

**Operation ICEBERG: How the Strategic Influenced the
Tactics of LTG Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr. at Okinawa**

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Abstract

The Okinawan campaign was World War II's last major offensive operation. Selected as the last position for which to organize the invasion of Japan, the scale and intensity of combat led to critical accounts from journalists accustomed to the war's smaller amphibious operations in 1943 and 1944. This criticism carried forward to later historical analysis of the operation's ground commander, Army Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. Labeled as inexperienced and an Army partisan, Buckner was identified as a major contributor to the campaign's high casualty numbers. This historical analysis has failed to address the impacts of decisions on early war strategy and their impacts to three key strategic factors: a massive shortage of service units, a critical deficit in shipping, and the expansion of strategic bombing in the Pacific. This thesis examines the role that these strategic factors played in influencing the tactical decision making of General Buckner at Okinawa.

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Introduction

In a syndicated column published on June 6, 1945, journalist David Lawrence blasted the conduct of the final battle of World War II, claiming that “mistakes appear to have made the Okinawa¹ affair a worse example of military incompetence than Pearl Harbor”, and that the battle was “the worst setback we have suffered in the Pacific.”² Lawrence’s comments were squarely aimed at Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr., commander of the Tenth United States Army and the Ryukyus Force, the ground and joint headquarters responsible for directing the Okinawa campaign. His forces battled difficult terrain, poor weather, and a fanatical Japanese defense of the island on the doorstep of Japan. The resulting American casualties shocked the press, who were unused to witnessing battles of this scale in the Pacific.

Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC) and Pacific Ocean Areas (CINCPOA), and Buckner’s immediate superior, offered a strong rebuke of Lawrence in a column published on June 17, 1945. He stated that Buckner’s “military and tactical decisions were his own, but they had my concurrence and that of the senior naval commanders concerned.”

¹ This thesis utilizes place names as utilized in primary sources. The Ryukyus (Nansei Shoto to the Japanese) designates the entire island chain extending south of Kyushu, of which Okinawa is the largest. The Ryukyus and Okinawa are used interchangeably, unless otherwise noted. Formosa is the modern Taiwan/Chinese Taipei. The Bonins (Ogasawara Gunto to the Japanese) stretch for 1,000 miles south of Tokyo, Iwo Jima is the largest island in the chain.

² David Lawrence, “Okinawa,” *The Evening Independent*, St. Petersburg, FL, 6 June 1945, 4.

Nimitz also addressed the significant terrain and supply problems that prohibited additional amphibious landings.³ He went on to blame inter-service and personal rivalries for influencing the press to criticize the U.S. commanders' performance in the battle.

Nonetheless, a number of prominent historians subsequently echoed criticism similar to that of Lawrence in their more recent analyses of the Okinawa campaign. Allan Millet and Williamson Murray's *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* concluded that Buckner's "flawed generalship contributed to the slaughter" on Okinawa.⁴ This conclusion ignored Nimitz's high opinion of Buckner's competence and ability to command a multi-service organization. Buckner described in his journal that Nimitz selected him for command partly out of appreciation for his delicate handling of a board of inquiry into an earlier Army-Marine controversy at Saipan.⁵

Strategic Theory and Doctrine

Both the media portrayal and later analysis by military historians highlight a traditional problem in historical analysis of military campaigns: focusing on the tactical decision-making while ignoring the influence of the strategic context

³ "Nimitz Defends Okinawa Campaign," *New York Times*, June 17, 1945, 3.

⁴ Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000), 512.

⁵ Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr. and Joseph Stilwell, *Seven Stars: The Okinawa Battle Diaries of Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. and Joseph Stilwell*, ed. Nicholas E. Sarantakes (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 17. Buckner served as president of the board of inquiry into the relief of Major General Ralph Smith, commander of the Army's 77th Infantry Division, by Marine Lieutenant General Holland Smith during the Battle of Saipan. Buckner's diary entry of October 7, 1944 claims that only after questioning of his inter-service views did Nimitz select Buckner for command of ICEBERG.

shaping those decisions. Okinawa provides a particularly illustrative case study of how strategic factors limit the range options available to tactical decision makers. However, Okinawa has to this point seldom been analyzed through this lens.

This thesis utilizes the prominent military historian Peter Paret's definition of strategy: "the use of armed force to achieve the military objectives" of the war as a whole, and "by extension, the political purpose of the war."⁶ In the Pacific war, strategic practitioners included the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who formulated strategy, and theater commanders such as General Douglas MacArthur and Nimitz, who executed it. By contrast, subordinate commanders such as Buckner, even though he oversaw a large-scale operation, remained tactical practitioners. Martin van Creveld's definition of the tactical level of war, that "the use of available military means in order to win battles," provides a firm foundation.⁷ However, any definition of strategy and tactics should also include a discussion of *operations*, defined as a coordinated series of simultaneous or sequential battles.

Operation OVERLORD provides an example of the concepts in practice. At the strategic level, the operation was the first in a series of campaigns designed to take Allied forces from Normandy to the defeat of Germany. The

⁶ Peter Paret, Introduction to *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), ed. Peter Paret, 3.

⁷ Martin van Creveld, "Napoleon and the Dawn of Operational Warfare," in *The Evolution of Operational Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), eds. Martin van Creveld and John A. Olsen, 8.

operational aspect of OVERLORD consisted of a series of battles beginning with the D-Day landings and ending with the struggle against the stubborn hedgerow defenses of the German Army. These battles involved tactical decision-making and methods, such as the airborne drops and amphibious landings carried out in the initial Allied invasion of Normandy.

A model for understanding the strategic level of war involves three interconnected concepts: ends, ways, and means. Ends are defined as the set of conditions that must be accomplished for victory, that is, the end state of a conflict as determined by senior military and civilian leaders.⁸ A nation achieves the end state through the application of ways. These can take the form of military, diplomatic, or economic actions, either singly or any combination of the three.⁹ Strategic bombing, blockade, and invasion were three ways available to achieve the end of the unconditional surrender of Japan. The final piece of the strategic puzzle consists of the means, the most important element of the equation. At its most basic it comprises the capabilities of a nation, for military ways it consists of the total manpower and material.¹⁰ Manpower consists of ground and air fighting units and ship crews. The nation's military capabilities include the equipment and logistics necessary to organize, deploy, and fight.

⁸ John A. Olsen, introduction to *The Practice of Strategy: From Alexander the Great to the Present*, eds. John A. Olsen and Colin Gray (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

⁹ Olsen, *Practice of Strategy*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Available “means” restricts the “ways”, and this in turn may dictate achievable ends.

Though it seems the easiest piece of the framework, each word carries enormous importance to the strategy-making process. In the case of the war against Japan, two phrases from the Joint Chiefs’ mission statement, “unremitting pressure” and “unconditional surrender,” dictated the strategy of the final year. The former required the use of all service forces: naval, air, and land, to continuously engage the enemy. Combining this with the second term adds numerous possible combinations of ways and means. Air, land and naval power each offered solutions, colored by each service branch’s commitment to certain strategic practices discussed below, to reach the end state.

Factors related to the grand strategic demands of the Pacific Theater as a whole, and even of the global U.S. effort against the Axis powers, shaped Buckner’s battle plans and conduct of the campaign on Okinawa. The most significant of these factors included the shortage of cargo and assault shipping, lack of service troops, and the competing demands of the strategic air war against Japan. Previous assessments and histories of the Okinawa campaign have almost universally overlooked the crucial role played by these considerations in circumscribing Buckner’s options when it came to the fight for the island.

The campaign for Okinawa was launched on April 1, 1945. Centrally located between the Marianas Islands and Japan, Okinawa and other islands in the Ryukyus offered terrain suitable for the mass construction of air and naval

bases required to conduct the invasion of Japan. By far the largest land operation in the Central Pacific Campaign, seven Army and Marine divisions fought a determined Japanese garrison of over 110,000 personnel. At sea the U.S. Navy battled continuous *kamikaze* attacks, with a loss of over 5,000 killed and 7,000 wounded. After three months of combat Tenth Army casualties were 7,300 killed and 31,000 wounded. The price was much steeper on the other side, as 107,000 Japanese defenders were killed.¹¹ Okinawa also claimed the highest ranking American combat casualty of the war when Japanese artillery fire killed Buckner in the last stages of combat on the island, depriving him of any chance to defend his own legacy.¹²

Military service histories provided the first in-depth analysis of the Okinawa campaign. Leading the way in 1947, the U.S. Army Historical Division's *Okinawa: The Last Battle* served as the most important secondary source for later works. All four authors had first-hand experience serving as embedded historians during the execution of the campaign, and their work comprises one volume of the U.S. Army Historical Division's seventy-nine volume collection from World War II, the "Green Book Series." *The Last Battle* only briefly addressed the strategic before proceeding to provide an in-depth tactical history of the Okinawa campaign. Other works in the series focused on the strategic level, but narrowed

¹¹ Appleman, Roy E., et al, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, Dept. of the Army, 1948), 490; Murray and Millett, 514.

¹² Ibid, 461. Buckner died of wounds received on June 18, 1945. He had been personally observing an attack by the 2nd Marine Division when he was struck in the chest by shrapnel from Japanese artillery.

in scope to individual topics including global grand strategy, theater level logistics, and strategic bombing.

Numerous historians have addressed Okinawa at the tactical level. In 1955 Chas Nichols and Henry Shaw penned the official Marine Corps history of the campaign, *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific*. Subsequent prominent accounts include Gerald Astor's *Operation Iceberg* and Robert Leckie's *Okinawa: the Last Battle of World War II*. Millet and Murray's *A War to Be Won* stands out among works addressing the entire Pacific theater by its singular attention to critiquing the leadership of Buckner

What is missing from all of these histories is an attempt to tie decisions made by Buckner to the overall strategic situation in the Pacific. Prominent histories of the campaign have echoed the comments of Lawrence, only judging leadership through the lens of the tactical. Leckie focused primarily on the tactical level and based his criticism of the campaign as a whole on the high number of Navy casualties. He devoted an entire chapter, "Minatoga: An Opportunity Lost," to criticize Buckner's failure to utilize his Marine units for a second landing at Minatoga, behind Japanese defenses on Okinawa.¹³ Leckie speculated that Buckner wanted Army units to receive the bulk of the honor for defeating the Japanese and deliberately delayed employing III Amphibious Corps

¹³ Though not addressed in this thesis, Navy Department documents undermine the claims of Lawrence and later historical critics of Buckner for not attempting a secondary landing at Minatoga. Captain A.E. Becker, chief of the Pacific subsection in the Chief of Naval Operation's War Plans Division reviewed all information available and determined that the beaches at Minatoga were not well suited for amphibious operations.

in southern Okinawa.¹⁴ Millet and Murray, while addressing the war as a whole, also focused on casualties in the campaign as the sole determinant in critiquing Buckner's leadership. Iwo Jima's 28,000 Marine casualties against 21,000 defenders, proportionally greater than Okinawa's 38,000 casualties when faced with 110,000 defenders, did not receive similar criticism. Neither work addressed strategic limitations to tactical operations at Okinawa.¹⁵

A headquarters at the army level of formation became a requirement as the Central Pacific campaign moved beyond operations against small island outposts to the larger landmasses closer to Japan. Pacific commanders initially selected Formosa as the objective of an operation, codenamed CAUSEWAY, which would have been Buckner's first command at the head of Tenth Army. His mixed force of Army and Marine divisions was to seize this key position in Japan's defensive perimeter. After months of planning, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cancelled CAUSEWAY due to shortages in required service troops, a decision in which Buckner played a key role.¹⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff then selected the Ryukyus Islands, including Okinawa, for Tenth Army's next objective. Smaller in size than Formosa, they offered the same advantages as Formosa: terrain suitable for both air and naval facilities and a location from which Army Air Force bombers could strike Japan.

¹⁴ Leckie, Robert, *Okinawa: The Last Battle of World War II* (New York: Viking, 1995), 155.

¹⁵ Leckie, *Okinawa*, 160; Millet and Murray, *A War to Be Won*, 512; Gerald Astor, *Operation Iceberg: The Invasion and Conquest of Okinawa in World War II* (New York: Donald Fine, 1995), 1.

¹⁶ Appleman, *Okinawa*, 4, 25.

The capture of the Ryukyus, in an operation eventually codenamed ICEBERG, would establish the final assault position for invasion of the Japanese Home Islands. Following the atomic bombing and surrender of Japan this operation instead became for the U.S. the last major battle of World War II, and one of its costliest.

Strategic Practice in the Pacific Theater, 1941-1944

Strategic practice has different vantage points ranging from branch of service, to experience and education, which produce different interpretations on which ways and means best accomplish the ends. Alfred Thayer Mahan's dominant place in U.S. naval theory pushed the concept of victory solely through sea control. Mahan believed that the control of commerce would ensure victory against an opponent dependent on oceangoing trade. Ground invasion would be unnecessary if the Navy had the power to dominate key shipping lanes.¹⁷

The Army remained divided between two vastly different strategic doctrines, one focusing on ground operations and one on the relatively new realm of air power. With the preponderance of its forces associated with ground combat, the dominant military theory can be traced from Napoleonic era theorist Antoine Jomini through updates by the lesser known Emory Upton and Elihu Root. Occupation of the enemy's home territory served as the only means to

¹⁷ Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, Public Domain, 8, 26-27, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13529/13529-h/13529-h.htm>.

achieve victory.¹⁸ Army Air Corps leaders, a minority within the Army as a whole, were primarily influenced by Italian air theorist Giulio Douhet and American aviation pioneer Billy Mitchell. Their concept that victory would best be achieved through the massing of air power, led to strategic bombing campaigns in both theaters of the war.¹⁹ Significantly, air power theory concerned the navy as well, where those focused on creating doctrine for warfare at sea sat astride Mahan and Douhet. Aviation would assist the main battle fleet in establishing sea control, but was also capable of continuous air strikes against the enemy homeland, thus giving carrier based aircraft both a tactical and strategic capability.²⁰

Decisions in war strategy closely followed these theoretical concepts. All strategic ways would require advanced bases to achieve the ends. The Navy would need bases from which it deploy surface, submarine, and air forces against Japanese shipping corridors. The Army Air Forces also required advanced bases, but for the purpose of placing heavy bombers in range of the enemy's industrial heart. Finally, the Army would require staging areas from which to mount a ground invasion force for Japan.

¹⁸ John L. Romjue, *American Army Doctrine for the Post-Cold War* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1997), 11-13.

¹⁹ Curtis LeMay, et al, *Strategic Air Warfare: An Interview with Generals Curtis E. LeMay, Leon W. Johnson, David A. Burchinal, and Jack J. Catton*, eds. Richard A. Kohn and Joseph P. Harahan (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, U.S. Air Force, 1988), 28, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112002117478>.

²⁰ Thomas C. Hone, "Replacing Battleships with Carriers in the Pacific in World War II," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (2013), 56-57.

Military service doctrine played a significant role in determining United States strategy at the onset of World War II. It continued as a point of debate and contention until the final stages of the war. The addition of grand personalities like Generals Douglas MacArthur and Hap Arnold, and Admiral “Bull” Halsey, added further complexity to the planning and execution of strategy in the war against Japan. When Buckner assumed command of Tenth Army in June, 1944, his future operations were inextricably tied to the interaction of these elements.

Chapter 1: Okinawa in the Strategic Context, 1941-1945

Many strategic factors played a role in setting the stage for Operation ICEBERG., but all shared a common component: logistics. The splitting of the Pacific into two commands led to competing demands for resources. Though the U.S. military was able to support both theaters through 1943, the next two years stretched the limits of the country's industrial power and force generation capability.

In a similar fashion, divergent views on how to achieve strategic objectives led to additional competition for troops, shipping, and logistics. They also helped determine intermediate objectives on the path to Japan. Strategic bombing, which ramped up operations starting in mid-1944, required Nimitz to secure several islands in the Marianas specifically for their suitability as B-29 bases.

Twentieth century American military strategy reflects the dominant role of logistics. All military ways and means share a dependency on supply lines stretching from the scene of action to the homeland. General Omar Bradley, commander of the U.S. 12th Army Group in World War II and post-war Army Chief of Staff, frequently stated that military "amateurs talk tactics, professionals talk logistics."¹ During World War II, U.S. offensive strategy often expended

¹ Richard Shireff, "Conducting Joint Operations," in *The Oxford Handbook of War*, eds. Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 376. For a naval perspective, ADM

significant effort to target both enemy production and movement of material. Strategic bombing in both theaters focused primarily on industrial areas, and submarine warfare in the Pacific aimed to cut off Japan from its raw material sources in Southeast Asia.² During the prelude to D-Day U.S. airpower devastated French railways to cut off both reinforcements and logistics from reaching Normandy. Late in World War II the biggest impediment to U.S. logistics came not from the enemy, but from distance.

Prior to World War II, the 1916 punitive expedition in northern Mexico was the last time the U.S. carried out a land-only campaign. The First World War required extensive sea, and to some extent air transport, to support military efforts. The geographical scope of World War II stretched even the vast logistical resources of the United States, exemplifying a military strategy problem more recently coined as the “tyranny of distance.”³ According to this concept, the amount of logistics required to exert power grows exponentially as the distance from the borders of a nation increases. This leads to larger and larger supply chains that consume a majority of the material before it reaches front-line military forces.⁴ What’s described as the “tooth-to-tail” ratio measures the corresponding

Hyman Rickover stated the “bitter experience in war has taught the maxim that the art of war is the art of the logistically feasible.” Quoted from *The Logistics of War*, eds. Andrew W. Hunt, James C. Rainey, and Beth Scott (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Logistics Management Agency, 2000), 168.

² LeMay, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 47, 54.

³ Military theorists borrowed this phrase from the title of a 1966 book by Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia’s History*.

⁴ Lester W. Grau and Jacob W. Kipp, “Bridging the Pacific: The Tyranny of Time and Distance,” *Military Review* (July-August 2000), 71.

effect on personnel requirements. U.S. ground forces in World War II operated at a typical ratio of 1:4, or four support personnel per armed combatant.⁵

The Pacific war dwarfed the European theater in size and distance between forces, further skewing the tooth-to-tail ratio. Supply vessels required seventeen days to travel from Pearl Harbor to Okinawa and twenty-six days to journey from San Francisco.⁶ In comparison, ports in Europe could be reached in less than two weeks from East Coast ports. U.S. West Coast port capacity also proved insufficient, forcing a portion of Pacific logistics through ports on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts.⁷ Increasingly hardened Japanese defenses at Iwo Jima and Okinawa added to the supply chain problems. Massive expenditures of ammunition proved the only option to destroy cave and concrete positions. Major General Ben Hodge, commander of the XXIV Army Corps at Okinawa, referred to the battle as “90% logistics and 10% fighting.”⁸

The United States began a series of operations in the spring of 1945 intended to isolate Japan and provide positions from which to force their surrender. Indecision by the Joint Chiefs of Staff through mid-1943 continued to frustrate strategic planning efforts to defeat Japan. The split of the Pacific Ocean

⁵ John J. McGrath, *The Other End of the Spear: The Tooth-to-Tail Ratio (T3R) in Modern Military Operations* (Ft. Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007), 18.

⁶ Samuel Eliot Morrison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Vol. XIV: Victory in the Pacific 1945* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1960), 165.

⁷ Sarantakes, Introduction to *Seven Stars*, 5

⁸ Major General Ben Hodges, April 12, 1945 interview with LTC Stevens, Army Historical Division, untitled notes, 1-26 April 1945, 10th Army Operations Reports 1940-48, Box 2441, Entry (EN) 427, Army Adjutant Generals Office, Record Group (RG) 407, National Archives College Park (NACP).

into two theater commands, the Southwest Pacific Area under General Douglas MacArthur and the Pacific Ocean Area under Admiral Chester Nimitz, served as the primary culprit. Service chiefs Marshall and King each lobbied for their own officers to receive overall command in the Pacific.

To keep the peace President Roosevelt urged maintaining the status quo, dooming any chance of a Pacific unity of effort similar to General Dwight Eisenhower's European Theater of Operations.⁹ According to Edwin Hoyt, the division of the theater resulted in a disruption of ten years' worth of U.S. Navy pre-war planning that envisioned a direct push across the Pacific to China. While Nimitz and King continued with this plan in the Central Pacific, MacArthur's campaign progressed through a ground forces heavy southerly route that would have been bypassed by the Navy.¹⁰ Ronald Spector argued that the dual campaigns, while portrayed as a safe and sensible strategy, nearly led to disaster. Each theater had come close to massive setbacks, for Nimitz at Bougainville in 1943 and for MacArthur at Biak in 1944.¹¹

Decisions made by the two theater commanders frequently interfered with the operations of their counterparts, making any strategic planning difficult. Both theater commanders, like their service chiefs, jockeyed for designation of their

⁹ Ed Cray, *General of the Army: George C. Marshall Soldier and Statesman* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 377-79.

¹⁰ Edwin P. Hoyt, *How They Won the War in the Pacific: Nimitz and His Admirals* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2012), 295.

¹¹ Ronald Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War Against Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 3.

area of operations as the decisive effort to defeat Japan. To keep the peace between the two public heroes of the Pacific, a plan for merging their command structures awaited victory on Okinawa, when MacArthur would assume command of all Army forces and Nimitz all Navy forces.¹²

Strategic Endgame, 1944-1945

Beyond the competition between theater commanders Nimitz and MacArthur, senior leaders of the military expressed support of the Joint Chiefs' strategic vision, but promoted strategic planning that favored their own service in ways that were at odds with the Joint Chiefs' vision. At the Joint Chiefs of Staff level, all strategic communications after August 1944 included a two-step process to win the war. Step one involved "lowering Japanese ability and will to resist by establishing sea and air blockades, conducting intensive air bombardment, and destroying Japanese air and naval strength." Step two called for victory through "invading and seizing objectives in the industrial heart of Japan."¹³ Competition between the services for primacy on operational ways contributed to a reduction in military effectiveness during the waning months of the war.

¹² Wesley F. Craven and John L. Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. V: From Matterhorn to Nagasaki, June 1944 to August 1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 531-32.

¹³ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Strategic Survey Committee 119, "Report on Operations Against Japan Subsequent to Formosa," *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Records of the JCS), Part 1: Pacific Theater (PT), Pacific Ocean Area (POA)* Reel 9, (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1983), August 30, 1944, 119.

Army Air Force leaders continued to hold the belief that strategic bombing alone would induce surrender. General Hap Arnold and his senior B-29 commander in the Central Pacific, Major General Curtis LeMay¹⁴, believed that heavy bombing of Japanese cities provided the option that would be the most cost effective and result in the fewest American casualties.¹⁵ They continued to push for a massive expansion of very long range (VLR) bombers, several times deliberately exceeding Joint Chiefs authorized unit numbers, a move that competed for personnel, logistics, and shipping with forces required to take and hold Japanese possessions. On the naval side, Admiral Earnest King, Chief of Naval Operations, served as lead advocate for a tight blockade of the Japanese Home Islands to choke off access to necessary civilian and military supplies. This option received little support as a means to end the war, but still resulted in extensive submarine and air interdiction of Japanese shipping lanes.¹⁶

A third and final approach favored by Marshall, and both Nimitz and MacArthur, argued that only through the invasion of Kyushu, and Honshu if necessary, would Japan surrender.¹⁷ Months of B-29 firebombing attacks

¹⁴ Army Air Forces LTG Millard Harmon (later MG Willis Hale and LTG Barney Gilles) on paper served as Deputy Commander of Arnold's Twentieth Air Force and the Pacific Theater's senior strategic bomber commander. In reality LeMay, commander of XXI Bomber Command, served as the theater's primary advocate and operational commander of the strategic bombing campaign against Japan.

¹⁵ LeMay, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 59, 62. LeMay was asked if "you were trying to defeat Japan specifically by means of strategic air power, and there were no ifs, ands, or buts about it?" LeMay responded with a curt "that's right"; Herman S. Wolk, *Cataclysm: General Hap Arnold and the Defeat of Japan* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2010), 66-69.

¹⁶ Ernest J. King and Walter M. Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1952), 437-41, 529-30; Hoyt, *How They Won the War in the Pacific*, 486.

¹⁷ Wolk, *Cataclysm*, 72-73; William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 431.

inflicted civilian casualties far exceeding the carnage in Germany, but did not diminish the will of the Japanese military to fight.¹⁸ Instead, resistance actually increased as the U.S. moved closer to Japan, undermining the premise of the Navy and Army's indirect approach strategies. Bombing and blockade appeared to require a timeline that extended beyond the limits of a war weary U.S. nation. Combined with uncertainty regarding the results of the Manhattan Project, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that Japan would likely surrender only in the event of physical occupation. Even so, this shift in strategic ways did not slow the growth of the bombing campaign. It continued until the end of the war, requiring a significant share of Pacific theater resources.

Pre-war planning had included the seizure of Formosa as a necessary step to victory in a war against Japan. After regaining the initiative from early Japanese victories, the 1939 Rainbow II plan, developed by the Joint Army-Navy Board, assumed initial victories by Japan, but envisioned regaining the initiative through recapturing the Philippines. The islands would then serve as a base for attacks against Japanese forces on the Chinese coast and Formosa.¹⁹ The lack of an updated strategic plan during the early war years left Formosa as a de-facto objective. In 1943 this materialized as Operation CAUSEWAY, intended for execution in Nimitz's Central Pacific campaign during spring 1945. Designed to seize only a portion of Formosa, those areas best suited for airfields and naval

¹⁸ LeMay, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 58.

¹⁹ Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 257-58.

facilities, CAUSEWAY would sever Japan from its supply bases and forces in Southeast Asia. It would also serve as a base for operations on the coast of China and the Japanese Home Islands. Strategic bombers based in the Marianas and China would have flight distances to Japan cut in half, as well as added protection from long-range fighter escorts.

A series of strategic factors in late 1944-early 1945 quickly led U.S. leaders to alter plans regarding Formosa. The invasion of Leyte in October 1944 fulfilled MacArthur's promise to return to the Philippines and provided an advanced base for the planned attack on Formosa. But MacArthur requested an additional operation to seize the island of Luzon and liberate Manila, a requirement not accounted for in long-range plans.²⁰ War Department planners pointed out that until Germany was defeated, troop availability precluded simultaneous major operations in both the Southwest and Central Pacific theaters. MacArthur's Luzon invasion would overlap the planned timeline for CAUSEWAY.²¹

Senior leaders of the Army Air Force called into question initial assumptions by CAUSEWAY planners that Army aircraft could reach Formosa from central Philippine airbases. Without land-based air support, an invasion of Formosa would have faced significant Japanese air power from the island itself,

²⁰ Hoyt, *How They Won the War in the Pacific*, 353.

²¹ War Department, Operations Division, SS 282 MISC, *Comparison of Operation "Central Luzon" Based on Revised RENO V and Operation CAUSEWAY Based on GRANITE II*, (undated), 1; SS 282 MISC, *Discussion of Assumption that war in Europe ends by 15 NOV 44*, 1 September, 1944, 2, Box 366, Entry 421, Office of Director of Plans and Operations, TS, ABC Correspondence, 1940-1948, War Department General and Special Staffs, RG 165, NACP.

mainland China, and the southern Home Islands. Naval aviation was insufficient to gain air superiority. Other voices called into question the entire premise behind the Formosa operation.²²

When assessing the range of operations available after CAUSEWAY the Joint Staff Planners concluded that the seizure of Formosa was unnecessary for the invasion of Japan, as the Ryukyus would still have to be occupied.²³ With this in mind senior leaders soon came to the conclusion that the strategic premise for CAUSEWAY no longer existed: the East China Sea could be severed by air and naval forces operating from the Philippines and any subsequent invasion of China would lengthen, rather than shorten, the war.

Most importantly, Buckner identified a critical shortage of combat and service troops available for Operation CAUSEWAY. Initial requirements for the limited occupation were 414,000 personnel, with an additional 150,000 troops needed for the seizure of the nearby island of Amoy.²⁴ U.S. Army Major General Edmond Leavey, Nimitz's assistant chief of staff for logistics, wrote in an internal memo on August 26, 1944, that "Army Service Troops for CAUSEWAY over and above what is already in the Pacific Ocean Areas are going to be practically

²² Clayton K.S. Chun, *Leyte, 1944: Return to the Philippines* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2015), 7.

²³ JCS, enclosure to JCS 924, "Operations Against Japan Subsequent to FORMOSA," *Records of the JCS, Part I: 1942-1945, The Pacific Theater, Pacific Ocean Areas* (Reel 9), June 30, 1944.

²⁴ HQ, Tenth Army, CMDR Tenth Army to CINCPAC, *Forces – CAUSEWAY – GRANITE II*, August 17, 1944, 17, Box 71, Tenth U.S. Army A.G. Section Operational Reports and Plans, 1944-1945, U.S. Army Commands 1942-1945, RG 338, NACP.

impossible to find.”²⁵ Upon reexamination of CAUSEWAY, senior planners determined that the entire island must be taken.²⁶ Estimates from the Army’s War Plans Division identified a shortfall of 132,000 combat troops and 300,000 service troops to occupy all of Formosa, well beyond the quantity of troops available, even given the May, 1945 defeat of Germany.²⁷

Operation ICEBERG Emerges

After realizing Operation CAUSEWAY lacked the resources for execution, particularly in light of MacArthur’s success in adding Luzon to the Philippine Campaign objectives, Nimitz and the Joint Chiefs shifted direction to occupation of islands in the Ryukyu and Bonin chains. Iwo Jima, largest of the volcanic Bonins, offered a base for long-range fighter aircraft escorts to Marianas-based B-29s. The island’s small size also allowed the operation to occur simultaneously with the invasion of Luzon. The Ryukyus offered both naval anchorages and a large tactical and strategic airfield capacity half the distance of that from the Marianas to Japan. U.S. military planners estimated enemy forces in the Ryukyus to be considerably lower than those on Formosa, which would significantly reduce the U.S. forces required for combat and support. This made

²⁵ HQ, CINCPAC, Assistant Chief of Staff, Logistics to 46, *Service Troops for CAUSEWAY*, August 23, 1944, 1, Box 71, Tenth Army A.G., RG 338, NACP.

²⁶ Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), War Plans Division, VADM D.B. Duncan to VADM Charles Cooke, *Future Operations in the Pacific*, Box 68, Strategic Plans, War Department (Series III), Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, RG 38, NACP.

²⁷ War Department, Operations Division, SS 282 Misc, *Comparison of Operation “Central Luzon” Based on Revised RENO V and Operation CAUSEWAY Based on GRANITE II*, 2-3, Box 366, Entry 421, Office of Director of Plans and Operations, TS “ABC Correspondence 1940-48, RG 165, NACP

the Ryukyus operation seem more feasible than CAUSEWAY, but the requirements were still large enough to delay the operation until the conclusion of the Luzon and Iwo Jima campaigns.²⁸ Japan was given additional time to reinforce Okinawa and prepare defenses, increasing both casualties and strain to the U.S. logistics system.

Nimitz's selection to command ICEBERG, Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr., took command of the Tenth U.S. Army with limited combat experience. Buckner was the son of Confederate Lieutenant General, and later governor of Kentucky, Simon Bolivar Buckner. He spent two years at the Virginia Military Institute before his father secured an appointment directly from President Theodore Roosevelt to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Buckner graduated in 1908 and had an uneventful career over the next 30 years. During World War I he served in a stateside training position until transferring to aviation, but the war ended before he completed flight training.²⁹

Most of Buckner's assignments in the 1920s and 1930s were spent in the academic circles of the Army. During that time Buckner distinguished himself as a student at the Command and General Staff College and the Army War College, earning instructor positions at both institutions immediately after graduation from the courses. He also served as West Point's Commandant of Cadets, helping to

²⁸ War Department, Operations Division, *SS 282*, 2-3.

²⁹ Sarantakes, Introduction to *Seven Stars*, 10-11.

shape a cohort of officers that included General Matthew Ridgeway, future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

During these assignments Buckner gained a reputation for strict adherence to doctrine, discipline, and maintaining physical fitness. He drove his own staff hard, at one point drawing the ire of older officers by running them through obstacle courses on Oahu. Shortly after the U.S. entered World War II, then-Colonel Buckner received an appointment to command all Army forces in Alaska, and a corresponding promotion to brigadier general. Three years later Buckner's successful management of an increasingly larger force, including command of joint Army and Navy forces, led to his promotion to lieutenant general and selection to form the new Tenth Army.³⁰

Buckner's new Operation ICEBERG, though not conceived to be on the scale of CAUSEWAY, nevertheless dwarfed the Normandy landings in size and complexity. Just moving the combat units into assault positions required precisely-sequenced shipping operations. The three Army divisions and corps headquarters embarked from the Philippines, the three Marine divisions set out from Pacific islands geographically distant from one another, and Tenth Army headquarters departed from Hawaii. Over 1,300 vessels took part in L-day (landing day).³¹ This complex arrangement was nearly undone by MacArthur's

³⁰ Sarantakes, Introduction to *Seven Stars*, 10-11; Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 18.

³¹ HQ, Tenth Army, *Tenth Army Action Report: Report of Operations in the Ryukyus Campaign 26 March 1945 to 30 June 1945 (Action Report Ryukyus)*, September 3, 1945, 5-0-5, 7-III-1, Box 2440, Entry 421, RG 407, NACP.

refusal to release units allocated for ICEBERG from operations on Leyte in time to refit and load shipping.

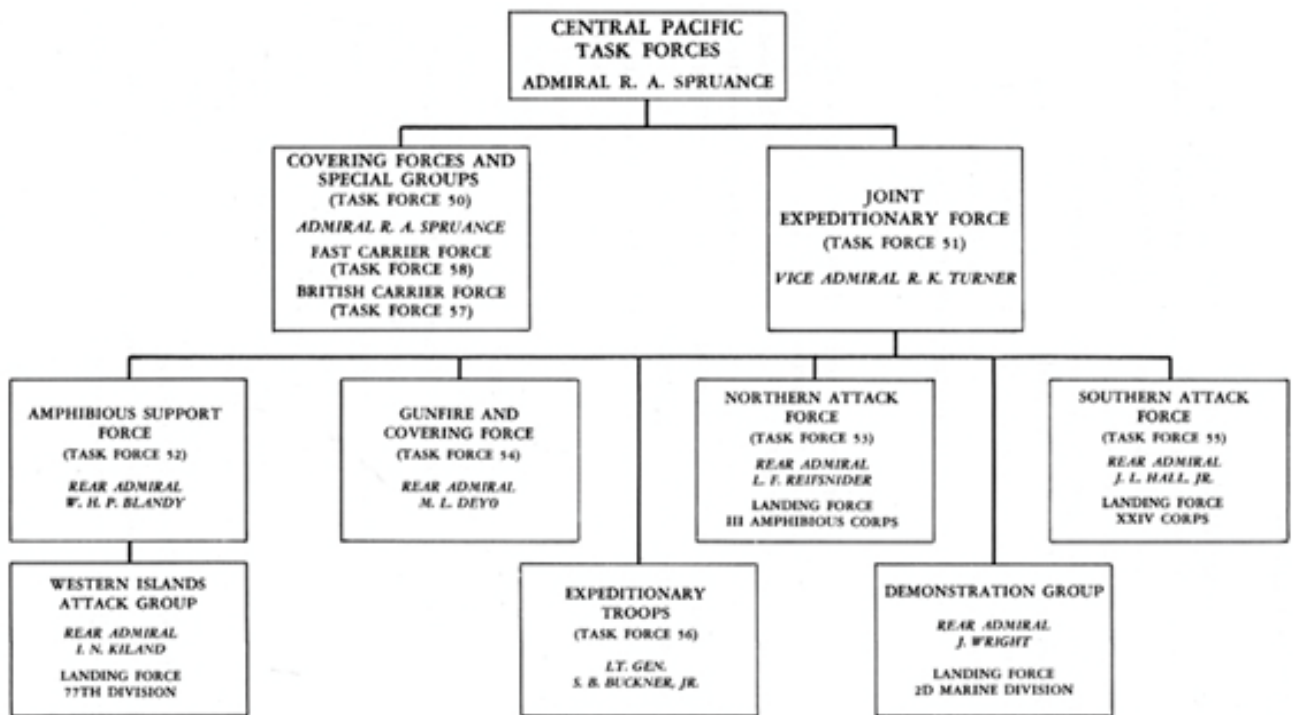
Plans for the operation were premised on a considerable underestimation of the number of enemy forces on the island. Intelligence reports identified a garrison of between 48,000 and 70,000 defenders, when in reality the number was over 117,000.³² Timetables for occupation of the islands and construction of airfields and ports, critical to maintaining the Kyushu and Honshu invasion dates, failed to take into account that the Japanese would staunchly defend the mountainous southern half of Okinawa, rather than concentrate on contesting the initial landing, as had been expected. Post-battle analysis claimed a total of 110,000 Japanese and Okinawans killed in action, only 7,000 were captured. The additional time required to defeat the Japanese disrupted planned shipping schedules and increased logistics consumption exacerbated service troop shortages.

A final factor making ICEBERG a particularly complicated operation, at both the tactical and strategic level, relates to the complexity of its command structure. Amphibious doctrine called for command to reside with the Navy until sufficient forces and logistics ashore allowed a ground force commander to assume command authority. At Okinawa the overall senior command for the

³² HQ, CINCPAC, *ICEBERG, CINCPAC Staff Study*, Serial 000131, October 25, 1944, 8, Box 71, Entry 421, RG 338, NACP.; JCS, Joint Staff Planners, "Operations Against Japan Subsequent to Formosa," *Records of the JCS, Part 1: PT, POA*, June 30, 1944, 100; Appleman, *Okinawa*, 490. In an interview two weeks before the invasion Buckner still held to an estimation of 65,000 Japanese defenders. 21 MAR 45 interview of LTG Buckner by SGT Burns, Army Historical Division, 10th Army Operations Reports, 1940-48, 110-0.3-110-0.013, Box 71, Entry 427, RG 338, NACP.

amphibious phase belonged to Admiral Raymond Spruance, 5th Fleet commander. Responsibility for the landing force, both ground and naval forces, fell to Task Force 51 commander Vice Admiral Richmond Turner. Buckner's Tenth Army, designated as Expeditionary Troops, Task Force 56, fell under Turner's command.³³

Figure 1: Central Pacific Organization for ICEBERG, January, 1945



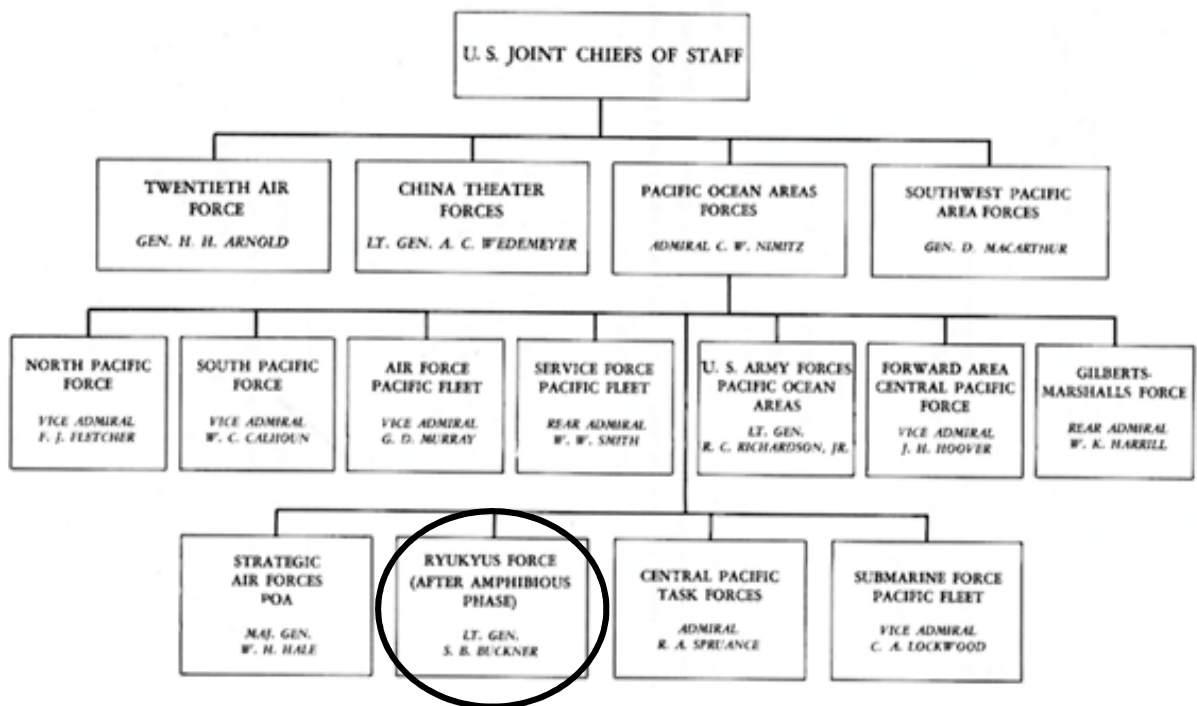
Source: Appleman, *Okinawa*, 22.

Once Turner gave the order, Buckner's headquarters transformed from solely ground combat control to assume command of all United States forces in the vicinity of the islands, designated as Ryukyus Force. With this change

³³ Appleman, *Okinawa*, 20-23.

Buckner reported directly to Nimitz, removing 5th Fleet from the chain of command. Spruance, and later Admiral “Bull” Halsey, retained significant responsibilities in support of ICEBERG, but also took on additional command duties related to preparation for the invasion of Japan.³⁴

Figure 2: Pacific Theater Organization, January, 1945



Source: Appleman, *Okinawa*, 20.

During both the planning and initial execution of ICEBERG Nimitz frequently corresponded directly with Buckner, bypassing two chain of command levels. This relationship reflected the interconnectedness of operational execution and future planning. Through mid-April Spruance served as primary

³⁴ Appleman, *Okinawa*, 23.

conduit for current operations discussions. Nimitz dealt directly with Buckner on any issues that affected operations beyond Spruance and Turner's direct command of ICEBERG.

Buckner's role in the cancellation of CAUSEWAY foreshadowed the issues that he wrestled with during ICEBERG. His requests for service troops were still not met, but the deficit was not large enough to stop the operation. Buckner's command executed the dual responsibilities of clearing the Ryukyus of Japanese defenders and of building a massive operational base for the invasion of Kyushu. Upon the establishment of a beachhead and assumption of joint command from Turner, Buckner operated one level below the theater commander and just two levels below the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

While Buckner and his staff were still planning for Operation CAUSEWAY, the Japanese 32nd Army was reinforcing Okinawa, Tenth Army's ultimate objective. The final bastion of Japan's crumbling defensive perimeter, the terrain of Okinawa was well suited for defense, with the southern half of the island dominated by rolling hills and east to west running ravines. The 32nd Army's commander, Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima, established a series of defensive lines by tunneling into the soft coral and limestone hills, creating vast underground complexes for his over 100,000 troops. Rather than face devastating naval gunfire trying to defend the beaches, the Japanese waited on high ground for U.S., protected from the low-angle fire of naval guns. Defensive positions were well stocked for extended operations, allowing soldiers to remain

under cover and limit exposure to the massive amount of firepower available to the invasion force.³⁵

Major action commenced at Okinawa on April 1, 1945, with over 1,300 ships in the invasion force. On landing day, naval gunfire from battleships and other combatant vessels were concentrated on possible enemy positions overlooking the invasion beaches. Expecting heavy initial resistance from the Japanese similar to Iwo Jima, 2 Army and 2 Marine divisions landed abreast at Hagushi on the west coast. With the Japanese avoiding an early confrontation, U.S. forces quickly drove across to the east coast. Continuing to execute based off the original ICEBERG plan, the III Marine Amphibious Corps turned north while the XXIV Army Corps moved south. The Marines advanced 84 miles to occupy the northern half of Okinawa, only opposed by 2,500 Japanese defenders, completing the task on April 18.³⁶

While Tenth Army enjoyed a relatively easy first week of operations, the Japanese unleashed their last remaining air and naval forces in a desperate attack to cripple the U.S. fleet. The battleship *Yamato*, the largest battleship ever built, departed Japan on April 6 on a one-way voyage to Okinawa. But *Yamato* and her escorts never reached their destination, the entire fleet was destroyed by relentless air attacks launched from U.S. carriers.³⁷ The Japanese air arm was much more successful in their mission. Hundreds of *kamikaze* aircraft attacked

³⁵ Leckie, *Okinawa*, 6-7.

³⁶ Appleman, *Okinawa*, 68-69, 75-76.

³⁷ Leckie, *Okinawa*, 92, 95.

U.S. combat and cargo vessels throughout Operation ICEBERG. Though ultimately unsuccessful in preventing the loss of Okinawa, the *kamikaze* sunk 34 U.S. ships and damaged 364 more. Total losses for the U.S. Navy were close to that of the ground forces, with nearly 5,000 killed and 4,800 wounded.³⁸

The first of ICEBERG's Phase II missions, an amphibious operation to bypass Japanese defenses and seize the northern Motubu Peninsula, was no longer required due to the Marine's speedy advance. The second objective of Phase II, the nearby island of Ie Shima, was also secured earlier than planned. After the first week of limited resistance on Okinawa, Buckner ordered the Army's 77th Infantry Division to seize the Ie Shima on April 16. After several days of hard fighting, during which famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle was killed, the island was declared to be secured on April 21.³⁹

To the south the XXIV Corps faced similar light opposition from April 4 to April 8. But they soon hit the main line of Japanese positions, built into fortified caves of the hilly terrain of southern Okinawa and centered on the ancient Shuri Castle. Later analysis would show that the defenders of Okinawa had the highest concentration of artillery encountered during the Pacific War. With both of the corps divisions heavily engaged, Buckner ordered the reserve 27th Infantry

³⁸ Appleman, *Okinawa*, 473.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 148-49, 163, 181.

Division into action. Even three divisions were not enough to crack the stout defenses.⁴⁰

With casualties mounting, Buckner began a piecemeal commitment of III Amphibious Corps from its positions in the north. Marine formations relieved worn-out units of the XXIV Corps at the end of April. After completing its task at Ie Shima, the 77th Infantry Division was also thrust into the fight against the Shuri defenses.⁴¹ Author E.B. Sledge was a member of the 1st Marine Division at Okinawa. In his World War II memoirs Sledge titled the chapter covering the division's commitment to the southern front: "Into the Abyss."⁴² As his unit moved in to take over positions from the Army's 27th Infantry Division Sledge described the chaos unfolding:

We ran and dodged as fast as we could to a place on a low gentle slope of the ridge and flung ourselves panting onto the dirt. Marines were running and crawling into position as soldiers streamed past us, trying desperately to get out alive. The yells for corpsmen and stretcher bearers began to be heard. Even though I was occupied with my own safety, I couldn't help but feel sorry for the battle-weary troops being relieved and trying not to get killed during those few critical minutes as they scrambled back out of the positions under fire.⁴³

Buckner was forced to resort to tactics utilized in earlier battles, most recently by the Marine Corps on Iwo Jima. Personally described by the general

⁴⁰ Appleman, *Okinawa*, 91, 104, 113

⁴¹ Astor, *Operation ICEBERG*, 278, 281.

⁴² Sledge, E.B., *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1981), 205.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 206.

as the 'blowtorch and corkscrew' method, flamethrower tanks and direct cannon fire, the 'blowtorch,' suppressed enemy fire. This allowed infantry and engineers, the 'corkscrew,' to use explosives and gasoline to seal or clear caves. It was a brutal, deadly affair that required each individual fighting position to be reduced one by one. As all positions were mutually supported, casualties on the exposed 'corkscrew' teams were extremely high.⁴⁴

Even with all available units committed to the southern front, Buckner's Tenth Army required two months to break through the Shuri Line, finally achieving success on May 29. It would take another three weeks of heavy combat to secure the remainder of Okinawa, which was declared to be secured on June 21, three days after Buckner's death. The next day, General Ushijima and his chief of staff, having failed in their mission, committed suicide.⁴⁵

Front-line combat units bore the brunt of ground casualties. Amongst the over 7,000 dead and 32,000 wounded ground troops were Sledge and many of his comrades. In Sledge's infantry company, only 23 out of 65 veterans of the earlier Battle of Peleliu came through Okinawa unscathed. Tenth Army also suffered from over 13,000 non-battle losses, a significant portion coming from "combat fatigue," a condition now classified as post-traumatic stress.⁴⁶ Given the

⁴⁴ Sarantakes, Introduction to *Seven Stars*, 6; Appleman, *Okinawa*, 256.

⁴⁵ Astor, *Operation ICEBERG*, 404, 428, 431.

⁴⁶ Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, 317; Astor, *Operation ICEBERG*, 403.

brutal nature of the fighting at Okinawa, it was natural for Buckner's subordinates to offer suggestions for how to speed up the defeat of the Japanese.

When observing Buckner's operational and tactical problems only from the narrow perspective of Okinawa, they appear easy to overcome for the U.S. military juggernaut. However, facing the combination of years of strategic indecision in the Pacific, a protracted campaign in Europe, and tight timelines for the invasion of Japan, Buckner's decision making at Okinawa was constrained by the strategic situation in the Pacific. These constraints, either specified by higher commands or a result of the general war situation, limited tactical freedom of action. Though Nimitz's defense of Buckner highlighted terrain difficulties and inter-service rivalry, neither factor explains the roots of the general's tactics at Okinawa. A deeper look into three strategic factors: service troop shortages, lack of shipping, and support to strategic bombing, identifies how they ultimately shaped the outcome of Operation ICEBERG.

Chapter 2: Service Troops in Short Supply

In November 1944, a Pearl Harbor conference room was the scene of a debate between men whose organizations consisted of hundreds of thousands to millions of military personnel. The assembled senior staff officers of CINCPAC, USAFPOA, Tenth Army and other commands were desperately trying to address a severe shortage of the service units required for Operation ICEBERG. The Pacific Theater had already been stripped of every available unit for the upcoming offensive so the conferees looked to curtail lower priority missions. After a lengthy discussion of the causes of the shortage, Rear Admiral McMorris, Nimitz's logistics officer, suggested reducing services in Hawaii, proclaiming that "some of the Engineer activities could be cut off...we have to get engineers from somewhere." Various engineer activities in Hawaii were examined, but by the end of the tabulation Colonel Marston, the USAFPOA G-4, frustratingly drew the frustrating conclusion that any such moves would be a "drop in the bucket" and that "we have a deficiency of some 40,000 troops and what we are talking about, will give us two to three hundred men."¹

Decisions made in 1941 and 1942 that calculated the numbers of U.S. troops thought to be required to win World War II had set the nation on a course

¹ HQ, CINCPAC, *Minutes of Conference between Staff Representatives of CINCPAC, COMGENPOA, COMGENAAFPOA, and COMGEN10THARMY on 24 November, 1944*, November 24, 1944, 12-14, 16, 18, Box 71, Entry 421, RG 338, NACP.

for the types of dilemmas faced by the planners of Operation ICEBERG in 1945. The Army's 1941 Victory Plan set a requirement for 8,500,000 personnel, including 215 combat divisions, to win a two-front war.² Largely based on a timeline that included a landing in France in 1943, pre-war supplying of the Allies with already limited U.S. material slowed the growth of Army units and doomed any large scale invasion prior to 1944. Instead the U.S., under pressure from its Soviet allies, settled for the fall 1943 Operation TORCH in North Africa. Once committed to Mediterranean Theater, further Allied landings at Sicily and Salerno continued to drain combat units and logistics from the build-up for a cross-channel invasion of France.³

A faulty assumption that the war in Europe would be concluded by the end of 1944, thus allowing a shift of resources to the Pacific, hampered strategic planning for the final campaigns against Japan. The Pacific Theater was placed in this position in large part due to the decision to prioritize the defeat of Germany over Japan. President Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs made this decision based on two considerations. First, that Great Britain and the Soviet Union would not be victorious without U.S. assistance. Second, that U.S. economic interests were tied more to Europe than Asia.⁴

² Charles E. Kirkpatrick, *An Unknown Future and a Doubtful Present: Writing the Victory Plan of 1941* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2010), 81, 98, <http://www.history.army.mil/catalog/pubs/93/93-10.html>.

³ Ibid, 102.

⁴ Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Greenfield (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1960), 40-42, http://www.history.army.mil/books/70-7_01.htm.

With the war against Germany extending into 1945, caps on military end strength proved too low for a global war stretching into 1945 and beyond. While the number of combat divisions required was less than half of the 215 projected, the opposite occurred for support units. Post-war analysis shows that a 15,000 soldier combat division actually required 45,000 service troops for support, not the Victory Plan's 15,000. MacArthur's campaign in the Southwest Pacific and extensive operations in the Mediterranean were not part of pre-war projections, further increasing the demand for service troops for logistics support.⁵ The situation became increasingly critical as the war against Germany extended well beyond the post-Normandy estimation of military planners. In the Pacific, Operation CAUSEWAY served as the first strategic casualty of pre-war failure to accurately estimate necessary manpower.

Both the Navy and the Army faced crippling personnel challenges after President Roosevelt in early 1945 denied their requests for any increases to overall end strength. The Chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Vice Admiral Randall Jacobs, shared his frustration with his service's personnel situation in a March 14, 1945, letter to Admiral King. Jacobs complained that "this Bureau is now receiving answers from the Chief of Naval Operations disapproving requests for increases ashore on the ground that no activity can be reduced to provide the equivalent savings." He went on to blame the naval aviation program for exceeding its personnel authorizations. Jacobs warned that "we will be required

⁵ Kirkpatrick, *Victory Plan*, 106.

to decide what shall be done and what must be slowed up for the rest of the war (underlined in original) with the realization that the greatest shortage is of personnel and not material.”⁶ Eight days later Jacobs’ deputy, Rear Admiral L.E. Denfield, provided King with the projected enlisted shore based personnel shortfalls: 37,000 on June 30, 1945, and 95,000 on June 30, 1946.⁷

Army shortages were just as acute. Early decisions on service force structure did not match the strategic conditions of the Pacific, resulting in a skewed ratio between combat and service personnel. The Victory Plan was based on projected European requirements, which was estimated to be a one-to-one ratio of service to combat personnel within the combat theater.⁸ This proved grossly misbalanced for Pacific operations as the war entered 1945, where extended supply lines required significantly more service troops. In order to support ICEBERG, commands from across the Pacific had shipping allocations reduced, and some currently employed service units were pulled from duties to participate in the operation. A study by the War Department’s Operations Division identified shortages for Phase I of ICEBERG, though not enough to stop

⁶ Navy Department, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chief Bureau of Naval Personnel to CIC U.S. Fleet and CNO, *The Personnel Situation*, March, 14, 1945, 1, Box 68, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

⁷ Ibid, From BuPers to CNO, *Advanced Base Enlisted Personnel Requirements – Report On*, April 22, 1945, 1.

⁸Kirkpatrick, *Victory Plan*, 95-96.

execution. Planners doubted that the later phases of the operation would be possible as no further service troops were available, even within the U.S.⁹

In Europe combat divisions were engaged in fighting continuously after the Normandy landings. The scale of combat was massive. In late 1944 the U.S. Army had 44 divisions engaged in the European Theater, compared to 21 in the Pacific.¹⁰ New divisions were constantly fed into combat after D-Day. The expansion of the battle front after the breakout from Normandy forced General Dwight Eisenhower to commit units directly into the front lines rather than relieving worn out units. The number of divisions peaked by the end of the year, with General Eisenhower forced to rotate crippled divisions to quieter areas of the front line. From the Battle off the Bulge to the defeat of Germany individual replacements, rather than unit-sized replacements, were the lifeblood of the theater, with divisions averaging 100 percent casualties every 3 months of combat.¹¹

Service units in Europe were only required to open a small number of ports. The most significant logistics problem occurred in the months following the breakout from Normandy when a shortage of trucks prevented sustainment of the Allies rapidly advancing armies. This was eventually solved by the repair and

⁹ War Department, Operations Division, Memo for Chief, Strategy and Policy Group, OPD, *Forces and Resources for ICEBERG*, January 8, 1945, 1-2, Box 465, Entry 421, RG 165, NACP.

¹⁰ Maurice Matloff, "The 90-Division Gamble" in *Command Decisions*, 379, http://www.history.army.mil/books/70-7_15.htm.

¹¹ Kirkpatrick, *Victory Plan*, 112.

rehabilitation of French rail lines and the capture of ports in Belgium, the Netherlands, and western and southern France. By the time of the Battle of the Bulge rear area service units were providing individual infantry replacements. Commanders were so “desperate” for replacements that they allowed African-American soldiers to serve in previously segregated units.¹²

The geography of the Pacific Theater led to a situation related to the availability of service troops that was the opposite of the one in Europe. Supply lines stretched across much greater distances, and dozens of bases had to be developed on a large number of assorted islands, atolls and small landmasses in order to organize logistics. At the same time, until the campaigns in the Philippines in the second half of 1944 most Pacific operations required only a handful of divisions. Amphibious operations took a proportionally heavy casualty toll on combat units (though absolute numbers of casualties were much smaller than operations in Europe), but after completion they were provided the necessary time to receive replacements, train, and rehearse for the next objective. A constant rotation of divisions was maintained, particularly in operations against the smaller island targets of the Central Pacific campaign.

Service units did not have such a luxury. Utilized in both combat and post-combat development, they had to cope with a theater largely devoid of any existing infrastructure. Construction of base facilities became the single largest impediment to theater logistics. After a six-week tour of most of the Pacific in fall

¹² Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, CMH Pub 11-4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 688-91, <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/11-4/chapter22.htm>.

1944, Major General W.A. Wood, senior Army representative on the Joint Logistics Committee, identified construction as the single greatest contributor to logistics problems. Vast road, airfield and port projects were required at nearly every Pacific base, and these continued for months after combat had ceased.¹³ As combat leapfrogged forward, hundreds of thousands of service personnel remained behind to complete base development, maintain and repair equipment, and manage the growing logistics lines.¹⁴

Senior American leadership struggled with solutions to the Pacific's service troop shortages. While combat divisions would not deploy from the U.S. until deemed sufficiently trained, the same was not true for service units. Many were deployed prior to completing collective training programs at their home station.¹⁵ The newly formed Island Command lacked the training required to control shore operations. Buckner requested an experienced unit from the European Theater, the Army's 1st Engineer Special Brigade, to handle the responsibility in the Ryukyus.¹⁶ Amphibious training was also often neglected. Tenth Army's post-ICEBERG analysis identified this as the primary cause for the

¹³ JCS, Joint Logistics Committee (JLC), "Minutes of J.L.C. 93rd Meeting," *Records of the JCS, Part 1: 1942-45, Meetings, JLC* (Reel 7), December 15, 1944, 3

¹⁴ War Department, Operations Division, SS 314, *Information on Broad Strategy to be Used Against Japan*, September 30, 1944, 7-8, Box 368, Entry 421, RG 165, NACP.

¹⁵ Appleman, *Okinawa*, 39-40.

¹⁶ Lida Mayo, *The Ordnance Department: On Beachhead and Battlefront* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991), 449, http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/beachhd_btlftrnt/index.html.

majority of drowning victims belonging to service units, citing their lack of experience with lifesaving equipment.¹⁷

Another proposed solution to the service troop shortage was the conversion of combat units to service units, a topic that was hotly debated. Though U.S. Army Colonel T.S. Riggs favored bringing the service troop shortages to the attention of the Joint Chiefs, he did not agree with a Joint War Plans Committee recommendation to cannibalize combat units to address the shortfalls. Riggs cited the morale issues of reassigning combat trained and experienced soldiers to rear area assignments as one area of concern, but the primary reason he opposed the conversion was the inefficiency of employing already trained personnel in another capacity.¹⁸

The massive mechanization of the United States military, initiated in 1940 as the nation organized for anticipated participation in World War II, resulted in a huge number of specialized jobs that required months of technical training.¹⁹ Regardless of the negative aspects of converting combat units into service units, over ten thousand personnel from infantry, armor and artillery units in the Pacific

¹⁷ J.H. Howe, HQ, Army Ground Forces, *Observers Report – Okinawa*, May 5, 1945, 11, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/586>.

¹⁸ JCS, JLC, “Minutes of the 93rd Meeting of the Joint Logistics Committee,” *Records of the JCS, Part 1: 1942-45, Meetings, JLC*, December 15, 1944, 7.

¹⁹ Kirkpatrick, *Victory Plan*, 89, 96-97.

Ocean Area experienced this transformation. Most were placed in general labor jobs, though some received intensive short term training for technical positions.²⁰

As previously noted, U.S. planning for the invasion of Formosa assumed troop availability would be sufficient once Germany was defeated, an outcome that was initially forecast for the end of 1944. Buckner estimated to Nimitz on September 26, 1944, that he would require 414,000 personnel to seize Formosa and another 151,000 to take the nearby island of Amoy. Buckner highlighted several critical unit types that were in short supply: “approximately 85% of technical supply units are not available. Of the forty-five (45) QM service companies (labor) required in the initial landing operation... only two (2) have been reported as available.” Buckner also claimed a deficit of 49,000 engineers, the single largest shortage of any unit type.²¹

Without these critical supporting units the entire capability of carrying out CAUESWAY disappeared. Supplies would remain on ships or stuck on beaches, road and airfield construction would lag behind demand, and Formosa would be unavailable as a mounting point for proposed subsequent operations against China, the Ryukyus, or southern Japan.

It was often the case that even when service units reached the Pacific theater they arrived to find less-than-optimum conditions for the performance of

²⁰ W .N. Todd, Jr., HQ, Army Ground Forces, *Observer's Report- Okinawa Operations*, May 1, 1945, 8, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/u/?p4013coll8,587>; HQ, CINCPAA, *Minutes of Conference 24 November 1944*, November 24, 1944, 11, Box 71, Entry 421, RG 338, NACP.

²¹ Office of the CG Tenth Army to CINCPAA, *Feasibility of CAUSEWAY Operation*, September 26, 1944, Box 71, Entry 421, RG 338, NACP.

their duties. War Department policy required commanders to provide material requirements to Army Service Forces 90 days before units deployed forward from the United States. Due to urgent short-notice requests from the theater, most units received travel orders less than 30 days before deployment to the Pacific. Upon arrival and execution of their duties, equipment degraded quickly in the humid climate. Until supply requests caught up, essential equipment was often 'deadlined,' a military term for being declared non-operational.²²

Even as the Okinawa invasion began, the service troop shortages that had led to the cancellation of CAUSEWAY remained unresolved, but pressure to end the war as quickly as possible did not allow for a pause in operations. On April 15, 1945 the G-4 section of U.S. Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Area (USAFPOA) reported that there were no available service units in the Central Pacific Area. Consolidation of South Pacific bases aimed to free up some units, but General MacArthur's South West Pacific Area (SWPA) command had first to pass on them before they became available to USAFPOA.²³

Lack of service forces affected all Pacific operations, including those of the strategic air campaign. General LeMay recalled in a post-war interview that Army Air Force leaders had to enlist volunteers from Marine Corps units in the

²² HQ U.S. Army Forces Pacific Ocean Areas (USAFPOA), G-4 Section, *G-4 Periodic Report, U.S. Army Forces Pacific Ocean Areas, for Quarter Ended 30 September 1945*, undated, 7-8, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/1744>.

²³ HQ USAFPOA, G-4 Section, *G-4 Periodic Report, U.S. Army Forces Pacific Ocean Areas, for Quarter Ended 31 March 1945*, April 15, 1945, 4, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/1765>.

Marianas to assist in moving bombs to the B-29 flight lines.²⁴ In May 1945 the Army Air Force tried to push ahead plans, without Joint Chiefs approval, to station by the winter of 1945-46 twelve B-29 groups in Central Luzon. McArthur wrote to Marshall that he lacked the engineer capacity for any additional facilities in the Philippines and might not have enough to even complete current projects. All available units had been stripped across the Pacific to foot the bill for ICEBERG.²⁵

These drastic measures were still not sufficient for planned construction on Okinawa and Ie Shima. On May 12, 1945, Nimitz thanked King and the other Joint Chiefs for providing additional fighter-bomber groups for ICEBERG, but informed them that “the pressing need at the present time is for Army construction and service troops to prepare fields and support Army Air Forces.”²⁶ Five days later Nimitz again wrote to King with a warning that MacArthur would try to gain control over Naval Construction Battalions in order to alleviate Army engineer shortages during preparations for OLYMPIC, the invasion of Japan. He urged King to speed up the deployment of Army units in order to preserve Seabees for naval construction needs.²⁷

²⁴ LeMay, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 59.

²⁵ Chester W. Nimitz, *Command Summary of Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz (Graybook), 7 December 1941 – 31 August 1945, Vol. 6*. (Newport, RI: United States Naval War College, 2013), “04 1308 May 45, MACARTHUR to CHIEF OF STAFF ARMY INFO COMAF20 and CINCPA ADV” (Yellow, Nimitz Only), <https://usnwcarchive.org/items/show/849>.

²⁶ Ibid, “12 0220 May 45, CINCPA ADV to COMINCH, FOR JOINT CHIEFS of STAFF” (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

²⁷ Ibid, “17 0841 May 45, CINCPA ADV to COMINCH” (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

Buckner's early establishment of an Island Command aided both the planning and execution of development projects, but shortages in qualified staff officers reduced its effectiveness. In December, 1944, Buckner wrote to Richardson that "skilled commander and key personnel for coordination and command all shore activities considered essential and...not yet found available in this theater."²⁸ The cancellation of ICEBERG Phase III (detailed later in this chapter) greatly expanded the scale of planned projects and the ballooning of additional units overwhelmed the Island Command staff. Units and material planned to build air facilities on the smaller island objectives of Phase III were instead diverted to Okinawa and Ie Shima.

Shortages included more than just operational units, it extended into both coordinating headquarters elements and the provision of logistics staff officers. The former is addressed in Chapter 3. Buckner and Wallace were forced to address the latter through requests for an emergency augmentation to the Island Command staff to handle the increased span of responsibilities, a process that would take significant time for the military services to address.²⁹ In the first weeks of ICEBERG the commander of construction troops, Navy Commodore Bissett, issued orders directly to individual brigades and battalions. The number of units was so great that a single headquarters could not effectively control operations. Another request was made for an engineer group headquarters to

²⁸ HQ, Tenth Army, BUCKNER to Richardson, *Redeployment Engineer Special Brigade*, December 3, 1944, Box 15, Commander Amphibious Forces Pacific Fleet Blue 160, Entry P61, RG 313, NACP.

²⁹ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, "COMGEN 10 to CINPOA ADV, 29 1012 APR 45" (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

serve as a subordinate command and control element for the dozens of engineer units.³⁰

Phase III of ICEBERG had been considered an essential step in bridging the distance between Okinawa and Japan. Primarily selected as fighter-bomber bases, the smaller island objectives had been assigned to V Amphibious Corps for occupation after Okinawa had been secured. Due to extended combat at Iwo Jima this was changed to III Amphibious Corps.³¹

Already aware of the precarious manpower issues of 1945, senior military leaders quickly lost interest in executing this final phase of ICEBERG. Just as was the case with Operation CAUSEWAY, Buckner's estimation of forces played a role in influencing the cancellation decision for ICEBERG Phase III. With airfield and port development on the islands already seized projected to continue until November, no engineers could be spared from either Okinawa or Ie Shima. Buckner requested an additional thirteen engineer construction and five engineer general service battalions for Phase III. Forwarding the information to Nimitz, LTG Richardson recommended the allocation of only six construction and zero general service battalions, as no other units were available in the Pacific or from the U.S.³²

³⁰ HQ, Tenth Army, *Office of the Chief of Staff Journal*, Entry of April 25, 1945, 15, HQ Tenth Army Office of Chief of Staff Journals, Box 1, Entry 421, RG 338, NACP.

³¹ John H. Bradley, Thomas B. Buell, and Jack W. Dice, *The Second World War: Asia and the Pacific* (Singapore: Square One Publishers, 2002), 243.

³² HQ, USAFPOA, COMGENPOA to CINCPAC, *Troop Requirements and Availabilities, Phase III, ICEBERG*, March 3, 1945, 1, 370.5-371, Box 24, Tenth U.S. Army Decimal Files 1944-1945, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP.

Rather than stretch service troops even more thinly, U.S. commanders decided to cancel ICEBERG Phase III and instead expand planned facilities on Okinawa and Ie Shima. Buckner, Halsey, MacArthur, and Nimitz all agreed to the move. Consolidating activities to the two main islands reduced the total number of service units required, though it placed an additional strain on the port capacities of the two islands.³³

Buckner, well versed in massive engineering projects during his time in Alaska, recognized the central role that engineers played in accomplishing the overall goals of ICEBERG. Only 70 percent of the engineer units requested by Tenth Army were available for the operation.³⁴ Given this shortfall, Buckner paid special attention to their employment. In the operation order for ICEBERG, Buckner maintained strict personal control over engineer unit operations, ordering that any changes to their missions required his explicit approval.³⁵

More than two months into ICEBERG Buckner's personal control of engineers remained unchanged. In June Army Air Forces units requested authorization to construct eight small shelters for crash trucks, the service's term for fire trucks, on Okinawan airfields. Nimitz required that any changes to base

³³ Nimitz, *Graybook, Vol. 6*, "COMPHIBPAC to CINCPAC ADV 31 0455 MAY 45" (Yellow, Nimitz Only); "COM5THFLT to CINCPAC ADV 01 0112 JUN 45" (Yellow, Nimitz Only); "CINCPAC ADV to COMINCH 01 1201 JUN 45" (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

³⁴ HQ, Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 11-XI-2.

³⁵ HQ, Tenth Army, "Annex 11: Engineer Plan," to *Tentative Operation Order 1-45: ICEBERG*, January 6, 1945, 1. Box 2441, Entry 427, RG 407, NACP.

development plans to go through his deputy commander, Vice Admiral J.H. Towers, for approval. Even the smallest scale project, such as the Okinawan airfield shelters, faced the prospect of denial until after the start of OLYMPIC, and then it would still be dependent on material and labor availability.³⁶

The demand for service troops across the Pacific had a negative effect on preparation for ICEBERG. Many were only released from their duties just two weeks or even days before departing for the Ryukyus, leaving no time to conduct pre-operation training.³⁷ Tenth Army's combat formations had extensive amphibious experience and were not adversely effected by a lack of training time. The same was not true of service units. Unable to conduct refresher training on both their primary mission and the tasks associated with amphibious operations, service units struggled to get men and equipment offloaded as they arrived in the Ryukyus.

The experience of soldier William Dobbs reflected the entire range of problems brought about by troop shortages. An experienced cargo handler assigned to the Army's 206th Port Company, Dobbs and his fellow soldiers were repeatedly parceled out to assist other units that fell behind schedule unloading ships off Okinawa.³⁸ These untrained units became the starting point for a

³⁶ HQ, CINCPAC, Letter from DEPCINCPAC, *Requests for Additions to Base Development Plans*, April 26, 1945, 1-2, Box 24, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP; HQ, CINCPAC, *CINCPAC to CG Tenth Army, Subject: Amendment to Base Development Plan OKINAWA and IE SHIMA, to Provide Shelters for Cardex Crash Trucks and Equipment*, June 10, 1945, Box 24, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP.

³⁷ HQ, Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 4-0-1.

³⁸ William H. Dobbs, *War Journey: Witness to the Last Campaign of World War II* (Bennington, VT: Merriam Press, 2012), 91-93.

vicious circle of events that compounded logistics problems. Delays in unloading prevented the start of construction to improve port facilities, further backing up logistics movement and placing additional burdens on cargo-handling units. It exposed stationary cargo vessels to *kamikaze* attacks, leading to the loss of essential material and personnel, and delayed incoming shipping waves by increasing the time required for each round trip.³⁹

At the outset of the Okinawa campaign, Buckner and his staff understood well the logistical difficulties that lay ahead. Three primary missions were assigned to Tenth Army. The first, the installation of service elements, was necessary to enable the other two: development of airfields and expansion of port facilities. All three missions faced serious challenges during ICEBERG.⁴⁰ Just getting service units to the islands proved a daunting task. Assault shipping was barely sufficient to lift all combat elements in the first wave. Critical construction units originally scheduled to land in the first days of ICEBERG were forced to wait for the initial assault shipping vessels to disembark troops and cargo and then return so that they could be loaded. The vast majority of service units arrived with later Island Command shipping waves that were subject to unloading delays due to port capacity problems.⁴¹

³⁹ Appleman, *Okinawa*, 79-81, 170.

⁴⁰ HQ, Tenth Army, *Tenth Army Tentative Operations Order 1-45: ICEBERG*, 1.

⁴¹ Appleman, *Okinawa*, 39; U.S. Navy, *Building the Navy's Bases in World War II: History of the Bureau of Yards and Docks and the Civil Engineer Corps, 1941-1946, Vol. 2* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), 399.

Island Command's task organization of June 30, 1945, puts into focus the scope of construction efforts. Between Okinawa and Ie Shima MG Wallace, commander of Island Command, had been assigned forty engineer battalions and numerous smaller engineer elements. All but a handful, mainly combat engineers, were allocated to naval and airfield development. The Army's commitment to expanding strategic bombing had overstretched the service's capacity to keep up with the growth. During ICEBERG a large number of the Army's Aviation Engineer Construction battalions were still occupied building B-29 airfields in the Marianas Islands. Nearly two-thirds of Buckner's construction engineers had to be provided by the Navy, though most the projects were in support of Army Air Force facilities.⁴² The doubling of planned airstrips on Okinawa and Ie Shima after the cancellation of ICEBERG Phase III complete the mission.

A post-campaign analysis of beach unloading operations stated that a service unit increase of 50 percent was necessary to maintain the required rate of cargo downloading.⁴³ This shortfall was recognized soon after the invasion commenced. A XXIV Corps staff officer succinctly identified the primary culprits: an acute lack of labor and a glut of command and control elements. The latter included Navy Beach Parties, corps and army level elements, and the Island Command.⁴⁴ Conditions at the beaches forced much of the unloading to be done

⁴² HQ, Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 2-II-22 to 2-II-23, 2-IV-2 to 2-IV-3.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 10-IV-2.

⁴⁴ War Department, LTC Stevens Interview with MAJ McStay, XXIV Corps, untitled notes, 1-26 APR 45, April 20, 1945, Box 2441, Entry 427, RG 407, NACP.

through manual labor by stevedores. A task usually assigned to hired island natives, the Japanese impressment of Okinawan males forced U.S. military personnel into the role. With both combat and service units heavily occupied, the 1st Engineer Special Brigade resorted to using 700 soldiers from anti-aircraft and armor units during the first two weeks of the operation.⁴⁵

Two months into ICEBERG port and beach unloading capacity had only marginally improved. Cancellation of Phase III had also increased monthly cargo requirements to over 1,000,000 tons per month. Major General Wallace, commander of ISCOM, requested from Buckner an additional eight port companies, eight amphibious truck companies, two Navy truck battalions, and five Navy base companies.⁴⁶ While these units were essential to the long-term development goals, little could be done to address capacity during the final weeks of heavy combat.

Not listed as a major objective, the construction of road networks was an essential implied task for Tenth Army that would facilitate both development and combat operations. The earliest staff studies had warned that road construction was critical, stating that “a complete rebuilding of the Okinawa Jima road net will be necessary.”⁴⁷ Not built to handle mass military traffic, the road networks

⁴⁵ Mayo, *Ordnance Department*, 461.

⁴⁶ HQ, Island Command Okinawa, Wallace to Buckner, *Additional Units and Equipment for Port Facilities Cargo Handling*, May 28, 1945, 1, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP.

⁴⁷ HQ, CINCPA, “Annex B: Logistics” to *ICEBERG, CINCPA Staff Study*, October 25, 1944, 36.

supplying ground combat forces became impassable after a period of heavy rain in May. Buckner ordered all available engineer units, including aviation construction battalions, to focus on reopening them. Nimitz allowed deviation from base development tasks if absolutely necessary, a policy that Buckner only resorted to on this one occasion. After making the decision, Buckner noted in his journal that he would “probably be taken to task for this by higher HQ” but concluded that “it is the right thing to do.”⁴⁸

The shortage of service troops would serve as an important factor, both at the tactical and strategic level, in Buckner’s decision against a second landing. The typical ratio of combat troops to support troops in World War II was 1:4, and even greater in the Pacific. Decisions early in the war on combat to support ratios led to a critical shortage of service units. A landing force of just one division of 15,000 troops would require, conservatively, 30,000 rear echelon troops to logistically support the new front. While some of these forces would already be allocated to the potential landing division(s), the majority of the manpower would need to be pulled from other tasks, including airfield construction, to build another logistics hub at Minatoga, the proposed location for the assault. As evidenced by the communications from the Pentagon and Nimitz’s headquarters, the rest of the theater had already been stripped of all available service troops to support ICEBERG. Strategic bombing commitments

⁴⁸ Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 65.

and MacArthur's Luzon invasion had both contributed to the theater-wide deficit.⁴⁹

Buckner also faced a growing backlog of unloaded shipping. Any additional reduction in personnel to support the Minatoga landing would come at a cost of further delays in assembling the men and resources required to support the strategic priority of base development. His only deviation from this mission occurred when road conditions put combat forces in danger of being cut off from Okinawa's logistics base. Having occupied nearly all planned base sites within the first two weeks of ICEBEG, Buckner's methodical advance to victory offered the lowest strategic risk.

⁴⁹ John J. McGrath, *The Other End of the Spear: The Tooth-to-Tail Ratio (T3R) in Modern Military Operations* (Ft. Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007), 18.

Chapter 3: Shipping Shortages in a Global War

As the war entered its final year the United States, even with its industrial might, could not keep up with the increased demand for shipping, particularly in the Pacific. The full consequences of the “tyranny of distance” were finally being felt. Driven by early war urgency, the U.S. military had largely conducted logistics without regard to long-term consequences. Buckner recognized the threat that inadequate logistics posed to the Okinawa invasion and took steps to address it. On February 16, 1945, he issued a command memo addressing the conservation of supplies that asserted “the lack of supply discipline within all ranks of the Armed Forces of the United States is a matter of general knowledge, and is fast acquiring the state of a public scandal.” Buckner threatened disciplinary action for any intentional over-request of supplies. He predicted his own future difficulties related specifically to shipping when he concluded that “lack of shipping capacity, plus vast areas to be served and supply lines of unprecedented length, make conservation of supplies mandatory if our assault upon the Japanese Empire is to continue.”¹

Shipping, more than any other factor, dictated how amphibious operations were planned and executed. Availability of the necessary numbers and types of

¹ HQ, Tenth Army, Simon B. Buckner to All Units Assigned or Attached to Tenth Army, *Conservation of Supplies and Equipment*, February 16, 1945, HQ, CG to 300.6, Box 12, Entry 427, RG 338, NACP.

shipping ultimately determined both the size and composition of a landing force and the ability to support it logistically. Beginning in mid-1944 the first doubts surfaced over the feasibility of long-range planning in the Pacific in light of shipping shortages. War Department strategists argued that proposed options for moving ahead with the scheduled invasion of Formosa, Operation CAUSEWAY, were not possible due to a lack of attack cargo ships (AKA) and attack transports (APA).² These two classes of ships were so vital to the war that the Joint Logistics Committee recommended they share, with B-29 production and Manhattan Project construction, the highest priority for civilian manpower.³ At a Pearl Harbor planning conference for ICEBERG months before the invasion, Admiral Turner told the assembled leaders and key staff that “this operation will take a long time due to the logistics problem.” Turner based this estimation on two shipping related factors: distance to supply points at Saipan and Guam and the effect of beach conditions on unloading operations.⁴ Both factors added significant time to shipping round trips.

While leaders in the Pacific theater grasped the approaching problems in shipping and logistics, planners at the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw little reason for pessimism. The Joint Warfare Plans Committee (JWPC) released their Ryukyus

² War Department, Operations Division, Strategy Section Paper 282/8, *Future Operations in the Pacific*, July 11, 1944, 4, Box 366, Entry 421, RG 165, NACP.

³ JCS, JLC, “Joint Logistics Committee Minutes of the 68th Meeting,” *Records of the JCS, Part 1: 1942-45, Meetings, JLC*, August 11, 1944, 3.

⁴ HQ, Tenth Army, *Notes from Conference 1 NOV 44, held at Headquarters Amphibious Forces Pacific Fleet*, November 3, 1944, 3-5, Box 14, Commander Amphibious Forces Pacific Fleet Blue 160, Entry P61, RG 133, NACP.

plan during the same time period as Turner's Pearl Harbor conference. The JWPC felt that the "logistics problems involved are similar to those already mastered in our island warfare against JAPAN."⁵ This generalization ignored the fact that distances to West Coast ports, from which most ICEBRG logistics would depart, had nearly doubled from earlier operations. Total personnel requirements were also twice the size of Iwo Jima and many more times greater than other Central Pacific objectives.

Not until January, 1945 did the Joint Staff comprehend the magnitude of the problem. During the February Conference at Yalta their conclusions on shipping shortages was included in a paper presented by the Combined Military Transportation Committee and the Combined Shipping Adjustment Board to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.⁶ The document laid out British and American ship shortages for the months of March through June. The American deficit in the Pacific theater averaged forty-two ships per month. The highest mark, fifty-one for March, corresponded with the most critical month for assembling ICEBERG forces and supplies. British and American shortages in Europe were nearly as pronounced. Based on this data the committees advised that "the shipping

⁵ JCS, Joint War Plans Committee (JWPC), *Plan for the Seizure of the Ryukyus*," November 11, 1944, 27, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/3044>.

⁶ The Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) consisted of the senior military leadership of the United States and Great Britain. The Joint Chiefs of Staff served as the American members. The British were represented by the First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Chief of the Air Staff. The CCS directed the overall Allied strategy during World War II, including joint decisions on logistics matters.

position is tight and that deficits approach unmanageable proportions, particularly in the Pacific.⁷

Few options remained to mitigate overall shipping shortfalls. U.S. ports had reached the maximum capacity available for birthing spaces and cargo storage areas. Conditions were also poor in forward areas, which suffered from a chronic shortage of port companies to manage the transfer of cargo. The military services were forced to deploy additional port units before they were fully trained, resulting in a significant drop in efficiency. A twenty percent reduction in logistics allocations had already been implemented to account for these port capacity issues. In January the Joint Chiefs warned against a further seven percent cut to all military programs proposed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. In their estimation the reductions would “eliminate or delay” planned operations and “slow down the war and make it necessary to revise strategic concepts.”⁸

A huge variety of vessels made up U.S. naval forces, but they primarily fell into two categories: assault and cargo. The former included the smallest landing craft up to those capable of landing tanks directly on hostile shores. Ships designed or retrofitted to carry landing craft, combat-load supplies, that were

⁷ Combined Chiefs of Staff, “Over-all Review of Cargo Shipping: Report by the Combined Military Transportation Committee and the Combined Shipping Adjustment Board”, Enclosure to “C.C.S. 746/10, Combined Chiefs of Staff Over-all Review of Cargo Shipping,” February 2, 1945, *Papers and Minutes of Meetings Argonaut Conference*, 55, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/3687>. ARGONAUT was the codename for the Yalta Conference.

⁸ JCS, “Appendix B: Discussion”, to “J.C.S. 1205/4: Overall Review of Cargo Shipping,” *Records of the JCS, Strategic Issues, Shipping*, January 30, 1945, 52-53; *Ibid.*, JCS, JLC, “Minutes of J.L.C. 93rd Meeting,” *Part 1: Meetings, JLC*, December 15, 1944, 7.

armed for protection and could provide fire support to assault troops, were also part of the assault fleet. Ship classes like the AKA and APA, mid-war modifications to bulk cargo ships, were deemed essential to the conduct of amphibious operations.

Amongst the numerous varieties of assault shipping, the Landing Ship, Tank (LST) became the linchpin of Pacific operations. LSTs played a role not only in initial combat landings, but later performed critical duties supplying forces over the beach when port facilities were unavailable. Plans for ICEBERG called for Okinawa's only major port, Naha, to handle many of the logistics requirements, but just as occurred in Europe after the D-Day landings at Normandy, expectations did not meet reality.⁹ Buckner assumed some risk at Naha in order to land forces closer to Kadena and Yontan Airfields, which were urgently required in order to begin the in-flow of Tenth Army's land-based aircraft. The port's proximity to the primary Japanese defensive lines delayed the occupation of Naha, and even then facilities there required months of rehabilitation to reach full cargo capacity, which proved too late to be of use during combat operations.¹⁰

Standard cargo vessels made up the bulk of the logistics fleet. These linked front-line combat units to the immense supply lines stretching across the vast Pacific to the United States. Lacking the ability to unload directly on the

⁹ HQ, CINCPAC, "Appendix B" to *ICEBERG*, *CINCPAC Staff Study*, 29.

¹⁰ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, "COMGEN 10 to CINCPAC PEARL 31 1715 MAY 45" (Green).

beach, these ships had to utilize either permanent or temporary docking facilities and were used primarily to supply rear-area bases and the later echelons of amphibious operations. Cargo shortfalls had first started to develop during the growth of the strategic bombing campaign in mid-1944. The addition of twelve Very Long Range bombing groups to the Marianas (addressed in Chapter 4) required thirty-one additional cargo (AK) and transport (AP) vessels be added to Pacific shipping requirements.¹¹ This single decision point accounted for three-fourths of the theater shortages projected by the Combined Chiefs of Staff for early 1945, another consequence of Joint Chiefs of Staff decisions to accelerate strategic bombing.

Numerous specialty vessel types performed specific functions, including the transport of fuel, ammunition, and refrigerated food. They also became a singular point of failure. Availability of petroleum tankers became a major concern of planners even earlier than assault shipping. Expansion of Army Air Forces operations in the Pacific stretched resources to the limits. In May, 1944, the Central Pacific only had five weeks of reserve aviation gas on hand. The Joint Logistics Committee warned that “reserves are so low now that unless action is taken promptly to obtain additional tankers for that area, the continuance of approved operations will be seriously affected.” Just weeks before

¹¹ Office of the CNO, Memo For ADM King, From D.B. Duncan, ACOS (Plans), *Logistics Implications of VLR Bombing Program*, May 22, 1944, 1, Box 68, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

the Normandy landings the committee recommended the reduction of tankers allocated for Britain in order to increase ships available in the Pacific.¹²

The tanker issue had not been resolved by the time of ICEBERG. Land-based aviation units served a critical role in supporting Tenth Army's advance. As airfields became operational, a growing number of Marine and Army Air Forces units moved in. The delayed arrival of three tankers carrying aviation gasoline in late April led to reduced flight hours during a period of heavy fighting against the Japanese Shuri Line defenses, coinciding with the first discussions about making a second amphibious landing.¹³

Ammunition supply was another concern of commanders at Okinawa, and their worries began early in the planning process and grew quickly once action commenced. In a December 1944 report, the Tenth Army G-4 disagreed with the Joint Staff study of ICEBERG's estimated rate of ammunition expenditure.¹⁴ Offensive warfare, particularly against an entrenched enemy, required enormous amounts of munitions.¹⁵ Three ammunition ships from the Central Pacific were supposed to supply XXIV Corps for ICEBERG. Instead, two of the three ships'

¹² JCS, JLC, "Enclosure A" to J.C.S. 822/1, "Tanker Availability For Theater Logistic Support, Report by the Joint Logistics Committee," *Records of the JCS, Strategic Issues, Shipping*, May 5, 1944, 8, 11.

¹³ HQ Tenth Army, G-4 Section, *G-4 Report No. 33, 28 April 45*, G-4 Reports: 12 APR to 16 MAY, Box 2481, Entry 427, RG 407, NACP.

¹⁴ HQ Tenth Army, G-4 Section, *Logistics Implications, ICEBERG*, December 27, 1944, 1, Box 2441, Entry 427, RG 407, NACP.

¹⁵ Sarantakes, Introduction to *Seven Stars*, 6; Appleman, *Okinawa*, 256.

loads were expended by the corps during combat on Luzon, and the third was diverted to other SWPA units.¹⁶

Once action commenced, commanders' concerns were quickly validated. In the first week two fully loaded ammunition ships were destroyed in Japanese air attacks.¹⁷ Within ten days XXIV Corps was critically short of mortar and artillery ammunition, having fired over 84,000 rounds of 105 millimeter and higher-caliber munitions. Ammunition had to be borrowed from the III Amphibious Corps stocks. This rate of fire actually increased as American forces reached the strongest of Japanese defenses. Buckner had to request approval from Nimitz for an earlier-than-planned deployment of four artillery ammunition carrying LSTs.¹⁸ Lack of port facilities also hampered ammunition resupply. Standard Navy cargo ships were not designed to unload in primitive conditions, they were best suited for permanent port facilities with cranes and other lifting equipment. At Okinawa and Ie Shima most supplies had to be transferred to smaller vessels as only a handful of temporary piers were able to be constructed. In early May Tenth Army devised a plan to unload these ships in the Marianas and transfer their cargo to the more versatile LSTs. This move increased beach unloading capacity and at the same time reduced targets for *kamikaze* attacks.¹⁹

¹⁶ HQ, XXIV Corps, BG Crump Garvin, *Estimate of XXIV Corps Logistics Situation*, January 13, 1945, 3, Decimal Files 44-45, 560-563.5, Box 32, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP.

¹⁷ Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 33; Dobbs, *War Journey*, 87-88.

¹⁸ HQ, Tenth Army, G-4 Section, *G-4 Report No. 17, 12 April 45*; *Ibid, G-4 Report No. 18, 13 April 45*; *G-4 Report No. 24, 19 April 45*, Box 2481, Entry 427, RG 407, NACP.

¹⁹ *Ibid, G-4 Report No. 37, 2 May 45.*

Shipping requirements consistently grew throughout the planning process. But this was not unique to ICEBERG; earlier post-operation studies had determined that shipping deficits were always underestimated.²⁰ Investigations found that the shipping initially allocated for previous campaigns was based on generic infantry division tables of men and equipment. During combat, and particularly so for amphibious operations, divisions were heavily augmented with both combat and service units. Additional units were also assigned at the corps and army level, primarily artillery (both anti-aircraft and ground support) and huge numbers of specialty service units. These additional units were not accounted for in early ICEBERG shipping schedules.²¹

To address the resulting shortfall, Tenth Army received approval from Admiral Turner in January 1945 for an additional twenty LSTs and forty Landing Ship, Mediums (LSMs), to better accommodate the full combat organization of the command. This brought Tenth Army's total number of assigned LSTs to a staggering 170. Even this augmentation was insufficient to move all units required for Phase I of ICEBERG. Buckner's staff had to organize a rapid turnaround of LSTs from the initial assault to pick up eight Naval Construction Battalions at Saipan. The III Amphibious Corps was also required to shift 10

²⁰ JCS, JLC, "Minutes of J.L.C. 98th Meeting," *Records of the JCS, Part 1: 1942-45, Meetings, JLC*, January 19, 1945, 2.

²¹ HQ, XXIV Corps, Major General Hodge, letter to LTG Buckner, *Shipping Requirements for an Amphibious Operation*, September 7, 1944, 1-2, 400-451.2, Box 28, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP

percent of its required cargo from the assault shipping wave to the first garrison wave, a move that had cascading effects on service unit arrival.²²

Planned amphibious operations during Phase II of ICEBERG were also found to be problematic. The Tenth Army G-4, the Army staff section responsible for all logistics and transportation, estimated that sufficient assault shipping was not available for the proposed simultaneous two division attack against Okinawa's northern Motobu Peninsula. Only one division could be moved at a time, resulting in risk to the first unit while landing craft executed the round trip movement and loading of the second. Occupation of the island of Ie Shima was also supposed to occur during this phase. The G-4 recommended moving the operation to Phase I when more shipping was available.²³

A key assumption in the CINCPOA staff study for ICEBERG was the timely release of assault shipping from operations at Leyte. The vessels had been transferred from Nimitz to MacArthur on the condition they would be available for the next Central Pacific amphibious operation.²⁴ A February request by Turner for an early release of LSTs and LSMs allocated to ICEBERG was not granted by MacArthur's headquarters.²⁵ Only after a series of cross-theater staff

²² HQ, Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 5-0-4.

²³ HQ, Tenth Army, G-4 Section, *Estimate of the Logistic Situation, Phase II ICEBERG*, January 22, 1945, 3-4, Box 2441, Entry 427, RG 407, NACP.

²⁴ HQ, CINCPOA, *ICEBERG, CINCPOA Staff Study*, 25 October, 1944, 1.

²⁵ HQ, Amphibious Forces Pacific, COMPHIBSPAC to CINCPOA, *Lighterage for Unloading XXIV Corps Equipment and Supplies at Leyte*, 1, Decimal Files 44-45, 560-563.5, Box 32, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP.

meetings and intervention from the Joint Chiefs of Staff did MacArthur permit the shipping to begin preparation for ICEBERG.²⁶

MacArthur's foot dragging on another issue also impacted shipping timelines. Major General Hodge's XXIV Corps, allocated for ICEBERG, participated in the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines. Similar to the conditional use of assault shipping, the corps was supposed to be pulled from combat in time to refit, train, and load for their next operation. On January 6 Nimitz sent an inquiry to MacArthur on the status of releasing the units. No action was taken, leading Hodges to personally write to Nimitz that intra-theater agreements made at a November 1944 conference were not being adhered to. The corps commander cited four key issues that would prevent his unit from participating in ICEBERG, including the failure to provide thirty days of supplies and lighterage, the smaller vessels used to move personnel and supplies from ship to shore, to assist in the loading and unloading of cargo. The supply deficiency required the addition of more supply vessels to the already complex ICEBERG logistics plan while the lack of lighterage threatened to disrupt the corps ability to stay on the invasion timeline.²⁷

On January 15 MacArthur wrote to Nimitz that the corps was required on Leyte until a new infantry division arrived to relieve it as all his remaining forces

²⁶ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, "CINCPSWPA to CINCPA 20 0535 FEB 45" (Pink); "CINCPA to CINCPWPA 21 0156 FEB 45" (Pink); MACARTHUR to COM7THFLT, CTF 77 25 1304 FEB 45" (Pink).

²⁷ HQ, XXIV Corps, MG Hodges to Nimitz, *Situation with respect to mounting XXIV Corps from Leyte*, January 16, 1945, 1, Box 166, Series XII, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division, RG 38, NACP.

were tied up in preparations for the Luzon invasion.²⁸ After several more rounds of communication MacArthur responded definitively on January 27 that “the 24th Corps is now fully engaged in combat and it cannot now be predicted when I will be disengaged.”²⁹ This statement was made a month after MacArthur himself had declared an end to Japanese organized resistance on Leyte at the end of December, 1944.³⁰ Only on February 10 was XXIV Corps assigned to Tenth Army. Corps staffers were thus excluded from providing shipping requirements during the planning process.³¹

Cascading effects from the shipping shortage occurred on both ends of the Pacific. Though combat units at Okinawa were able to quickly disembark men and equipment from assault shipping, Island Command garrison units fell behind due to unloading capacity at beaches and ports. Massive stores of excess supplies were scattered across the Pacific. One of the headquarters responsible for the administration of these bases, the Central Pacific Base Command, recommended to the headquarters of Army Service Forces that material destined for ICEBERG ship directly from the United States. The time

²⁸ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, “CINCSWPA to CINCPA 17 1400 JAN 45” (Pink).

²⁹ HQ, SWPA, *CINCSOWESPAC to CINCPA*, January 27, 1945, Box 166, Series XII, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division, RG 38, NACP.

³⁰ Charles R. Anderson, *Leyte* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), 29-30.

³¹ HQ Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 5-0-4.

required to collect surplus supplies would tie up a significant amount of shipping.³²

Though this plan offered an opportunity to tailor loads to specific units and phases of ICEBERG the reality of shipping schedules intervened. At U.S. ports supplies were loaded as they arrived, rather than according to the order of when they would be used, to minimize the days that ships remained stationary. This resulted in unloading of unnecessary cargo at Okinawa and further compounded delays to shipping and construction schedules.³³

Competing demands for limited shipping assets plagued operations in the Pacific Theater. The situation was so dire that President Roosevelt himself addressed it in a December 1944 directive that forbade the use of cargo vessels for storage. In forwarding this message, Nimitz commented that subordinates should have “a more realistic appreciation of port and discharge capacity.”³⁴ Any delays in loading and unloading operations adding time to an already lengthy supply chain.

On March 28, Nimitz’s headquarters directed all rear areas to cease non-essential construction and maintenance activities, stating that the resulting reduction in their supply tonnage was needed for the increased requirements for

³² HQ, Central Pacific Base Command, From HQ Central Pac Base Command to CG, Army Service Forces, *Advanced Shipment of Maintenance to Provide Continued Resupply in ICEBERG Operation*, January 4, 1945, 2, Decimal Files 44-45, 560-563.5, Box 32, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP.

³³ HQ, Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 5-0-7, 5-0-9.

³⁴ HQ, CINCPAC, *20 DEC 44 Memorandum from CINCPAC* (no subject), Box 71, Entry 427, RG 338, NACP.

long-range bomber munitions. Nimitz himself sent a message on April 28 to Fleet Admiral King, copies of which were provided to his immediate subordinates and General MacArthur, stating his recommendations for operations beyond Okinawa. In the message he labeled shipping as the primary problem in mounting an invasion of Japan before the end of 1945.³⁵

In May, 1945 Nimitz ordered a massive consolidation of south Pacific bases in order to release both shipping and troops for the advance toward Japan. Vice Admiral J.H. Towers, CINCPAC Chief of Staff, informed Nimitz that 75% of assault shipping allocated to the task was instead moving Navy cargo, a consequence of poor logistical planning that had left huge stocks of supplies scattered across the command. The expansion of the VLR program also confounded planners. Towers referred to the “repeated acceleration of VLR requirements” as an “imposing demand on shipping and terminal port reception capacities.”³⁶

Adding to an already precarious state of affairs regarding shipping and logistics, the turbulent Ryukyus weather further delayed unloading operations. Joint Chiefs of Staff studies on future operations in 1944 identified March 1st as the preferred invasion date, though March and April also marked the beginning of an unfavorable period of heavy overcast skies and high probabilities of rain.

³⁵ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, “28 0208 Mar 45 CINCPAC PEARL to COMGENPOA, COMGENAFAFPOA, DEPCOM20THAF” (Green); “28 0235 Apr 45 CINCPAC ADV TO COMINCH INFO CINCSWPA, COM3RDFLT, COM5THFLT, COM7THFLT” (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

³⁶ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, “23 0315 May 45, CINCPAC PEARL to CINCPAC ADV (Towers to Nimitz Only)” (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

Concluding combat in the spring avoided the dangerous summer typhoon season.³⁷ However, delays in releasing troops from the Philippines, shipping shortfalls, and poor weather resulted in the original invasion date being delayed by a month.³⁸ Finally executed on April 1st, the critical early days of the operation were hampered by the start of the rainy season. Unloading operations were suspended on three of the first 12 days of the operation due to poor weather. Cargo backloads, already building up due to stevedore shortages, continued to increase.³⁹

Civil government responsibilities had also not been accounted for during early logistics planning. The Tenth Army G-4 reported to Buckner that the CINCPAC Staff Study failed to include an estimated 10,000 tons of monthly subsistence supplies required to care for Okinawa's civilian population. This figure equaled nearly an entire day's total tonnage unloaded during the first crucial months of ICEBERG.⁴⁰

During his tenure at Tenth Army, Buckner was constantly occupied by shipping concerns. In his first week of command Lieutenant General Richardson, commander of U.S. Army Forces Pacific Ocean Area, requested a detailed plan

³⁷ JCS, Joint Staff Planners, "Annex A" to "J.P.S. 404/6 Future Operations in the Pacific," *Records of the JCS, Part 1: PT, POA*, July 9, 1944, 13.

³⁸ HQ Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 3-0-9.

³⁹ War Department, SGT Burns, Army Historical Division, interview with Navy LT C.D. Clawson, Navy Beach Battalion, April 13, 1945, Box 2441, Entry 427, RG 407, NACP

⁴⁰ HQ, Tenth Army, Memo from Tenth Army G-4, *Logistics Implications, ICEBERG*, December 27, 1944, 2.

for the conducting of ship-to-shore logistics movement. Richardson brought up difficulties from earlier operations and included an after-action review from Saipan to help Buckner with developing a plan.⁴¹ Buckner and his staff in turn developed detailed plans for all aspects of the logistics chain. Admiral Turner, who had commanded numerous amphibious operations in the Central Pacific, reviewed and “considered to be excellent” Buckner’s concept for organizing shore parties.⁴²

To combat anticipated logistics shortages during ICEBERG the maximum utilization of resources was emphasized in a series of Tenth Army operational directives issued in January. Logistics Directive No. 1 stated that “this headquarters will render such aid to the garrison forces of a captured objective as will expedite the work of base development.” Units departing the combat area for rehabilitation were directed to loan organizational equipment and hand over supplies to garrison forces. Equipment was to be returned to the original owners only at the latest possible date before their next operation. Another directive emphasized the importance of utilizing captured Japanese material when available and directed the formation of corps and division-level salvage teams for collection.⁴³ Both directives reflected the shortfall in required shipping.

⁴¹ HQ, USAFPOA, Richardson to Buckner, *Proposed Logistical Plan for Ship to Shore Movement*, October 15, 1944, 400-451.2, Box 28, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP.

⁴² Headquarters, Amphibious Forces Pacific, Turner to Buckner, *Shore Party Concept Revision*, December 11, 1944, 1, Box 14, Entry P 61, Commander Amphibious Forces Pacific Fleet Blue 160, RG 313, NACP.

⁴³ HQ, Tenth Army, “Logistics – Number 1,” January 1, 1945, 7; “Logistics – Number 2,” January 1, 1945, 12-13. *Operational Directives, Tenth Army, 1945*.
<http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/622>.

With essential equipment and material delayed in reaching construction units Tenth Army emphasized to its units the necessity to use every asset available to complete the mission.

Tenth Army's G-4 section fought throughout the ICEBERG planning process to correct unrealistic estimates for logistics and shipping requirements made by CINCPHA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Nimitz, as much as possible, funneled decision making on shipping through Buckner. While still preparing for CAUSEWAY Nimitz ordered his staff and subordinate headquarters to route all shipping changes through Buckner before he would approve them. This was required even if a change was absolutely necessary given the situation.⁴⁴

Offloading speed had always been a point of emphasis during ICEBERG planning. Less than a month from the beginning of the operation, Nimitz wrote to his subordinates that "the inadequacy of harbor facilities at LEGUMINOUS and INDISPENSIBLE⁴⁵ make it necessary that despatched (sic) to those areas at a rate commensurate with discharge capabilities and the tactical situation."⁴⁶ Nimitz's warning ultimately proved prophetic.

From the opening days of the invasion cargo vessels were backed up while waiting to be unloaded due to a lack of stevedores and the reduced speed

⁴⁴ HQ, CINCPHA, CINCPHA Message, *Changes to echelon and shipping schedules*, August 24, 1944, 1, Decimal Files 44-45, 560-563.5, Box 32, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP.

⁴⁵ LEGUMINOUS was the codename for Okinawa, INDESPENSIBLE was Ie Shima.

⁴⁶ HQ, CINCPHA, Memo From CINCPHA, *Control of Shipping – ICEBERG* (Serial 000299), 1, Decimal Files 44-45, 560-563.5, Box 32, Entry P 50416, RG 338, NACP.

of offload operations over reef-blocked beaches. After six weeks of growing frustration, including the loss of numerous waiting cargo vessels to *kamikaze* attacks, Buckner was forced to take action. On May 16 he recommended to Admiral Turner that standard vessels unload their cargo in the Marianas Islands. Then it would be loaded onto LSTs and LSMs and delivered on the beaches at Okinawa. Two weeks later Buckner provided Nimitz with an update on port capacity, stating that none would be available until the end of June and he still lacked the personnel to man them once opened.⁴⁷

Though Tenth Army succeeded numerous times in increasing shipping allocations, it was not enough to overcome the impact on logistics resulting from the fog of war. Unexpected losses of ammunition ships, poor weather, the Japanese defensive plan and other factors combined to throw off the detailed planning for ICEBERG. Buckner's knowledge of the strategic shipping shortage in the latter stages of the Pacific Campaign influenced many of his decisions at the tactical level. While the original invasion plan called for landings on both the west and east coasts of Okinawa, he scrapped this for a more simplified single approach from the west.⁴⁸

Buckner also modified the original plan's sequence of operations. During the first days of the invasion he opposed any use of his immediate reserve force, not wanting to lose flexibility. After identifying that the Japanese were only

⁴⁷ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, 19 "0431 May 45 COMGEN TEN to COM5THFLT" (Green), "31 1715 May 45 COMGEN 10 to CINCPOA PEARL" (Green).

⁴⁸ HQ Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 3-0-10.

defending the southern half of Okinawa, he followed the January recommendation of the G-4 section and used the 77th Division to seize Ie Shima in Phase I. Though starting development projects on Ie Shima earlier than planned added logistical complexity, this was offset by both short and long-term benefits. Committing the 77th Division, until then holding at sea, freed up their assault shipping for other missions after the Ie Shima landings were completed and the division moved to Okinawa to join the XXIV Corps offensive. In the same vein, construction troops began airfield development ahead of schedule, moving forward on one of the primary goals of Operation ICEBERG.⁴⁹

As the operation progressed the continual influx of personnel and material for base development further strained shipping. Austere port conditions, including the delay in opening Naha, forced Buckner to utilize landing craft as the primary supply vessels for both his combat forces and development efforts on the islands. Any large scale secondary landing would have required additional assault shipping to maintain the flow of logistics, but none were available in the Pacific. The unanticipated operations in the Philippines, increases to strategic bombing, and the requirements to support the vast amount of bases spread across the Pacific subsumed a large share of available shipping. With the entire theater already operating on reduced logistics allocations, Buckner was not able to maintain a reserve of ships to conduct a large scale landing.

⁴⁹ Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 30, 33.

Even if additional shipping had been available Buckner lacked the service units required to maintain any combat forces engaged on a new front. Additional shore parties, ammunition and supply dumps would have had to been organized by service units. But there were no troops available, either locally or across the entire Pacific. The decisions to prioritize Europe over the Pacific, to mount dual Pacific campaigns, and the expansion of strategic bombing resulted in a critical shortage of units, particularly port and engineer units. Operations at the main supply area would have had to been reduced in order to free up the personnel required to build a similar logistical line at a Minatoga beachhead, further slowing down unloading operations and extending turn-around times for cargo vessels.⁵⁰ Such a move threatened the timeline for development of base facilities and the November target for Operation OLYMPIC.

⁵⁰ Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 18.

Chapter 4: Arnold, LeMay, Halsey, and the Strategic Bombing Campaign

The Army Air Force Aims to End the War

After spending enormous material and manpower waging a strategic bombing campaign against Germany, with what they regarded as great success, the Army Air Force in 1944-45 aimed to do the same against Japan. This push was bolstered by support from President Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Strategic bombing was seen as an alternative to costly ground operations and as a means to bolster U.S. morale, while at the same time, decreasing the Japanese will to fight. Ineffective early missions flown from bases in China gave way to much more potent attacks after the 1944 capture of the Marianas Islands, which had been selected as an objective for seizure primarily in order to provide bases less at the limit of the B-29 heavy bomber's 1,600 mile range. In a role similar to that of the B-17 in Europe, the B-29 became the workhorse of the Pacific strategic bombing campaign, which was designated in official military terminology as the Very Long Range (VLR) bombing program.¹

Supporting the bombing campaign came at a high cost in supplies, transport and infrastructure. In April 1944, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the

¹ Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds, *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Volume 5, The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki, June 1944 to August 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983), 3-4.

deployment of twelve B-29 groups to the Marianas. Rear Admiral D.B. Duncan, head of the Navy War Plans Division, sent a warning to Admiral King that:

In view of increasingly “tight” shipping situation, VLR operations can only be supported at to the expense of other – possibly more productive – effort. If VLR bombing does not prove an effective blow against the enemy, our efforts to support it will actually serve to lengthen rather than shorten the PACIFIC war.²

By the last years of the war many U.S. military leaders regarded strategic bombing as a tool of victory almost equal in importance to the traditional ground and naval forces. This was a radical departure from pre-war thinking. In 1941 the Army’s primary doctrinal work, *Field Manual 100-5*, made no reference to strategic bombing. The doctrinal role of the Army Air Forces was to “further the mission of the supported unit and receive its mission and objectives from the commander of the forces which it is supporting.”³

Early champions of the bomber, including General of the Army Hap Arnold, Army Air Force Chief of Staff, succeeded in institutionalizing their ideas on strategic bombing. The 1939 design of the B-29 itself, ill-suited for any other missions, foreshadowed the increasing prevalence of strategic bombing doctrine. The 1944 edition of *Field Manual 100-5* split combat aviation into tactical and strategic air forces. It strongly advised against use of strategic bombers to

² Office of the CNO, Admiral D.B. Duncan to Admiral King, *Logistics Implications of VLR Bombing Program*, 22 May, 1944, 2.

³ War Department, *War Department Field Manual 100-5: Field Service Regulations, Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. U.S. War Department, 1941), 12-14, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll9/id/24>.

execute tactical missions, except “when the action is vital and decisive”, and closed the discussion with the caveat that “this deviation from basic employment is rare.”⁴

With the activation of the 20th Air Force in April, 1944, Pacific commanders no longer had a say in target selection. With Arnold holding personal command of the headquarters any requests for deviation from strategic targets required approval from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At Okinawa B-29s were authorized to support Buckner’s ground forces for five weeks. LeMay vigorously opposed the mission, but acquiesced when Nimitz promised to not ask for the diversion of strategic bombers again prior to the Japan invasion.⁵

United States Army Forces Pacific Ocean Areas, the headquarters responsible for all Army administrative and logistical functions in Nimitz’s theater, clearly identified strategic bombing as “one of the principle missions” of the headquarters. Army Air Corps units shared logistics supply lines in common with ground forces. But they also had their own dedicated air and maritime shipping assets for munitions and major parts independent of the Army’s Service of Supply.⁶ The stationing of the initial twelve VLR groups in the Marianas required

⁴ War Department, *War Department Field Manual 100-5: Field Service Regulations, Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. War Department, 1944), 22, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll9/id/30>.

⁵ LeMay, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 48.

⁶ G-4 Section, HQ USAFPOA, *G-4 Periodic Report, U.S. Army Forces Pacific Ocean Areas, for Quarter Ended 30 June 1945, 24 July 1945*, 3, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/1793>.

an additional thirty-one cargo ships for support, a consideration explored in depth in Chapter 3.⁷ This first deployment marked the start of a yearlong debate on the effectiveness of strategic bombing and its logistics implications for the Pacific Theater. Reaching the highest level of leadership, political and personality-driven decision making trumped the objections of both Army and Navy strategic planners.

Okinawa marked the culmination of the testy relationship between the services regarding strategic bombing in the Pacific. After years of prioritizing strategic bombing in Europe over the Pacific, the Joint Chiefs in August, 1943 ordered a B-29 force to India and China to begin strategic bombing of Japan. Codenamed Project MATTERHORN, the campaign was cancelled before it began due to its enormous logistical cost. Needing a new base of operations, the Joint Chiefs directed the planned force of 12 B-29 groups to be based in the Marianas Islands.⁸

In May, 1944, Navy planners raised flags of warning about strategic bombing's impact on the Central Pacific campaign. Rear Admiral D.B. Duncan, Assistant Chief of Staff for War Plans, wrote to Admiral King that "some concern has been felt as to our ability to provide the logistic support for 12 groups in the MARIANAS without impinging on other operations."⁹ The process of transferring

⁷ Office of the CNO, Duncan to King, *Logistics Implications*, 22 May, 1944, 1.

⁸ Haywood S. Hansell Jr., *The Strategic Air War Against Japan: A Memoir* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986), 55-57, 142-45.

⁹ Office of the CNO, Admiral D.B. Duncan to Admiral Ernest King, *VLR Program for the Marianas*, 26 May, 1944, 1, Box 68, Entry Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

the B-29 wing from the China-Burma-India Theater to the Central Pacific highlighted the poorly coordinated nature of the campaign. In a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Joint Logistics Committee the members discussed a just-completed study on the logistical impact of the B-29 transfer, but declined to forward it to commands in the Pacific because the War Department had already approved the move. In their haste to utilize the growing bomber force, the U.S. Military's senior leaders neglected to consider the tail-to-tooth operational ratio of the bombing campaign. This first step marked the beginning of an ever increasing demand for share of Pacific Theater resources.¹⁰

After receiving approval for the initial Marianas deployment, the Army Air Forces quickly called for a much greater Pacific footprint. Navy planners repeatedly stressed to Admiral King that any further growth jeopardized operations in the first half of 1945. D.B. Duncan's May 22, 1944, memo highlighted the huge disparity between the actual weight of bombs dropped, and the load placed on the logistics system to provide them. He also recommended opposing any additions to 20th Air Force until the command demonstrated their effectiveness.¹¹

Two months later the Navy War Plans Division addressed the topic again through a proposed draft memorandum from King to the commanding general of

¹⁰ JCS, JLC, "Joint Logistics Committee 104, 9 February, 1945," *Records of the JCS, Part 1: 1942-1945, Meetings, JLC*, 1; Hansell, 55-57.

¹¹ Duncan to King, 22 May, 1944, 2.

the Twentieth Air Force. Quoting estimates from Nimitz's staff, the memo called into question the validity of B-29 requirements that were presented at meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Citing an overestimation of port capacity and an underestimation of tanker requirements, it concluded that the VLR plan "underestimates shipping requirements by approximately 600,000 tons."¹² President Roosevelt's support of the massive production and employment of B-29s, together with the placement of command of 20th Air Force in the hands of General Arnold, prohibited Navy warnings from slowing the growth of the VLR bombing program.¹³

A four-fold expansion of the B-29 force occurred over the next year. The first increase, from 12 to 20 groups in November 1944, led Nimitz to express his concerns about this increase to Lieutenant General Ernest Harmon, commanding general of the Army Air Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas. Nimitz noted that the theater lacked both sufficient service troops for construction, and the shipping needed to move materials necessary for building bases. Though he closed the letter with a commitment to implement the Joint Chiefs' decisions if feasible, Nimitz offered a strong rebuke of the VLR program as a whole. He stated that "until these shortages are met, the Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas is very much opposed to augmentation of VLR program

¹² Office of the CNO, Draft Memo from War Plans Division to CG 20th AF, *Logistic support of air forces in future Pacific operations*, 31 July, 1944, 1, Box 76, Entry Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

¹³ Wolk, *Cataclysm*, 82-83.

requiring Service Troops and Shipping that might otherwise be available for carrying out the POA program of operations.”¹⁴

Under continued pressure from Roosevelt and his chief advocate, Army Chief of Staff George Marshall, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized an increase to 48 B-29 groups. Captain Paul Stroop, the Navy’s chief of aviation plans, warned against the conversion of B-24 units to B-29s, a cause both King and Nimitz took up with Arnold. Just two days before ICEBERG kicked off Stroop proposed that King and Arnold write a memorandum seeking to stop the transfer of three B-24 groups that would support the invasion. This pressure from the Navy’s top leaders, coupled with the tenacity of Japanese resistance at Okinawa, led Arnold to cancel conversion plans on May 16, 1945.¹⁵

Army Air Force designs on Okinawa as a massive B-29 base also drew Stroop’s attention. Original plans called for a force of 12 VLR groups to be established on the island. Stroop correctly predicted that the AAF would shoehorn more bombers onto the island than authorized, referring to their “customary “foot-in-the-door method” that would “eventually have 20 groups on Okinawa.” Just two weeks later Stroop informed Duncan that the Twentieth Air

¹⁴ HQ, CINCPAC/POA, Memo to CG AAFPOA from CINCPAC, *Increase of 8 Groups of VLR Bombers for P.O.A.*, 7 November, 1944, 1-3, Box 76, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

¹⁵ HQ, Army Air Forces, GEN Arnold to ADM King, *Planned deployment of Very Heavy Bomber (VHB) Groups*, May 16, 1945, Box 76, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

Force successfully executed the *fait accompli*, having established sixteen bomber groups, four more than authorized and with more on the way.¹⁶

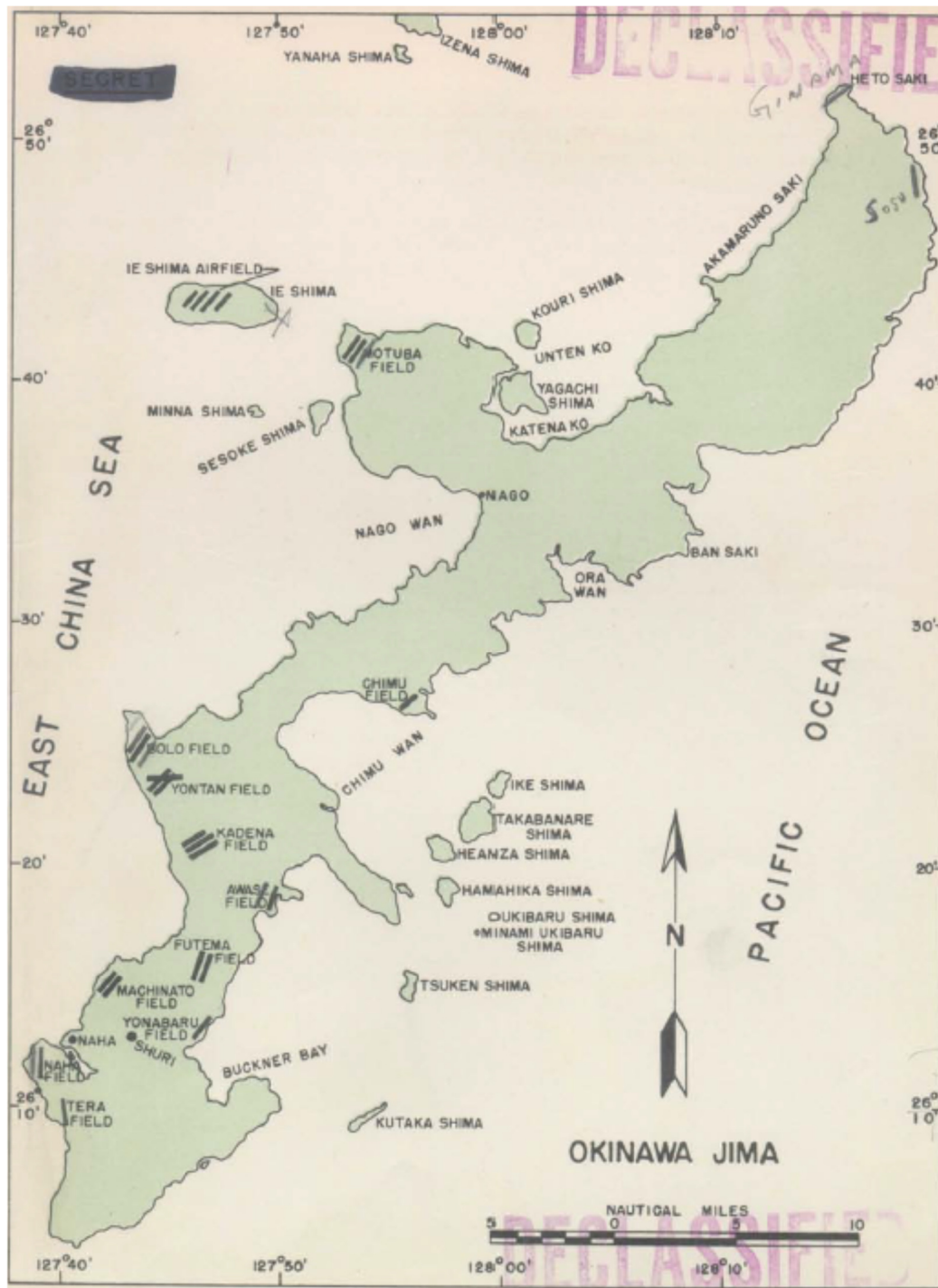
Massive airfield and support facility construction projects began only days after the launch of ICEBERG. Mostly conceived during the planning phase, airfield sites sprang up across both Okinawa and Ie Shima. Though existing Japanese facilities provided an opportunity for early basing of tactical support aircraft, the vast majority of fields were bare sites that would require significant new construction. On June 30, just days after organized resistance ceased on Okinawa, construction was already underway or in the works on eleven airfields with nineteen total flight strips. Fifteen strips featured runways long enough for heavy bombers, and seven met the 7,500 foot runway requirement for B-29s.¹⁷ Ie Shima held four more airfields capable of supporting aircraft as large as B-24 heavy bombers. Estimates forecast completion of all fields by November 15, 1945, just in time to support the invasion of Kyushu.¹⁸

¹⁶ Navy Department, Memo from CAPT Stroop to RADMs Duncan and Gardner, 31 May, 1945; Navy Department, Memo Stroop to F-1, *Comments on JCS 1190/8 – Planned Deployment of Strategic Very Heavy Bomber Groups*, 15 June, 1945, Box 76, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

¹⁷ Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC) and Pacific Ocean Areas (POA), *Base Facilities Summary: Advance Bases Central Pacific Area*, 30 June, 1945, 224, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/u?/p4013coll8,2622>.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 234.

Figure 3: Airfield Sites, Okinawa and Ie Shima, June 1945



Source: HQ CINCPAC and POA, *Base Facilities Summary, Advance Bases Central Pacific Area*, 30 June 1945, [CARL Ft Leavenworth](#), 223.

Buckner became a central figure in the debate over competing strategic “ways” to end the war and their impact on efforts to support tactical operations at Okinawa. Though his Army background biased him somewhat toward a preference for land based ways to reach strategic ends, Buckner’s ideas primarily rested on his interpretation of the conclusion of World War I and its meaning for the prevention of future similar wars. In 1943, while still commanding in Alaska, Buckner stated that “you’ve got to march into their country to make them realize their complete defeat” and that “we made a mistake when we did not crush Germany by actual invasion in the last war.” His views on tactical losses for strategic gain, that “loss of a few thousand men in invading Japan would be insurance against the loss of millions in the next war” provide insight into how Buckner conducted operations at Okinawa with an eye firmly set on the next battle.¹⁹

Though a seasoned Army infantry officer, Buckner did not hold negative feelings towards the use of air power. His experience in Alaska played no small role in this attitude. The single greatest contribution to repelling Japanese attacks in the Aleutians came from air power, not ground or naval forces. Air raids against the Japanese Navy, though causing little damage, eventually forced their withdrawal. The islands of Attu and Kiska remained occupied but mopping up operations required relatively small amphibious assaults. From his new command’s location, Buckner wrote to his wife Adele on June 15, 1945, that

¹⁹ “General Buckner a West Pointer: Son of Confederate General Was Academy Head from 1933-6, Born in Kentucky,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1945, 7.

Okinawa-based bombers were conducting daily attacks against Japan, and claimed that the campaign had “already developed our island into a powerful offensive base.”²⁰

In addition to his personal notes on the topic, Buckner continued to receive explicit guidance on airfield construction from Admiral Nimitz throughout the campaign. Less than two weeks into the invasion Nimitz wrote to Buckner and other senior officers in the combined force that “the governing principle will be maximum early development of Okinawa as a base for attack on Japan consistent with immediate urgent requirements for tactical purposes.” In a May 28 note for Buckner’s eyes only, Nimitz ordered him to speed up the construction efforts and to relieve his senior officers if necessary, remarking that airfields were progressing “disturbingly slow.”²¹

While Buckner and Nimitz traded correspondence on the matter, other senior leaders from the Army Air Force and Navy, from general officers in the Pacific to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also weighed in on the issue. On April 14, Vice Admiral Raymond Spruance, commander of the 5th Fleet and the Central Pacific Task Force, conducted an inspection of facilities on the island and warned Nimitz two days later that poor weather and lack of natural runway material would extend the planned construction timetables.²²

²⁰ Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 65.

²¹ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, “12 2314 Apr 45 CINCPAC ADV to CG10” (Green); “28 0910 May 45 CINCPAC ADV TO COM5THPHIBFOR” (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

²² Ibid, “16 0834 Apr 45 COM5THFLT to CINCPAC ADV” (Green).

Initial plans for basing bombers on the island called for two of the first eight airfields under construction to accommodate B-29s. Fierce opposition, both by Japanese ground forces on Okinawa and *kamikaze* aircraft from Japan, led to a debate on construction priorities. In early May competing demands from Navy and Army Air Force leaders reached Nimitz, with Buckner included in the message distribution. On May 6, Spruance issued a direct request to Buckner that he cease work on facilities for long-range bombers. Instead Spruance wanted to shift focus to fighter aircraft fields, which would aid in the defense against *kamikaze* attacks. Four days later Major General Curtis Lemay, now deputy commander of Twentieth Air Force, responded that this would interfere with plans for basing B-29s on Okinawa.²³

Nimitz rebuffed LeMay on May 11, identifying tactical aircraft as the highest priority for facility construction. True to his philosophy of valuing the opinions of his battlefield leaders, Nimitz asked Buckner for his view on the matter. Buckner, understanding the strategic intent of his mission, had come to this conclusion even earlier than Nimitz. His journal entry of May 6 revealed that he immediately ordered the changes recommended by Spruance, five days before Nimitz's order.²⁴

²³ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, "06 0129 May 45 COM5THFLT TO CTF 56" (Green); "10 0752 May 45 DEPCOMAF 20 to CINCPA PEARL" (Green).

²⁴ Ibid, "16 0834 Apr 45 COM5THFLT to CINCPAC ADV" (Green); "06 0129 May 45 COM5THFLT TO CTF 56" (Green); "10 0752 May 45 DEPCOMAF 20 to CINCPA PEARL" (Green); "11 0042 May 45 CINCPA ADV TO DEPCOM20AF" (Green); Buckner and Stillwell, *Seven Stars*, 53.

Buckner believed that strategic bombing had a role in the war, though he identified its primary benefits as its psychological impact on Japan and the military and industrial damage that would reduce resistance to invasion, not as a means that would in itself force surrender. Buckner demonstrated this belief in his decision to prioritize tactical airfield construction over strategic bomber fields. This decision would lead to increased capacity for the tactical aircraft supporting Tenth Army's ground assault and to greater protection for naval assets in the Ryukyus. The move also bolstered preparation for Operation OLYMPIC by increasing capacity for those aircraft that best supported amphibious operations. Buckner in a May 29, 1945, message to Nimitz clearly stated that "fighter fields", not VLR strips, were "vital to future plans."²⁵

Nimitz shared these sentiments. He wrote to King and the Joint Chiefs on 12 May 12, 1945, that changes should be made to the types of aircraft deployed to the island. Nimitz advised that "a decision to execute OLYMPIC this year may make it desirable to temporarily replace some part of the VLR wings proposed for OKINAWA by types better adapted for attack on enemy air forces and air installations and for close support of troops."²⁶

Naval Aviation Goes Strategic

The Pacific strategic bombing campaign had a dynamic missing from the strategic bombing campaign in Europe. Though the Air Corps owned the only

²⁵ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, "29 1012 May 45 COMGEN10 to CINCPAC ADV" (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

²⁶ Ibid, "12 0220 May 45, CINCPAC ADV to COMINCH" (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

“strategic” bombers, naval aviation advocates argued that mass attacks by carrier based tactical aircraft produced strategic effects. This belief stemmed from the radical shift in naval strategy after Pearl Harbor. At the time of the attack the U.S. Navy operated eight aircraft carriers, of which only five were designed as carriers, the others being converted tenders or battle cruisers.²⁷ The small number of carriers during the early war years meant that they were continuously employed, with the most critical period occurring from the Battle of the Coral Sea to Midway. As the operational area continued to shrink in early 1945, the Navy was faced with the dilemma of having a glut of carriers with limited targets for their employment. For instance, plans for Operation OLYMPIC, the invasion of Kyushu, included a total of fifty aircraft carriers, seven times the pre-war force.²⁸

Nimitz’s rotation of his main battle fleet leadership reflected the constant shifting of operational focus during the last two years of war. Command of the Central Pacific Task Forces transferred multiple times between Admiral Raymond Spruance, designated 3rd Fleet, and 5th Fleet under Admiral William “Bull” Halsey.²⁹ During the Central Pacific Campaign large scale amphibious

²⁷ U.S. Navy, “The Carriers The List,” <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/ships/carriers/cv-list.asp> (accessed October 10, 2015).

²⁸ Office of the CNO, War Plans Division, *Brief of OLYMPIC*, 19 May, 1945, 7, Box 68, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

²⁹ Navy fleet number assignment ties to the commander and staff. More staffs exist than actual organized fleets, allowing for rotation of personnel during extended conflict. Individual ships are assigned to the fleet headquarters and then further down to numbered task forces or task groups, they also rotate between active service and refit periods.

operations at the Marianas, Iwo Jima and Okinawa command fell to Spruance. Under his command was the Navy's foremost amphibious practitioner, Vice Admiral Richmond Turner. In between the Marianas and Iwo Jima a significant part of Nimitz's fleet supported MacArthur's invasion of the Philippines. Halsey was given command in anticipation of a decisive carrier aviation battle against the remnants of the Japanese fleet. With the almost complete destruction of the Japanese Navy, Nimitz experienced a six month period between ICEBERG and OLYMPIC with no major land operations to employ his carrier aviation.

Halsey and his staff, with the blessing of Nimitz, planned for a series of air raids targeting Kyushu and Honshu months before ICEBERG began that were designed to keep the carrier fleet in action. The concept was not a new one, having first appeared as an October 1944 CINCPAC plan. Using the codename HOTFOOT, the operation proposed "to destroy enemy military forces and facilities, (and) to provide *strategic* cover for the PACIFIC Campaign by containing or diverting enemy forces in the EMPIRE."³⁰

At the Pentagon, Admiral King's staff study of HOTFOOT included an assumption that "carrier(s) can prosecute effectively a strategic bombing campaign."³¹ In practice the employment of carriers as part of the strategic bombing effort played only a small role in the closing months of the war. Even compared to the reduced bomb loads of B-29s operating from the Marianas, the

³⁰ HQ, CINCPAC, *CINCPAC Joint Staff Study HOTFOOT*, 5 October, 1944, 1, Box 76, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

³¹ Office of the CNO, *COMINCH Staff Study HOTFOOT III* (undated, likely May, 1945), Box 76, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

total ordnance dropped by carrier based aircraft was small. For instance, on one multi-day operation Halsey's aircraft dropped a total of 300 tons of bombs. By comparison, in support of that raid, LeMay's bombers in one maximum effort attack against Japanese airfields dropped 3,000 tons.³² The effectiveness of carriers in a strategic bombing role was inhibited by the heavy refit requirements for both aircraft and ships, as well as the threat of Japanese air and submarine attacks, which prevented the carriers from carrying out continuous raids. Navy War Plans Division member Captain C.D. Glover expressed concern to a fellow planner over the over-ambitious goals of HOTFOOT III, remarking "we should have learned from experience to evaluate the potentialities of our air forces and to guard against over-optimism." He recommended toning down language in the staff study that read as if carrier aviation would single-handedly win the war.³³

Halsey's prolonged commitment to support MacArthur doomed the original HOTFOOT, but planning for subsequent carrier-based strategic bombing operations continued at the Pentagon and CINCPAC headquarters. Support for the concept from the Navy's top leadership drowned out Glover and others' words of caution. The latest iteration of the concept, HOTFOOT III, made its way through Washington and Pearl Harbor in May, 1945. HOTFOOT III offered a long-term solution to the problem of idle aircraft carriers, with raids against Japan scheduled for the period of time encompassed by ICEBERG, OLYMPIC, and

³² LeMay, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 51-52.

³³ Office of the CNO, Memo from C.D. Glover, F-112, to F-15, *Comment on HOTFOOT III*, May 2, 1945, 1, Box 76, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division (Series III), RG 38, NACP.

CORONET, which was the planned spring 1946 invasion of the Tokyo Plain on Honshu. This continued interest coincided with Nimitz's schedule for the rotation of leadership in the Central Pacific Task Forces, with Halsey and his 5th Fleet staff taking the lead in HOTFOOT III planning.

Mid-way through Operation ICEBERG Halsey once again assumed command of the Central Pacific Task Forces, freeing Spruance and his 3rd Fleet staff to begin planning for Operation OLYMPIC. On May 28, 1945, Halsey requested and received approval from Nimitz for a prolonged raid by the majority of his assigned fast carriers against the island of Hokkaido in the first week of July. In another cable sent just minutes his initial request, Halsey added targets in Kyushu and Honshu that would extend the duration of the operation to more than a week. Though smaller raids against Japanese airfields had taken place throughout the execution of ICEBERG, the new plan required a full 14 days of refit for Halsey's fast carriers, removing them from their support of Okinawa operations in mid-June.³⁴ Just as the Army Air Force pushed ahead of published timelines, Halsey moved his carrier raids ahead of schedule, sending two carrier task groups on a June 8 raid against Kyushu.³⁵ From that point forward Okinawa no longer served as 3rd Fleet's primary mission.

Offensive operations against entrenched enemy forces required mass quantities of supporting fire to gain ground. The mountainous terrain of southern

³⁴ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, "28 0921 May 45 HALSEY to NIMITZ" (Yellow, Nimitz Only); "28 0929 May 45 HALSEY to NIMITZ" (Yellow, Nimitz Only); "29 0859 May 45 NIMITZ to HALSEY" (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

³⁵ *Ibid*, "06 0829 Jun 45, COM3RDFLT to CINCPAC ADV" (Yellow, Nimitz Only).

Okinawa limited the effectiveness low angle naval gunfire. Designed to engage other ships on the horizon, such firepower proved largely ineffective against cave defenses. The ability of aircraft to hit pin-point targets and the increased lethality of the new munitions they carried made air support vital to success. Halsey's departure left Buckner and Tenth Army dependent primarily on Marine aircraft operating off captured Japanese airfields at Kadena and Yontan. A significant portion of the Navy's remaining escort carrier aircraft conducted combat air patrols to defend against *kamikaze*, leaving few sorties to support ground operations.

With a vastly reduced level of aviation support, any amphibious end run at Minatoga to bypass the Japanese defenses would prove problematic. Minatoga fell outside the range of U.S. artillery to the northeast of the Shuri Line. Minimum firing distances also prohibited larger caliber guns from moving to the new beachhead until it could expand significantly, leaving landing forces vulnerable to a Japanese counterattack. Without the aid of the fast-carriers and Army Air Force heavy bombers, the proposed amphibious landing faced significant operational risk.

What had been the greatest example of U.S. joint operations during World War II fell apart before Okinawa was secured. The push for strategic bombing by both the Army Air Forces and Navy had led to a diversion of essential fire-support in the middle of Buckner's heaviest fighting on Okinawa, a result of the military services desire to utilize their massive fleets of aircraft. The B-29 growth in the Pacific also diverted service troops and shipping that restricted the tactical

options open to Buckner. Both factors contributed to Buckner's decision to continue a frontal attack that promised a high cost in terms of both time and men, but one that was certain to achieve the goals of ICEBERG.

Conclusion

“I am not hurrying the attack on the south, but am greatly reducing casualties by a gradual and systematic destruction of their works. This we are doing successfully and can, I feel confident, break their line in ample time for our purposes.”¹ These two sentences in LTG Buckner’s April 14, 1945, letter to his wife Adele provide a concise view of his tactical and strategic outlook at Okinawa. Though Buckner spent the majority of his time directing tactical operations and visiting ground combat troops, the strategic goals of the U.S. were constantly on his mind. He recognized the value of the Ryukyus both as a means to end the war with Japan and as a means of providing a longer-term forward presence in the Pacific. In another letter to Adele he stated that “strategically it [is] highly important to our air and naval forces as a base to prevent further trouble from starting in the Orient. I hope we are sensible enough to keep it.”²

Senior leaders of the other military services respected Buckner’s leadership abilities and commitment to joint operations. As already noted, Nimitz hand-selected Buckner for command of Tenth Army, even with his limited combat experience. Buckner’s immediate supervisor during the amphibious portion of

¹ Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 39.

² *Ibid*, 40.

ICEBERG also had a high opinion of his performance and character. After a conference at Okinawa Nimitz wrote to King that Turner “rates Buckner very highly and wishes to work with him in the invasion.”³ This was high praise from two of the Navy’s most respected leaders.

Buckner did his part to recognize sister service contributions and protect fragile inter-service relationships; this was key to his effort to maintain progress towards strategic goals in the Pacific. When a mid-campaign press briefing by USAFPOA commander LTG Richardson only mentioned the progress of Army units, an angry Buckner remarked in his journal that he immediately “wrote him an official letter urging him to give due credit to my *Marines*” [emphasis in original] and claimed that “Richardson is always a menace to good relations between the services in the Pacific. Adm. Nimitz knows it.”⁴ Buckner also selected Marine Major General Roy Geiger, commander of III Amphibious Corps, as the successor to command of Tenth Army, another point of contention with Richardson. This is the only instance in U.S. military history of a Marine commanding a field army level force. Though junior in date of rank to MG Hodge, Buckner viewed Geiger as more qualified to assume the position.⁵

Buckner demonstrated a sound strategic understanding throughout his tenure as Tenth Army commander. The command’s first planned operation,

³ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, “CINCPAC to COMINCH, 12 1215 APR 45” (Yellow, Nimitz Only). The invasion referenced was Operation OLYMPIC.

⁴ Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 45.

⁵ Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 17. Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, 300.

CAUSEWAY, marked his first major decision point tied to strategic issues. Though others raised concerns on its feasibility and value, the voice of the combat commander held the most weight. His projections of service troop shortages, a problem he helped bring to light, ultimately forced a change to Tenth Army's objective.

Buckner recognized and addressed strategic factors throughout the planning and execution of Operation ICEBERG. In October, 1944 Buckner became the first Pacific commander to organize and activate a separate island command at the onset of fighting. A successful element of mid and post-battle re-organization in the Marianas and Iwo Jima, the island command concept relieved tactical commanders of rear area logistics and base development responsibility.⁶ In planning for ICEBERG Buckner took these lessons learned and improved upon the concept. Shifting most of the non-combat functions to the Island Command allowed Tenth Army Headquarters to focus on current operations and future battle plans. A separate general officer led headquarters, which gave the organization its own command authority, dealt solely with orchestrating the massive development effort to both support combat forces and prepare Okinawa for its role in the invasion of Japan. Buckner placed himself in a position to exercise command of both combat and support activities.

Designation as the Commander of Expeditionary Forces, a joint command position, also led Buckner to a critical decision about headquarters composition.

⁶ Buckner and Stilwell, *Seven Stars*, 18; HQ, Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 11-XXVI-1.

His understanding of the function of each service and the significant increase in headquarters responsibilities led to a request and approval for a significant staff augmentation. Totalling 86 Army, 27 Navy, and 32 Marine officers, the additional expertise proved beneficial in mitigating strategic logistics issues. An Army Ground Forces observer found that the detailed planning and execution of amphibious operations was due in large part to the Navy officers on the staff of Tenth Army.⁷

Buckner's expanded staff included two additional general officers. The first, Marine Brigadier General Oliver Smith served as one of two Tenth Army deputy chiefs of staff. Buckner's request for a Marine deputy reflected his recent experience as the investigating officer of a contentious episode at Saipan, the relieving of an Army general officer by a Marine commander. Providing a strong Marine presence at the table to represent half of ICEBERG's combat force deliberately aimed to keep cordial relations between the two ground services. More importantly, Navy Commodore Andrew Bissett assumed command of all Island Command construction troops. The placement of a general officer in such a position reflected Buckner's prioritization of airfield and port construction.⁸

Buckner did not completely ignore tactical considerations in decision making. Under pressure from Navy leaders facing the *kamikaze* onslaught, Tenth Army occupied four additional small islands to augment air defense

⁷ Howe, *Observers Report - Okinawa*, 10; HQ, Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 3-0-5.

⁸ HQ Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 2-II-22.

warning efforts.⁹ Though these operation required only small forces, the diversion of any amount of shipping slowed base development operations. Another call in late May, 1945, to shift all engineers to road repair for an entire week also provided short-term tactical benefits at the expense of strategic objectives.

Tenth Army's ICEBERG operation plan, much like the mission goals of CAUSEWAY, reflected the focus on occupying terrain suitable for bases. Invasion beach selection was determined by proximity to existing Japanese airfields and the flatlands of the central portion of the island. Phase II of ICEBERG called for the seizure of the nearby island of Ie Shima, another area suitable for large scale air facilities. Beyond this objective the rest of the mission statement called for an "occupation (of) such northern OKINAWA as necessary to establish control of the entire island and develop base facilities in favorable locations." No specific task to defeat all Japanese forces, nor a timeline for completing occupation of the islands was included in either CINCPOA directives or those promulgated by Tenth Army.¹⁰

Ten days after the invasion Nimitz questioned 5th Fleet Commander Admiral Raymond Spruance on the need for three Army divisions to clear southern Okinawa. If all three were not required Nimitz recommended using the 77th Infantry Division to capture Ie Shima before the planned ICEBERG Phase II

⁹ HQ, Tenth Army, *Action Report Ryukyus*, 1-0-2.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 1-0-2, 3-0-7.

date.¹¹ This contingency had already been planned for by Buckner and his staff two months before the assault. His decision to fold Phase II into Phase I both addressed the strategic shortage of shipping and secured prime territory for airfield development early in the operation.

In mid-April, geography and a well-crafted Japanese defensive plan forced American forces into a slogging frontal assault. Buckner's subordinates, most stridently among them the 77th Division commander Major General Andrew Bruce, called for an amphibious end run to hasten victory. Successful in Europe, and more recently in the Philippines, the tactic required coastal maritime superiority to land forces behind fixed enemy defenses to force their retreat. Two tactical factors limited the feasibility of such a move. First, the proposed landing site fell outside of the range of artillery located on the main Tenth Army front. Second, the reefs off of Minatoga limited beach access to only a portion of assault shipping types and excluded entirely any sustainment from standard cargo vessels.¹² These two considerations alone made a second amphibious operation problematic, undermining the arguments of Leckie, Millett, and Murray.

Strategic factors, though, turned out to be the greatest contributor to limiting Buckner's options. Admiral Halsey's increase in carrier raids against Japan significantly reduced Tenth Army's air support. Though ostensibly labeled

¹¹ HQ, CINCPAC, *CINCPAC ADV to COM 5th FLT*, Serial 10046, April 10, 1945, Box 71, Tenth U.S. Army A.G. Section Operational Reports and Plans, 1944-1945, U.S. Army Commands 1942-1945, RG 338, NACP.

¹² Office of the CNO, War Plans Division, Memo for F-00, by A.E. Becker Jr (F-112), *Southeast Beaches of Okinawa – report of*, June 16, 1945, BOX 166, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division, Series XII, RG 38, NACP.

as operations in support of ICEBERG, the attacks were a long-term project favored by Nimitz and Halsey. Any daring tactical move by Buckner had to conclude quickly carriers departing for refit. The Twentieth Air Force had also ended participation in ICEBERG and returned to strategic bombing of Japanese cities.

Theater wide shipping and manpower shortages played a much greater role in influencing Buckner than the reduction of air support. His mission centered on development, combat operations were only necessary to secure base sites and prevent the Japanese from interfering with construction. The major impediments to successful completion of ICEBERG stemmed from logistics issues four years in the making. Projected force structure requirements in the 1941 Victory Program were weighted too heavily towards combat units, an oversight that did not become evident until the peak of combat operations in both theaters in 1944. A key contributor to this situation was the splitting of the Pacific into two competing theaters under MacArthur and Nimitz. Pre-war planning had focused on a single axis of advance through the Central Pacific. The addition of a second route through the South Pacific and the Philippines added dozens of new bases and corresponding increases to service unit requirements. Buckner's first planned operation for Tenth Army, the occupation of Formosa, became a casualty to the effects of the split commands.

These same decisions also impacted the availability of shipping. As both Pacific campaigns moved further from U.S. ports, the requirements for shipping outstripped U.S. ship production capacity. Extension of the war in Europe into

1945 prevented the transfer of shipping assumed to occur as part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 1944 strategies for the final approach to Japan. Shortages of key ship types, most importantly assault shipping, became a limiting factor in the movement of logistics into austere port environments like those at Okinawa. Nimitz had to loan shipping to MacArthur to facilitate operations in the Philippines. The tardy return of these vessels impacted the preparation for ICEBERG.

Massive expansion of the Pacific strategic bombing campaign in 1944 added significantly to both the service troop and shipping shortages. The largest impact to service troop numbers was the demand for engineers to construct airbases. So many Army engineer units were occupied in the Marianas that the Navy had to assist with construction of airfields in Operation ICEBERG. Transportation of fuel, munitions, and parts were added to an already strained logistics system. Buckner's plans for ICEBERG required numerous changes to shipping schedules to account for competition from within the theater, most resulting in arrival delays or restrictions on unit weight allowances.

These strategic conditions ultimately led Buckner to the decision to complete the Okinawa campaign through the continued application of 'blowtorch and corkscrew.' This course of action offered the lowest risk to the Pacific's strategic goals in light of significant shortages in both service troops and shipping, exacerbated by the massive manpower and logistics requirements of the strategic bombing campaign. In the end Buckner's tactical decisions likely added only a few weeks to the projected completion of combat operations. Just

hours before his June 18 death, Buckner had cabled to Nimitz that “enemy resistance in OKINAWA broken today.”¹³ Given Okinawa’s distinction as the last battle of World War II, Buckner has been subject to increased scrutiny for the losses that occurred. But this hindsight bias ignores the fact that Buckner operated under the belief that the invasion of Japan was necessary to win the war. Though his successor would oversee weeks of mopping up operations, Buckner had completed the occupation and had placed Island Command on track to complete the majority of construction projects required to launch Operation OLYMPIC.

¹³ Nimitz, *Graybook*, Vol. 6, “18 June” (Running Summary).

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