

CHAPTER XX

The Morotai Operation

The Landing

With the logistic, tactical, and airfield development plans completed, Morotai unit commanders turned their attention to solving final problems of staging and to conducting rehearsals. Unforeseen difficulties made it necessary to draw up intricate staging schedules, which resulted in the most complicated staging plan employed in the Southwest Pacific since the Hollandia-Aitape operations.

Final Preparations and the Approach

Initially, General Krueger had hoped to stage the entire TRADEWIND Task Force at Maffin Bay, but as early as the 22d of July it began to appear to his planners that the crowded conditions and inadequate facilities at Maffin Bay would make such a plan impossible of execution.¹ Therefore, the ALAMO G-4 Section recommended that staging be divided, with task force headquarters, task force artillery, the 124th Regimental Combat Team of the 31st Division, and the task force reserve staging at Aitape, where all were already located. The 31st Division, less the 124th RCT,

would be mounted at Maffin Bay, where no more than 1,000 men of the Allied Air Forces would also load. Most of the air force units would be staged at Hollandia or Biak, while various engineer units would be staged at Hollandia, Aitape, Maffin Bay, Sansapor, and Finschhafen. Realizing that no other solution was possible, however desirable, General Krueger and Admiral Barbey approved the split staging plan.²

In order to prepare the necessary airfields and associated facilities at Morotai on schedule, the staging and shipment of engineer units was planned so that most of these organizations would reach Morotai by D plus 3. Nearly all the rest of them were to arrive by D plus 6, and rear echelons of all were to close at Morotai by D plus 16.³ By 3 September these staging plans, as well as the tactical and logistic

¹ Memo, ACofS G-4 ALAMO to CofS ALAMO, 23 Jul 44, no sub, in ALAMO G-3 Jnl Morotai, 5-19 Jul 44; Memo, ACofS G-4 ALAMO to Deputy CofS ALAMO, 23 Jul 44, no sub, in ALAMO G-4 Jnl Morotai, 16 Jul-28 Aug 44; Memo, Asst ACofS G-3 ALAMO to ACofS G-3 ALAMO, 24 Jul 44, no sub; Memo, Actg ACofS G-3 ALAMO to CofS ALAMO, 25 Jul 44, no sub; Memo, Col McDonald to Asst ACofS G-3 ALAMO, 26 Aug 44; CTF 77 Opns Rpt Morotai, p. 8.

² Memo, Col McDonald to Asst ACofS G-3 ALAMO, 26 Jul 44. No final shipment plan for the engineers can be found. The plan given above is based on the dates the various units reached Morotai as established from their after action reports.

plans for all air, naval, and ground units, had been completed. The bulk of the assault shipping and landing craft had reached the two principal staging areas—Aitape and Maffin Bay—on 2 and 3 September to begin loading and to conduct rehearsals.⁴

Rehearsals were carried out at Aitape on 4 September for the 124th Regimental Combat Team and smaller units scheduled for the assault on White Beach. The Shore Battalion, 534th Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment, for the especial benefit of which the rehearsal was undertaken, came ashore in good order. Despite the fact that the battalion had had no previous assault experience, General Hall, the task force commander, terminated the rehearsal at mid-morning. By that time no bulk stores had been unloaded and many vehicles had not been sent ashore. General Hall had called off the rehearsal because it was difficult to find dispersal room for all the supplies and equipment which had been unloaded; because some scarce equipment was in danger of being damaged; and, finally, because much time would be needed to reload the ships. Admiral Barbey believed that none of these considerations outweighed the value of complete rehearsal, particularly in view of the large tonnage of supplies and equipment to be unloaded at Morotai during the assault phase. However, actual landing conditions at Morotai later indicated that more complete rehearsals might have had little value.⁵

⁴ CTF 77 Opns Rpt Morotai, p. 7; TRADEWIND Task Force, Hist of the INTERLUDE [Morotai] Opn, 4 Aug 44 to 4 Oct 44, p. 12 (hereafter cited as TrTF Hist of INTERLUDE, 4 Aug-4 Oct 44).

⁵ CTF 77 Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 7-8; 4th Engr Special Brigade, Monthly Hist Rpt, 30 Sep 44, Sec. I, Opns, p. 2.

Red Beach assault units carried out a rehearsal on the mainland east of Wakde Island on 6 September. Landings again proceeded smoothly and rehearsals were curtailed. Some LST's did not beach and others could not discharge all their vehicles because the rehearsal beaches were not particularly good. Many other vehicles were not unloaded because the 31st Division, like the 81st, did not have sufficient waterproofing material for both extended rehearsals and the assault.⁶

Final loading took place generally without difficulty except at Aitape, where adverse surf conditions made it necessary to use LCT's to ferry troops from the beach to ships lying offshore. At Maffin Bay most of the embarkation was carried out directly from the beach except that some troops were ferried from the shore to LCI's by DUKW's. Loading was completed at Aitape on the 8th, and that section of the assault force left the area the next day to rendezvous on the 11th with the Maffin Bay group. Departing Maffin Bay on the 12th, the convoy was joined on the 13th by the Covering Force and the escort carriers. To achieve as much secrecy as possible, the convoy was routed forty miles north of Biak and thence northwest out of sight of the Asia and Mapia Islands, where the Japanese were believed to maintain garrisons and radio stations.

Movement beyond Biak was practically without incident. There was one suspected submarine contact, but the undersea boat could not be found; one soldier fell overboard from an LCI during a dark night, but he, fortunately, was picked up by another LCI. An unexpectedly strong westerly current was encountered, forcing the convoy to reduce speed in order not to reach

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

Morotai too early. Landfall was made as scheduled on the morning of the 15th. Apparently, neither the destination nor the approach of the attack force had been detected by the Japanese.⁷

Air Support and Naval Bombardment

In order to preserve chances for tactical surprise at Morotai, there was no preliminary air or naval bombardment of that island prior to D Day.⁸ However, for fourteen days preceding 15 September land-based planes of the Allied Air Forces had carried out especially heavy raids on Japanese air bases within range of Morotai. Halmahera Island, the northern Celebes, and Ceram received most attention. In addition, Japanese fields on the Vogelkop and Bomberai Peninsulas of western New Guinea were kept neutralized, and raids against Davao on Mindanao had been undertaken in conjunction with the strikes of the Third Fleet's carrier task groups against the Philippines.

As a result of the land-based and carrier-based aircraft operations, Morotai was virtually isolated from possible Japanese air counterattacks when D Day dawned. But, in order to take no chances that the enemy might have managed to keep a few planes operational within range of the island, attacks on enemy air bases in the Morotai area were executed as planned during the morning of D Day. Planes of a supporting fast carrier task group executed a bombing and

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2; CTF 77 Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 9-10; TrTF Hist of INTERLUDE, 4 Aug-4 Oct 44, p. 15; British Combined Operations Observers SWPA, Report of Naval and Army Observers on the Morotai Operation, 30 Sep 44, pp. 9, 14-15, 74, filed with other TrTF records.

⁸ This subsection is based principally on CTF 77 Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 10-15; CINCPAC-CINCPAO, Opns in POA Sep 44, pp. 80-81.

strafing sweep over Japanese air bases in the Manado area of the northeastern Celebes, about 250 miles west-southwest of Morotai. The carrier-based planes, which destroyed twenty-eight Japanese aircraft on the ground, met no aerial opposition. After that strike, the fast carriers stood off Morotai the rest of the day, providing combat air patrols.

Early on D-Day morning, land-based bombers of the Allied Air Forces hit Japanese air installations on Batjan Island, off the southern end of Halmahera. At 0715 cruisers and destroyers of the Covering Force moved into Galela Bay, at the northwestern end of Halmahera, to bombard enemy airfield installations and ground defenses along the shores of that bay. The shelling cratered the airfields and set fire to a number of buildings and supply dumps in the same area. A few troop and cargo barges also were destroyed. Following the surface bombardment, which lasted about an hour, CVE-based planes swept over northern Halmahera. Beginning at 0900 land-based bombers took over the task of keeping the enemy fields in that area neutralized. As a result of the combined efforts of aircraft from the Third Fleet, the Seventh Fleet, and the Allied Air Forces, not a single Japanese plane approached within range of Morotai during the day.

Naval fire support at Morotai began two hours before landing time. Two destroyers opened up on Cape Dehegila, at the southern tip of the Gila Peninsula, and Mitita Island, about three miles off the cape, to cover the movement of the assault convoy northwest through the strait between the two. This harassing fire lasted for half an hour. From H minus 100 to H minus 40 minutes 2 heavy cruisers threw 400 rounds of 8-inch ammunition on Red and White

Beaches, and destroyers hit the area with 2,400 5-inch shells. After the destroyer fire ceased, LCI rocket boats and gunboats kept up a steady stream of 20-mm., 40-mm., and 3-inch fire on the beaches and, beginning at H minus 5 minutes, started a barrage of 4.5-inch rockets. All this fire was actually precautionary, since no enemy defenses had been found and no opposition was expected.

While the naval bombardment was going on, assault shipping moved into assigned positions west of the landing beaches, quickly and without confusion. Visibility was excellent, the sea was calm, and there were only light surface winds. APD's quickly launched LCPR's which were to take the assault troops of the 124th Infantry to White Beach, and LST's were equally fast in putting into the water the LVT's of the Red Beach assault waves. The leading waves formed rapidly and moved on an accurate course toward the proper beaches.

The Landing Beaches

LVT's carrying the assault troops of the 155th and 167th Infantry Regiments to Red Beach were on shore at 0830, H Hour.⁹ (See Map 20.) Men of the 124th Infantry disembarked from LCVP's on the coral fringing reef some eighty yards offshore and waded through water one to five feet deep to White Beach, where the first troops were reported ashore at 0831. There was

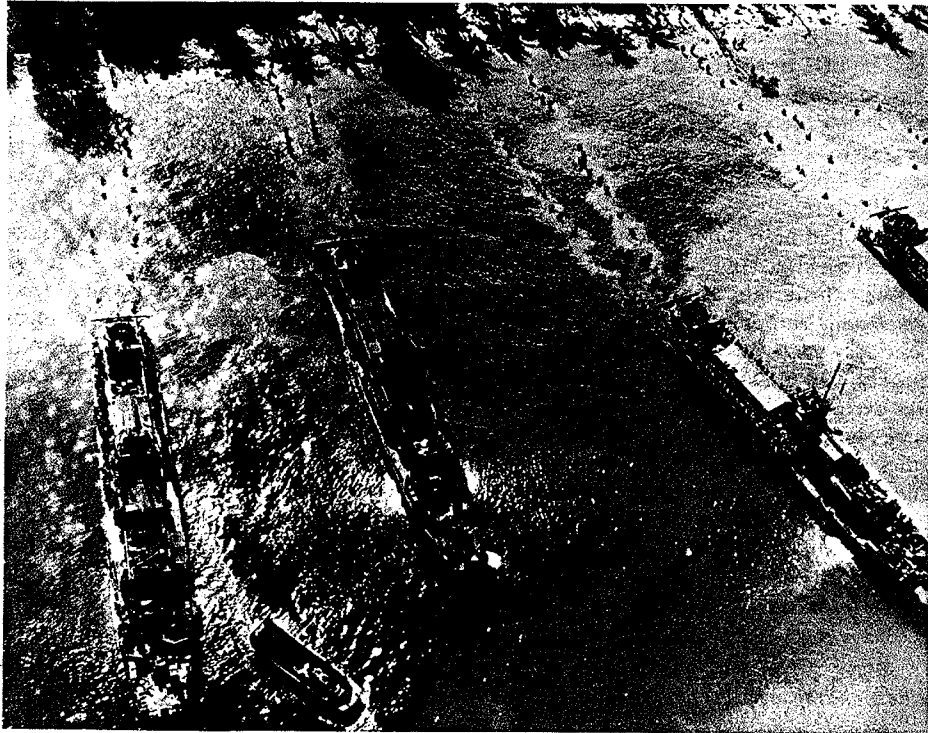
⁹ This subsection is based on: CTF 77 Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 12, 19-22; British Combined Opns Obsrs SWPA, Rpt on Morotai, pp. 12-13, 30; TrTF Hist of INTERLUDE, 4 Aug-4 Oct 44, pp. 15-17; 4th ESB, Monthly Hist Rpt, 30 Sep 44, Sec. I, Opns, pp. 3-5; 544th EB&SR Opns Rpt Morotai, Secs. IV and V, n. p.; 534th EB&SR Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 1-3; 31st Inf Div [TrTF] Arty Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 1-2.

no opposition to the landings and the assault troops, once ashore, rapidly re-formed their tactical units and started moving inland or along the shore line to perform assigned missions. The lack of opposition was indeed fortunate. Had the Japanese been prepared at Morotai, Allied casualties would probably have been extremely heavy.

Offshore conditions and, to a lesser extent, beach terrain at Morotai were not at all what had been expected. Available intelligence was not faulty—it was nonexistent. In order to preserve the element of local tactical surprise, no beach or reef reconnaissance had been attempted at Morotai before 15 September, and even aerial photographic missions had been few and far between lest the Japanese suspect that the Allies were interested in the island. Thus, the landing was planned on the assumption that Red Beach would prove to be 40 to 50 feet deep and composed of firm sand and that the fringing reef, 100 to 135 yards wide, would be rough but firm and covered in spots with a light sand deposit. White Beach was expected to be 15 to 20 feet deep and fronted by a rather rough fringing reef about 80 yards wide. There was some suspicion that these estimates might prove optimistic.

In point of fact, offshore conditions at Red Beach were undoubtedly the worst encountered in the Southwest Pacific Area throughout the entire war. The expected light sand deposits proved to be principally a deep mixture of glutinous clay and mud, much of which had only a thin covering of sand. The inshore side of the reef was covered with many loose coral boulders. Finally, the beach itself was much less deep in spots—especially at high tide—than had been anticipated.

At Red Beach all the landing craft waves touched the outer edge of the reef approxi-



LCI'S AT MOROTAI unloading troops at Red Beach.

mately on schedule and the LVT's had little difficulty negotiating the reef. LCI's moving up to the outer edge of the reef at H plus 15 minutes disgorged troops in from 3 to 5 feet of water. Some of the LCI's stuck on coral heads near the outer edge of the reef and troops had to disembark in neck-deep water. Several LCI's were unable to retract and had to be towed off the reef later in the day. LCT's did somewhat better and many of them got to within 40 yards of the beach. But about 75 percent of the engineer vehicles and equipment from the LCT's bogged down in the clay or sand on the reef. LCM's bringing artillery and engineer

weapons, equipment, and vehicles ashore to Red Beach had little better luck, and most LCM cargo had to be towed ashore. Some vehicles drowned out as they awaited towing.

It had been intended that LST's would move into the left flank of Red Beach, but some misunderstanding of orders caused three LST's to come in on the right flank, approximately 1,000 yards south of the center of the beach. These three dropped their ramps about 80 yards offshore and started unloading into four and a half feet of water. As had been the case with the cargo aboard smaller landing craft, many of the vehicles

aboard the LST's quickly got stuck in the clay and mud or were hung up on coral heads. Ultimately, many had to be towed ashore by bulldozers, tractors, or LCT's. Three more LST's later tried to beach at the same place. Conditions were so bad that these three were moved to positions off the center of Red Beach and unloaded over their ramps into LCT's. At 1130 two additional LST's scheduled for D-Day unloading at Red Beach were diverted to White Beach.

The latter was not much better than Red Beach. Clay and mud conditions were not quite as unfavorable as on the reef fronting Red Beach, but the White Beach reef was 150 yards wide, 70 more than had been anticipated, and it was much rougher than expected. As a matter of fact, the leader of the first LCVP wave had decided, upon approaching the shore, that White Beach would be an impossible landing point. He swung his wave about 300 yards to the north where, unfortunately, conditions were no better. The rest of the landing waves moved up to the offshore edge of the reef opposite the proper spot. But anywhere in the immediate vicinity of White Beach movement ashore was difficult. The reef was so rough that at one step an infantryman would have little more than the soles of his shoes under water, but at the next he would find himself up to his shoulders.

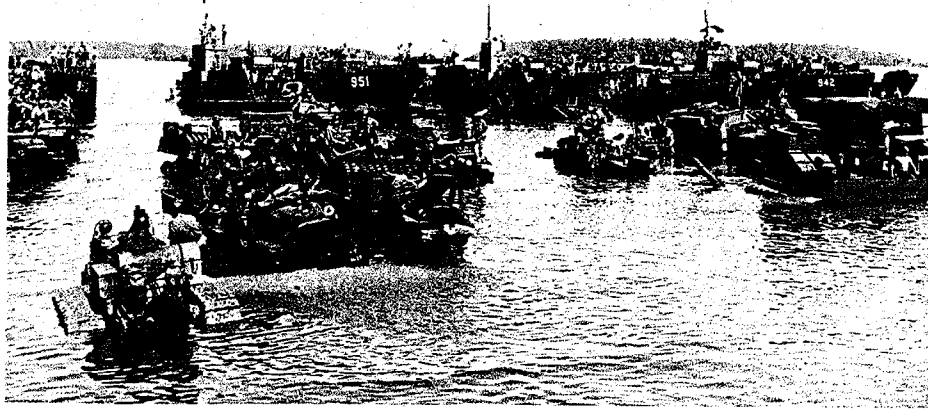
The experience of LCI's at White Beach was similar to that at Red Beach. At the extreme outer edge of the reef there was a low ridge one to two feet higher than the rest of the reef. This ridge stopped landing craft such as LCT's and LCM's about 100 yards offshore. As a result, many vehicles were discharged into about four feet of water, most of them to drown out or bog down in mud and clay. Even some DUKW's

got caught in the mud, while many others became hung up on coral heads.

Before noon the reefs in front of both Red and White Beaches were literally dotted with wheeled vehicles of all types, artillery pieces, tractors, bulldozers, and trailers that had bogged down in the mud, dropped into holes, or had caught on coral heads or coral boulders. Some, not recovered for days, were completely submerged at high tide. It was impossible to do a great deal on D Day to speed unloading operations. For instance, U. S. Navy demolition experts were available but to use them to blast the reefs would have delayed unloading and would not have effected any significant improvement on D Day. Again, at Red Beach only three of eight Shore Party bulldozers launched from LST's were able to reach the beach. At White Beach all the Shore Party bulldozers reached shore but the necessity for employing them in towing other vehicles to shore delayed clearing beach exits and dispersal of supplies on the mainland.

By 1445 conditions on Red Beach were accepted as impossible and direct unloading of LST's was practically stopped. Four LST's were withdrawn from the reef but unloading of mobile loads was continued over their ramps into LCT's or LCM's. Then, with the afternoon rise in tide, three LCT (6)'s and one set of ponton causeways were beached. Thereafter, LCT's and LCM's discharged LST cargo across these emergency piers. Even so, the six LST's at Red Beach were only 40 percent unloaded by dark on D Day; unloading continued throughout the night. The six were not completely discharged until D plus 1.

At White Beach, about 1000, a trial LST beaching was undertaken but the ship was only able to get within 100 yards of the



UNLOADING AT MOROTAI. *The clutter off the original beaches (top). LST's at Blue Beach (bottom).*

shore, dropping its ramp in nearly 5 feet of water. The Beach Party undertook a rapid hydrographic survey and discovered a much better beach about three quarters of a mile to the south. New White Beach, as the area was designated, had clear approaches and a much smoother offshore reef. One LST ran into New White Beach at 0930 and by noon six LST's, including the two diverted from Red Beach, were unloading there. Cargo discharge at New White Beach proceeded rapidly and by 1800 all six LST's were empty and had retracted. LCT's were also diverted to New White Beach from White Beach.

Conditions were so poor at Red and White Beaches that during the morning of D Day a survey party was sent overland to the eastern side of the Gila Peninsula and the shores of Pitoe Bay. There an excellent LST landing area was found. Blue Beach, as the new site was designated, was located at the upper end of the Gila Peninsula. It had a good slope, though about twenty-five yards offshore there was a flat coral shelf on which LST's rested at low tide. At high tide, however, LST's were able to beach with dry ramps. Beginning with D plus 1, Blue Beach was used to the exclusion of other areas for unloading LST's and for many LCT's and LCM's lightering supplies ashore from cargo ships. As a ponton pier and earth jetties were constructed at Red Beach lightering continued in that area also. Operations at White Beach were stopped on D plus 3 until Navy demolition crews blasted approach channels through the reef, a task which was accomplished on D plus 4.

Conditions on land were practically perfect except for a few spots on Red Beach where very thin crust covered a watery bog in which many vehicles sank almost out of sight. All such spots were located quickly

and thereafter avoided. Inland, the ground at Red, White, and Blue Beaches was dry and generally well drained. As Admiral Barbey reported: "Track making under these conditions was child's play, and vehicles on landing moved direct to dispersal area. No surfacing material was required."¹⁰ Shore Party operations, organized around the 534th and 544th Engineer Boat and Shore Regiments of the 4th Engineer Special Brigade, went smoothly after the first slow start during the morning. All things considered, unloading of troops and supplies, supply dispersal, and dump establishment proceeded remarkably well in the face of many unforeseen difficulties.

Ashore, the 155th Infantry secured its northern half of Red Beach without difficulty and moved rapidly inland some 2,000 yards to the D-Day objective line. The 167th Infantry, on the southern half of the beach, had no trouble either, and occupied Pitoe Drome by 1300 hours. The 124th Infantry's 1st Battalion met no opposition at White Beach as it landed and swung south to secure the Gila Peninsula, a job completed at 1500. The rest of the regiment, making few contacts with the enemy, pushed rapidly inland to the D-Day objective line and established contact on the left with the 167th Infantry late in the afternoon. The day's action cost the 124th Infantry 7 men wounded, while 12 Japanese had been killed and 1 had been captured. There is no record of casualties in the rest of the 31st Division on D Day.

General Persons, commanding the 31st Division and the TRADEWIND Assault Force, established his command post ashore at 1235. More than satisfied with the results of operations on D Day, he laid plans to

¹⁰ CTF 77 Opns Rpt Morotai, p. 21.

expand the beachhead to the assigned perimeter line around the airfield area on the 16th. The night of 15–16 September was generally quiet in the beachhead area.

Securing and Developing Morotai

Expanding the Hold

Operations on 16 September began at 0800, when all three regiments of the 31st Division resumed their advances.¹¹ By 1300, against negligible opposition, the division had secured a perimeter around the Pitoe Drome area over 7,000 yards wide, east to west, and about 5,000 yards deep north to south. At 1000 General Hall established his command post ashore on the east coast of the Gila Peninsula, near the point where that peninsula joined the mainland. The 126th Regimental Combat Team started landing at 0930 and took up station along the Gila Peninsula, relieving 124th Infantry elements still there.

After 16 September combat operations on Morotai resolved themselves into a series of patrol actions designed to hunt down small Japanese parties. In addition, radar stations and observation posts were established on many offshore islands and at various points around Morotai's shore. Responsibility for most of the latter undertakings was assigned to the 126th Infantry, which on the 17th began occupying islands off the southwestern and western coasts of Morotai as well as various capes on the southwestern and southeastern shores. During the next two days additional outposts were set up

¹¹ This subsection is based on: TrTF Hist of INTERLUDE, 4 Aug–4 Oct 44, pp. 16–32; ALAMO Force Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 14–16; 124th Inf, "Our Regiment in 1944," pp. 74–79; 126th Inf Opns Rpt Morotai, n. p., Annex 16 to TrTF Hist of INTERLUDE, 4 Aug–4 Oct 44.

on capes at the northeastern and northern shores, and a radar station, the last set up in the area, was established on 21 September at Raoe Island, off the west coast about twenty-five miles north of Red Beach.

Evidence of previous Japanese occupation and of some current Japanese activity was discovered by many of the outposts on the mainland, especially those at the northern capes and along the west coast. Patrols in the northern capes area made many contacts with small parties of Japanese and captured or destroyed much enemy equipment, including about ten truckloads of radar equipment, fuel oil, clothing, and (shades of red tape!) a duplicating machine. Most of the patrols and outposts in all areas reported that the Japanese fled inland to Morotai's rugged interior when fired upon.

While the outposts and radar stations were being set up, the 31st Division had extended the original task force perimeter to occupy additional space for bivouacs and supply installations, a step made necessary when General MacArthur's headquarters had decided to expand airfield construction on Morotai beyond that originally contemplated. The new perimeter, secured by the evening of the 20th, extended the old some 1,500 yards north, and east along Morotai's southern shore about 10,000 yards to the Sabatai River. The average inland depth of the eastward extension was one and one-fourth miles. Inland, the perimeter extended east and west over twelve miles.

The Japanese on Morotai showed little offensive spirit, choosing to escape rather than to attack or even defend prepared positions.¹² Some of them attempted to flee

¹² Enemy information in this subsection is based principally on: ALAMO Force Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 20–21; Annex 2, G–2 Report, pp. 4–8, to TrTF Hist of INTERLUDE, 4 Aug–4 Oct 44.

from Morotai by barge, apparently trying to reach the relative safety of Halmahera. The Japanese commander on Halmahera, when he belatedly learned of the Allied landing on Morotai, gave up whatever plans he may have had to reinforce that island by barge. The Japanese Navy was not about to risk any ships for such purposes—ships weren't available and, moreover, similar attempts to reinforce Biak during the *KON Operation* had not met with much success. Barges available to the Japanese at Halmahera could reach Morotai only by running a blockade that was soon established by the Allied Air and Naval Forces. Indications are that no more than three or four barges were sent to Morotai during the period 15 September to 4 October, upon which date General Krueger declared the Morotai operation over. During subsequent months a few barge-loads of troops did manage to slip through the Allied blockade to reach Morotai from Halmahera. Although these reinforcements caused some trouble, especially by harassing Allied outposts, their arrival had no real effect upon the situation at Morotai.

The most significant Japanese reaction to the Allied landing came in the form of frequent but generally ineffective air raids, the first of which occurred when a lone enemy plane dropped three bombs on the Red Beach area on the morning of D plus 1. No damage or casualties to Allied forces resulted. Damage was negligible in subsequent raids and, insofar as can be ascertained, only twelve Allied soldiers were wounded as a result of the air attacks in the period to 4 October. A few subsequent air attacks caused more extensive damage to Allied aircraft on the island.

The total number of Japanese killed on Morotai was 104, and 13 were captured.

PT boat skippers estimated that they had accounted for at least 200 more in sinking Japanese barges between Morotai and Halmahera. Allied casualties to 4 October numbered about 30 men killed, 85 wounded, and 1 missing.

Supporting Arms and Services

Field artillery of the TRADEWIND Task Force began reaching the beaches quickly on D Day despite the necessity for towing ashore almost all artillery weapons and equipment.¹³ Artillery units were soon emplaced, but, since Japanese resistance was practically nonexistent, there were few calls for artillery fire. Because the Japanese were believed capable of major aerial counter-attack, antiaircraft artillery was put ashore as soon as possible. Acting with remarkable speed in the face of the difficult landing conditions, the 383d Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons battalion had some of its weapons emplaced on the beach by H plus 20 minutes. The remainder of that unit and one battery of the 744th Antiaircraft Artillery Gun Battalion were ashore and emplaced before dark. The rest of the 214th Antiaircraft Artillery Group began moving ashore on D plus 1. To the intense fire which the group was able to throw into the air over the beachhead and airdrome areas goes much of the credit for preventing Japanese aircraft from causing extensive damage.

Medical problems at Morotai were not

¹³ This subsection is based on: ALAMO Force Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 16, 23–25; 31st Inf Div Arty Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 2–3; CTF 77 Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 25–26; Annex 10, Surgeon's Rpt, p. 2, to TrTF Hist of INTERLUDE, 4 Aug–4 Oct 44; Annex 2, G–2 Rpt, pp. 2, 6–8, to same; Ltr, Gen Persons to Gen Ward, 6 Nov 50, no sub, in OCMH files.

as serious as expected, since Japanese opposition was light and careful control measures against tropical diseases were soon instituted. The entire beachhead and airfield area was sprayed with DDT on D Day as a prophylaxis against scrub typhus. Antimalaria and antityphus measures were strictly enforced within the 31st Division. The effectiveness of these measures and the air spraying is demonstrated by the fact that not one case of scrub typhus was found among Allied troops on Morotai to 4 October. To that date there were only 49 cases of malaria and 22 cases of dengue fever, most of them outside the 31st Division. About 990 men of the task force were hospitalized to 4 October: approximately 710 for other, mostly minor, diseases and sickness; 175 for injuries not incurred in combat; and 103 for battle wounds or injuries. By 4 October almost all these cases had been evacuated by Seventh Fleet LST's.

Civil affairs on Morotai were handled, as usual, by a NICA Detachment. Moving ashore on D Day, the detachment quickly brought the natives back under Dutch sovereignty—an easy task in light of the fact that the natives proved friendly and cooperative. Working through NICA, many natives provided information concerning Japanese dispositions on Morotai and Halmahera, while others acted as guides for patrols ranging over Morotai. Since it was necessary for the NICA Detachment to establish new native villages outside the airfield perimeter, few natives could be secured to work for Allied forces until after 1 October, on which date about 350 were ready.

On 25 September the TRADEWIND Task Force was dissolved as such. Its missions, including air-base development, were continued by General Hall in his capacity as Commanding General, XI Corps.

Airfield Construction

The Morotai planners had expected that a fighter strip could quickly be prepared at the site of the abandoned Japanese field, Pitoe Drome, in southwest Morotai, and a strip there was to be in operation no later than D plus 2, 17 September.¹⁴ No work was done on the site on D Day for two reasons. First, the landing problem delayed getting engineer equipment ashore and second, when survey parties examined the site, they found it not as suitable as anticipated.

During the next two days it was determined that a fighter strip could be constructed in the Pitoe Drome area but that no bomber field could be developed there. A search for bomber field sites, of utmost importance for the support of subsequent operations, was begun immediately, and on D plus 3 it was determined that first priority should be given to a site adjacent to the beach at Gotalalamo village, on the north shore of Pitoe Bay east of the Gila Peninsula. Clearing was begun at this site the next day, and the airfield ultimately constructed there was designated Wama Drome.

Meanwhile, work had continued at the Pitoe Drome site, which was not ready to receive fighters until 29 September, D plus 14. The site was finally abandoned and relegated to the status of an emergency field which came to be known as Pitoe Crash Strip. A number of factors influenced the

¹⁴ Unless otherwise indicated this subsection is based on: TrTF Engr Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 2-4; ALAMO Force Opns Rpt Morotai, pp. 22-23; 931st Engr Avn Regt Opns Rpt Morotai, n. p., Annex 27 to TrTF Hist of INTERLUDE, 4 Aug-4 Oct 44; MS, The Pacific—MATTERHORN to Nagasaki, [tentative title], Vol. V of the series THE ARMY AIR FORCES IN WORLD WAR II, Ch. IX, pp. 48-52, Ch. X, pp. 41-45, copies of draft chapters in OCMH files.

decision to abandon the site. Japanese air reaction had been so ineffectual that the need for a fighter base on Morotai was not as urgent as had been expected. Aircraft based on CVE's, some of which remained in the Morotai area for weeks, were able to keep away most of the Japanese planes, and their efforts were supplemented by long-range land-based fighters from Sansapor. Moreover, the line of approach which planes had to use to land on Pitoe Crash Strip interfered with that of the more important bomber base at Wama Drome. Finally, the terrain at the crash strip was by no means as well drained as that at other locations on the Doroeba Plain, and it was necessary to expend much engineer effort to keep the strip operational.

Construction at Wama Drome was seriously delayed from D plus 5 through D plus 10 by a series of heavy rain storms; on some of those days it was too wet even to clear brush. Japanese air attacks and many red alerts, sounded whenever enemy aircraft approached Morotai, also stopped construction from time to time. But perhaps the most serious delaying factor was a lack of good surfacing material. It had been anticipated that good surfacing material would be found on Morotai as it had been on other islands with a coral base, but the Morotai coral alternated between a fine sand practically useless for airdrome surfacing and coral rocks which, almost as hard as granite, required much time and effort to break up. Only a few small deposits of intermediate grade coral could be found.

Battling almost continuously with soggy ground and tropical cloudbursts, engineers managed to have 4,000 feet of Wama Drome operational by D plus 19, 4 October.

On that day the first planes to be based permanently on Morotai began using the field, on which emergency landings had been made since 30 September. With the arrival of the permanent fighter aircraft garrison on the 4th, the last CVE's were finally able to leave the Morotai area.

So far, neither the first nor second construction objectives for Morotai had been met. Pitoe Crash Strip was not ready to receive fighters until D plus 14 instead of D plus 2 and was abandoned shortly after Wama Drome was ready for fighters. Wama Drome did not satisfy the second construction objective—completion of a 7,500-foot strip for medium and reconnaissance bombers by D plus 25, 10 October—although ultimately it was extended to 5,000 feet. Clearing aimed at the accomplishment of the third objective, a strip 6,000 feet long capable of extension to 7,000 feet, by D plus 45, started on 23 September. The new field, which acquired the designation Pitoe Drome, was located about 1,200 yards north of Wama Drome. Construction proceeded slowly at Pitoe Drome because so much engineer effort had to be devoted to the completion of Wama Drome. By 4 October almost 7,000 feet at the new site had been cleared, but it was not until the 17th, D plus 32, that even one runway was surfaced, let alone taxiways and dispersal lanes.

Meanwhile, rapid development of a large air base on Morotai had assumed much greater importance than had been anticipated. According to General MacArthur's and Admiral Nimitz' plans for the final steps in the approach to the Philippines, there was to have been an interval of two months between the Morotai and Palau operations and the initial invasion of the

Philippines, at Mindanao. During these two months, air and light naval bases were to have been prepared to support the final advance into the Philippines. Radical changes had to be made in these plans.

As Third Fleet carriers ranged far and wide early in September providing strategic air support for the Palau and Morotai operations, carrier pilots striking targets in the central and southern Philippines reported Japanese strength there weaker than had been supposed. Admiral Halsey found in these reports a welcome opportunity to recommend to his superiors that objectives in the western Carolines, except Ulithi, be bypassed in favor of an immediate and direct move into the central Philippines. Admiral Halsey, who made no recommendations concerning Morotai, believed that Ulithi would have to be taken to provide a forward area fleet anchorage in the western Pacific.

These suggestions were received with some enthusiasm at General MacArthur's and Admiral Nimitz' headquarters. The latter commander agreed with Admiral Halsey's proposal to bypass Yap in the western Carolines, and he released troops and amphibious means committed to that operation to General MacArthur for employment in an early invasion of Leyte in the central Philippines. General MacArthur, with these means placed at his disposal, decided that he could move directly to Leyte, canceling the Talaud Islands and Mindanao operations. But the two commanders did not believe it possible to bypass the Palaus, for they considered air bases on those islands necessary to protect Allied lines of communication in the western Pacific and they hoped that land-based air support for the invasion of

the Philippines might be provided from the Palaus. Morotai had to be taken to provide left-flank protection for forces moving into the Philippines. The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed generally with the proposal to cancel the Yap, Talaud, and Mindanao operations and they approved a 20 October target date for the invasion of Leyte.¹⁵

Principally as a result of terrain difficulties and inadequate gasoline storage facilities, fields in the Palaus were not ready in time to provide any support for the invasion of Leyte.¹⁶ This fact, coupled with the cancellation of the Talaud Islands operation, made it obvious that if any land-based air support for the invasion of the Philippines was to be made available, it would have to come from Morotai. Actually, Morotai-based aircraft flew no sorties against Leyte, but they did provide support by flying many missions over Mindanao and other islands in the southern Philippines. On 7 October Morotai-based fighters began flying cover for Allied Air Forces bombers which, based at fields further to the rear, were striking Mindanao and the Visayan Islands. Medium bombers (B-25's) began operations against Mindanao from Morotai on the 13th. Six days later Allied Naval Forces' Ventura and PB4Y reconnaissance bombers, operating under Allied Air Forces

¹⁵ Rad, Com3dFlt to GINCPOA, 13 Sep 44, CM-IN 12893; Rad, CINCSWPA to JCS, CX-17697, 14 Sep 44, CM-IN 12636; Rad, JCS to CINCSWPA, OCTAGON-24, 13 Sep 44, CM-IN 12198; Flt Adm William F. Halsey and Lt Comdr J. Bryan, III, *Admiral Halsey's Story* (New York, 1947), pp. 199-201. For additional details concerning this change in plans see: M. Hamlin Cannon, *Leyte: Return to the Philippines*, a forthcoming volume in the series U. S. ARMY IN WORLD WAR II.

¹⁶ MS, *The Pacific—MATTERHORN* to Nagasaki, Ch. IX, pp. 30, 48, Ch. X, p. 74.

control, began missions against targets in the Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies. During early October, Morotai-based fighters also flew cover for a number of large-scale bombing attacks against the Japanese oil center at Balikpapan, Borneo, and ultimately Allied planes based on Morotai completed neutralization of Japanese air power throughout those sections of the Indies within range. The Morotai

fields, secured at an extremely low cost, were well worth the taking.¹⁷

¹⁷ Early in 1945 Australian units began moving to Morotai, and a large part of the Australian ground force which invaded Borneo was staged through that island. Between 15 September 1944 and 1 February 1945, the Japanese raided Morotai 82 times. The heaviest Japanese raid occurred on 22 November, when 2 men were killed, 15 injured or wounded, 15 planes were destroyed, and 8 were severely damaged. The last Japanese raid was carried out on 22 March 1945.