

INTRODUCTION

Lone Tree Hill Staff Ride

This packet of materials is designed to help participants prepare for the battle of Lone Tree Hill virtual staff ride (VSR). This introduction will provide background information on the purpose and the components of a staff ride and some suggestions on how best to use the read ahead material in preparation for the staff ride.

The United States Army's publication for conducting staff rides is *The Staff Ride: Fundamentals, Experiences, Techniques* (available at through the Army University Press website at: <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Books/CSI-Press-Publications/Staff-Ride-Handbooks/#staff-rides>). This book defines the staff ride as a three-phased activity: a preliminary study of a historical event, a field phase at the location of that event, and an integration session.

The purpose of the preliminary study phase is to provide the participants an understanding of the historical events prior to visiting the field. This study can include reading materials, classroom sessions, movies, and any other material that can be presented before seeing the terrain. For this staff ride the preliminary study phase is primarily the read ahead material referenced in this package. The preliminary study phase is critical to the success of the field study phase and therefore equally critical to the success of the staff ride as a whole.

The field study phase most readily distinguishes the staff ride from other forms of historical study. It adds the one critical element of study that cannot be replicated in the classroom, in map study, or in readings—a view of the actual terrain. Because the field study builds upon the preliminary study, each phase compliments the other to produce a coherent, integrated learning experience. The visual images and spatial relationships seen during the field study may reinforce or challenge analytical conclusions reached during the preliminary study or generate new insights that build upon the added dimension of seeing virtual ground.

The integration phase provides an opportunity for participants to reflect upon the staff ride experience. Several positive effects stem from the integration phase. First, it provides the participants the opportunity to analyze the preliminary and field study in order to develop a richer overall view of the campaign. Second, it provides a mechanism through which participants may organize and articulate their impressions of both the campaign and the insights derived from its study that are applicable to them today. The integration phase for the battle of Lone Tree Hill staff ride will be conducted currently with the field phase after each stand and at the conclusion of the field study.

Participants should conduct their preliminary study by reading the excerpt from CMH Publication 5-8-1, "The Approach to the Philippines" by Robert Ross Smith.

General guidance:

1. Participants should know what decisions were made, a general understanding as to why that decision was made (or an educated guess – be prepared to defend your

answer), and the impact of those decisions.

2. Participants should take notes during the preliminary study phase for use during the field study. The facilitators will lead the discussions with open ended questions to provide participants with the maximum opportunity to share their knowledge. Do not read from a book verbatim; it shows a general lack of preparation.

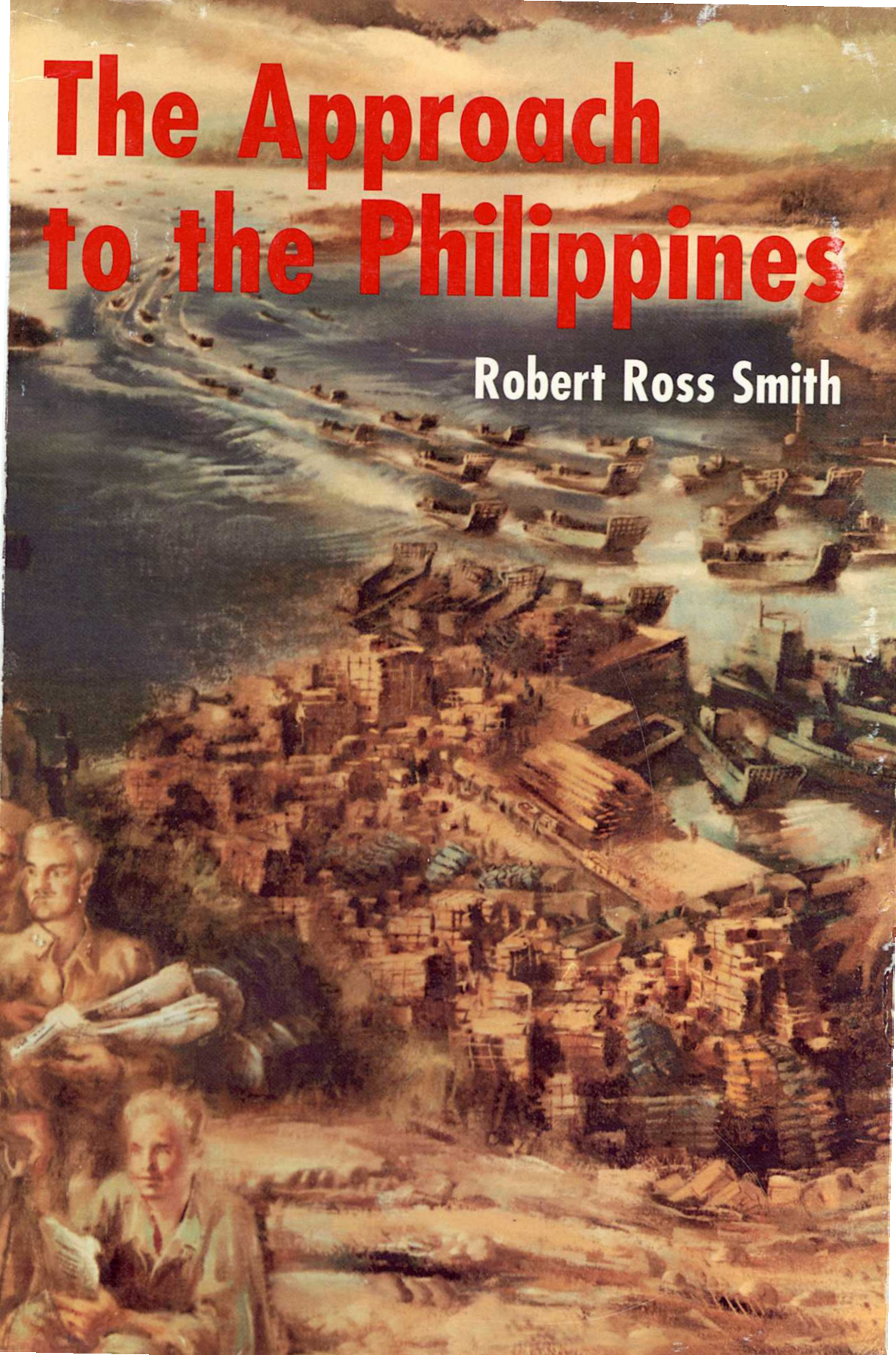
The stands for the field phase are:

| Stand | General Description |
|---|--|
| The road to Maffin Bay | Begins with an overview of the Southern Pacific Operation and the campaign along the northern coast of New Guinea. |
| The 158th attacks | The initial attempt by the 158 th to seize Lone Tree Hill. |
| The Japanese counterattack and U.S. repositioning of troops | The Japanese attempt to destroy the U.S. forces along the Toem-Arare beachhead and the relief of the 158 th by 6ID. |
| 20 th BDE/6 th ID attacks | The seizure of Lone Tree Hill by 20 th BDE/6 th ID |
| Aftermath | The resumption of the Southern Pacific Operation |

Participants will describe what happened, what the result was, and analyze the impact on the operation. As much as possible these descriptions will be open discussions. The free flow exchange of ideas and questions are the hallmarks of a good staff ride and is strongly encouraged.

The Approach to the Philippines

Robert Ross Smith



UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II

The War in the Pacific

THE APPROACH TO
THE PHILIPPINES

by

Robert Ross Smith



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CHAPTER X

Lone Tree Hill: The Initial Attacks

The Japanese at Wakde-Sarmi

Japanese Plans for Western New Guinea, April–May 1944

When in late 1943 and early 1944 the Japanese had withdrawn their strategic main line of resistance westward to Wakde-Sarmi, Lt. Gen. Fusataro Teshima's 2d Army had been ordered to hold that area at all costs, employing for this purpose the 36th Division, less the 222d Infantry on Biak Island. But with the loss of Hollandia in April, Wakde-Sarmi had become an exposed salient without protection from the east, north, or south. The next base westward was 200-mile-distant Biak Island, only partially developed. With the Wakde-Sarmi area no longer defensible, Imperial General Headquarters on 2 May informed the 2d Area Army that the strategic main line of resistance in the New Guinea area was to be withdrawn to the line Biak–Manokwari.¹

On 2 May it probably appeared to Imperial General Headquarters that this new line might be held for some time. The 32d and 35th Divisions (the latter minus the 219th Infantry, reinforced, sent to the Palaus) had been dispatched from China to western New Guinea in mid-April and, at

the time of their sailing, it seemed probable that they had a good chance to arrive safely at their destinations. But from the beginning, bad luck dogged the path of the *Takeichi Convoy*, as the two-division lift was called. One regimental combat team of the 32d Division was practically wiped out when the ship carrying it was sunk in the South China Sea by an American submarine on 26 April. The remaining ships stopped at Manila, in the Philippines, before sailing on for Halmahera and western New Guinea.

The *Takeichi Convoy* suffered further disasters on 6 May, when three more ships were sunk by American submarines off Manado in the Celebes. These losses left the 32d Division with but two infantry regiments (one of which lacked a battalion) and about one half its normal artillery. The 35th Division (exclusive of the units in the Palaus) was reduced to four complete infantry battalions and little more than a single battery of division artillery.²

After the *Takeichi Convoy* disasters, Lt. Gen. Korechika Anami, commanding the 2d Area Army, recommended a whole new

¹ Hist of Army Section, Imperial GHQ, pp. 111–13; Hist of 2d Area Army, pp. 53–55; Naval Opns in the Western New Guinea Area, pp. 2–3.

² Hist of Army Section, Imperial GHQ, pp. 111–13; Hist of 2d Area Army, pp. 53–55; Naval Opns in the Western New Guinea Area, pp. 3–4; The Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee [JANAC], *Japanese Naval And Merchant Shipping Losses During World War II By All Causes* (Washington, 1947), pp. 58–59; ALAMO Force, G-2 Wkly Rpt 58, 13 Sep 44, copy G-2 DofA files; Kawakami Comments.

series of redispositions for western New Guinea. He suggested that the *219th Infantry* be brought from the Palaus to Biak and that another regiment of the *35th Division* be dispatched from Halmahera, where its remnants had finally landed, to New Guinea. General Anami also had some plan to send one regiment of the *32d Division* to Biak to reinforce the *222d Infantry* or at least to move the division to the Vogelkop Peninsula. He also proposed that the *2d Amphibious Brigade*, a recently organized unit trained for small-boat transportation and amphibious warfare, be moved from the Philippines to Manokwari or Biak.

General Anami's plans were overambitious, for, as *Imperial General Headquarters* well knew, shipping simply was not available to undertake all the redispositions he had suggested. Moreover, *Imperial General Headquarters* was convinced that it would be foolhardy to risk any large ships forward of Sorong. The high command therefore approved only the concentration of the *35th Division* at Sorong, which was accomplished by the end of May. Higher headquarters also decided to keep the *32d Division* at Halmahera and reorganize it there.³

Meanwhile, Allied Air Forces bombers and long-range fighters, based on the newly won Hollandia fields, had begun to appear over Wakde, Sarmi, Biak, Noemfoor, and Manokwari in such large numbers that the Japanese found it next to impossible to use those bases for air operations or supply storage. Even Sorong, the Japanese knew full well, was within range of Allied attack bombers from Hollandia. These Allied air operations, coupled with increasing Allied submarine activity, such as that which had

caused the 6 May disaster to the *Takeichi Convoy* in waters which had previously been relatively safe for Japanese shipping, convinced *Imperial General Headquarters* that another strategic withdrawal was necessary. Accordingly, on 9 May, the high command informed the *2d Area Army* that a new strategic main line of resistance was to be set up along the line Sorong–Halmahera. The new line represented a strategic withdrawal of nearly 600 miles from the Wakde–Sarmi area since March.

Biak and Manokwari, forward of the new line, were to be held as long as possible as an outpost line of resistance. But the Wakde–Sarmi area forces were for all practical purposes written off as a loss and instructed to hold out as best they could. This high command attitude duplicated that taken earlier in the year when the Japanese had recognized that the *18th Army* was irredeemably lost.⁴

The Japanese garrison at Wakde–Sarmi was commanded by Lt. Gen. Hachiro Tagami,⁵ who was also the commander of the *36th Division*. That division had begun arriving in western New Guinea from North China in December 1943, and by mid-January 1944 the *223d* and *224th Infantry Regiments* (less small detachments left at Manokwari or sent inland) had closed at Wakde–Sarmi and the *222d Infantry* had reached Biak Island. In addition to the organic units of the *36th Division*, General Tagami had under his command in the Sarmi area some anti-aircraft units and mis-

³ Hist of *Army Section, Imperial GHQ*, pp. 111–13, 120–23; The Palau Opns, pp. 57–61; Hist of *2d Area Army*, pp. 53–55; Kawakami Comments.

⁴ Hist of *2d Area Army*, pp. 55–58; Hist of *South-eastern Area Army*, pp. 61–64; Hist of *Army Section, Imperial GHQ*, pp. 111–13.

⁵ The Japanese characters of the general's family name can also be read as Tanoue or Tanouye, in which readings it appears in some translated documents. The reading used in this volume is the most common.

cellaneous airdrome engineer, medical, and other service organizations, including men of naval guard detachments. The entire force in the Sarmi area was designated the *Yuki Group*.⁶

Dispositions of the Yuki Group

It will be recalled that when the Allies had landed at Hollandia, the *2d Army* had sent the *Matsuyama Force* (comprising the headquarters and the *2d* and *3d Battalions* (less two rifle companies) of the *224th Infantry* and a battalion of *36th Division* mountain artillery) toward Hollandia from Sarmi.⁷ This group, commanded by Col. Soemon Matsuyama, the commanding officer of the *224th Infantry*, was at Armopa, about half-way between Sarmi and Hollandia, when the Allies landed on the mainland opposite Wakde Island on 17 May. The *51st Field Road Construction Unit*, which had been building roads and bridges for the *Matsuyama Force*, was also in the Armopa area.

Almost coincident with the departure of the *Matsuyama Force* for Hollandia, General Tagami divided the Wakde-Sarmi area

into three defense sectors. (See *Map 9*.) The *Right Sector Force* was responsible for Wakde Island and for thirteen miles of coast line from Tementoe Creek west to the Woske River. Besides the Wakde Island garrison, the *Right Sector Force* comprised 300 men of the *3d Battalion*, *224th Infantry*, under a Captain Saito, the *16th Field Airdrome Construction Unit*, and a five-gun battery of 75-mm. mountain artillery. It was commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel Kato, also the commander of the airdrome engineers, and numbered (not counting the troops on Wakde) about 1,200 men.⁸ The bulk of the *1st Battalion*, *224th Infantry*, was also in the same area, but it was apparently engaged in moving supplies forward to the *Matsuyama Force* and was not under Colonel Kato's control.

West of the Woske River was the area of the *Central Sector Force*, under Col. Naoyasu Yoshino, also commanding officer of the *223d Infantry*. The sector ran from the Woske west about four and a half miles to Sawar Creek and included within its boundaries Sawar Drome. The principal combat forces comprised the *223d Infantry*, less the *2d Battalion* and the *2d Company* of the *1st Battalion*. Other units were a battery of three 75-mm. mountain artillery guns, the *103d Field Airdrome Construction Unit*, some anti-aircraft organizations, and possibly a platoon of light tanks.⁹ The strength of the *Central Sector Force* was approximately 2,500 men.

The *Left Sector Force*, also about 2,500 men strong, was responsible for a defense

⁶ Opns of *Yuki Group*, p. 13; Hist of *2d Area Army*, pp. 26-27; Japanese Studies in WW II, 32, *2d Army* Opns in the Western New Guinea Area, pp. 1-2, copy in OCMH files. *Yuki* (literally: *Snow*) *Group* was apparently a code name for both the *36th Division* and the whole of General Tagami's command in the Sarmi area. It is not clear whether General Tagami retained any control of the *222d Infantry* on Biak, but the probability is that the Biak force operated directly under *2d Army* command.

⁷ Information in this and the following subsection is from: Opns of *Yuki Group*, pp. 12-15 and Map 3; Miscellaneous orders of the *36th Division* and *224th Infantry*, dated late Apr and early May 44, as translated in ALAMO Force G-2 Wkly Rpt 48, 5 Jul 44, copy in G-2 DofA files; Hist of *2d Area Army*, pp. 51-53, 57-59; Hist of *Southern Area Army*, pp. 61-64; *2d Army* Opns, pp. 1-6; *2d Army* Opns at Sarmi and Biak (Rev), pp. 10-26.

⁸ Strength figures in this and the following subsection are the author's estimates, based upon conflicting and incomplete sources.

⁹ The existence of this tank platoon is open to question, because it is known that the *36th Division's* tank company was on Biak and only one tank was ever found in the Sarmi area.

sector extending westward from Sawar Creek six and a half miles to Tevar Creek, which empties into the sea immediately west of Sarmi. Troops consisted of the *2d Battalion, 223d Infantry* (less two companies but with a company of the *1st Battalion* attached), most of a battalion of 75-mm. mountain guns, a number of engineer units, and some antiaircraft artillery. The commander was Maj. Gen. Shigeru Yamada, also the commander of the *4th Engineer Group*, a headquarters which controlled the activities of many engineer and other service units in the area. The commander of the *223d Infantry's* battalion was Capt. Yoshio Toganae.

In addition to the three defensive sectors and the *Matsuyama Force*, there were a number of detached units operating under the *Yuki Group*. Some of these units patrolled the coast far west of Sarmi, while others were stationed at points deep inland. Service troops not specifically assigned to the defensive sectors were concentrated for the most part near Sarmi or bivouacked along the banks of the Orai River, which entered the ocean about two miles east of Sarmi.

The total Japanese troop strength in the Sarmi area, including the temporarily absent *Matsuyama Force*, was about 11,000 men. Of these, a little more than half were trained and effective combat troops. The most accurate Allied estimates made prior to 17 May accounted for a total of 6,500 Japanese, of whom about 4,000 were thought to be combat troops.¹⁰

Reactions to the Allied Landings

After the Allied landings, the first action taken by General Tagami was to instruct the *Matsuyama Force* to retrace its steps to Sarmi. This order was issued on 17 May, but for the next two days the general took no other decisive steps. He had lost about 250 men killed and a like number wounded before 17 May as a result of Allied air action. Operations on the 17th had caused many more casualties and had created a great deal of confusion. On that day, troops of the *Right Sector Force* in the Toem-Arare area fled beyond the Tor River and Tementoe Creek. On a hill near Maffin Drome, General Tagami could but sit helplessly by and watch as his 800-man garrison on Wakde Island was annihilated. Continued Allied air and naval bombardments added to his casualties, and the *Yuki Group* probably lost over 1,000 men from the 17th through the 20th of May. General Tagami's food and ammunition supply, already low, was being destroyed by Allied naval and air operations and by such shore-based artillery fire as the *TORNADO* Task Force was able to bring to bear on his storage dumps. His situation was anything but enviable. On 19 May the *2d Army* ordered him to attack.

General Tagami planned a pincers movement. The *Matsuyama Force* was ordered to concentrate at Masi-masi, a coastal village about four and a half miles east of Tementoe Creek, and to prepare to attack the Allied positions at Toem. On the west flank, the *Central Sector Force* was reorganized. The service troops were placed under the command of a Captain Fujimura while the combat elements (two battalions of the *223d Infantry* with supporting artillery) were assigned to Colonel Yoshino for offensive operations. The new combat organiza-

¹⁰ Allied figures are from *ALAMO Force* FO 16, 30 Apr 44; *TTF* FO 1, 12 May 44. The Allied figures perforce included the *Matsuyama Force* since the Allies did not learn until after 17 May that any large body of Japanese troops had been dispatched from the Sarmi area toward Hollandia.

tion, designated the *Yoshino Force*, was to cross the Tor at the confluence of that river and the Foein (a point about four miles upstream) during the night of 22-23 May. From the ford, the force was to attack the Toem area from the south and southwest. Simultaneously, the *Matsuyama Force* was to attack from the east. The double envelopment was set for the night of 25-26 May.

While the two arms of the pincers were moving into position, the reorganizing *Right Sector Force* assembled along the west bank of the Tor River to prevent Allied advances toward the Maffin and Sawar airdromes. The rest of the combat troops and armed service personnel that General Tagami was able to muster he organized as a new battle force to which he gave the confusing title *Yuki Group*, a name which by now apparently bore three connotations—the new force, the entire garrison of the Sarumi area, and the *36th Division*. The nucleus of the new *Yuki Group* was probably the *2d Battalion, 223d Infantry*,¹¹ which was reinforced by parts of various units from the *Left* and *Central Sector Forces*. The *Yuki Group* was to move into the hills south and southeast of Maffin Drome to defend that area in cooperation with the *Right Sector Force*, to which was also temporarily attached the *1st Battalion, 224th Infantry*. Within a few days the TORNADO Task Force was to be put on the defensive by the *Yoshino* and *Matsuyama Forces*. But before that happened, one part of the task force was to encounter the well-prepared and skillfully manned de-

fenses of the new *Yuki Group* and the *Right Sector Force*.

The 158th Infantry Against Lone Tree Hill

As they awaited the outcome of the battle for Wakde Island, TORNADO Task Force units on the mainland had restricted combat operations to patrolling. Engineers had continued construction and road improvement, and the D plus 1 convoy had arrived and had been unloaded without incident. The *2d Battalion, 163d Infantry*, sent patrols across Tementoe Creek on the east flank without finding any signs of organized enemy units. The *3d Battalion*, on the west flank, was ready to move across the Tor River to expand the initial beachhead and discover enemy intentions.

Preliminaries to a Mainland Campaign

Since there was a possibility that strong enemy forces might oppose an advance west of the Tor, General Doe, who did not believe it prudent to commit his small task force to more than one offensive at a time, postponed movement across the Tor until the capture of Wakde Island was assured. Late on the afternoon of 18 May, when it appeared to the task force commander that the situation on Wakde was well in hand, he gave the *3d Battalion* permission to push patrols to the west side of the river, but before dark there was only time for one platoon to cross. That unit established a bridgehead on the west bank in preparation for a crossing by the rest of the battalion.¹²

On the 19th, *3d Battalion* patrols found evidence that the Japanese intended to hold

¹¹ There is some confusion as to whether the *2d Battalion, 223d Infantry*, was initially assigned to the new *Yuki Group* or to the *Yoshino Force*. In any case it did not join the *Yoshino Force* during the offensive phase of Japanese operations in the Sarumi area. The name *Central Sector Force* was retained by Captain Fujimura's organization of service troops.

¹² TTF G-3 Jnl, 6-25 May 44; 163d Inf Jnl, 13-30 May 44.

the ground west of the river. Two organized and well-armed enemy patrols were encountered near Maffin No. 1, a native village on the beach about 3,000 yards beyond the Tor, and another enemy patrol was located at Maffin No. 2, a hamlet about 2,500 yards upstream. The next day a Japanese infantry force supported by mortars and machine guns launched a series of small attacks against the 3d Battalion's bridgehead but failed to dislodge the Company I platoon which was holding the river crossing. Intermittent Japanese machine gun and mortar fire continued throughout the 20th, and three rifle platoons of Company K were sent across the river to relieve the Company I unit. There was a threat of more serious fighting. ALAMO Force, on the basis of new, special intelligence, radioed to the TORNADO Task Force that the Japanese were planning a major counterattack against the Toem-Arare beachhead.¹³

The night of 20-21 May passed quietly, but about midmorning on the 21st the 3d Battalion's positions at the mouth of the Tor were bombarded by large-caliber mortar or high-angle artillery fire. The battalion was alerted to expect an enemy attack, but no assault materialized. The remainder of the day was therefore spent in strengthening defenses, while at the Arare area the time was devoted to reorganizing and re-equipping the various 163d Infantry units which had by now returned to the mainland from Wakde, Insoemanai, Liki, and Niroemoar Islands.¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid.*; Rad, ALAMO to TTF, WF-3246, 20 May 44, in ALAMO G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 16-22 May 44.

¹⁴ The Provisional Groupment on Insoemanai had been disbanded on 19 May and its troops either returned to the mainland or sent to Wakde. Liki and Niroemoar had been captured according to plan by Companies E and I on 19 May. The two companies had been transported to the objectives by two APD's and two LCT's, protected by DD's. The islands

Early on the morning of 21 May the convoy bearing the 158th Regimental Combat Team, ALAMO Force Reserve, for the Wakde-Biak operation arrived off Toem.¹⁵ The 158th Infantry went into bivouac near Arare, while the combat team's 147th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. howitzers) quickly set up its guns near the same village to reinforce the 191st Field Artillery Group's fire on targets west and south of the bridgehead across the Tor River.¹⁶

Almost coincident with the arrival of the 158th Regimental Combat Team, the mission of the TORNADO Task Force was enlarged. Originally the task force had been charged only with the seizure of Wakde Island and the immediately adjacent mainland area. These tasks had been accomplished by 22 May, but on the same date General Krueger changed the mission and assigned a new one which was reminiscent of the original concept of the Wakde-Sarmi operation. General Krueger now felt that Wakde Island would not be secure until more information concerning Japanese intentions could be obtained. Furthermore, he believed that the arrival of the 158th Regimental Combat Team would allow the task force to mount an offensive which would break up the known Japanese attack plans and would place the enemy on the defensive.

proved to be unoccupied by the Japanese and the Fifth Air Force radar detachments were immediately set up. The only casualty was the native chieftain of Liki, who was wounded by the preassault naval bombardment. Detachments of the 163d Infantry were left on both islands to protect the radar installations. TTF G-3 Jnl, 6-25 May 44; 163d Inf Jnl, 13-30 May 44.

¹⁵ The unit reached the area a day ahead of schedule, thereby causing some confusion. The beaches were not ready to receive the troops and supplies, and some of the ships, without awaiting instructions from task force headquarters, started unloading over the wrong beaches.

¹⁶ TTF G-3 Jnl, 6-25 May 44.

Accordingly, he ordered the TORNADO Task Force to institute a vigorous overland drive toward Sarmi, sixteen miles west of the Tor River.¹⁷

This decision, based upon the scanty, incomplete information concerning Japanese strength and dispositions available to General Krueger at the time, was destined to precipitate a protracted and bitter fight. The Japanese had no intention of abandoning Sarmi and the two airstrips between the town and the Tor without a desperate struggle. The fighting was not, however, to be carried out under the direction of General Doe or by the 163d Regimental Combat Team. The task force commander decided to use the 158th Infantry to start the westward drive which ALAMO Force had ordered, and elements of the recently arrived regiment began relieving the 3d Battalion, 163d Infantry, at the mouth of the Tor River on 23 May.

Meanwhile the 41st Division, scheduled to invade Biak Island on 27 May, had found that it needed another general officer for that operation. General Doe, whose administrative assignment was assistant commander of the 41st Division, was the logical choice to fill the division's command requirement. Accordingly, on 25 May, he left the Wakde area and his place as commander of the TORNADO Task Force was taken by Brig. Gen. Edwin D. Patrick.¹⁸

The 158th Regimental Combat Team was organized on 11 May 1944 at Finsch-

hafen in Australian New Guinea. At that time its component parts were the 158th Infantry Regiment, the 147th Field Artillery Battalion, the 506th Medical Collecting Company, and the 1st Platoon, 637th Medical Clearing Company. Other units were assigned to the combat team from time to time during its combat operations. In the Wakde-Sarmi area the combat team commander was General Patrick and the commander of the 158th Infantry was initially Col. J. Prugh Herndon.¹⁹

West to the Tirfoam River

On the morning of 23 May Company L, 158th Infantry, began advancing westward from the Tor River bridgehead. (*Map 11*) Plans for the day were to complete the relief of the 3d Battalion, 163d Infantry, extend the bridgehead to the west, and establish a road block at Maffin No. 1. The remainder of the 3d Battalion, 158th Infantry, was to cross the Tor during the day and follow Company L to Maffin No. 1. At that village the battalion was to assemble and prepare to attack westward toward Sarmi at daylight on 24 May. This attack was to be supported by the remainder of the 158th Infantry, which was scheduled to move across the Tor on the 24th and 25th.²⁰

During the 23d the advance of Company L met increasingly strong resistance.²¹ Japa-

¹⁷ TTF G-3 Jnl and Jnl file, 6-25 May 44; Rad, ALAMO to TTF, WF-3772, 22 May 44, in ALAMO G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 18-22 May 44; Ltr, Gen Krueger to Gen Ward, 2 Jan 51, no sub, in OCMH files.

¹⁸ TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 17-25 May 44, p. 8; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 25 May-12 Jun 44, p. 1; Rad, ALAMO to TTF, WF-3972, 24 May 44, and Rad, ALAMO Rear Hq to ALAMO Adv Hq,

WF-4062, 24 May 44, both in ALAMO G-3 Jnl, Wakde-Biak, 23-24 May 44. There are five separate reports bearing the title TORNADO Task Force, each dated according to the length of tenure of various units as task force headquarters.

¹⁹ 158th RCT Opns Rpt Sarmi-Wakde, 11 May-21 Jun 44, pp. 1-3.

²⁰ 158th Inf FO 2, 23 May 44, in 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May-21 Jun 44.

²¹ Unless otherwise indicated, information in the rest of this subsection is from: 158th Inf Jnl and Jnl files, 9 May-21 Jun 44; TTF G-3 Jnl, 6-25

nese defenses were centered around three small, brush-bordered lakes near the beach about 1,800 yards west of the Tor. The rest of the 3d Battalion, 158th Infantry, across the Tor before 1130, quickly moved forward to assist Company L, which had been pinned down along the main coastal track west of the lakes by Japanese machine gun and rifle fire. Company K pushed up to the left flank of Company L, while Company I moved toward L's rear. With the aid of mortar fire from the 81-mm. weapons of Company M, Companies K and L were able to push gradually forward during the afternoon, advancing on a front about 400 yards wide.

Finding that the attack was not progressing as rapidly as he had expected, Colonel Herndon ordered his 1st Battalion across the Tor. The 1st Battalion did not start moving until 1400 and could not get far enough forward to join the attack before dark. Tanks would probably have been of great help to the 3d Battalion, but by the time the mediums of the 1st Platoon, 603d Tank Company, moved across the Tor, the forward infantry troops had already halted for the night.

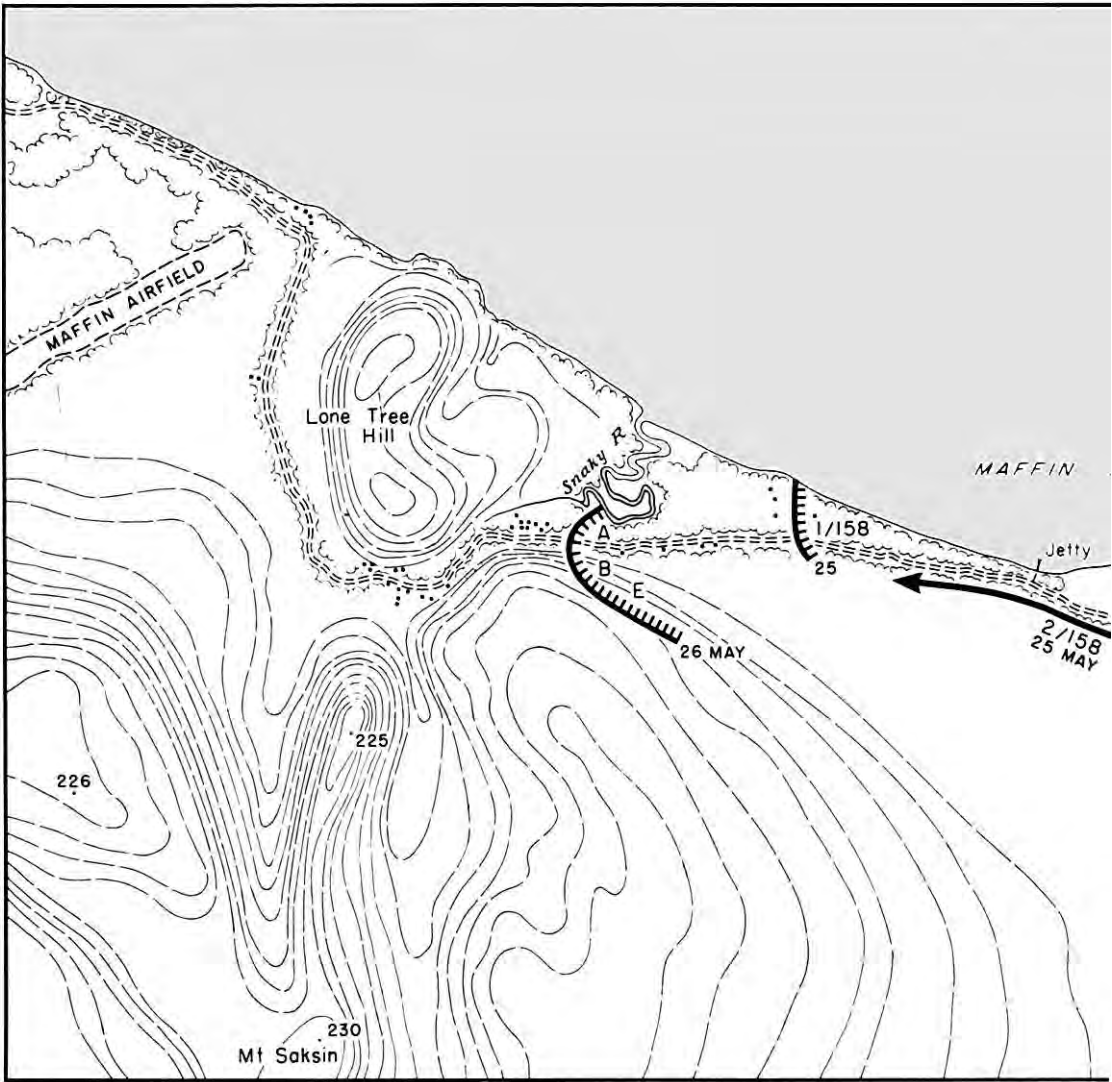
Companies L and K dug in for the night across the main coastal track at a point about 400 yards east of Maffin No. 1. Here the road swung away from the beach, and Company L extended the perimeter about 500 yards north to the shore of Maffin Bay. Company I was in position along the road east of Companies L and K. The 1st Battalion bivouacked for the night on the west bank of the Tor at the river's mouth. The

3d Battalion had lost 8 men killed, 12 wounded, and 1 missing during the day, while 6 Japanese had been killed and 1 captured. Plans for the morrow were to have the battalion continue the attack westward.

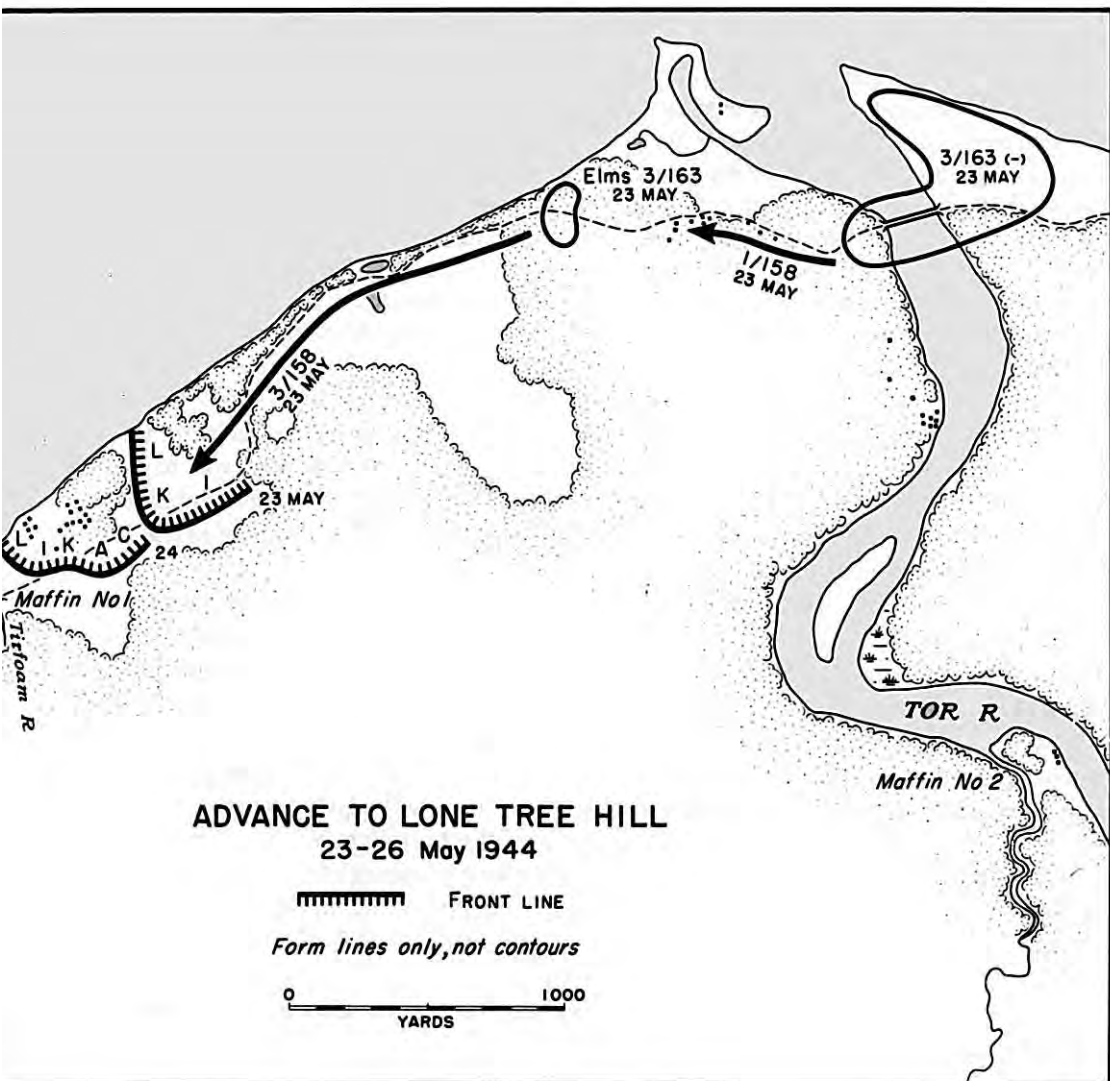
Shortly after 0700 on the 24th, the 81-mm. mortars of Company M laid down a brief concentration in front of Companies K and L, and at 0715 the 147th and 218th Field Artillery Battalions began a fifteen-minute support bombardment. When a few artillery shells fell on Company L, the 3d Battalion commander thought that his own artillery was falling short, and he had the fire stopped quickly. Actually, this was Japanese artillery fire. The infantry unit was mistaking Japanese artillery for its own, a failing not uncommon with troops not previously subjected to enemy artillery fire. Despite the lack of extended artillery support, Companies K and L moved out as planned at 0730. Company L, on the right, advanced along the beach encountering only scattered rifle fire but Company K, on the main road, had hardly started when Japanese machine gun and rifle fire from concealed positions in a wooded area on the left front halted its advance. Unable to gain any ground, Company K called for tank support. Two tanks, together with a flame-thrower detachment from Company B of the 27th Engineers, arrived at Company K's lines about 1000. With the flame throwers and tanks blasting the way, the infantrymen overran the Japanese defenses, killing ten of the enemy and capturing two machine guns. The remainder of the Japanese force, probably originally some forty men strong, disappeared into the jungle south of the road, whence scattered rifle fire continued to harass Company K.

Company L reached the outskirts of Maffin No. 1 about 1400. The movement had been slow, not as a result of Japanese oppo-

May 44; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 17-25 May 44, pp. 7-9; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 25 May-12 Jun 44, pp. 1-6; 158th RCT Opns Rpt Sarmi-Wakde, 11 May-21 Jun 44, pp. 2-4; Ltr, Col Herndon to Gen Ward, 23 Dec 50, no sub, in OGMH files.



MAP 11



H. Damon

sition but because the battalion commander did not believe it prudent for Company L to advance far beyond Company K. Deploying to find a crossing over the Tirfoam River, just west of Maffin No. 1, Company L was subjected to intense machine gun fire from enemy positions on the west bank. The company then moved southwest away from the beach toward the main road and up the Tirfoam. This maneuver was greeted with new outbursts of machine gun fire from Japanese positions on both sides of the river. The company commander called for tank support, and the 1st Platoon, 603d Tank Company, sent four of its mediums forward.

As the tanks moved into position elements of the *Right Sector Force*, comprising Captain Saito's men of the *3d Battalion, 224th Infantry*, and a company of the *223d Infantry*, charged out of the jungle. The Japanese were under Colonel Kato, *Right Sector Force* commander, who was killed as he personally led a small detachment against the American tanks. The enemy was quickly thrown back with heavy losses by the combined fire of the four tanks and Company L's riflemen and machine gunners. However, under cover of their infantry attack, the Japanese had dragged a 37-mm. anti-tank gun forward out of the jungle. As the enemy infantrymen withdrew to the southwest after the death of Colonel Kato, the antitank gun opened fire. It was soon destroyed and its crew killed, but not before three of the American tanks had been so damaged that they had to be withdrawn for repairs.²²

The separate actions of Companies L and

K during the morning had created a gap between those two units, and the battalion commander sent Company I forward to fill the void. The reinforcing company moved west along the road to Company K's right rear. The latter had been unable to advance because of continued enemy fire from its left flank, and, therefore, shortly after 1200, Colonel Herndon ordered the 1st Battalion forward. The 1st was to bypass opposition on Company K's left by a deep envelopment to the south across the Tirfoam. Once beyond the river the battalion was to push northwest to a jetty which projected into Maffin Bay about 600 yards west of the Tirfoam's mouth.

Company A started the flanking maneuver about 1330 but was soon halted by machine gun and rifle fire from dense jungle south of the main road. Company C was ordered to reinforce Company A. However, by the time Company C got into position to continue the attack, darkness was approaching and the battalion commander stopped the flanking maneuver for the night. Meanwhile, Company K, upon the arrival of Company A at its left flank, had extended its right front to Maffin No. 1, establishing contact there with Companies L and I. Company L had sent patrols across the Tirfoam late in the afternoon, but these parties were withdrawn before dark and the company began setting up night defenses about 200 yards east of the river.

For the night Company L's right flank rested on the beach, and the unit's left was tied into Company I's perimeter farther inland. To the left rear of Company I was Company K, with its lines stretching across the coastal track. Companies A and C were south of the road on K's left. Company B had moved forward late in the day to rein-

²² Japanese information here and in the rest of this subsection is from *Opns of Yuki Group*, pp. 15-16; and *2d Army Opns at Sarmi and Biak (Rev)*, pp. 20-22.

force the 3d Battalion's three rifle companies and was apparently located for the night near Companies I and L.

Casualties during the day had been heavy—28 men were killed and 75 wounded. Many others, including the commander of Company I, had dropped from heat exhaustion and had to be evacuated. The officer strength of Company I was reduced to two. Japanese casualties were undoubtedly higher, especially as a result of the *Right Sector Force's* suicidal attacks against the four American tanks. Colonel Kato's place as *Right Sector Force* commander was taken by Maj. Yasake Matsuoka, formerly a battalion commander of the *233d Infantry*, who was ordered to continue to defend the approaches to Maffin Strip.

The sacrifices of the *Right Sector Force* had not been in vain. Under cover of the unit's holding action the *Yoshino Force* continued its wide envelopment south of the 158th Infantry toward Toem and Arare, a maneuver of which the *TORNADO Task Force* was as yet unaware. At the same time the delaying action of the *Right Sector Force* gave the *Yuki Group* ample time to move into the hills south and east of Maffin Strip. The 158th Infantry, ordered to continue the advance on the 25th, was soon to engage the *Yuki Group* and the remnants of the *Right Sector Force*, which had withdrawn south into the jungle and west into hills beyond the Tirfoam.

Discovering the Japanese Defenses

Action on the 25th started with the withdrawal of the 158th Infantry's forward units to a point 350 yards east of the Tirfoam, while artillery and mortar concentrations were laid on the banks of the river and on suspected enemy defenses west of the

stream.²⁸ Under cover of these fires the 1st Battalion relieved the 3d, and Company E was sent forward to reinforce the left of the 1st Battalion. The 3d Battalion reverted to regimental reserve.

Patrols of the 1st Battalion moved out about 0830, and the main body followed fifteen minutes later. The artillery and mortar fire had been effective. Japanese defenses east of the Tirfoam, strongly held the previous day, were found to be destroyed or abandoned. With only scattered rifle fire opposing its movement, the 1st Battalion reached its initial objective—a bridge which crossed the Tirfoam about 200 yards inland—at 0915. Patrols moved north and south along the east bank, dispersing enemy stragglers and securing Maffin No. 1. At 0930 Colonel Herndon decided to send the battalion across the river. The next objective was the jetty 600 yards to the west.

Preparatory to movement across the Tirfoam, the 1st Battalion's machine guns and 60-mm. mortars (the latter attempting to get tree bursts) sprayed a heavily wooded area just west of the bridge. Patrols crossing the river shortly after 0930 reported only sporadic rifle fire which did not seem to represent an organized defense, and Companies B and C crossed the bridge without incident about 1115. Company E followed and deployed on the left flank of the 1st Battalion. By noon Company B had reached the jetty. There the 1st Battalion paused to

²⁸ Unless otherwise indicated this and the following subsections are based on: TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 25 May–12 Jun 44, pp. 1–4; 158th RCT Opns Rpt Sarmi-Wakde, 11 May–21 Jun 44, pp. 4–9; 1st Bn 158th Inf Jnl, 11 May–21 Jun 44; 2d Bn 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May–21 Jun 44; 3d Bn 158th Inf Jnl, 12 May–18 Jun 44; TTF G-3 Jnl, 25–31 May 44; 158th Inf Jnl and Jnl file, 9 May–21 Jun 44; Ltr, Herndon to Ward, 23 Dec 50. Enemy info is principally from Opns of *Yuki Group*, pp. 15–16, and *2d Army Opns* at Sarmi and Biak, p. 22.

reorganize and lunch while the 2d Battalion crossed the Tirfoam. By 1300 both battalions had been fed and were ready to push onward. Colonel Herndon set the next objective as Lone Tree Hill, a terrain feature which rose from the flat coastal plain about 2,000 yards west of the jetty.

Lone Tree Hill had been named for a single tree which was depicted on its crest by the map then employed by TORNADO Task Force. Actually, the hill's coral mass was covered with dense rain forest and jungle undergrowth. Lone Tree Hill was about 175 feet high, 1,200 yards long north to south, and 1,100 yards wide east to west. The north side dropped steeply to a rocky shore on Maffin Bay. The hill's eastern slope was fronted by a short, violently twisting stream which was promptly dubbed the "Snaky River" by the 158th Infantry. The main road curved away from the beach to pass south of the Snaky River and Lone Tree Hill through a narrow defile. The southern side of this defile was formed by two noses of Mt. Saksin, a terrain feature about 100 feet higher than Lone Tree Hill. The more westerly of these noses was named "Hill 225" after its height in feet. No name was given to the eastern ridge line, which pointed toward Lone Tree Hill from the southeast. There was a small native village at the eastern entrance to the defile and another at the pass's western outlet.²⁴

Mt. Saksin was a name given to an indefinitely outlined hill mass which forms the northern extremity of the Irier Mountains, extending inland from the coast at Lone Tree Hill. The name Saksin was specifically applied to a prominent peak about 2,000

yards due south of Lone Tree. On or about 23 May General Tagami had moved his headquarters into the Mt. Saksin area, apparently on the southwest side of the central peak. As the 158th Infantry pushed forward on the 24th, elements of the *Yuki Group* and *Right Sector Force* moved onto Hill 225 and Lone Tree Hill. On these two terrain features the Japanese began constructing hasty defensive positions. These, together with the natural terrain barriers in the area, effectively guarded the land approaches to Maffin Strip, which lay less than 1,000 yards west of Lone Tree Hill.²⁵ A sea approach was at least temporarily out of the question, since the TORNADO Task Force did not have sufficient landing craft to execute and support such a maneuver. Finally, it was not considered probable at task force headquarters that the Japanese land defenses of the Maffin Strip area would be strongly held. On the other hand, Colonel Herndon, as the result of patrol reports, did believe that a large Japanese force might be on Hill 225 or Mt. Saksin's eastern nose.

About 1500 on 25 May, Companies B and C had reached a point on the main road a few yards below the southernmost bend of the Snaky River. There, enemy machine gun fire from the native village at the eastern entrance to the defile between Lone Tree Hill and the two noses of Mt. Saksin halted the advance. As the forward troops deployed to find cover from the Japanese fire, they were subjected to an intermittent artillery bombardment, which the battalion thought was coming from TORNADO Task Force weapons emplaced east of the Tor River;

²⁴ The past tense is used in this paragraph because the entire cast of the terrain in the Lone Tree Hill area was changed during the next two months by continuous artillery and air bombardment.

²⁵ In addition to the *Yuki Group* and *2d Army* sources, the foregoing enemy information is derived from operation orders of the *36th Div* and *223d Inf*, Apr-May 44, as translated in *ALAMO Force*, G-2 Wkly Rpt 48, 5 Jul 44.

but no American artillery unit was placing fire within 1,000 yards of the 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry, at the time.²⁶ For a second time part of the regiment was mistaking Japanese artillery fire for its own.

General Patrick, who had succeeded to the command of the TORNADO Task Force during the morning, was informed of the opposition encountered by the 1st Battalion. He ordered the advance stopped for the night and instructed the 158th Infantry to remain well east of the Snaky River so that American artillery could register on the native village and the defile without endangering the forward troops. Harassed by a few artillery shells, which by now had been recognized as originating from Japanese 70-mm. or 75-mm. weapons, the 1st Battalion pulled back about 500 yards east of the Snaky. A perimeter was set up with the battalion's left resting on the road and its right on the beach. The 2d Battalion established a series of company perimeters back along the road to the east. Casualties for the day had been 22 men killed and 26 wounded, almost all in the 1st Battalion, while about 50 Japanese had been killed.

When the attack orders for the day had been issued, it had been hoped that the 1st Battalion could reach the top of Lone Tree Hill before nightfall. Since the unexpectedly strong enemy opposition had prevented the realization of this hope, plans were made to continue the advance westward on the 26th. The ultimate objective was the east bank of the Woske River, 2,000 yards west of Lone Tree Hill, and the intermediate objective was the native village at the eastern entrance

to the defile. The advance was to be preceded by naval shelling of the northern slopes of Lone Tree Hill from 0630 to 0700. A fifteen-minute artillery preparation was also to precede the advance, and the infantry was to start moving at 0845.

On the morning of the 26th the naval fire started ten minutes late. Two destroyers lying offshore shelled the northern slopes of Lone Tree Hill and the Maffin Bay area, firing on known or suspected enemy defensive positions and assembly points. After a twenty-minute bombardment the two support vessels withdrew. Artillery fire did not begin until 0830. The time lag gave the Japanese ample opportunity to prepare for the infantry attack which had been heralded by the destroyer fire. The artillery, aiming its shells into the defile and against the eastern slopes of Lone Tree Hill, ceased firing about 0845. A few moments later the 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry, Company B again leading, started moving westward. The infantry's line of departure was nearly 1,000 yards east of the village at the south-east foot of Lone Tree Hill, and the advance had to be slow because the road ran through heavily jungled terrain. The enemy therefore had sufficient time to reoccupy positions in the defile and on Lone Tree Hill which might have been vacated during the American artillery barrage. The value of both the naval and artillery bombardment had been lost.

Company B moved forward to the point at which it had been held up the previous afternoon and was again stopped—this time by fire from the southeastern corner of Lone Tree Hill. Company D's heavy machine guns were brought up to spray a densely wooded area in front of the point rifle platoon. The fire dispersed the Japanese riflemen, and Company B moved forward

²⁶ As checked in: 147th FA Jnl, 21 May–14 Jun 44; 191st FA Gp Jnl, 17 May–26 Jun 44; 191st FA Gp S-3 Rpts, 18 May–26 Jun 44; 167th FA S-3 Work Sheets, 25 May 44. The firing records of the 218th FA are included in the records of the 191st FA Gp.

again. Less than 100 yards of ground had been gained when the company again encountered machine gun and mortar fire originating in the native village.

Company A, initially off the road to the right rear of Company B, turned north to the mouth of the Snaky River. One platoon crossed at the river mouth at 1030 but was quickly forced back to the east bank by Japanese machine gun fire from the rocky beach below the north face of Lone Tree Hill. Artillery support was called for, supplied, and proved successful in stopping the enemy fire, and about 1350 all Company A crossed the Snaky. Orders were to move down the west side of that stream to establish contact with Company B and to send one platoon up the eastern slope of Lone Tree Hill to probe enemy positions.

Other efforts were meanwhile being made to scatter the Japanese opposing Company B. Company E (less a platoon which was patrolling on Mt. Saksin) moved up to the left flank of Company B and on the south side of the main road. The combined efforts of the two rifle companies proved insufficient to dislodge the Japanese from their positions at the eastern entrance to the defile, and the enemy fire forced the American units to seek cover. Company F was therefore ordered to pass through B's left flank and proceed to Hill 225 to take the Japanese positions from the rear.

Company F's attack could not be started before dark and Company A, moving up the west side of the Snaky, was unable to relieve much of the pressure on Company B. Finally, Company A was forced for a second time to withdraw to the east bank of the river as a result of enemy fire from Lone Tree Hill. Tanks would have been of great help to Company B, but the bridge over the Tirfoam could not bear their weight, and

the road west of the stream was in such disrepair that tanks probably could not have negotiated it.

Casualties on the 26th had been lighter—only 6 men were killed and 10 wounded—while an estimated 35 Japanese had been killed. To prevent further casualties from being inflicted by Japanese patrols which were expected to roam around the flanks of the forward elements during the night, a semi-circular perimeter was established. Company B anchored its right flank near the eastern edge of the native village and extended its lines southwest across the road for a distance of about 100 yards. Company E refused the south flank by stretching the line southeast from B's left, 500 yards up the slope of Mt. Saksin's eastern nose. Company A tied its left into B's right and extended the defense northeast about 300 yards from the road to a large bend in the Snaky River. The remainder of the 1st and 2d Battalions was strung out along both sides of the main road to the rear of the three forward companies.

Operations during the day had secured less than 1,000 yards of ground in a westerly direction and about the same distance inland from the beach. However, the 158th Infantry had located and probed some of the principal Japanese defenses in the area—defenses which indicated that the Japanese guarding the land approaches to Maffin Strip were in greater strength than had been expected. Company B had discovered that the enemy was firmly dug in along both sides of the defile. A platoon of Company A had found Lone Tree Hill to be honeycombed with enemy defensive positions, especially on its northern and northeastern faces. The regimental Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon and a platoon of Company E patrolled in the vicinity of Mt. Saksin and Hill 225. The Company E platoon found many

deserted Japanese positions along the eastern slopes of Mt. Saksin and on that hill's eastern nose, but the Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon had a less optimistic report. Probing into rugged, heavily forested terrain between the east nose and Hill 225, the platoon had been ambushed. Extricating itself with difficulty, it reported that the Japanese were dug in in great strength all over Hill 225.

Orders for the next day reflected a still prevailing notion at task force headquarters that the Japanese defenses were weak. The 1st Battalion was to push on through the defile and at the same time secure Lone Tree Hill. The 2d Battalion was to clear Hill 225. Prior to the 26th, field artillery had been supporting the 158th Infantry from positions 8,000 to 10,000 yards to the east. Once the infantry had debouched from the western end of the defile, it would move into an area beyond the most effective range of artillery support. Therefore the 147th Field Artillery Battalion's 105-mm. howitzers were displaced forward to Maffin No. 1 to support the advance of the 158th Infantry on the 27th.

The Defile

At 0700 hours on 27 May two destroyers, firing on Lone Tree Hill and the Maffin Strip area, started scheduled fire support for the day's advance. Artillery and infantry action on this morning was much more closely co-ordinated than on the previous day. The destroyer fire lasted until 0745, at which time the field artillery and all the 81-mm. mortars of the 158th Infantry laid concentrations on suspected and known enemy positions in the defile, on Lone Tree Hill, and on Hill 225. At 0830 Company F, moving around Company E on the south

flank, started its attack. Behind close artillery support, apparently controlled by artillery liaison planes for the most part, Company F pushed up a terrain feature initially believed to be Hill 225. It was not discovered until late the next day that F Company was actually on the eastern nose of Mt. Saksin and about 700 yards east of its reported location.

Since artillery fire had knocked out two enemy machine gun nests which had been delaying the advance, patrols of Company F were able to reach the top of the eastern ridge. The rest of the company moved up the hill at 1000, encountering scattered rifle fire from enemy positions to the southwest. Company E, just before noon, arrived atop the same hill on F's right. Company E had orders to secure the southern slopes of the defile between Hill 225 and Lone Tree Hill.

Company B, still at the eastern entrance to the defile, was again unable to make any progress and during the morning was held up by machine gun and mortar fire from concealed enemy positions on the southern and southwestern slopes of Lone Tree Hill. No sooner had some of these positions been eliminated by American artillery and mortar fire than Company B was subjected to enemy machine gun and mortar fire originating from the northeast side of Hill 225, the reported location of Companies E and F. Actually, the artillery fire had not been entirely effective, because it had not reached into deep draws or caves in which many of the Japanese weapons were emplaced.

Company E, attempting to move down the northern slopes of the eastern ridge to Company B's aid, was soon forced back by enemy rifle fire and infantry counterattacks from the west. At the same time small parties of Japanese, under cover of their own machine guns, started a series of minor counter-

attacks against Company B. Company F did not become engaged in this action. Instead, the company dug in on the ridge it was holding and sent patrols to the south and west to probe Japanese defenses. It was soon discovered that the combination of rugged terrain and Japanese machine gun and rifle fire limited patrolling to a very small area.

North of Company B, Company A patrolled along the west bank of the Snaky River and on the eastern slope of Lone Tree Hill during the morning and early afternoon. About 1630 the company moved in force up Lone Tree, finding the eastern slope of the hill to be unoccupied. Most of the fire that had harassed the company during the morning had apparently originated on the beach below the northern face of Lone Tree Hill. For the night the unit dug in at the crest of the hill. Again, little ground had been gained, although the eastern nose of Mt. Saksin and Lone Tree Hill had been at least partially occupied.

The 1st and 2d Battalions of the 158th Infantry had now been engaged in heavy combat for three days against an enemy force which was aggressive and clever on the defense. The combined *Right Sector Force-Yuki Group* troops were well led, taking every advantage of heavily forested terrain for cover and concealment, yet retaining their mobility. The Japanese were tried and trained troops, having had considerable experience in China and having been in the Sarimi area for over six months. The 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry, on the other hand, was in combat for the first time. The 2d and 3d Battalions had been in combat on New Britain against lesser opposition and in different terrain, and both had undergone some reorganization and had received many untried replacements since. By

evening on 27 May the 158th Infantry had lost almost 300 men killed, wounded, or evacuated as nonbattle casualties—the latter principally as a result of heat exhaustion. American artillery support had not been all that could be desired. Maps were so inaccurate that the artillery had difficulty finding designated targets, and it was impossible, even with the aid of spotting aircraft and forward observers, to lay fire into the enemy's defile positions without endangering the forward troops. Finally, tank support had not been obtainable, much as it was needed by Company B, which was bearing the brunt of the defile warfare.

So important did Colonel Herndon now consider tank support that he secured permission to have two tanks brought forward to the beach at the mouth of the Snaky River. The tanks were to be transported by LCM's (all of which were badly needed at the Arare-Toem beachhead and at Wakde Island for lightering purposes) to the mouth of the Snaky on the morning of the 28th and were to move south along the stream to aid the units trying to break through the defile. Two rifle companies, one each from the 1st and 2d Battalions, were assigned to the defile battle on the 28th. Two other rifle companies of the 1st Battalion were to advance over Lone Tree Hill and down its western slopes. The first objective of the latter units was the point at which the main road, after winding south around Lone Tree Hill, again reached the shores of Maffin Bay. This point was about 700 yards northwest of the hill crest and about 100 yards from the northeastern edge of Maffin Strip. In a simultaneous movement the 2d Battalion (less one rifle company) was to move across Hill 225 to the western outlet of the defile. Thence the battalion was to strike north along the road to the eastern end of Maffin Strip to

establish contact with the 1st Battalion's two companies.

This two-pronged attack was designed to seal off Lone Tree Hill and render Japanese positions on the hill untenable. At the same time, combined infantry-tank action was to clear the defile and open the main overland supply route to Maffin Strip. The road, which engineers had been repairing forward from the Tor for the last three days, would then be opened for traffic from the river to the airfield. The ultimate regimental objective was still the east bank of the Woske River.

On the 28th, after a well-timed preliminary artillery bombardment, Company C moved forward to the crest of Lone Tree Hill and joined Company A. The latter unit then attempted to move down the steep northern face of the hill to the rocky beach below. Japanese defenders in caves and crevices on this clifflike side stopped the attack before it was well under way. It was impossible to place fire on the Japanese positions from above, and Company A had to withdraw to the crest of Lone Tree. Company C, at midmorning, started moving in densely jungled, irregular terrain along the western slope of the hill, attacking generally to the north. About 1300 a Japanese patrol, coming out of a wooded area at the western base of the hill, fell upon Company C's left flank. The American unit beat off this attack, principally by rifle fire, without too much difficulty, but as soon as the enemy party was dispersed Company C was pinned down by mortar and machine gun fire originating near the eastern edge of Maffin Strip. Elements of Company A then tried to move down the west side of the hill along a route south of Company C's positions. This effort was also greeted with Japanese machine gun and rifle fire and was aban-

doned. The two companies could now see Japanese movements to the southwest, movements which seemed to presage an imminent enemy attack in force against the west side of Lone Tree Hill. The terrain on the west side of Lone Tree was not well suited for defense. Moreover, both Company A and Company C were running low on water and ammunition and the 1st Battalion commander considered it probable that the terrain would prevent successful resupply efforts. He therefore ordered the two companies to withdraw to the line of the Snaky River. This maneuver began about 1600.

Meanwhile, south of Lone Tree Hill, Companies B and E had been making determined efforts to break through the defile. Patrols probing forward during the morning reported steadily increasing Japanese resistance on both sides of the pass. About noon further efforts were temporarily abandoned, while the heavy weapons of Company H and the 81-mm. mortars of Company D laid a new barrage into the Japanese positions. After this fire, B Company moved west along the road and Company E, attempting to clear ravines on the south side of the defile, followed along to B's left rear. Company B could not get beyond the native village and the attack was unsuccessful. For the fourth or fifth time in three days the Japanese had thrown back an assault at the defile.

At 1145 Company E relieved Company B near the village. The latter unit was ordered to move to the beach at the west side of the Snaky River. There the company was to set up a defensive perimeter to protect an engineer platoon which was blasting out of the beach coral an approach for the two tanks scheduled to be unloaded there from LCM's. While Company B was digging in at its new location it was subjected to heavy mortar,

machine gun, and rifle fire from Japanese on the north face of Lone Tree Hill. At 1800 the company therefore withdrew to the east side of the river mouth. The engineer platoon withdrew from the Snaky River about the same time, but not before a tank approach had been completed on the beach east of the river mouth.

On the southern flank Company F had run into strong enemy opposition during the morning. In the afternoon the company discovered that it had not been on Hill 225, but that it was now in a difficult position in a ravine between that hill and the eastern nose of Mt. Saksin. When it was noticed during the afternoon that enemy troops on Hill 225 were maneuvering to attack, Company F withdrew up the western slopes of the eastern nose. The Japanese, forestalled in their attempt to trap Company F in the ravine, then turned their attention to Company E at the native village. An enemy force estimated to be fifty men strong moved from the southwest against Company E, which drove the Japanese back only after a sharp fire fight.

Colonel Herndon now felt that his forward positions were rapidly becoming untenable. The Japanese were apparently moving eastward and northward in some strength and the terrain west of the Snaky River made supply of the two forward battalions extremely difficult. The colonel therefore radioed to the task force commander that he intended to withdraw to the line of the Snaky River for the night. The 1st Battalion was to be on the north of the night's defensive positions and the 2d Battalion was to refuse the left flank by extending the lines south of the road along the eastern nose of Mt. Saksin. Colonel Herndon also planned to relieve the 1st Battalion

with the 3d on the morrow. These plans were approved by General Patrick who, early the next morning, also ordered Colonel Herndon to cease offensive efforts.

The 158th Infantry Withdraws

On 27 May General Patrick had been informed by General Krueger that two battalions of the 163d Infantry, which was still protecting the Toem-Arare beachhead, were soon to be shipped to Biak. At the same time General MacArthur's headquarters and ALAMO Force were considering plans to stage a division in the Wakde-Sarmi area in preparation for operations farther to the west. The two headquarters decided that the 6th Infantry Division, which had recently completed jungle and amphibious training in eastern New Guinea, would be the most logical unit to send forward. General Krueger knew that the 163d Regimental Combat Team was scheduled to leave the Wakde-Sarmi area for Biak, but he did not want operations in the former region to be halted for lack of troops. He therefore recommended that a combat team of the 6th Division be dispatched to Wakde-Sarmi immediately, even without its artillery if leaving the latter out of the shipment would speed the movement of the infantry regiment.²⁷

Because of the danger of overextending his lines, General Patrick had already decided to halt the westward movement of the

²⁷ Rad, ALAMO Adv Hq to TTF, WH-98, 26 May 44, in TTF G-3 Jnl, 25-31 May 44; Rad, ALAMO Adv Hq to GHQ SWPA, WH-63, 25 May 44, in G-3 GHQ Jnl, 26 May 44; Rad, GHQ SWPA to ALAMO, C-12888, 24 May 44, and Rad, ALAMO Rear Hq to ALAMO Adv Hq, WF-4263, 25 May 44, both in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl, Wakde-Biak, 24-26 May 44.

158th Infantry. He felt that with a garrison of two regimental combat teams the fifteen-mile-long perimeter which the TORNADO Task Force was occupying could be held. Before westward advance could be resumed, however, Japanese forces which were harassing the southern and eastern flanks of the Toem-Arare beachhead defenses would have to be dispersed. As a result of an attack by some 200 Japanese on Toem during the night of 27-28 May and because there were indications that the enemy was to make further assaults against the beachhead, the task force commander recommended that no elements of the 163d Regimental Combat Team be shipped to Biak until after the arrival at Toem of a combat team of the 6th Division.

But on the morning of 29 May, General Krueger notified General Patrick that the two battalions of the 163d Infantry would have to leave for Biak the next day. General Patrick considered that the one remaining infantry battalion of the 163d Regimental Combat Team would not be sufficiently strong to hold the Toem-Arare beachhead area. He therefore ordered the 158th Infantry to send one of its battalions back across the Tor River.²⁸

On the morning of 29 May the 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry, relieved the 3d Battalion, 163d Infantry, at Arare. General Patrick ordered the rest of the 158th Infantry to improve its positions along the Snaky River and to defend that line until the arrival of a 6th Division regimental combat team on or about 4 June. The 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry, was replaced on the Snaky

River line by the 3d Battalion of the same regiment.²⁹

Early the same morning Company F of the 158th Infantry, holding an exposed position on the eastern nose of Mt. Saksin, found itself surrounded by enemy patrols. The Japanese appeared to be maneuvering for an attack and Company F hurriedly withdrew. The unit had to fight its way back to the perimeter of Company G, which was located on the main road about 800 yards northeast of the eastern nose.

As a result of this action, and because the Japanese were continuing pressure against the 3d Battalion's Snaky River lines from both the south and west, Colonel Herndon felt that his river positions could not be held much longer. Worse still, from his point of view, his 1st Battalion had been withdrawn east of the Tor. Without this strength he believed his forces insufficient to hold the line at the Snaky and, at the same time, prevent the Japanese from outflanking his units to the south and cutting his line of communications back to the Toem-Arare beachhead area. Therefore, after consultation with his battalion commanders, he ordered the 2d and 3d Battalions to withdraw to the east bank of the Tirfoam River, 2,000 yards to the rear, and form a new defense line.³⁰

Just past 1500 Colonel Herndon informed General Patrick of the decision to redispense the forward area forces. At first General Patrick was not inclined to consent to this withdrawal, but upon reconsideration

²⁸ Rad, ALAMO Adv Hq to TTF, WH-173, 29 May 44, and Rad, TTF to ALAMO, Y-542, 28 May 44, both in TTF G-3 Jnl, 25-31 May 44; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 25 May-12 Jun, p. 2.

²⁹ Rad, TTF to ALAMO Adv Hq, Y-573, in TTF G-3 Jnl, 25-31 May 44; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 25 May-12 Jun 44, p. 2; 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May-21 Jun 44.

³⁰ TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 25 May-12 Jun 44, pp. 2-3; 158th RCT Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, p. 6; Ltrs, Herndon to Ward, 8 Nov and 23 Dec 50, no sub, in OCMH files.

gave his approval. The movement began immediately, under continuing Japanese pressure from the south.³¹ About 1600 General Patrick arrived at Colonel Herndon's command post, which by then had been moved away from the Tirfoam, where the new defense line was taking shape, to a point approximately 1,800 yards east of that stream.³² Shortly thereafter General Patrick reported to General Krueger: "Investigation convinced me that [the] withdrawal [was] unwarranted."³³ General Patrick relieved Colonel Herndon and placed in command of the 158th Infantry Col. Earle O. Sandlin, who had recently arrived in the area and who had been acting as his chief of staff.³⁴

Meanwhile, under Colonel Herndon's direction and in the face of continued harassing from Japanese on the south flank, the withdrawal had been completed without the loss of a single man or piece of equipment. Companies E, K, L, and M set up defenses along the east bank of the Tirfoam, with Company E echeloned slightly to the left

rear of the other three. Within the perimeter were 3d Battalion headquarters, the Cannon Company, and Company C, 27th Engineers, the latter about 900 yards east of the Tirfoam. The rest of the 158th Infantry maintained defenses back along the main road to the mouth of the Tor, where were located the 147th Field Artillery, Company I, and various medical units.

At the Tirfoam Company E had not completed digging in when it was subjected to heavy mortar and machine gun fire. The troops manned their weapons, but the Japanese withdrew without attacking. About midnight approximately fifty Japanese bypassed Company E and fell upon Company C, 27th Engineers. Colonel Herndon's fears of attack along his line of communications had been well taken, for the *Right Sector Force* had begun flanking movements designed to recapture the entire Maffin Bay area. However, the combat engineers quickly proved their versatility by driving off the enemy force with rifle, carbine, and machine gun fire. Five of the engineers were killed. Enemy casualties could not be estimated since the Japanese removed their dead and wounded during the night.³⁵

The remainder of the night was more quiet, and the next morning the defenses along the Tirfoam were improved. There were a couple of minor attacks during the afternoon and desultory rifle and 70-mm. or 75-mm. artillery fire was directed against all American units still west of the Tor. The 147th Field Artillery Battalion, withdrawing to the east bank of the Tor late in the afternoon, was struck by some of this enemy artillery fire and lost one man killed.³⁶

³¹ Ltr, Herndon to Ward, 23 Dec 50; Rad, TTF to ALAMO, Y-601, 29 May 44, in TTF G-3 Jnl, 25-31 May 44; 158th Inf S-3 Opns Rpt 7, 29 May 44, in 158th Inf Jnl file, 9 May-21 Jun 44; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 25 May-12 Jun 44, p. 3.

³² Ltr, Herndon to Ward, 23 Dec 50; 158th RCT Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, p. 6.

³³ Rad, TTF to ALAMO, Y-601, 29 May 44, in TTF G-3 Jnl, 25-31 May 44, copy also in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 29-30 May 44.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Gen Krueger approved Gen Patrick's action in: Rad, ALAMO Adv Hq to TTF, WH-234, 30 May 44, in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 29-30 May 44. At General Patrick's request, no reclassification proceedings were carried through against Colonel Herndon, who later received another responsible post of command in the theater. See Rad, TTF to ALAMO, Y-745, 2 Jun 44, and Rad, ALAMO Rear Hq to ALAMO Adv Hq, WF-311, 2 Jun 44, both in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 1-3 Jun 44.

³⁵ 158th Inf Jnl and Jnl file, 9 May-21 Jun 44; 2d Army Opns at Sarmi and Biak (Rev), p. 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*; 158th RCT Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, p. 7.



LCM FERRY across mouth of Tor River, looking west.

Final Operations of the 158th Infantry

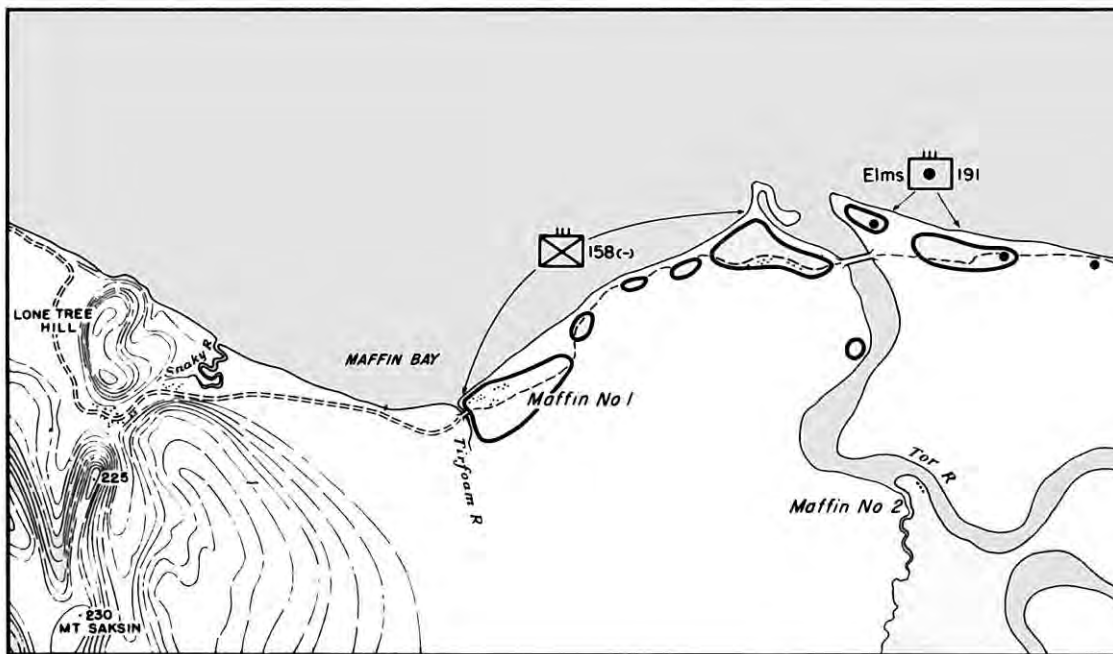
While the new line along the Tirfoam was being developed on 30 May by the 158th Infantry, the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 163d Infantry, together with regimental headquarters, departed for Biak. The 2d Battalion remained on the west bank of Tementoe Creek, which marked the eastern flank of the TORNADO Task Force, but it and the rest of the 163d Regimental Combat Team were soon to follow the other battalions. Through 30 May, after which

elements of the 163d Infantry engaged in little activity in the area, the regiment had lost 46 men killed and 154 wounded. Other elements of the combat team lost 8 men killed, 10 wounded, and 1 missing.⁸⁷

Redispositions of the TORNADO Task Force

Upon the departure of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 163d Infantry, many changes

⁸⁷ 163d Inf Jnl, 13–30 May 44; 163d Inf Casualty Rpts, atchd to 163d Inf Opns Rpt Toem–Wakde.

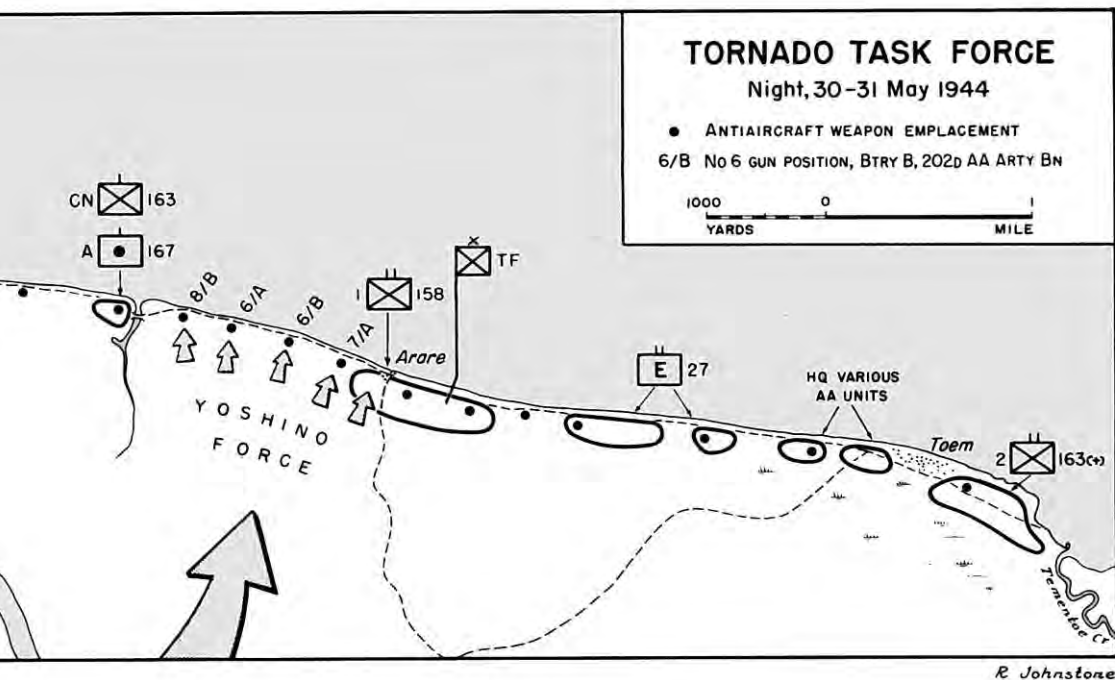


MAP 12

Twenty-one separate perimeters were maintained by the TORNADO Task Force along approximately twelve miles of coast line during the night of 30–31 May 1944. The Yoshino Force fell upon the isolated antiaircraft gun positions.

were made in the dispositions of the TORNADO Task Force until, by the end of the day, the task force was spread out over almost twelve miles of coast line between Tementoe Creek and the Tirfoam River. (Map 12) The 2d and 3d Battalions, 158th Infantry, and other attached or organic units held perimeters west of the Tor. Various field artillery units were emplaced at the east side of the Tor's mouth. Task force headquarters was at Arare, close to the principal supply and ammunition dumps, and was protected by the 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry. At no point did the lines of any task force elements extend inland as much as a mile from the beach.

At dusk there were twenty-one perimeters of varying sizes, strengths, and distances from each other. Antiaircraft units were especially spread out in an effort to secure the maximum possible protection against low-flying Japanese planes. The 40-mm. guns and some .50-caliber weapons of Batteries A and B, 202d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, were strung out in beach emplacements between the Tor River and Tementoe Creek. Between the task force headquarters perimeter at Arare and the position of Headquarters, 191st Field Artillery Group, near the mouth of the Tor, a distance of almost 5,000 yards, there were six separate antiaircraft gun emplacements. Only one of these



perimeters, that at the mouth of the Un-named River west of Arare, contained other than antiaircraft troops, and these were men of the Cannon Company, 163d Infantry, and Battery A, 167th Field Artillery Battalion. The fifteen other perimeters included infantry positions or some engineer and artillery posts which were over 2,000 yards from the nearest infantry units. The perimeters east of the Tor were all-around defenses, and those west of the river were oriented principally toward the west, where most of the Japanese strength was apparently located.³⁸ These widespread disposi-

³⁸ 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May-21 Jun 44; TTF G-3 Jnl, 25-31 May 44; 158th RCT Opns Rpt Sarimi-Wakde, p. 7; 167th FA Opns Rpt Wakde, p. 7.

tions presented the Japanese with an opportunity to destroy all or parts of the TORNADO Task Force in detail.

Even while the 158th Infantry had been engaged in heavy fighting around Lone Tree Hill, the two arms of General Tagami's planned double envelopment had been slowly closing in on the Toem-Arare area. Bypassing the 158th Infantry by moving along routes up to four miles inland, the *Yoshino Force* had crossed the Tor at the junction of the river with the Foein on the night of 25-26 May. On the 26th, leading elements of the *Matsuyama Force*, advancing from the east, had moved into position about two and a half miles south of Toem.

About 200 men of the *Matsuyama Force*

had attacked the positions of the 1st Battalion, 163d Infantry, near Toem during the night of 27–28 May and had killed two Americans and wounded fourteen others. Friendly fire during the confusion of the night action killed four other American soldiers. The 1st Battalion killed about thirty Japanese by rifle and machine gun fire and hand grenades, and before dawn on the 28th the enemy had withdrawn southeastward.³⁹

It was this attack, coupled with a suspicion that such assaults might be repeated in the near future, that had prompted General Patrick's 28 May request that the 163d Regimental Combat Team be retained in the Wakde area until a regiment of the 6th Division arrived. But, despite the fact that this request was disapproved and the bulk of the 163d Infantry left his area on 30 May, it appears that General Patrick was not particularly alarmed about Japanese forces on his south flank. He had halted the advance westward until the few Japanese he believed to be on the south flank could be dispersed, and he had brought one battalion of the 158th Infantry east of the Tor to replace the two of the 163d Infantry which had left for Biak. On 28 May General Patrick estimated Japanese strength in his area to be 2,000–3,000 on the west flank, 300 east of Tementoe Creek, and 300 "in roving bands" south of Toem and Arare.⁴⁰

The TORNADO Task Force had underestimated the strength of Japanese forces in the area. The figure for the number of enemy east of Tementoe Creek was three or four

days old on 28 May and, apparently, had been estimated on the basis of a single aerial reconnaissance. Instead of roving bands south of the Toem–Arare perimeter, there were over 2,000 organized troops of the *Yoshino* and *Matsuyama Forces* within three miles of the coast at Toem. Total enemy strength in the Wakde–Sarmi area was still over 8,000 men rather than the maximum of less than 4,000 estimated by the TORNADO Task Force.⁴¹

American patrols found no signs of large, organized enemy forces south of the central perimeter for the two or three days following the attack during the night of 27–28 May, an attack which marked the beginning of a series of minor assaults against the Toem–Arare area. As a matter of fact, few American patrols were sent out. On the 28th a party from Company F, 163d Infantry, moving about three quarters of a mile up the east bank of Tementoe Creek, found one small Japanese bivouac area. A patrol of Company B, 163d Infantry, found a recently cut trail 1,200 yards south of Arare, but saw no Japanese. The next day the 2d Battalion, 163d Infantry, sent two patrols up and across Tementoe Creek, but neither encountered any Japanese.

The only patrol which operated in the area west of Tementoe Creek on the 29th seems to have been sent out by the 218th Field Artillery Battalion. This party moved about 3,000 yards up the east bank of the Tor past Maffin No. 2. Thence the patrol marched overland back to its base, where it reported that it had found no signs of enemy

³⁹ TTF Opns Rpt Wakde–Sarmi, 25 May–12 Jun 44, p. 3; Opns of *Yuki Group*, pp. 14–16; *2d Army Opns at Sarmi and Biak (Rev)*, pp. 25–26.

⁴⁰ Rads, TTF to ALAMO, Y-542 and Y-573, 28 and 29 May, respectively, both in TTF G-3 Jnl, 25–31 May 44.

⁴¹ The figures for the Japanese are the author's estimates and are based on information from both Allied and Japanese sources which were not then available to the TORNADO Task Force.

activity. There are no indications in the TORNADO Task Force's records that any American patrols were sent south in the area between the Tor River and Tementoe Creek on 30 May.⁴²

Japanese Attacks East of the Tor

Gun position No. 6 of Battery B, 202d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, was located in an isolated perimeter on the beach about 900 yards west of Arare. The position was approximately 500 yards distant from the two nearest friendly units, both of which were other isolated antiaircraft gun posts.

At 1830 on 30 May, No. 6 gun position was attacked by a squad of Japanese infantrymen from the *Yoshino Force*. The anti-aircraft artillerymen, after losing one man killed, killing ten of the enemy, having their .50-caliber machine guns jam, and running out of rifle ammunition, retired to gun position No. 7 of Battery A, 500 yards to the east. The latter position was attacked intermittently from 1840 to 0430, but the combined gunners of the two positions threw back each assault with rifle and machine gun fire. About 500 yards west of Battery B's No. 6 position was situated Battery A's No. 6. The latter perimeter was harassed by mortar, rifle, and machine gun fire from shortly after 1830 hours throughout the night. It was attacked by *Yoshino Force* troops at least twice, but the antiaircraft gunners managed to drive the enemy back each time. Gun position No. 8 of Battery B, another 400 yards to the west, was also at-

tacked about 1830. The .50-caliber multiple machine gun in the position became overheated and jammed. The men in the position, running low on rifle ammunition, scurried out of the gun pit and took cover in the brush along the beach. Here they stayed until the enemy withdrew at 0430.

In the action against the four gun positions, the Japanese captured one .50-caliber machine gun, damaged a multiple .50-caliber mount and removed the gun barrels, damaged two 40-mm. guns, and destroyed miscellaneous electrical and communications equipment. Using the captured .50-caliber machine gun to good advantage, the enemy force which attacked Battery B's No. 6 position and A's No. 7 moved away from those two gun pits toward the task force supply dump and the perimeter of Company B, 158th Infantry.⁴³

One group from the *Yoshino Force* began delivering machine gun and rifle fire on the 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry, about 1900, and at 2200 the *Yoshino Force* launched a furious, suicidal attack against Company B. This assault continued until 0430, while the Japanese tried to fire the task force supply dumps with "Molotov Cocktails" and demolition charges and engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with the men of Company B, who used rifles, hand grenades, pistols, knives, and bayonets to beat off the assault. At 0430 the attack abated and the enemy withdrew to the south. Total American losses during the night action were twelve

⁴² The foregoing information on patrol activity is from: TTF G-2 Jnl, 25 May-3 Jun 44; TTF G-3 Jnl, 25-31 May 44; 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May-21 Jun 44.

⁴³ Information concerning action against the anti-aircraft units is taken from a file entitled: Correspondence, Wakde-Sarmi-Toem Task Force, in the files of the AA Sec., Hq Sixth Army, in ORB RAC AGO collection. Info about the Japanese side is from Opns of *Yuki Group*, p. 16, and *2d Army Opns at Sarmi and Biak* (Rev), p. 26.

killed and ten wounded. At daylight fifty-two dead Japanese were counted in front of the antiaircraft and infantry positions. There were signs that the enemy had carried away dead or wounded men and it was therefore estimated that the Japanese losses were much higher than those actually counted.⁴⁴

On the morning of 31 May the TORNADO Task Force, in expectation of more night attacks, set to work to strengthen the defenses between the Tor River and Tementoe Creek and to reduce the number of separate perimeters along the beach. This action was given added impetus during the day by receipt of a message from ALAMO Force which was interpreted to mean that the remainder of the 163d Regimental Combat Team (the 2d Battalion, 163d Infantry, the 167th Field Artillery, engineer units, etc.) was to be sent to Biak immediately.⁴⁵ General Patrick thereupon ordered the elements of the 158th Infantry still west of the Tor to withdraw to the east side of that river and take over the perimeters still held by parts of the 163d Regimental Combat Team. A bridgehead was to be maintained on the west bank of the Tor, but the main task force perimeter was to be reduced to the area between Tementoe Creek and the Tor and no further offensive efforts westward were to be undertaken until the arrival of a combat team from the 6th Division.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ 1st Bn 158th Inf Jnl, 11 May–21 Jun 44; TTF G–3 Jnl, 25–31 May 44.

⁴⁵ Rad, ALAMO to CRO GHQ SWPA (with info copy to TTF), WF–6416, 31 May 44, in TTF G–3 Jnl, 25–31 May 44; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde–Sarmi, 25 May–12 Jun 44, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Ltr Order, CG TTF to CO 158th Inf, 31 May 44, and Rad, TTF to ALAMO, Y–667, 31 May 44, both in TTF G–3 Jnl, 25–31 May 44.

Colonel Sandlin, commanding the 158th Infantry, was made responsible for setting up the new task force defenses. He decided to leave the 2d Battalion, 158th Infantry, west of the Tor. The 3d Battalion, less Company K, was to move to Tementoe Creek to relieve the 2d Battalion, 163d Infantry, while Company K was to reinforce the perimeter around the task force supply and ammunition dumps at Arare. The total number of separate perimeters was to be drastically reduced and those left were to be strengthened. All units assigned defensive missions, especially the infantry elements, were to undertake intensive patrolling south of the Toem–Arare beachhead area.⁴⁷

By nightfall redispositions had been completed. In contrast to the situation the previous night there were now only eight separate perimeters. One, held by the 2d Battalion (reinforced) of the 158th Infantry, was west of the Tor. General Patrick decided to keep the 2d Battalion, 163d Infantry, ashore during the night. Therefore, the 3d Battalion, 158th Infantry, did not move to Tementoe Creek but remained on the east bank of the Tor at the river's mouth. In the same perimeter were regimental headquarters and field artillery, antiaircraft, and engineer units. The next perimeter to the east was at the mouth of the Unnamed River, west of Arare. At the latter village and at Toem were other defensive positions. Another large perimeter stretched back along the beach from the mouth of Tementoe Creek. The antiaircraft gun positions, with but two exceptions, were well within the perimeters of

⁴⁷ Ltr, CO 158th Inf to CG TTF, 31 May 44, sub: Plan for Defense of Beachhead between the Tor and Tementoe Rivers, in TTF G–3 Jnl, 25–31 May 44.

larger units and the two exceptions were within 400 yards of supporting forces. The precautions taken by Colonel Sandlin were undoubtedly well advised, but in comparison with the previous night, the night of 31 May–1 June proved abnormally quiet.⁴⁸

The Japanese Withdraw

On the morning of 1 June General Patrick was informed by ALAMO Force that the 2d Battalion, 163d Infantry, and the other remaining elements of the 163d Regimental Combat Team were not to leave for Biak until a regimental combat team from the 6th Infantry Division arrived at Toem. General Patrick, who by now considered that the Japanese operations on the south constituted a real threat to the TORNADO Task Force, decided to make no major changes in dispositions until the arrival of the 6th Division unit. Instead, for the next few days the task force further strengthened its positions in expectation of strong Japanese attacks.

But the *Yoshino* and *Matsuyama Forces* had already missed whatever chance they may have had to destroy the TORNADO Task Force in a piecemeal fashion. Apparently neither Colonel Yoshino nor Colonel Matsuyama could co-ordinate operations of the two arms of the double envelopment, and because of communication and supply difficulties and the distance involved, General Tagami, still ensconced in his command post in the Mt. Saksin area, could exercise no tactical control over the two forces, which could organize no more effective attacks. The Japanese, having suffered heavy losses in vain, now decided that further efforts to

seize the Toem–Arare beachhead would be futile.

On 10 June the *Yoshino Force* started withdrawing southwest across the Tor to take up new positions in the Maffin Bay area. The *Matsuyama Force*, having difficulty reorganizing and collecting food, did not begin retiring westward until two days later. Meanwhile, the TORNADO Task Force had settled down to await the arrival of a combat team from the 6th Infantry Division before resuming offensive operations.⁴⁹

While enemy attacks east of the Tor gradually stopped after 1 June, many small attacks had to be beaten back west of the river at the bridgehead held to 3 June by the 2d Battalion, 158th Infantry, and after that by the 3d Battalion. During the first week in June, all elements of the TORNADO Task Force undertook extensive patrolling which was productive of definite evidence that the entire 223d Infantry, 36th Division, was in the Sarimi area.

Prior to the landings near Wakde on 17 May, the Allies had believed that only parts of the 223d and 224th Infantry Regiments were stationed in the Sarimi area, but shortly after D Day all three battalions of the 224th Infantry had been accounted for. On the basis of this information and the discovery during the first week of June that the entire 223d Infantry was also in the area, Allied intelligence officers raised their preassault estimates of Japanese strength from 6,500 men to 10,776—the latter estimate being remarkably close to the Japanese figure of 11,000. The Allies believed that of the original 10,000-odd less than 4,750 Japanese, including 3,500 combat troops, were still

⁴⁸ TTF Maps and Overlays, 25 May–12 Jun 44; TTF G-3 Jnl, 25–31 May 44; 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May–21 Jun 44.

⁴⁹ TTF Opns Rpt Wakde–Sarimi, 25 May–12 Jun 44, p. 4; TTF G-3 Jnls, 25–31 May and 1–12 Jun 44; 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May–21 Jun 44; Opns of Yuki Group, pp. 16–18; 2d Army Opns at Sarimi and Biak (Rev), pp. 25–29.

alive by the end of the week. According to Japanese sources, this estimate was low and should have read a total of 8,000 men and over 4,000 combat troops.⁵⁰

The Relief of the 158th Infantry

General Patrick now believed, as Colonel Herndon had previously, that the enemy would maintain a strong defense against any new offensive westward from the Tor and considered it probable that resistance would center in the Lone Tree Hill area. He had already made plans to bypass that area by a shore-to-shore movement to Sarmi Peninsula, whence Lone Tree Hill could be attacked from the rear. This plan had been temporarily abandoned when the 163d Infantry left for Biak Island and the Japanese started their attacks east of the Tor. However, the new strength estimates, coupled with his belief that Lone Tree Hill and Hill 225 would be strongly held, prompted General Patrick to revive the bypassing plan. The imminent arrival of reinforcements from the 6th Division would, he thought, provide the troop strength necessary to carry out the maneuver.

The TORNADO Task Force commander planned to send one battalion to Sarmi Peninsula on 9 June and another the following day. Scouts had already landed on the peninsula and had reported it undefended. It therefore seemed possible that the proposed movement would meet with no opposition. Once the peninsula had been secured, the two battalions (both of which were to be

from the 6th Division) were to move south-east down the coast ten miles to Lone Tree Hill. This movement was to be co-ordinated with a simultaneous drive westward from the Tor River by the 158th Infantry.⁵¹

Again, the shore-to-shore movement had to be postponed when it was discovered that necessary naval support vessels could not be made available because they were engaged in operations off Biak Island, 200 miles to the northwest. Then, when the 6th Division began to reach Toem on 5 June, that division's commander requested that none of his troops be employed offensively until at least two regimental combat teams were ashore and his men could become acquainted with the terrain and situation in the area. Finally, landing craft to be used in the bypassing maneuver had to be used to unload the large ships which brought the 6th Division to Toem.⁵² The first units of the 6th Division to arrive in the Wakde-Sarmi area were the 1st Infantry Regiment and the 6th Engineer Battalion (C). The 1st Infantry immediately relieved that part of the 158th Infantry which was holding the Toem-Arare beachhead perimeter.

General Patrick, although he had canceled the amphibious movement to Sarmi Peninsula, now decided to resume the advance westward with the 158th Infantry moving overland from the Tor. This attack was to begin on the morning of 7 June. The first regimental objective was the Lone Tree

⁵⁰ TTF G-3 Jnl, 1-12 Jun 44; ALAMO G-2 Wkly Rpts, 44, 7 Jun, and 45, 14 Jun 44, copies in G-2 DoFA files; Opns of *Yuki Group*, p. 13; Hist of *2d Area Army*, pp. 55-58; *2d Army Opns*, pp. 2-6.

⁵¹ TTF Rpt, Wakde-Sarmi, 25 May-12 Jun 44, p. 9; Rad, TTF to ALAMO, Y-817, 3 Jun 44, in TTF G-3 Jnl, 1-12 Jun 44.

⁵² *Ibid.*; Rad, ALAMO Adv Hq to TTF, WH-123, 4 Jun 44, in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 3-4 Jun 44; Rads, TTF to ALAMO Adv Hq, Y-1116 and Y-1117, 11 Jun 44, in TTF G-3 Jnl, 1-12 Jun 44.

Hill–Hill 225 area, and the final objective was the Woske River, as it had been on 25 May.⁵³

The 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry, crossed the Tor on 6 June and relieved the 3d Battalion, which moved back to the east bank, and the 2d Battalion joined the 1st on the next day. The enemy west of the Tor remained inactive on 7 June while the 1st and 2d Battalions patrolled toward Maffin No. 1 and made preparations to move westward in force the next morning. The 1st Battalion was to advance along the coastal road while the 2d, on the left, was to push cross-country in a deep enveloping maneuver south of the beach. The advance was to be cautious, and the progress of the 1st Battalion was to depend upon that of the 2d. All units were to halt at 1600 each day to begin organizing night defensive positions.⁵⁴

Both the 1st and 2d Battalions, 158th Infantry, jumped off in the attack at 0830 hours, 8 June.⁵⁵ The advance was supported by a platoon of the 603d Tank Company and was preceded by a brief concentration fired by the 167th Field Artillery. During most of the morning there was little opposition. About 1100, however, enemy rifle and machine gun fire began forcing the 2d Battalion back toward the main road, and Company E, south of the main body of the

battalion, lost contact with the rest of the attacking force for two or three hours.

After 1200, resistance also began to stiffen on the 1st Battalion's front. The attack bogged down at a line of bunkers and pill-boxes which guarded the coastal road just west of the small lakes 1,500 yards east of the Tirfoam. These defensive positions had been constructed, repaired, or reoccupied since the last time the 158th Infantry had covered the same terrain. Tank support was requested. Two tanks arrived at the front late in the afternoon and soon reduced the pill-boxes, but by the time this mission had been accomplished, it was time to start digging in for the night. The 1st Battalion set up its defenses along the line of destroyed positions and extended its perimeter from the road north to the beach. The 2d Battalion, reassembled on the road by 1600, refused the south flank. Casualties during the day had been 4 men killed and 13 wounded, while 27 Japanese had been killed and 1 captured. A quantity of enemy arms and ammunition had also been seized.

The night passed without incident and early on 9 June patrols began to probe westward toward the Tirfoam. Scouts reported that the Japanese were holding another defense line, including reoccupied bunkers, on a slight rise at the west bank of the river. About 1000 hours, tank-infantry teams began to destroy the Japanese-held positions along the new line. While tank 75-mm. fire was destroying bunkers or forcing the Japanese to seek cover, infantrymen crept forward to toss grenades into bunker gun ports or shoot down Japanese who tried to escape from the area. While these tank-infantry team operations were taking place, the rest of the two infantry battalions rested. Japanese 75-mm. fire, from a weapon emplaced on the beach between the Snaky River and

⁵³ 1st Inf S-3 Per Rpt 1, 5 Jun 44, in TTF G-3 Jnl, 1-12 Jun 44; Rad, TTF to ALAMO, Y-911, 6 Jun 44, in TTF G-2 Jnl, 1-12 Jun 44; TTF FO 3, 6 Jun 44, filed in TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 25 May-12 Jun 44.

⁵⁴ TTF FO 3, 6 Jun 44; 1st Bn 158 Inf Jnl, 11 May-21 Jun 44; 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May-21 Jun 44; 158th RCT Opns Rpt Sarmi-Wakde, 11 May-21 Jun 44, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Information in the remainder of this section is from: 1st Bn 158th Inf Jnl, 11 May-21 Jun 44; 2d Bn 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May-21 Jun 44; TTF G-3 Jnl, 1-12 Jun 44; 158th Inf Jnl, 9 May-21 Jun 44; 158th RCT Opns Rpt Sarmi-Wakde, pp. 9-10; 2d Army Opns at Sarmi and Biak (Rev), pp. 23-24.

Lone Tree Hill, harassed the 1st Battalion for a while, but this fire was summarily stopped when a 155-mm. howitzer of the 218th Field Artillery Battalion scored a direct hit on the enemy piece.

By 1130 the enemy defensive positions had been cleaned out and the 1st and 2d Battalions resumed the advance westward. Aided by fire from the 147th Field Artillery, which had supplanted the 167th in the close support role, the two infantry units probed cautiously forward, and it was not until 1530 that both reached the east bank of the Tirfoam. Opposition was scattered, but the American units lost 6 men killed and 6 wounded. It was estimated that 50 of the enemy had been killed and one was captured.

Undoubtedly the 158th Infantry could have crossed the Tirfoam River during the afternoon, but, late in the morning, the unit's mission had been changed as a result of new orders from General Krueger, who planned to employ the 158th Infantry for an assault on Noemfoor Island, 300 miles northwest of Sarmi, in late June or early July. It was necessary that the unit be prepared to move from Wakde-Sarmi on short notice and General Krueger ordered General Patrick not to involve it deeply in offensive operations. Advances west of the Tirfoam had therefore been postponed until a second combat team of the 6th Division could arrive in the area to relieve the 158th Infantry.

On 10 and 11 June the 158th Infantry limited its activities to patrolling, consolidating defensive positions, and driving Japanese outposts westward. One outpost, lying southeast of the 2d Battalion, was manned by about a hundred Japanese and had to be cleared by tank fire and infantry assault. The Japanese, who were members of a *223d Infantry* company assigned to the *Right Sector Force*, fled toward Mt. Saksin, leaving behind 4 heavy machine guns, 1 light machine gun, 2 70-mm. howitzers, and 1 37-mm. antitank gun. Patrolling after the 11th was productive of one strange piece of enemy equipment—a pair of Japanese ice skates.

On 14 June the 20th Infantry, 6th Division, relieved the 158th Infantry at the Tirfoam. The 158th recrossed the Tor and went into a defensive perimeter on the west bank of Tementoe Creek. Patrols sent south and east during the next week encountered a few stragglers from the Japanese garrison at Hollandia or from the *Matsuyama Force*. On the 22d the entire regimental combat team was relieved of all combat responsibility in the Wakde-Sarmi area and began final preparations for the Noemfoor Island operation.

During its operations in the Wakde-Sarmi area the 158th Regimental Combat Team lost 70 men killed, 257 wounded, and 4 missing. The unit took 11 Japanese prisoners and estimated that it killed 920 of the enemy.

CHAPTER XI

Lone Tree Hill and Beyond

The 6th Division's 20th Infantry, together with the 6th Medical Battalion, the 1st and 51st Field Artillery Battalions, and miscellaneous other division units arrived at Toem on 11 June. The 1st Infantry and the 6th Engineers were already in the area and the rest of the division, including the 63d Infantry and the 80th Field Artillery Battalion, began unloading on 14 June. With the 11 June convoy had come the division commander, Maj. Gen. Franklin C. Sibert, and his headquarters. Under General Sibert's command the TORNADO Task Force was to continue the drive westward toward Sarimi. The capture of Sarimi and the destruction of Japanese forces west of the Tor River were to be accomplished rapidly, for plans were already being made by ALAMO Force to employ the 6th Division in another operation which, scheduled for late July, involved seizure of an air-base site on the northwestern tip of the Vogelkop Peninsula.¹

The 6th Division Against Lone Tree Hill

General Sibert assumed command of the TORNADO Task Force on 12 June.² His first

problem was to get the various units of the 6th Division unloaded. The division had been hastily and unsystematically loaded at Milne Bay, in eastern New Guinea, because the ships which were to carry it to Toem arrived at Milne Bay so late that comprehensive loading plans could neither be made nor executed. Moreover, the Toem beaches were mediocre, unloading and storing facilities inadequate, and lighterage was insufficient. Unloading therefore proceeded very slowly, and the 20th Infantry had to borrow many crew-served weapons from the 158th Infantry before it could relieve the latter unit at the Tirfoam.³

The Objective

General Sibert believed that it would be tactically and logistically unsound for his division to engage in offensive action until all its units were unloaded, settled, and acquainted with the combat area. Therefore he planned to have the 1st Infantry mop up south of Toem and Arare until unloading

Task Force, in place of Headquarters, 158th Regimental Combat Team, which had held that role since it, in turn, had replaced Headquarters, 163d Regimental Combat Team, on 25 May.

¹ TTF G-3 Jnl, 1-12 Jun 44; Ltr, OI, Comdr ALAMO Force to CG 6th Inf Div, 10 Jun 44, in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 10-11 Jun 44; Rad, ALAMO Rear Hq to ALAMO Adv Hq, WF-3060, 15 Jun 44, in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 15-16 Jun 44.

² On the same date Headquarters, 6th Infantry Division, began operating as Headquarters, TORNADO

³ Rad, TTF to ALAMO Adv Hq, Y-1117, 11 Jun 44, in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 11-13 Jun 44; Ltr, Gen Sibert to Gen Krueger, 18 Jun 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 27-31 Jul 44. While in command of the TORNADO Task Force, General Sibert wrote almost daily personal letters to General Krueger.

was complete, and he instructed the 20th Infantry to limit its action to sending patrols west of the Tirfoam to locate enemy defenses. After the 20th received its own equipment, it would push westward in conjunction with a series of battalion shore-to-shore movements along the coast toward Sarmi. General Sibert's staff estimated that unloading, mopping up, and patrolling would be completed in time for the 20th Infantry to begin a major offensive on 1 July.⁴

General Krueger would not sanction such a delay in initiating an advance westward. Surf, beach, and terrain conditions in the Toem-Arare area had proved unsatisfactory for the establishment of a staging base, but it was known that the shore of Maffin Bay afforded better conditions. General Krueger realized that quick control over the Maffin Bay area was necessary if the theater were to make any use of the Wakde-Sarmi region as a staging base. On 18 June he therefore ordered General Sibert to start an immediate offensive, and the latter accordingly changed his plans.

The 1st Infantry was instructed to relieve 20th Infantry elements at the Tor bridgehead, and the 20th Infantry was directed to concentrate at the Tirfoam in time to attack westward on 20 June. The initial objective was the Lone Tree Hill-Hill 225 area, but the advance was to continue until all Japanese in the coastal area between the Tirfoam and Sarmi town had been destroyed or dispersed inland.⁵

The 158th Infantry had spent but four days in the vicinity of Lone Tree Hill and had not been able to explore the terrain thoroughly.⁶ Such information as the regiment had acquired was turned over to the 6th Infantry Division but proved sketchy and not altogether accurate. Beginning on 21 June, the 20th Infantry was to gain a new and more detailed picture of the Lone Tree Hill area.

At the top of Lone Tree Hill was a stretch of rough but generally level ground lying mostly along the western part of the hill. This flat ground, about 700 yards long north to south, was shaped like a crude dumbbell. At its northern end, the level area was about 300 yards wide. It narrowed at the center of the hill to less than 100 yards but broadened again on the south to a width of about 250 yards. There were many coral outcroppings, potholes, and small crevices, while on the north the hill terminated in a very rugged prominence called Rocky Point. This terrain feature, which extended into Maffin Bay from the central mass of Lone Tree Hill, was about 300 yards wide east to west. Its northern face was not as heavily overgrown

18 Jun 44, in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 18-19 Jun 44; TTF FO 7, 18 Jun 44, in TTF, FO's and Daily Opnl Orders, 13 Jun-18 Jul 44; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 12 Jun-18 Jul 44, p. 10.

⁶ Terrain information in the rest of this section is compiled from: TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 12 Jun-18 Jul 44, pp. 2-4; Sketches in TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 12 Jun-18 Jul 44; Ltrs, Sibert to Krueger, 18 and 26 Jun 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 27-31 Jul 44; Ltrs and atchd sketches, Sibert to Krueger, 27, 28, and 29 Jun 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 17-20 Jul 44; G-2 TTF, Rpt to Comdr TTF, 26 Jun 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 27-31 Jul 44; Rad, TTF to ALAMO Adv Hq, no number, 26 Jun 44, in TTF G-2 Jnl, 24 Jun-2 Jul 44. The past tense is used in the description because the terrain was extensively changed by air, naval, and artillery bombardment and by engineer demolitions and construction.

⁴ Rads, TTF to ALAMO Adv Hq, Y-1116 and Y-1117, 11 Jun 44, in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 11-13 Jun 44; Rad, ALAMO Rear Hq to ALAMO Adv Hq, WF-3060, 15 Jun 44, in ALAMO Adv Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 15-16 Jun 44.

⁵ Rad, ALAMO to TTF, WH-3478, 18 Jun 44, in TTF G-2 Jnl, 12-23 Jun 44; Ltr, Sibert to Krueger, 18 Jun 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 27-31 Jul 44; Rad, TTF to ALAMO, Y-1268,

as the rest of Lone Tree Hill. Although Rocky Point's northeast slope was steep, foot troops could climb that face with more ease than they could approach the top of Lone Tree Hill from most other points.

A deep ravine ran southwest into the central mass of Lone Tree Hill from a sandy beach on the east side of Rocky Point. The floor of the ravine varied from 20 to 30 yards in width and its nearly vertical western wall was 40 to 50 feet high. Both sides were honeycombed with natural or man-made tunnels, caverns, and small caves, most of which were connected with each other by underground or deeply defiladed passages. Some caves reached a width of 40 feet, a depth into the hillside of 50 feet, and a height of 20 feet. The ravine terminated on the eastern slope of Lone Tree Hill in a steep grade at the narrow central portion of the hilltop.

East of the ravine and extending to the west bank of the Snaky was an oval-shaped, low, and generally flat shelf about 250 yards wide east to west and almost 450 yards long. Its eastern and northern sides lay about 20 feet above the surrounding sea-level plain. The approaches from the beach or the Snaky River were very steep and in places were sheer, low cliffs. On its southwestern side the shelf led to precipitous grades reaching to the top of Lone Tree Hill. South of the narrow section of the hilltop plateau these grades flattened into a wide draw with gradual slopes.

West of Rocky Point was a beach not more than twenty feet deep, behind which was a vertical rock and clay ledge varying from three to five feet in height. Between the ledge and the western face of Lone Tree Hill was a heavily forested swampy area extending more than 300 yards inland. The western face of the hill was an almost vertical

cliff, 60 to 80 feet high, and was rock-faced but covered with heavy jungle undergrowth. The steepest part, about 700 yards long, gave way at the southwest corner of Lone Tree Hill to less precipitous heavily forested slopes extending through the defile between Lone Tree Hill and Hill 225.

Lone Tree Hill contained a veritable maze of Japanese defenses. There were many caves and bunkers on the western cliff—positions which were hidden from ground observers by tall trees or undergrowth on the cliff face. There were also a few pillboxes or bunkers in the swampy area between the cliff and the beach west of Rocky Point. Two 75-mm. field pieces, defiladed by rocky outcroppings, were emplaced by the enemy on this beach. On the face of Rocky Point and on the rocky shore below were other defensive positions and at least one other artillery piece. In the ravine east of Rocky Point were five 75-mm. mountain guns hidden in various caves or crevices. Although none of these guns could be traversed, they were so emplaced that they covered most of the northwestern, northern, and northeastern land and sea approaches to Lone Tree Hill.

On the hilltop plateau Japanese defensive positions included log and earth dugouts which, presenting low silhouettes and covered with undergrowth, were very difficult to locate. Atop the hill rough holes were also dug under or between the roots of large trees. Some of these defenses were arranged in lines across the ravine and wide draw leading to the hilltop from the northeast and east, respectively. One of the most troublesome installations was a Japanese observation post at the northern part of the hilltop plateau. This post, about one hundred feet off the ground in the branches of a huge tree, was sturdily constructed and cleverly

camouflaged. It had withstood air, naval, and artillery bombardments aimed at Lone Tree Hill prior to 20 June. From the post the Japanese could observe movements along the main road to the east of Lone Tree Hill, the entire beach area from Sarmi to Arare, and maneuvers on most of the hill itself.

Information available to the TORNADO Task Force on 20 June indicated that Lone Tree Hill was defended by 700 to 800 Japanese. Most of these troops were believed to be members of the *3d Battalion, 224th Infantry*, plus a few men and weapons of *36th Division* artillery—75-mm. mountain guns.⁷ The strength estimate was reasonably accurate—there were actually near 850 Japanese on the hill—but it did not take into account the Japanese south of Lone Tree Hill on Hill 225 and the eastern nose of Mt. Saksin, from which enemy troops could move rapidly to reinforce Lone Tree Hill and from which they could defend the southern approaches to that hill. Moreover, there were elements of many more *36th Division* units in the immediate Lone Tree Hill area. (*Map V*)

Command in the area was exercised by *Headquarters, Right Sector Force*, now under Colonel Matsuyama of the *224th Infantry* who, as his regiment arrived west of the Tor, took over the sector command from Major Matsuoka. By 20 June the troops on Lone Tree Hill proper comprised the *1st Battalion, 224th Infantry*, less one company; the remnants of Captain Saito's 300-man company of *3d Battalion, 224th Infantry*, riflemen and *36th Division* artillerymen (Captain Saito had long since been killed); probably a company from the *3d Battalion, 223d Infantry*; elements of the

16th Field Airdrome Construction Unit; *36th Division* artillery weapons and crews; and, finally, a few men of antiaircraft and service units who had been armed as auxiliary infantry. South of Lone Tree Hill, on Hill 225 and the eastern nose of Mt. Saksin, were emplaced most of the rest of the *224th Infantry*, the bulk of the *16th Field Airdrome Construction Unit*, probably another company of the *223d Infantry*, and an anti-aircraft battery converted to infantry. The total Japanese strength in the Lone Tree Hill-Hill 225-eastern nose area was probably at least 1,800 men. The *1st Company, 224th Infantry*, down to about 30 men, was initially left east of the Tor to conduct reconnaissance and guerrilla warfare around the TORNADO Task Force beach positions, but moved across the river some time after 20 June to rejoin the rest of the *Right Sector Force*. Two companies of the *2d Battalion, 224th Infantry*, were between the Tirfoam and the Tor, with instructions to harass the Allied line of communications along the coastal road west from the Tor.

About the same time that Colonel Matsuyama assumed command of the *Right Sector Force*, the *Yoshino Force* and the new *Yuki Group* were apparently disbanded as such and combined to form a new *Central Sector Force* under Colonel Yoshino, the commander of the *223d Infantry*. Colonel Yoshino's new sector ran west from the west side of Lone Tree Hill to the old western boundary at Sawar Creek, where the *Left Sector Force*, still under General Yamada, took up. Except for the one or two companies assigned to the *Right Sector Force*, Colonel Yoshino's entire *223d Infantry* was assigned to the *Central Sector Force*. Also under his command were various artillery, antiaircraft, and service units,

⁷ Rad, TTF to ALAMO Adv Hq, Y-1268, 18 Jun 44, in TTF G-2 Jnl, 12-23 Jun 44.

including whatever was left of the *103d Field Airdrome Construction Unit*. The remnants of the *51st Field Road Construction Unit*, formerly attached to the *224th Infantry*, were sent to the area of the *Left Sector Force*. The bulk of Colonel Yoshino's troops were on the western slopes of Mt. Saksin, although some were in defensive positions along the coast immediately west of Lone Tree Hill. The strength of the force was about 2,000 men.⁸

To the Top of Lone Tree Hill

The attack west from the Tirfoam River jumped off on schedule at 0800 on 20 June. The 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, moved along the main coastal road. The 3d Battalion followed closely, while the 2d remained in reserve at Maffin No. 1. Shortly after 1200 the 1st Battalion, having encountered no opposition, reached the Snaky River. Company B pushed on toward the village at the entrance to the defile between Lone Tree Hill and the eastern nose of Mt. Saksin. This advance was greeted by a hail of fire from Japanese automatic weapons emplaced in the defile—fire reminiscent of the opposition encountered by Company B, 158th Infantry, at the same place more than three weeks earlier.⁹

The 20th Infantry's Company B tried to outflank the enemy position to the south but was halted by intense Japanese machine gun fire. Tanks sent forward to aid the infantry were unable to reach the enemy guns because the terrain was impassable to tracked or wheeled vehicles, which could scarcely negotiate the rough road, let alone the thick

jungle and rising ground to the south. Late in the afternoon Company A was sent forward to Company B's position, but both units encountered heavy fire and soon lost contact with the rest of the 1st Battalion. The two companies remained for the night in an isolated perimeter near the village and about 400 yards west of the main body.

The 3d Battalion had moved north off the coastal road during the morning, and late in the afternoon it had established a perimeter extending south 200 yards from the beach along the east bank of the Snaky River. The battalion had encountered little opposition during the day, but patrols which had crossed the Snaky before dark reported finding many Japanese defensive positions on the eastern slopes of Lone Tree Hill. A gap which existed between the 1st and 3d Battalions was partially filled just before nightfall by elements of the 2d Battalion, which were sent forward late in the afternoon. Casualties during the day were four killed and twenty-eight wounded.

The 1st and 3d Battalions, 1st Infantry, moved across the Tor River in the morning of 20 June and took over the positions in the vicinity of Maffin No. 1 vacated by the 20th Infantry. The 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry, assumed responsibility for the protection of the bridgehead across the Tor. The regiment was to remain east of the Tirfoam in reserve on 21 June while the 20th Infantry moved on against Lone Tree Hill.¹⁰

Operations of the 20th Infantry during the morning of 21 June consisted principally of patrolling designed to locate enemy strong points on and around Lone Tree Hill.¹¹ The

⁸ *Opns of Yuki Group*, pp. 16–18; *2d Army Opns*, pp. 3–6; *2d Army Opns at Sarmi and Biak (Rev)*, p. 30 and Sketch 11.

⁹ 20th Inf S-3 Per Rpts, 14 Jun–16 Aug 44; TTF G-3 Jnl, 12 Jun–18 Jul 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; 1st Inf S-3 Per Rpts, 11 Jun–16 Jul 44.

¹¹ Information in the rest of this section is from: Ltr, Sibert to Krueger, 23 Jun 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 27–31 Jul 44; TTF G-2 Jnl, 12–23 Jun 44; TTF G-3 Jnl, 12 Jun–18 Jul 44; 1st Inf S-3 Per Rpts, 11 Jun–16 Jul 44; 20th

1st and 3d Battalions undertook most of this scouting while the remainder of the 2d Battalion, together with the regimental Antitank Company, closed up on the 1st. Companies A and B moved south of the main road through the defile toward Hill 225, and both units encountered strong opposition. By the end of the day the 1st Battalion's positions were essentially the same as they had been in the morning, except that Company B was south of the road and about 600 yards distant from the rest of the battalion. The battalion's mission was primarily defensive: to probe Japanese defenses on the southern side of Lone Tree Hill and protect the south flank of the 2d and 3d Battalions as the latter units assaulted the hill.

Patrols of the 3d Battalion reached the northeast face of Lone Tree Hill during the morning and observed enemy activity on the rough beach below Rocky Point. Other patrols, working toward the eastern slopes of the hill, brought back negative reports which contradicted those obtained at dusk the previous afternoon. However, as a result of these negative reports, it was decided that the 3d Battalion should attack in force during the afternoon. At 1345, after a fifteen-minute artillery and 4.2-inch mortar preparation, one company moved across the Snaky River, immediately finding the twenty-foot cliff along the eastern side of the shelf which lay between the Snaky River and the central mass of Lone Tree Hill. The morning patrols had not, apparently, reported the existence of this cliff, and naturally it was not known that Japanese de-

fenses were established along it. Machine gun and rifle fire from the *1st Battalion, 224th Infantry*, soon pinned down the 3d Battalion's leading platoon.

The company commander quickly sent part of his unit northward to find the Japanese left flank. Moving around the northeast end of the shelf, this group discovered the beach entrance to the deep ravine between the western side of the shelf and Rocky Point. Progress into or across the ravine was impossible in the face of the intense Japanese small arms fire which greeted the advancing American unit. Company B, 6th Engineers, then in the forward area to cut a road from the mouth of the Snaky River to Rocky Point, was brought up to the ravine to help clean out caves and crevices with flame throwers and demolitions, but could not reach the enemy positions through the continued machine gun, mortar, and rifle fire. Infantry bazooka squads also tried to blast the Japanese out of their caves but failed when their ammunition ran out. Since there was no time to bring additional rockets forward before dark, all elements of the 3d Battalion and the engineer company were withdrawn to the east bank of the Snaky River for the night. The 20th Infantry was to continue the assault on the morrow with the 3d Battalion moving against Lone Tree Hill from the northeast, the 2d Battalion in reserve, and the 1st Battalion remaining in its holding position.

American casualties during the day were two men killed and twenty-four wounded. Initially it was thought that some of these casualties had been caused by friendly mortar fire covering the 3d Battalion's patrolling. Later investigation proved, however, that the losses had been caused by enemy fire. Japanese artillery and mortars usually remained silent throughout the fighting on

Inf S-3 Per Rpts, 14 Jun-16 Aug 44; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 12 Jun-18 Jul 44, pp. 5-6; 6th Inf Div Arty Opns Rpt Sarmi-Maffin Bay, 11 Jun-17 Jul 44, pp. 3-4; 20th Inf, *The Battle of Lone Tree Hill*, n. d., copy in OCMH files. Enemy information is from *2d Army Opns at Sarmi and Biak (Rev)*, pp. 30-31.

Lone Tree Hill except when American mortars and artillery began firing. The psychological effect of this trick on the troops of the 6th Division was obvious, and for a long while they thought that part of their losses resulted from friendly fire. It is probable that many Japanese were killed during the day but, because of the confused nature of the fighting along the cliff on the eastern shelf and in the ravine, the 3d Battalion could attempt no estimate of Japanese losses in its zone. The 1st Battalion estimated that its patrols south of Lone Tree Hill had killed about thirty-five of the enemy.

Task force artillery and the 20th Infantry's 81-mm. mortars fired on Lone Tree Hill intermittently throughout the night, concentrating on the Rocky Point area. Operations on 22 June started at 0800 when eighteen Wakde-based P-47's strafed Lone Tree Hill, dropped full belly tanks, and set them afire. The air action, which ceased at 0820, was followed by an intense artillery concentration, of ten minutes' duration, fired by two 105-mm. and one 155-mm. howitzer battalions. The artillery sent 720 rounds of 105-mm. ammunition and 360 rounds of 155-mm. shells into an area 400 yards wide and 600 long on the northeast side of the hill.

Infantry action started about 0830 with Company K, two platoons abreast, leading the advance and Company I following close behind. Company K approached the hill from the northeast and from a point on the beach just west of the deep ravine. Only scattered rifle fire marked the first part of the ascent, for the Japanese were stunned by the weight of the preparatory air and artillery fire. About 1115 the advance platoons had to seek cover from enemy light mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire, most of which seemed to originate in caves and

crevices along the sides of the ravine. Company I, which had been waiting in reserve on the beach, was now dispatched up the hill to reinforce Company K. The combined fire power of the two units was sufficient to drive the Japanese back into their caves, and the assault companies reached the top of Lone Tree Hill just south of Rocky Point at 1240.

Company L, about 0930, had begun an attempt to reach the top of the hill from the southeast corner. The company passed through 1st Battalion units near the village at the entrance to the defile and pushed northwestward. Japanese infantrymen were seen moving about near the village, and Company M's 81-mm. mortars were called upon to protect Company L's rear by lobbing shells into the hamlet. Four tanks were also brought forward along the main road to aid in clearing the village and the ground between the settlement and Company L. Since marshy terrain and heavy undergrowth prevented the tanks from accomplishing their mission, Company F was called forward and attached to Company L to protect the latter's flanks and rear.

Together the two companies tried to force their way up the southeast slope of Lone Tree Hill, but they were subjected to intense machine gun and rifle fire from the northwest, west, and southwest. The two units thereupon withdrew from that face, moved back to the eastern edge of the oval shelf, and marched north to the point at which Companies K and I had started up the hill. Company F followed K's route to the hilltop, meeting little opposition on the way. Company L pushed across the ravine about 200 yards south of F's line of march and, since the Japanese remained hidden in the ravine's many caves, had little difficulty reaching the top of the hill. By 1500 Companies

F, I, K, L, and part of Company M had established a common perimeter near the north end of the hilltop.

The 2d Battalion, 20th Infantry, relieved during the morning by the 2d Battalion of the 1st Infantry, had been sent forward about 1400 to complete the occupation of Lone Tree Hill. Following the route employed by Companies F and L in the forenoon, the battalion (less Company F) moved across the southern end of the shelf and along the southeastern slope. Advancing cautiously through heavily forested, tangled terrain, at 1700 the battalion reached the head of the wide draw which led to the narrow central part of the hilltop. Little opposition was encountered and the battalion moved up the hill and along the hill crest to a point about 400 yards south of the 3d Battalion. Increasingly strong enemy opposition made it impossible to close the gap between the two before dark. Hasty positions were set up for the night defenses.

Despite the fact that part of Company K had been temporarily pinned down by enemy fire during the morning, neither that unit nor Company I had had any real difficulty reaching the top of Lone Tree Hill. Companies F and L, after they had changed their direction of attack, had also made their way to the top against negligible opposition, and the 2d Battalion had been delayed more by the terrain than by enemy action. For the second day in succession the task force commander had reason to believe that the Lone Tree Hill area was not strongly held, and he expected that the hill would be secured shortly.

The 3d Battalion, during the afternoon, found indications that the Japanese had other plans. The battalion perimeter was within sight of the enemy's observation post, which was almost continuously manned

although four or five Japanese were shot out of it in the course of the afternoon. So close was the observation post to the 3d Battalion's perimeter that friendly artillery was unable to fire on it, but well-directed enemy artillery fire, which harassed the 20th Infantry's rear installations, indicated that the Japanese were putting their observers to good use. There was also some reason to suspect that the many caves and crevices along the ravine and Rocky Point contained numerous enemy troops who had apparently deliberately permitted the 3d Battalion to reach the top of the hill without offering serious battle.

The suspicion proved well founded. About 1730 approximately two companies of Japanese, under the personal leadership of Colonel Matsuyama, poured out of hidden positions on Rocky Point or in the ravine and fell upon the 3d Battalion's perimeter with suicidal fury. Confused fighting, sometimes hand-to-hand, continued well into the night, until it was thought that every Japanese soldier in the northern section of Lone Tree Hill must have been killed. Although the 2d Battalion's positions were not attacked, the unit could not move to the 3d Battalion's aid. Such a maneuver would have been foolhardy in the darkness and tangled undergrowth, and the 2d soon found that it, too, was surrounded. Thus, by 2400, the Japanese had completely reversed the tactical situation atop Lone Tree Hill. Early in the afternoon the 20th Infantry had been at the Japanese rear. Now the enemy was at the 20th Infantry's rear, had isolated both the 2d and 3d Battalions of that regiment, and had cut all lines of communication to the base of the hill.

Casualties on the 22d could not be counted because of the confusion resulting from the night attack. However, it was esti-

mated that about 30 Americans had been killed and another 100 wounded, most of them in the 3d Battalion, before the enemy attack waned at midnight. There were but 40 known Japanese dead, the majority of whom had been counted by 1st Battalion patrols on the southern side of Lone Tree Hill. The number of the enemy killed by the 3d Battalion after 1730 could not be estimated, but it is known that Colonel Matsuyama was wounded during the action.

Holding Lone Tree Hill

The 3d Battalion expected that the enemy withdrawal during the night presaged reorganization for another attack.¹² This expectation was correct, for Colonel Matsuyama did have plans to continue the attack. On the 22d the two companies of the *2d Battalion, 224th Infantry*, which had been east of the Tirfoam, had arrived to reinforce him, as had the *7th Company* of the same regiment, previously on detached duty at an inland post.

Action on the 23d began at dawn when Japanese troops, some of whom were using American weapons and wearing parts of American uniforms, attacked the 2d Battalion, 20th Infantry, from the deep ravine. The battalion initially held its fire, thinking that the enemy force might be a friendly patrol, and the Japanese were able to ad-

vance to within fifteen yards of the battalion lines before being recognized. It was an hour before the results of this error could be corrected—an hour during which both the 2d Battalion and the Japanese suffered heavy losses. The hour ended with an enemy retreat.

At 0800 the 2d Battalion was instructed to make contact with the 3d, clear the Japanese from the rest of the northern section of the hilltop plateau, and form a two-battalion perimeter. Moving north along the hill crest soon proved impracticable, for the Japanese held strong positions in the 400-yard interval which still separated the two battalions. The 2d Battalion therefore decided to bypass the opposition. The unit marched back down the hill, crossed the oval shelf, and turned north along the west bank of the Snaky. About 250 yards south of the beach, the battalion turned west and, at 1000, was held up by enemy fire from the same twenty-foot-high cliff which had stalled the 3d Battalion's attack on 21 June.

The 2d Battalion then withdrew from the cliff north to the beach east of Rocky Point and reorganized. At 1120 the movement up Lone Tree Hill was resumed, this time along the same route employed by Companies I and K on the previous day. The advance was opposed by enemy machine gun, mortar, artillery, and rifle fire, but the 2d Battalion, with Company G suffering especially "heavy casualties,"¹³ slowly fought its way upward by fire and movement. At 1400 the leading elements began reaching the top of the hill, but it was not until 1630 that the battalion had assembled in an organized perimeter. The new position was just northwest of the 3d Battalion's lines, overlooked the west cliff of Lone Tree Hill, and appar-

¹² Sources for this section are: Ltr, Sibert to Krueger, 23 Jun 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 27-31 Jul 44; TTF G-2 Jnls, 12-23 Jun and 24 Jun-2 Jul 44; TTF G-3 Jnl, 12 Jun-18 Jul 44; 1st Inf S-3 Per Rpts, 11 Jun-16 Jul 44; 20th Inf S-3 Per Rpts, 14 Jun-16 Aug 44; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 12 Jun-18 Jul 44, pp. 6-8; 6th Inf Div Arty Opns Rpt Sarmi-Maffin Bay, 11 Jun-17 Jul 44, pp. 4-6; Rad, TTF to ALAMO Adv Hq, Y-1268, 18 Jun 44, in TTF G-2 Jnl, 12-23 Jun 44; *2d Army Opns at Sarmi and Biak (Rev)*, pp. 31-32, 34, 41.

¹³ This statement is from a 20th Infantry S-3 Periodic Report, but exact figures are not available.

ently was not connected with the 3d Battalion perimeter. The latter unit had held and strengthened its positions during the morning while it sought cover from continuous Japanese mortar and rifle fire and awaited the arrival of reinforcements before beginning mopping-up operations.

The 3d Battalion had received few supplies since reaching the top of Lone Tree Hill on 22 June. The unit had run out of water, and only a heavy rainfall during the night of 22–23 June had prevented thirst from becoming a major problem. To relieve this situation Company L, 1st Infantry, was ordered to take ammunition, water, and rations to the hilltop plateau. The company received the order late on 22 June but managed to move only as far as the northeastern corner of Rocky Point before dark. At 0800 the next morning the relief company started up the hill, meeting little opposition until it reached the top of Rocky Point. There it was pinned down as Japanese forces moved in behind it to cut the line of communication down the hill. Company L soon ran out of ammunition for, in addition to the supplies, the men had carried to the hilltop only their loaded weapons, with no extra ammunition. Despite help from elements of the Antitank and Service Companies, 20th Infantry, Company L was able to maintain only intermittent contact with the 3d Battalion, 20th Infantry.

It was not until late afternoon, after the 2d Battalion, 20th Infantry, had arrived atop Lone Tree Hill that Company L, 1st Infantry, was relieved. By that time the company had suffered many casualties and had lost much of the matériel it had been carrying up the hill. Neither the 2d nor 3d Battalions, 20th Infantry, received appreciable amounts of supplies during the day, and only the heroic efforts of small volunteer

groups kept these units supplied with enough food and ammunition to carry on the fight. The 1st Infantry, to support the operations of the small carrying parties, sent two machine gun platoons and two 37-mm. anti-tank guns forward to the foot of Rocky Point. With this cover the supply groups managed to fight their various ways up and down the hill and evacuated 300 wounded men during the day.

The evening of 23 June brought another 224th Infantry counterattack which was aimed at both the 2d and 3d Battalions' perimeters. These attacks came from the east side of Lone Tree Hill, the Japanese apparently having moved around the north side of the hill along Rocky Point. The initial assault culminated in a bayonet charge, which was repulsed by rifle and machine gun fire with heavy losses to the Japanese. Despite this defeat, small groups of the enemy continued suicidal attacks throughout the night of 23–24 June.

It would probably have been much easier to bypass Lone Tree Hill, isolate it, and starve out the Japanese garrison, but there were two reasons why General Sibert did not do so. First, as long as the Japanese held Lone Tree Hill, which dominated the Maffin Bay area, the shores of that bay could not be safely employed for a staging area. Second, operations from 20 to 22 June had apparently convinced the task force commander that Lone Tree Hill was not strongly held, and he had therefore ordered the frontal assault. That this estimate was in error was realized when dawn of 23 June brought with it the information that the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 20th Infantry were cut off atop Lone Tree Hill. When the hill had still not been captured by dark on 23 June the general decided to outflank it by a shore-to-shore maneuver and then con-

tinue the attack from both west and east. He ordered the 1st Infantry, reinforced by the 6th Reconnaissance Troop, to seize the beach just west of Rocky Point on the morning of 24 June. The regiment was to clean out the western side of Lone Tree Hill and prevent any more Japanese reinforcements from reaching it.

For the shore-to-shore maneuver, the 1st Infantry chose Companies K and I. Company K boarded ten LVT's at the beach near the Tirfoam River and moved to the west side of Rocky Point. The LVT's were protected by the 6th Reconnaissance Troop aboard thirteen LVT(A)'s armed with 37-mm. guns. Both groups of amphibian vehicles were fired on by Japanese 75-mm. guns emplaced on Rocky Point, but Company K made a safe landing at 0900 hours. Attempting to move inland, the company was immediately pinned down on the narrow beach by enemy fire of all types which originated along the west face of Lone Tree Hill and Rocky Point.

The LVT's, again protected by the LVT(A)'s, made a return trip with Company I, 1st Infantry, which landed on the right of Company K at 1200. About 1330 four tanks of Company C, 44th Tank Battalion, transported by LCT's, arrived at the hard-pressed beachhead, which was subjected to ever increasing machine gun and rifle fire. Upon their arrival the tanks covered the evacuation of wounded and the landing of supplies by firing on Japanese positions in the swampy woods between the beach and the west cliff of Lone Tree Hill. One LVT, loaded with wounded men, was sunk about 175 yards off Rocky Point by Japanese 75-mm. fire. All the men were rescued by an LVT(A), which succeeded in silencing the enemy artillery weapon.

Companies I and K were unable to make

any progress inland. Japanese defensive positions in the swampy woodland, occupied by elements of the 223d *Infantry*, prevented an advance. The four tanks attempted to move off the beach to attack these positions but found that they could not negotiate the low clay and rock bank behind the shore line. The tanks remained on the beach for the night to protect the exposed infantrymen, but the 6th Reconnaissance Troop returned to the vicinity of the Tirfoam River mouth at darkness.

On top of Lone Tree Hill during the day the 2d and 3d Battalions, 20th Infantry, in the face of enemy mortar, rifle, and machine gun fire, began to clear the Japanese from the many caves and crevices on Rocky Point, the deep ravine east of the point, and the hilltop plateau. For the mission of clearing Rocky Point, assault teams were formed by personnel of the Antitank Company, Headquarters Company of the 2d Battalion, Company H, and a few men from Company F. Elements of the 3d Battalion, 1st Infantry, including most of Company L, also were engaged in the mopping up. The assault teams were armed with a variety of weapons, including flame throwers, bazookas, rifle grenades, hand grenades, BAR's, TSMG's, high explosives, and even gasoline. While this action continued, the 2d Battalion, 20th Infantry, aided by Company L of the 1st Infantry, secured the supply route up the hill.

By nightfall there were definite signs that Japanese resistance in the northern section of Lone Tree Hill was weakening, and during the night of 24-25 June there were no major counterattacks, although harassing mortar, grenade, and rifle fire continued. Headquarters of the 3d Battalion, 20th Infantry, and Company M of the same regiment moved across the Snaky River in the

afternoon and established a perimeter on the beach at the east side of Rocky Point, from which Company M's heavy weapons could aid in the mopping-up operations.

Despite the weakening of Japanese resistance, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 20th Infantry, and Company L, 1st Infantry, continued to suffer heavy casualties during the day. At dusk 2d Battalion effectives numbered only 330 men, and the 3d Battalion had only 322 effectives left. The losses of Companies I and K, 1st Infantry, could not be ascertained because not all the wounded and dead had been evacuated and because communications had broken down at intervals throughout the day. However, it was known that at least 9 men had been killed and 37 wounded, and that the dead included 2 Company K officers.

The next day, 25 June, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 20th Infantry, now reinforced by both Companies L and M, 1st Infantry, and Company B, 6th Engineers, continued clearing Rocky Point, the deep ravine, the northern part of the hilltop plateau, and the eastern shelf, where a few scattered Japanese still held positions along the twenty-foot-high cliff. Flame throwers, demolition charges, bazookas, and hand grenades all proved successful in eliminating Japanese resistance and sealing or clearing caves and crevices. The task was easier on the 25th, for the Japanese slowly gave up the fight and were killed or sealed off in their caves. Casualties continued to mount—the 2d Battalion, 20th Infantry, had only about two hundred effectives by the end of the day—but many of the losses were not due to Japanese action. Many men were evacuated over the now secured supply route to the top of the hill as they fell from exhaustion or became sick.

On the beach west of Rocky Point Companies I and K, 1st Infantry, had little suc-

cess in expanding their beachhead. The tanks proved useless in the area and were therefore withdrawn to Maffin No. 1. The two infantry companies, pinned down during the morning, kept up a continuous mortar barrage against Japanese positions in the swamp to the south, against the western cliff of Lone Tree Hill, and, when certain such fire would not endanger troops atop the hill, against the northwest corner of Rocky Point. This mortar fire, coupled with the operations on the plateau, began to have the desired effect during the afternoon, and Companies I and K were able to push their defenses beyond the narrow beachhead slightly southward and westward and toward the shore beneath Rocky Point. Once or twice during the afternoon, patrols were able to reach the top of Lone Tree Hill from the northwest corner of the point and established contact with 20th Infantry units. Late in the afternoon Company M, 1st Infantry, operating from the east side of the point, managed to push a patrol around the shore to establish contact with Company K.

Though Companies I and K could find little tangible evidence of the results of their operations, they had actually wiped out the *223d Infantry's* defense force in the area just west of Lone Tree Hill. By dusk on the 25th, it had become obvious that the combined efforts of the 3d Battalion, 1st Infantry, and the 2d and 3d Battalions, 20th Infantry, had either cleared out the northern half of Lone Tree Hill or had forced the Japanese to withdraw. The latter conclusion was the more nearly correct. The *36th Division* decided on 25 June to withdraw the bulk of the *Center and Right Sector Forces* west of the Woske River and establish new defensive positions, thereby keeping the *223d Infantry*, the bulk of which had not been committed to action in

the Lone Tree Hill area, more or less intact. Only the remnants of the 224th Infantry were to remain east of the Woske, and they were to withdraw into rough terrain southwest of Mt. Saksin.

At nightfall on the 25th, General Sibert estimated that his three forward battalions had lost approximately 140 men killed and 850 wounded and evacuated, including those who had to be sent back to the rear because of wounds, sickness, heat exhaustion, or psychoneurotic disorders. Known Japanese dead in the northern part of the hill numbered 344, but it could not be estimated how many more had been thrown over the west cliff, sealed in caves, or carried off by withdrawing remnants of the Japanese defense force. According to Japanese sources, the Japanese had lost about 500 men killed and another 300 wounded in the Lone Tree Hill-Hill 225-Mt. Saksin area.

By noon on 25 June it was apparent to General Sibert that only mopping-up operations remained to be accomplished on and near Lone Tree Hill. For all practical purposes, that area had been secured.

Final Operations in the Wakde-Sarmi Area

Mopping Up by the 6th Division

As the 2d and 3d Battalions, 20th Infantry, were in no condition to undertake the mopping up, General Sibert decided to relieve those two units with the 3d Battalion, 63d Infantry.¹⁴ The latter unit and the 3d

Battalion, 1st Infantry, were to clear the Lone Tree Hill area and all enemy west to the Woske River and inland for a distance of 800 yards. The 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, was to continue its holding mission south of Lone Tree Hill and, in co-operation with the 1st Battalion, 1st Infantry, was to clear the defile, Hill 225, Mt. Saksin, and Hill 265, which lay about 1,000 yards southwest of Hill 225. The relief of the 2d and 3d Battalions, 20th Infantry, was accomplished by 1500 on 26 June. To that time the regiment had lost 83 men killed, 484 wounded, and 10 missing. The unit estimated that it had killed 781 Japanese, by far the majority of them in operations on Lone Tree Hill during the period 22 through 25 June.

On 27 June the 3d Battalion, 63d Infantry, began mopping up on the top of Lone Tree Hill. These operations proved more difficult than anticipated, for a few Japanese machine gun nests were still active on the southern section. But by dusk on 30 June, no more live Japanese were to be found. On the same day the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, pushed through the defile south of the hill and found only a few stragglers in its zone. A continuous perimeter, running from the western exit of the defile north along the main road to the beach, was now established around Lone Tree Hill.

During operations at the Lone Tree Hill area from 20 through 30 June, American losses were approximately 150 killed, 550 wounded, and 400-500 evacuated from the forward area as a result of sickness, non-combat injuries, and combat fatigue. During the same period, the TORNADO Task Force claimed, 942 dead Japanese were actually counted in the area from the Snaky

¹⁴ Information in this subsection is based on: TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 12 Jun-18 Jul 44, pp. 5-9; 6th Div Arty Opns Rpt Sarmi-Maffin Bay, 11 Jun-17 Jul 44, pp. 6-7; TTF G-3 Jnl, 12 Jun-18 Jul 44; TTF G-2 Jnl, 24 Jun-2 Jul 44; 1st Inf S-3 Per Rpts, 11 Jul-16 Jul 44; 20th Inf S-3 Per Rpts, 12 Jun-16 Aug 44; 63d Inf S-3 Per Rpts, 17 Jun-17 Jul 44; Ltr, Sibert to Krueger, 26 Jun 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 27-31 Jul

44; Ltrs, Sibert to Krueger, 27 Jun-10 Jul 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 17-20 Jul 44; Opns of Yuki Group, p. 18; 2d Army Opns at Sarmi and Biak (Rev), pp. 34-37.

River west to the Woske and from the beach to the southern slopes of the defile, and the TORNADO Task Force estimated that 400 more had been sealed in caves at Lone Tree Hill. How these casualties were divided among the Japanese units is impossible to ascertain, but it is probable that at least 750 of the dead were members of the 224th Infantry and most of the rest from other units of the *Right Sector Force*. The 16th Field Airdrome Construction Unit, for instance, had been practically wiped out, as had the two companies of the 223d Infantry which had been placed under Colonel Matsuyama's command. That over 1,300 Japanese were killed in the coastal area from the Tor to the Woske by 30 June does not appear to be an exaggerated claim.

Although clearing enemy forces from the Lone Tree Hill area practically assured the security of the Maffin Bay staging area, General Sibert believed that in order to make the region entirely safe, it would be necessary to drive the enemy out of the terrain between the Woske and Tor for a distance of at least 3,000 yards (about one and three-fourths miles) inland. Operations for this purpose began on 1 July when the 1st Infantry extended the perimeter along the coast to the Woske. On 4 July elements of the 63d Infantry occupied Hill 225 and on the next day seized the crest of Mt. Saksin. Both these terrain features were found to contain numerous well-organized, strong defensive positions, all of which had been abandoned. Hill 265, southwest of Hill 225, proved a tougher nut to crack because of Japanese opposition and terrain difficulties. But on 8 and 9 July the 1st Battalions of the 1st and 63d Infantry Regiments finally secured the hill crest, which had been held by elements of the 224th Infantry. With the

fall of Hill 265, the last enemy strong point in the Maffin Bay region had been taken.

Meanwhile, the remaining Japanese forces were busily withdrawing west of the Woske. On 12 July General Sibert sent a reconnaissance in force (comprising Company A, 1st Infantry, the 6th Reconnaissance Troop, and elements of Company C, 44th Tank Battalion) across the river. This force moved rapidly beyond Sawar Drome and across Sawar Creek, which lay a little over three miles beyond the Woske. At the banks of Metimedan Creek, about 1,500 yards beyond Sawar Creek, the force was halted by Japanese fire from positions held by the *Left Sector Unit* and the 3d Battalion, 223d Infantry, along the Metimedan and from highlands beyond that stream. The 6th Division group returned to the Woske before dark, there to receive the welcome news that elements of the 31st Infantry Division were about to reach Maffin Bay to relieve the 6th Division.

The End of the Operation

When General Krueger chose the 6th Division to seize an air-base site on the Vogelkop, he decided to retain one of the division's regimental combat teams at Wakde-Sarmi as a reserve. But even if this combat team were not required on the Vogelkop, it would hardly suffice to defend the Maffin Bay-Wakde area and, at the same time, undertake the offensive patrolling necessary to maintain contact with Japanese forces in the area and to keep those forces away from Maffin Bay. Both the 25th and 33d Infantry Divisions could be moved to Maffin Bay, but neither could arrive by 15 July, when the 6th Division had to start loading for the Vogelkop operation. How-

ever, the 31st Infantry Division, which was scheduled to stage at Hollandia for another operation in September, could be moved to Maffin Bay by the 15th. General Krueger therefore recommended that the 31st Division (less the 124th Regimental Combat Team, at Aitape) be sent to Maffin Bay. General MacArthur quickly approved this proposal.¹⁵

The 31st Division began unloading at Maffin Bay on 14 July and by the 18th, when the division commander, Maj. Gen. John C. Persons, assumed the position of Commander, TORNADO Task Force, all the 6th Division, with the exception of the 20th Regimental Combat Team, had been relieved. The latter unit remained attached to the 31st Division until 21 August and left the area for the Vogelkop on the 26th. The remainder of the 6th Division began leaving on 27 July. Except for the 124th Regimental Combat Team, the 31st Division closed in the Wakde-Sarmi area by 15 August.¹⁶

The two regimental combat teams of the 31st Division, the 155th and the 167th, which operated at Wakde-Sarmi had no previous combat experience but received much valuable training in a series of patrol actions, company-sized scouting missions, and battalion reconnaissances in force. General Persons wanted to mount an offensive to drive the Japanese from a main line of resistance which they had established in the low hills between Metimedan Creek and Sarmi, but the demands for labor at the Maffin Bay staging area and the necessity for committing many troops to the defense of that area made it impossible to assemble sufficient strength for such an attack. Then,

by the time the 6th Division's requirements had been met, the 31st Division itself had to begin preparations for another operation.

The 31st Division therefore had to confine itself principally to its patrolling missions, both west and east of the perimeter. Patrols east of the perimeter were sent out to hunt down stragglers from the Japanese Hollandia garrison, and most of them, comprising armed natives of the Wakde-Sarmi area, were led by a Dutch officer, 1st Lt. C. J. Sneeuwjagt. Meanwhile, work went on at the Maffin Bay staging area, and during the period 18 July–31 August there was unloaded at Maffin Bay a daily average of 2,500 tons of various supplies. During the same period the 31st Division lost 39 men killed, 195 wounded, 34 injured, and 3 missing. The division killed 294 Japanese, found 497 dead, and captured 14 others.¹⁷

Since the 31st Division would need protection as it staged for its mid-September invasion of Morotai Island, northwest of the Vogelkop, General Krueger recommended to General MacArthur that a regimental combat team of the 33d Infantry Division (another unit without combat experience) be moved from eastern New Guinea to Maffin Bay. The theater commander approved this suggestion, and the 123d Regimental Combat Team, under Brig. Gen. Donald J. Myers (also assistant division commander), arrived at Maffin Bay on 1 September. The next day General Krueger declared that the Wakde-Sarmi operation was over.¹⁸

¹⁵ TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 18 Jul–1 Sep 44, pp. 2–4; 115th Inf Opns Rpt Maffin Bay-Toem, pp. 1–2; Ltrs, Gen Persons to Gen Krueger, 18 and 20 Jul 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl 21–23 Jul 44; Ltr, Gen Persons to Gen Ward, 6 Nov 50, no sub, in OCMH files.

¹⁶ ALAMO Force Opns Rpt Wakde-Biak, p. 28; ALAMO Force FO 23, 21 Aug 44, in ALAMO Rear Hq G-3 Jnl Wakde-Biak, 16–24 Aug 44. As usual General Krueger closed the operation for the purpose

¹⁷ ALAMO Force Opns Rpt Wakde-Biak, p. 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 12 Jun–18 Jul 44, pp. 9–10; TTF [31st Inf Div] Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 18 Jul–1 Sep 44, pp. 2–4.

Epilogue

All elements of the 31st Division left Maffin Bay early in September and on the 25th of the month the TORNADO Task Force was disbanded as such, Headquarters, 123d Regimental Combat Team, assuming all operational and administrative duties in the area. Late in September the Allied Air Forces began to close out the Wakde Island air base and to move its men and equipment forward until, by December, the Wakde field was relegated to the status of an emergency strip.¹⁹

In October, command of all American forces left in the Wakde-Sarmi area passed from General Krueger to the recently established U. S. Eighth Army, which was commanded by Lt. Gen. Robert L. Eichelberger, formerly the commander of the RECKLESS Task Force and I Corps. The 123d Regimental Combat remained in the region until relieved by a composite battalion combat team from the 93d Infantry Division on 26 January 1945. The 93d Division elements undertook some local security patrolling, but their main mission was to speed the evacuation of remaining supplies from the Maffin Bay staging area. This job was finished by 6 February, when all the remaining troops left the mainland for Wakde Island. One company of the 93d Division remained on Wakde, sending a few amphibious patrols to the mainland, until the first week in October 1945. Then the company—the last

of ending certain requirements for historical records. Again, this termination coincided with an administrative change in the area concerned, for on 1 September General Myers assumed the duties of Commander, TORNADO Task Force, in place of General Persons.

¹⁹ 123d RCT Opns Rpt Maffin Bay, 1 Sep 44–27 Jan 45, pp. 1–2. Information on closing Wakde was furnished by Capt. B. L. Mortensen (USAF), Air Hist Gp, Hq USAF, 22 Nov 48.

American troops in the area—left to join its division in the Philippines.²⁰

The Results of the Wakde-Sarmi Operation

Though the importance of the Wakde-Sarmi operation cannot be measured in terms of casualties, the casualty figures are of interest. From 17 May through 1 September American losses in the area were approximately 400 men killed, 1,500 wounded or injured in action, and 15 missing.²¹ During the same period about 3,870 Japanese had been killed in the area and 51 Japanese had been taken prisoner. How many more of the original Japanese garrison of some 11,000 had died of sickness and starvation, or had been buried in caves at Lone Tree Hill, could not be determined. It was estimated, however, that as of 1 September only 2,000 effective Japanese combat troops were left in the Wakde-Sarmi area.²² Much more important than

²⁰ 368th RCT Opns Rpt, 5 Jan 44–1 Sep 45, pp. 3–9; 368th Inf Opns Rpt Maffin Bay, 19–24 Mar 45, pp. 1–3. One other infantry unit also spent a little time at Maffin Bay. This was a battalion of the 136th Infantry, 33d Division, which spent about a month, September–October 1944, working as a labor organization at the Maffin Bay staging area.

²¹ TTF G-3 Per Rpt 107, 1 Sep 44; TTF G-1 Per Rpts 15 and 16, 30 Aug and 5 Sep 44, respectively; TTF G-1 Sum, 18 Jul–1 Sep 44, p. 2. The G-1 and G-3 figures do not agree and cannot be reconciled. Furthermore, various sets of G-3 figures are mutually irreconcilable as are different sets of G-1 figures. The figures given in the text are the author's approximations from the sources cited.

²² ALAMO Force, G-2 Wkly Rpt 57, 30 Aug 44, copy in G-2 DofA files; Ltr, Persons to Ward, 6 Nov 50; 123d RCT Opns Rpt Maffin Bay, 1 Sep 44–27 Jan 45, p. 2. The last ALAMO Force figures for Japanese casualties (from ALAMO Force G-2 Wkly Rpt 61, 4 Oct 44, copy in G-2 DofA files) are 3,963 Japanese killed and 55 captured. In addition, according to various sources, there were 2 Korean, 2 Javanese, 1 Chinese, and 36 Formosan prisoners. Total known casualties were thus 4,059. Colonel Yoshino, Colonel Matsuyama, and General Yamada

the enemy casualties was the fact that two reinforced Japanese regimental combat teams had been destroyed as effective fighting forces and eliminated as a threat in the Southwest Pacific.

In return for their losses, the Allies had obtained a valuable staging and air-base site. The Wakde Island airdrome quickly proved its value by enabling the Allied Air Forces to support not only operations within the Southwest Pacific but also those in the Central Pacific. The Fifth Air Force flew bombardment missions from Wakde against Biak, Noemfoor, enemy installations on the Vogelkop, Halmahera, Morotai, and, in the Central Pacific Area, against the Palaus and other islands in the Carolines. Fifth Air Force planes and Seventh Fleet land-based reconnaissance bombers from Wakde made substantial contributions to the success of the Central Pacific's mid-June invasion of the Marianas by striking enemy air and fleet installations in the Palaus and reporting the movements of Japanese fleet units within flying range. Since the Japanese fields on Biak were not captured in time for Southwest Pacific aircraft to undertake from that island any missions in support of the Mariana operation, the Wakde field had to carry a far greater load than was originally intended for it. Finally, from Wakde, Seventh Fleet PB4Y's initiated the first regular air reconnaissance of islands in the Philippines since early 1942.

survived the war, but what happened to General Tagami cannot be ascertained from available documents.

The Fifth Air Force controlled operations from Wakde until late August, when the Thirteenth Air Force took over the field. The latter unit afterwards supported the mid-September invasions of Morotai and the Palaus with numerous bombing and reconnaissance missions from Wakde.²³

For ground forces, the Wakde-Sarmi area proved equally valuable. In operations there the 6th Infantry Division, the 31st Infantry Division (less one regimental combat team), the 123d Regimental Combat Team of the 33d Infantry Division, part of the 158th Regimental Combat Team, and innumerable attached units received their first combat experience. The value of the area for training was thus obvious, but the region was equally valuable as a staging base. The whole or parts of five different task forces—sent to Biak, Noemfoor, the Vogelkop Peninsula, and the Philippines—were staged from the Arare-Toem beaches or the shores of Maffin Bay. Had available assault shipping been used for long trips from eastern New Guinea bases to objectives beyond Wakde, the pace of operations in the Southwest Pacific would certainly have been slowed. Instead, many units were moved to Maffin Bay by noncombatant vessels, picked up there by assault ships, and taken on to new objectives to the north and west, the nearest of which was Biak Island.²⁴

²³ Information on Allied Air Forces use of Wakde was provided by Capt. B. L. Mortensen, Air Hist Gp, Hq USAF, 22 Nov 48.

²⁴ ALAMO Force Opns Rpt Wakde-Biak, p. 28; TTF Opns Rpt Wakde-Sarmi, 12 Jun-18 Jul 44, pp. 9-10.