on 6 to 18 June, the 24th Division's front was also hard-pressed. Because the Naval Base Force fighting on Oroku threatened the Americans' west flank, they were slower to probe forward on the west, the IJA 24th

Division's sector. By 11 June, however, the Americans had passed through all the rear guard resistance and had also subdued Oroku. They attacked the whole length of the 24th Division line, Kunishi—Yuza-Dake—Yaeju-Dake, on 12 June, after the east flank fighting had already been underway for six days.¹⁰

From 12 to 17 June, the IJA 24th Division's 32d and 89th Infantry Regiments sturdily held their ground against continuous attacks by the U.S. 1st Marine Division and part of the U.S. 96th Infantry Division. Here the Japanese resistance still had the quality it had had on the Shuri line. Relying on well-prepared caves and the high ground of Kunishi Ridge and Yuza-Dake, and having still a fair amount of trained manpower, the IJA 24th Division did not budge for five days, despite the usual bludgeoning by infantry-tank groups and fierce land, sea, and air saturation bombardment.¹¹

The searing pattern of assault and counterassault typical of the Shuri fighting still appeared here. The U.S. Marines assaulted Yuza village for many days only to be driven out on as many nights. Before dawn on 12 June, two companies of the U.S. 7th Marine Regiment reached the crest of Kunishi Ridge itself, but at daylight, they were fiercely counterattacked and their communications cut off by the mortaring and shelling of the north face of the ridge they had just come up. Casualties in these isolated American companies were heavy, but they were nevertheless built up into a survivable fighting force in the next five days by the precarious expedient of handling all supply by tanks. Tanks brought reinforcements, plasma, and ammunition when they came up and carried out the wounded when they left. Any other movement across the deadly north slope area was impossible, because IJA 24th Division elements still held parts of the ridge and points east of the ridge so that they could carpet its whole face with fire. Things were no better for the Americans on the crest of the ridge. They could not stand up without being shot so that even the wounded had to be dragged on ponchos to the escape hatches under the tanks. The tanks themselves, which came up each day to fight for enlargement of the perimeter, were subject to 47-mm antitank fire on the road, both coming and going. Twenty-one American tanks were destroyed in the five days of Kunishi Ridge.¹²

The Japanese line east of Yaeju-Dake fell back a mile between 12 and 18 June, while the line west of Yaeju-Dake held rock steady. The reason for this discrepancy was that the east end of the line was engaged six days before the west end, but also lay in part in the west end's having a greater density of trained men and weapons than the east had. Thanks largely to a copious infusion of replacements from service support troops to the line divisions, the 24th Division on the west had 12,000 men, equal to 85 percent of its original strength. The east flank's 44th IMB had 3,000 troops, equal to 67 percent of its original numbers, while the 62d Division had 7,000, equal to about 60 percent of its initial roster.¹³

By 12 to 18 June, a majority of the units fighting east of Yaeju-Dake were already reorganized into rear-area units with few light weapons and

almost no heavy ones. The 6th Specially Established Regiment, fighting on the 44th's left, for example, was a new reconstituted regiment, not a trained combat regiment, and was made up entirely of rear-area personnel. The same was true of the 62d Division's remnant that was sent to help the 44th. The 60 percent of the 62d's original strength level still on the line was not the 62d's original line combat component but everything else. As these forces went in on the Japanese right, they were "indignantly assaulting enemy tanks with clenched teeth and naked fists," as one reminiscing IJA staff officer put it. The problem east of Yaeju-Dake was not a problem of morale but simply a matter of the units there having reached the end of their resources, in numbers, weapons, and combat-trained leadership. This exhaustion of resources came a few days earlier on the IJA right than on the left because the Americans attacked sooner on the right and because the IJA units on the right were more battle worn.¹⁴

Some small efforts were made to solve the Japanese armaments problem between 12 and 17 June. Several planeloads of hand grenades and grenade launchers were parachuted in by the 6th Air Army. The untouched garrison on Tokuno Island sent five small boats of ammunition to the beleaguered 32d Army, but though they successfully negotiated the long sea voyage, they were sunk within sight of 32d Army's Kiyan position.¹⁵

By 18 June, the 24th Division's position on the Japanese left was also giving way. On 15 June, American units had penetrated an area between Yaeju-Dake and Yuza-Dake in the middle of the 89th Regiment's front. This led, on 19 June, to the death in combat of almost all officers and men of the 89th near Aragaki.¹⁶

The 22d Regiment was brought up from its rearward reserve position on 13 June, shortly after American attacks began in earnest on the 12th. To strengthen the far left of IJA 24th Division's sector, the American strength doubled in this area on 17 June when the U.S. 6th Marine Division, having finished at Oroku, took over the western half of the 1st Marine Division's line. At that time, the whole 22d Regiment line collapsed under the weight of the reinforced Marines' assault. The entire unit was overrun and wiped out. The regimental headquarters was surrounded, and almost all of its staff, including the commander, died in action.¹⁷

The 32d Regiment in the center still held out as of 17 June, even though its left flank, where the 22d Regiment had been, was completely unhinged. The U.S. Marines had already moved south through Maezato village by dusk of the 17th and were 1,000 yards in the left rear of the 32d Regiment's line. By 18 June, the 32d Regiment was fully enveloped on its left and rear, but its front remained intact. Meanwhile, the regimental headquarters was attacked from the rear by American infantry-tank groups. For four days, these attacks were fought back. By the evening of 22 June, however, the line battalions and the 32d's headquarters were separately enveloped and communications between them disrupted. Within a few days, the 32d Regiment, in its turn, had ceased to exist as a fighting force. By 22 June, nothing remained of the 24th Division except the division headquarters

troops around Medeira and such refugees from the line regiments as had reached them.¹⁸

All of 24th Division, like the rest of the 32d Army on the Kiyau Peninsula, suffered from lack of combat personnel and arms. Combat ranks were badly thinned, so each regiment was reconstituted in the lull just after the arrival at the new Kiyau line. Medical, veterinary, supply, and other personnel were brought in to make good the losses. As a result, the line units consisted of men with a variety of specialties, none of which was combat.¹⁹

The Japanese shortage of weapons was telling. Men impressed from the rear had no weapons and were given none. Each reconstituted 24th Division battalion had to make do with eighty rifles, five light machine guns, and five grenade launchers. Even the machine-gun companies had only three to five machine guns, and regimental gun companies had only two guns. Moreover, not all of this scarce equipment was in good condition. Limited troop numbers, experience, and equipment all help to explain the abrupt dissolution of the 24th Division's line regiments between 17 and 22 June.²⁰

By 19 June, it was apparent to the 32d Army Staff and its commander, Ushijima, that neither the west nor the east sectors of the army's line would hold. The staff therefore began doing some formal, but nevertheless important, things to prepare for the end of the army. On 10 June, a unit citation bearing Ushijima's signature had already been awarded to the 24th Division for its achievements on the Shuri line and in the 4 May offensive. Now, on 19 June, Ushijima's last order to the army congratulated all units on their performance. But, he noted, the army's weapons were nearly expended, and communications between units had been severed. Therefore, wherever communications were broken, the senior officer of any unit was authorized to command it without waiting on orders from a superior. All members of the army were to "fight to the last." Ushijima's last order made no mention of surrender.²¹

The 19 June order tidied up matters with respect to the subordinate units, but formalities toward superiors also had to be observed. On the evening of 18 June, Ushijima sent his farewell message to the vice chief of staff of the IJA, Kawanabe Torashiro, and to the commander of the 10th Area Army on Taiwan, Ando Rikichi. Ushijima ended his message with a poem: "May the island's green grass, which has withered waiting for autumn, be born again in the spring in our honored country."²² This was reciprocated on 21 June when Army Minister Anami Korechika and Chief of the Army General Staff Umezu Yoshijiro sent their farewell messages back to the commander of 32d Army. Their coded radio transmissions also revealed that Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner Jr., the U.S. Tenth Army commander, had been killed on 18 June. All of the 32d Army headquarters cheered at this news, beside themselves with joy. Only Ushijima grieved over the enemy commander's death and was much perplexed to find that his whole young staff was virtually rejoicing. Also on 20 June, the 32d Army received a dispatch from the 10th Area Army that contained a citation for all 32d Army.²³

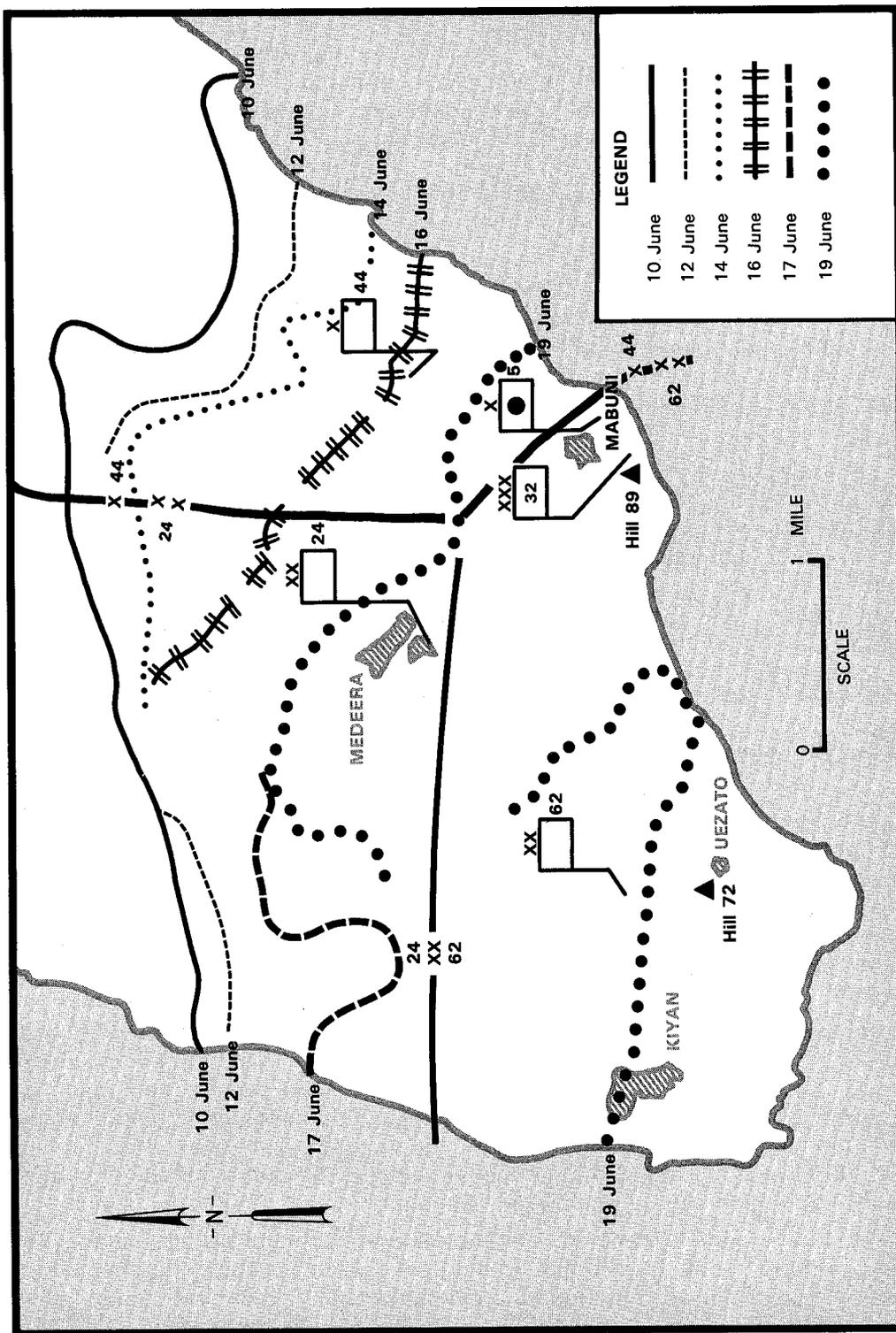
As Ushijima and Cho attended to these formal details, the two flanks of the U.S. forces continued to close southward like giant tongs around Medeera pocket as pivot. By 19 June, the U.S. Army XXIV Corps and U.S. III Amphibious Corps had pushed the IJA 44th IMB back to a line running from Medeera to Mabuni. On the west, the IJA 24th Division's line regiments had all been crushed or bypassed, so that the U.S. III Amphibious Corps was actually approaching Mabuni from the west. The American pincers were within two miles of closing, leaving only a narrow sliver of Okinawa in Japanese hands (see map 15). Outside this sliver, only a residual rear-area garrison force remained at the southernmost tip of the Kiyau Peninsula, which formed its perimeter north of Hill 72 and Uezato village. This small garrison group was isolated from major headquarters and would be overrun without great difficulty by the U.S. 6th Marine Division on 21 June.²⁴

In fact, by 19 June the IJA sustained organized resistance only at two separated strongpoints, one around Mabuni, where the 32d Army headquarters had been located from early June and where the 62d Division headquarters and the remnant of the 44th IMB headquarters had now been driven. The other strongpoint was around Medeera where the 24th Division headquarters and troops attached to it still held a perimeter. By this time, all personnel—medical, technical, and other—were utilized as line combat troops.²⁵

By 20 June, American forces closed the tongs, and only the Mabuni and Medeera strongpoints remained. The 32d Army Staff officers at Mabuni could hear fierce tank and small-arms battles in the intervals between bombardments. The struggle could be heard in every direction, less than a mile distant. The last contact between the 32d Army at Mabuni and the 24th Division at Medeera came by foot messenger on 20 June. At 1200 on 21 June, the small-arms firing in Mabuni village, 400 yards north of the headquarters cave, suddenly died away, which meant that the headquarters guard unit, sent forward to hold the village, had been wiped out. Within two hours, headquarters guards on Hill 89 overlooking one of the entrances of the headquarters cave were attacked by elements of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division and overrun. The Americans easily located the cave entrance shaft and dropped in explosives that killed ten officers and men of the staff. Despite all the casualties it had supervised since 1 April, these deaths on 21 June were the first battle injuries the 32d Army Staff had sustained in the whole campaign.²⁶

These events meant that there were no longer any combat assets between the 32d Army Staff and its adversary. Even as late as 3 June, when two-thirds of 32d Army's complement had been lost, there had been almost no casualties at battalion level or above because line troops had sacrificially shielded the staffs. As of 22 June this had ceased to be the case. Nothing stood between the U.S. 7th Infantry Division and the commanders of 32d Army.

Since the 32d Army had ceased to be, planning its operations was a dead letter. Instead the 32d Army Staff, all that remained of the original



Map 15. Battle line on the Kiyan Peninsula, 10—19 June 1945

100,000-man organization, now had to attend to the orderly dissolution of itself. This process had begun on 18 June with the round of farewell orders and messages. A banquet was also held on that day for the 32d Army Staff, marking the beginning of the end, even as shells concussed the ground overhead. The banquet was a farewell dinner, featuring canned goods and sake, like that preceding the 4 May offensive. Ushijima and his entire staff were there. It was not a gala, however. The best Scotch had not survived the retreat, and the headquarters itself was only a natural cave little improved, where officers bumped their heads on stalactites and water dripped constantly.²⁷

With farewell orders and the obligatory banquet out of the way, headquarters staffs themselves began to think about honorable death attacks. The various headquarters at the Mabuni command cave resolved on 21 June to "stand to die in order." In other words, brigade staffs, division staffs, then staffs of army headquarters units would conduct honorable death attacks in sequence, followed finally by suicide of the 32d Army commanders.²⁸

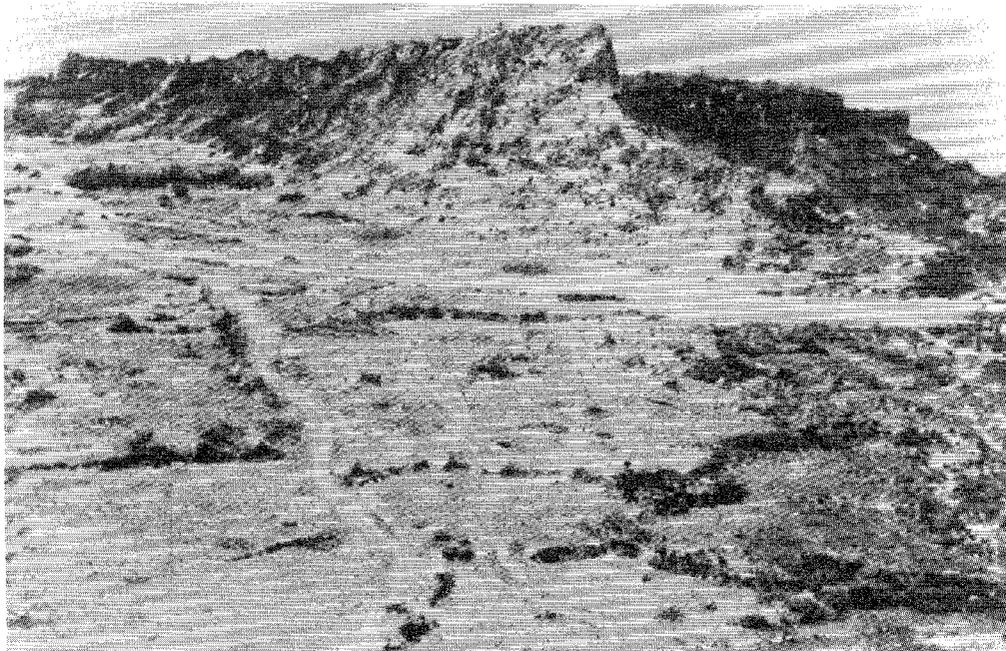
Formally exempted from this expectation were the young officers of the 32d Army Staff, however. From the beginning, Cho had maintained that the IJA had been disadvantaged by the wanton self-destruction of staffs in the Pacific. Therefore, Cho decided, and ordered, that all of the staff officers of the 32d Army would avoid honorable death and ritual suicide. He specified that Yahara, Miyake, Nagano, and others would report to IGHQ on the battle. Kimura, Kusumaru, and others would escape from the Kiyau Peninsula to north Okinawa and wage guerrilla warfare. Each staff member was therefore ordered to make his escape on the night of 19 June, and about twenty officers and escort troops did. Even so, some remained out of a sense of loyalty to their commanders.²⁹

An effort was also made to exfiltrate ordinary soldiers to carry on guerrilla warfare in the north. Troops sent north through the American lines traveled in groups of two or three, wore civilian clothes, and carried small arms only. A group usually carried only one firearm and some grenades. They moved on the night of 18–19 June and on several subsequent nights. The Americans, by this time accustomed to small-scale infiltration, put up illumination flares to detect these soldiers and killed most of them in the open.³⁰

However, most of the troops at Mabuni and Medeira were told by their officers to continue to resist where they were. The 32d Army Staff heard on 21 June that the 5th Artillery Command headquarters had made an honorable death attack the preceding night. The headquarters staff of the 24th Division near Medeira still held out, but the 32d Army Staff had no way to know this, and the Americans would soon control all the entrances to the 32d Army command cave at Mabuni.³¹

It was resolved therefore that the officers and men still present at the headquarters on 22 June would attack the Americans that night and drive them off the crest of Hill 89, which overlooked the headquarters cave, about 400 yards away. On the night of 21–22 June, by moonlight, the head-

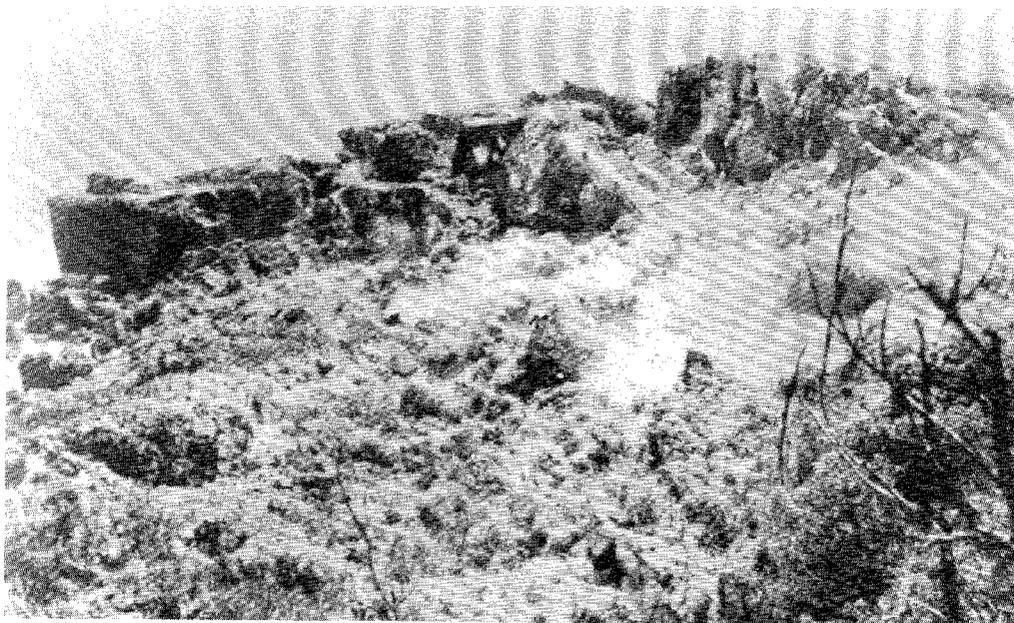
quarters guard unit did charge up the steep slopes toward the Americans, their last act. At this same time, in the respite thus guaranteed, Ushijima and Cho were to commit ritual suicide.³²



Hill 89. Last terrain feature defended under IJA 32d Army command

Ushijima's cook described what happened: At about 2200 on the night of 21—22 June, he was ordered to prepare an especially large dinner. He made it as sumptuous as he could, with rice, canned meats, potatoes, fried fish cakes, salmon, fresh cabbage, pineapples, tea, and sake. While the generals ate this feast, the cook immediately began making breakfast, as was customary, since no cooking smoke could be exposed after daylight. This saved his life, since the sentry at the cave entrance (whom the cook could see) and almost everyone else had been sent away to attack Hill 89 at 2330.³³

From his kitchen near the cave mouth, the cook was able to witness the generals' ritual suicides later that night. At about 0340, as the moon was just setting into the ocean, Ushijima and Cho went out of the cave onto the narrow ledges overlooking the sea. The ledges were too narrow for the generals to face north toward the imperial palace. Both Ushijima and Cho then committed *seppuku*, with their aides severing their heads instantly to minimize their suffering. Three orderlies secretly buried the bodies. Then, the remaining staff members obligingly went back into the cave to eat the breakfast the cook had prepared. That was the end of it. When night fell on 22 June, the cook fled, and the remaining staff sortied in their final "penetration attack" against the Americans who were, by now, in foxholes less than 100 feet away.³⁴



Ledges on Hill 89 where Ushijima and Cho committed ritual suicide

Only elements around the headquarters of the 24th Division at Medeera still fought on—but not for long. Only the 22d Regiment remained, and the 24th Division headquarters lost contact with it on 23 June. The 22d Regiment was overrun soon after. Somehow, the 24th Division headquarters managed to survive until 30 June, when its members also committed suicide in their command cave just south of Medeera.³⁵ This was an epilogue, however. Most observers describe the fighting as having substantially ended on 21 June.

Although the 32d Army had ceased to exist, some of its members still endured. Some lived passively but did not surrender, as Ito Koichi's men did in the same caves they had dug many months before. Also, remnants of the Kunigami Detachment still dwelled in the mountains in the far north.³⁶

For the first time in the Pacific war, substantial numbers of IJA troops surrendered, 7,400 in all. Many, though, did not. Soldiers in the 32d Army were reluctant to surrender for several reasons: they were ordered not to surrender, and it was customary not to, but above all, their officers had told them and they believed that they would be tortured and killed if captured.³⁷

Unfortunately, the prohibition against surrender left a large number of miserable and desperate IJA soldiers in open terrain. Sometimes, they committed suicide by stepping into a fire zone or by holding a grenade to their stomachs, a kind of “poor man’s *seppuku*.” Regrettably, during this period, many committed abusive acts against the civilian population. There were many cases in the Pacific war where Japanese soldiers carried out atrocities



Stunned IJA defender surrenders



A group of IJA 32d Army survivors after surrendering to U.S. forces

against subject peoples. Here, the atrocities were committed on a large scale against Japanese citizens. Knowing that death was imminent, the soldiers freely committed rape. In some cases, fearing discovery, the soldiers forced parents to kill their crying babies, or the soldiers killed the infants themselves. Sometimes, they killed Okinawans seeking to share a cave, fearing they were spies. This widespread abusiveness left deep scars and, to this day, is a divisive influence between the people of Japan and of Japan's Okinawa. For the average soldier, postbattle suicide was neither voluntary nor dignified. The no-surrender policy for the mass of soldiers was dehumanizing and had the unintended consequence of victimizing large numbers of Japanese civilians.³⁸



Surviving civilians chatting with a U.S. soldier after the Okinawa battle

Japanese Casualties

IJA casualties are easy to calculate in the Okinawa campaign because there were only two kinds: POW and KIA (killed in action). The Japanese had 100,000 men on Okinawa, 67,000 IJA, 9,000 IJN, and 24,000 native Okinawans. Of these, 7,400 were taken prisoner and almost all the rest perished, the exception being the handful who surrendered after the war ended on 15 August. Many of the 7,400 captured were hastily impressed native Okinawans who were less imbued with the no-surrender doctrine.³⁹

A total of 70,000 Japanese soldiers were lost by attrition in the first eight weeks of combat on the Okinawa isthmus. All of these were line combat soldiers and company-grade officers, leaving only the 32d Army's

staffs and technical and rear-area personnel. The heavy artillery was still intact, but most of the infantry weapons were lost by the time of the 27 May—3 June retreat. The result after 3 June was that noncombat soldiers had to fight without weapons. These troops were simply overwhelmed. Whole lines melted away, and casualties in the third week of June skyrocketed, reaching 3,000 a day. For the first time on Okinawa, IJA soldiers went into the caves and cowered there for safety instead of using them as active fortifications.⁴⁰

For the first time, Americans were able to roll from cave to cave with flamethrower tanks and explosives with little resistance between. American official histories tend to conceptualize this easy advance as a matter of anticave techniques being finally perfected, but the remaining Japanese' near-complete lack of weaponry and training may have been the operating factor. The IJN stand on Oroku, in contrast, though it also used inexperienced people, was rich in weapons, especially machine guns, and allowed no easy advance. American sources do not make much of the Japanese lack of weapons on Kiyau, perhaps feeling that even one machine gun in Japanese hands was one too many. Japanese officer observers all believed, however, that the shortage of small arms and antitank weapons was decisive for the poor quality of IJA fighting in the final weeks.

American Casualties

The secondary accounts of the Okinawa battle usually suggest that, against the Japanese combat losses of 100,000 dead or captured, the Americans suffered losses of only some 6,000. This indicates a highly favorable American loss ratio of 1 to 17. But the overall impact of Okinawa on American personnel was less positive than these triumphant figures suggest. Only 76,000 men in the Japanese force were uniformed and trained military; the other 24,000 persons were recently impressed indigenous militia and labor groups. Despite the IJA's sometime use of Okinawans in service roles, 76,000 is probably a more realistic figure for the real combat force U.S. divisions faced.⁴¹

To subdue these 76,000 IJA regulars cost U.S. Tenth Army exactly 6,319 KIA between 1 April and 30 June 1945. This figure is still one-twelfth of the Japanese number killed. What the figures conceal, however, is the substantial U.S. losses in categories other than KIA. The Tenth Army losses from 1 April to 30 June in WIA (wounded in action), IIA (injured in action), MIA (missing in action), and DOW (died of wounds) categories totaled 32,943 men, this in addition to the 6,319 KIA. Nor does the 6,319 figure include an additional 33,096 casualties in the "nonbattle" categories of sick, injured, other, and deaths. In other words, besides the KIA wastage, 66,039 Americans were lost to combat on account of wounds, illness, and death from various causes.⁴²

Many of these recorded non-KIA casualties may have been minor, allowing them to return early to the fighting front. That such was not the case is suggested by the strength reports of the fighting divisions. As of 8 April,

the present-for-duty strength of the four infantry and two Marine divisions, plus XXIV Corps and III Amphibious Corps service personnel, was 146,451. Added to these units' strength from 1 April to 30 June was a small but steady flow of replacements that totaled 22,801 men. The original force plus the replacements totaled 169,252 men. Nevertheless, the present-for-duty strength of the six divisions and two corps on 30 June was 101,462. This was an equation from which 67,790 American soldiers had disappeared. Of these, 6,319 were recorded KIA, leaving 61,471 other men still not capable of resuming their duties a week after the battle had ended. In other words, of the 66,039 non-KIA casualties, 61,471 were still serious enough that they had not reappeared for duty after the battle.⁴³

It is likely that many of these 61,471 men would return to duty after weeks or months, after putting a proportionate strain on the medical system. Nevertheless, if all casualties are counted, not just KIA, the Americans' short- and medium-term loss from Okinawa operations totaled 72,358 men,* not too different from the total of IJA regulars present. American planners' anxieties about invading Japan proper may have sprung from this fact, known to them but not emphasized later, that the U.S. total casualty figure on Okinawa was 72,000 men.

Conclusion

The Japanese achievement on Okinawa was remarkable. Despite being outnumbered 2 to 1 in manpower and outgunned 10 to 1 in ground firepower alone, the Japanese mounted a dogged defense for ten weeks, denied their adversary strategically desired terrain, and inflicted casualties in all categories almost equal to their own numbers. Okinawa was the only occasion in the Pacific war, apart from Iwo Jima, where an IJA force acquitted itself so well. The credit for this achievement must go in part to staff decisions made long before the battle began. The building of the fire-port caves and the development of the doctrines for their use, as much as any other factors, allowed 32d Army to defeat the effect of the overwhelming land, air, and sea fires directed against it.

Although not usually thought of in these terms, the battle for Okinawa was a case where assiduous staff work overcame disproportionate firepower. Moreover, the Okinawa doctrinal solutions came mainly from the staff at the battle site, who to implement them, had to ignore both the IJA's deeply ingrained traditions of light infantry attack and the specific directives they received from higher headquarters. The staff members of the 32d Army were alone in their final responsibility for the outcome and also alone in the solutions they devised. Though none of the units present on Okinawa had served in earlier Pacific campaigns, the Okinawa staff did, to some extent, develop its doctrines in light of earlier combat events in the Pacific. Nonetheless, the 32d Army Staff members were successful mavericks who tempered their own operational doctrines in defiance of what they were advised to do by faraway theoreticians.

*6,319 KIA, 32,943 WIA and other battle casualties, and 33,096 nonbattle casualties.

The Okinawa battle was unusual in that it exhibited the stasis and lethality of World War I fronts even though it employed the full range of mobile World War II weapons: tanks, aircraft, radios, and trucks. On Okinawa, the modern weapons increased battle zone lethality due to bombardment and fire, without doing anything to decrease the static quality of the front. This suggests that dense battle, the "fire-swept zone" characteristic of World War I, may occur in modern warfare regardless of weaponry, wherever two large forces are concentrated to acquire the same finite objective. Episodes of dense battle therefore took place in World War II on Okinawa and Iwo Jima, as well as in the urban siege warfare of the several European fronts.

Dense battle makes special demands of an infantry force. Infantry on the surface in the fire-swept zone, whether attacking or counterattacking, must be fearless, agile, technically ingenious, and tolerant of heavy casualties. World War I staff officers invented a new kind of soldier that exemplified these qualities, the storm troops. Paradoxically, the old IJA doctrine's emphasis on fearless, almost thoughtless, light infantry attack was a suitable preparation for surface combat in the fire-swept zone. Light infantry combat, even hand-to-hand combat, flourished at the margins of the fire-swept zone, and in dense battle everything is done by margins. The IJA's old doctrines of boldness, extreme small-unit initiative, self-sacrifice, and close fighting were, unintentionally, an ideal training for dense battle in counterattack warfare, even though that training was antithetical to the larger operational doctrines needed on Okinawa.

The Okinawa infantry fighting, besides taking place in an environment of unusually high lethality, consisted on both sides of a main weapon—in caves or tanks—and the rifle teams protecting them. This pattern—the use of machine guns or machine-gun strongpoints—also emerged in the no-man's-land fighting of World War I. The Okinawa experience suggests that this tactical grouping may be one of the most basic in modern combat and likely to appear in a wide variety of circumstances and regardless of the specific configuration of the weapon. This means a modern operational planner must pay attention to both elements of the equation, the skilled infantry team and the weapon. On Okinawa, the U.S. Tenth Army won with tanks, and the IJA 32d Army defended as long as it did with sited fire ports that were low in technology but high in sophistication. Even so, both the caves and tanks were vulnerable unless protected by infantry, who ended in dueling at close ranges with small arms to decide the outcome.

Besides providing insights into modern infantry tactics, the Okinawa campaign demonstrates the transformation in defensive fortifications mandated by air power. The World War I trench erected a barrier toward the enemy in the front. But the advent of aircraft mandated a barrier against the enemy above. On Okinawa, the entire Japanese Army moved underground, lived underground, and performed most combat functions underground. This arrangement may prove a necessary feature of any future combat effort that does not enjoy air superiority. The IJA's operations on

Okinawa offer some helpful clues with respect to the effective use of such underground forts.

Finally, Japan's Okinawa experience demonstrates what resourceful and determined soldiers can do, even when facing superior numbers and simultaneous overwhelming lethality on land, air, and sea. Intelligence and diligence can stand against even the most extreme technological superiority. But not forever. Ultimately, brave men and overwhelming firepower will always defeat brave men alone.
