

Interview with Raymond A.
Spruance by Philippe de Baussel,
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ADMIRAL RAYMOND A. SPRUANCE

Bill

I fell heir to Admiral "Bull" HALSEY's Task Force at the end of May , 1942 , just when Admiral NIMITZ was preparing to send him out to protect the Island of Midway against a Japanese invasion which he had learned about through cryptanalysis . Admiral Halsey , after six months at sea , on the bridge under the tropic sun , had been afflicted by an unbearable skin eruption against which nothing^{would do} , not even homemade remedies like oatmeal baths , temporarily Halsey had to go to the hospital .

After we had won the Battle of Midway , in early june of 1942 , I returned to Pearl Harbor and I was ordered as Admiral NIMITZ Chief of Staff . This relieved me of my regular command of a division of heavy cruisers . I was to stay in that capacity from the end of June 1942 to early August 1943 , a period of about ¹³ ~~fifteen~~ months . White-haired NIMITZ was a first-class fighting man . I got to know him very well during that time . We lived under the same roof in Pearl Harbor . I walked with him down to the office in the morning and back with him each evening . He needed a lot of exercise and whenever we had some free time we pitched horse-shoes together , went swimming or even climbed mountains . He is one of the few people I know who never knew what it meant to be afraid of anything . Typical of his character was his first reaction each time we thought of a way to hit the Japs . He always said : "Let's go and do it ! "

Our Forces in the Pacific , in 1942 , were pretty thin . However , we started planning as best we could a way to take the offensive against the Japanese as soon as we would be ready . It took us approximately two years after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor to get underway . As Chief of Staff , I had naturally a hand in this planning and I remember when Admiral NIMITZ from Admiral KING in Washington, received a directive/in the spring of 1943 , just after the Casablanca Conference , to prepare an operation on the Marshall Islands . In other words the President , the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Admiral King , who was Chief of Naval Operations , down the chain of command , had decided to put the emphasis on a Central Pacific drive , as opposed to a major drive under General ~~MacArthur~~ MacArthur's command in the South Pacific along a New-Guinea - Mindanao Axis . MacArthur , we all knew , was furious about this decision but the Joint Chiefs had good reasons to act that way .

In anticipation of the opening of a Central Pacific axis, the United States Navy , just before and after the declaration of war had ordered ^{plus all sorts of other vessels} 22 new fleet carriers/that would become available in 1943 . This was our huge ship-building program that enabled us to win the war . The ships that were struck on the 7th of december 1941 were the battleships , all of which , except for the "Arizona" which was never raised , were in the process of beeing repaired . I remember , in the early stages of our Central Pacific operations , when we finally had a Fleet anchorage , looking around and thinking : " If I only had now the ships that were available on the 7th of December , I would be awfully thin." By 1943 , new ships were coming out from every-

where : new battleships , new destroyers , new submarines , new transports and new carriers .

The Joint Chiefs had reasoned that our new carriers would be largely wasted in support of a New Guinea - Mindanao axis but that if they could be freed from a mere auxiliary role they could be used continuously to win command of the sea over ever-increasing areas . Central Pacific Forces , spearheaded by these mobile airfields , could eventually dispense with land-based air support and make tremendous leaps from one group of islands to the other . Moreover , I will say that the Navy , faced since 1898 with the problem of defense or recovery of the Philippines , had long ago come up with the idea of moving the Fleet across the Central Pacific .

When Admiral NIMITZ told me that the start of this movement was going to be capture of the Marshalls , I commenced to study ways and means to do it .

Then , one day during the spring of 1943 , as I was walking with Admiral NIMITZ from our quarters to his office , he suddenly told me :

" There are going to be some changes in high command of the Fleet . I would like to let you go but unfortunately for you I need you more here ." I replied :

" Well , the War is an important thing . I personally would like to have another crack at the Japs , but if you need me here , this is where I should be ." And I thought no more of it until the next morning when , again coming down from our quarters , Admiral NIMITZ told me : " I have been thinking this over during the night . Spruance , you are lucky : I decided

that I am going to let you go , after all." This was how he announced to me that I would be in command of our whole Central Pacific Force .

We had had many "powwows" (conferences) in Pearl Harbor , when I was Chief of Staff , on how this job of taking the Marshalls should be done . Among the many ideas that were put forth , one of them was that the Marshalls had a lot of ennemy airfields on them and that we ought to go in , divide our forces according to the places to be taken , and simply take them . When I learned that I was going to be in command of the whole Central Pacific operation , I had a more personal and vital interest in seeing that the job was done successfully . However , I was not at all in favor of just going in and doing it . The only person who wanted to capture some outlying position was Admiral Forrest Sherman , Admiral NIMITZ's Chief of Operations , a fine and extremely able officer . He was strong for taking Wake Island . However , I was definitely against that because Wake didn't lead anyplace. It was^{only} on the northern fringes of the Marshalls . I wanted to come up , on the contrary , from the South , from our main line of communications which ran from the United States , in a wide circle , through New Zealand to Australia . We could use the area of the Solomons to ^{move} ~~xxxxx~~/north , near Guadalcanal , for instance , where we had already started the offensive . I finally ^{made} ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~/the proposition of coming up from the southerd^{wa} with assistance from Canton Island .

We decided to go through the Ellice Islands and into the Gilbert Islands , which were British but had been seized by the

Japanese , and establish our airfields wherever they could be put . This plan won the approval of Admiral NIMITZ , Admiral KING and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington . There had been opposing theories about it . Once , for instance , I was told , but didn't see it myself , that a roomful of experts in Pearl Harbor who did not know much about the conditions in this area , who hadn't even studied them properly and who , above all , weren't even going to have to do it themselves , had said of my plan that : "I wanted a sledge hammer to drive a ^{tack} spike." They didn't say that anymore after we took Tarawa .

The ultimate aim was occupying the Marshalls . The Marshalls , under Japanese mandate since World War I , had been closed to foreigners since 1935 . In these years of privacy , Japan had had ample opportunity to fortify these islands and make them as impregnable as the geography could afford . They succeeded without any doubt . Like most island groups in the Central Pacific , the Marshalls are an archipelago of atolls, each a perimeter of flat coral islets surrounded by a fringing reef and enclosing a lagoon . Included are some 35 atolls , most of which contain one or more islands large enough for an airfield

Our intelligence had estimated that they contained at least half a dozen air bases . But no one could be sure , for no allied military force had visited the area since Halsey's hit-and-run raid in early 1942 . Furthermore , there were no allied airfields close enough ~~xxx~~ from which to take them under reconnaissance . One of the biggest planning problems that we had to face all along the campaign in order to conduct a good amphibious operation was the total lack of good aerial

photography of the places we wanted to take . The amphibious people needed this information badly . They had to know about the reefs and the beach configurations . They had to evaluate the system of defense that the Japs had built in each of these places . And the only photographs that we had at the time of the Marshalls were those taken through periscopes of submarines , which , while useful and better than nothing , couldn't tell us much about the rest .

One of the things for which I take most credit for , during this meticulous planning , was the way I choose my staff . When Admiral NIMITZ had told me I was going to have this central Pacific Command , practically the most important in the whole Pacific area at the time , I remember saying : - "Sir , I would like to get Admiral Kelly TURNER from Admiral HALSEY , if I can steal him ." /Admiral TURNER was an old shipmate of mine , nicknamed "Terrible Turner" because of his stubbornness and his outspokenness , who was a tough , very intelligent fighting man . We had served three years together on the staff of the Naval War College , in Newport , and I knew him well . But I also said : " I want /^{Rear} Admiral TURNER was an old shipmate of mine , nicknamed "Terrible Turner" because of his stubbornness and his outspokenness , who was a tough , very intelligent fighting man . We had served three years together on the staff of the Naval War College , in Newport , and I knew him well . But I also said : " I want /^{Major} General Holland SMITH for the Marines ." His reactions to any inept or slovenly performance had earned him the nickname of " Howling Mad SMITH " . I had seen a little of him before the war when I was Commandant of the Tenth Naval District in the Carribean. I finally got them both . Because of the fact that they were both very strong-minded and didn't know each other , I sometimes wondered , when we were making our plans , whether we could get the operation planned out before there was an explo-

-sion between them . Fortunately , although they disagreed on certain details , they made a very efficient team . Kelly TURNER had the old battleship "Pennsylvania" as his flagship and he and General SMITH and their staffs embarked together when the operation started . When they returned , I am witness to the fact that each had a wholesome respect for the other as good fighting man . They were my two chief people for capturing places .

For nearly two years after Pearl Harbor , we ^{accomplish} didn't/~~do~~ much in the Pacific except ~~the~~ Jimmy Doolittle's raid on Tokyo , the Battle of Midway which we had to win , the Battle of the Coral Sea which was a stand-off , the Guadalcanal operation and the recapture of the Aleutian Islands . Most of our action had been concentrated in the South Pacific .

The Guadalcanal amphibious landings took place in early August of 1942 . It was the beginning of the MacArthur offensive along the Solomons - New Guinea - Mindanao axis that ended up in the recapture of the Philippines much later . It was , however , a Navy operation . We had decided to strike/^{first} at Guadalcanal because we had reports that the Japanese were building airfields in the area . They already had a seaplane base at Tulagi and they were building more and landing more troops to increase their foothold which , previously , had been small . We could not allow that ~~unless we preferred to have a permanent threat~~ without jeopardizing our position in the whole south Pacific . Guadalcanal was the farthest that the Japanese had gone down in the Southern Solomons . The Southern Solomons were on our line of communications that we had established

^{to}
~~between~~ New Zealand and Australia . It was also about as far from the mainland of Japan as you could come into contact with the Japanese and have a first class war . In other words it was difficult for them to supply these places , ~~and fairly easy for us to attack~~ . Later on , the more we advanced in the ^{and South} Central/Pacific , the more we stretched our own lines of communication and supply and the more the Japanese problem decreased . The battle for Guadalcanal was costly and bloody and it lasted until January 1943 but it was won .

One of the very important things that we had done , ~~from~~ ^{before} 1941 to 1943 , was to ^{plan for} ~~build~~ our Service Squadron 10 , which was our ^{logistic} ~~escort~~ and repair outfit for the Central Pacific Forces . We could thus make minor necessary repairs ~~at sea or~~ ^{or} at anchorage without having to cover thousands of miles to return to Pearl Harbor . Service Squadron 10 gave us ^{better logistic} ~~a much larger~~ autonomy ^{substant when} until we had secured ^{good anchorages} ~~good~~ anchorage facilities in the ^{later} Gilberts , the Marshalls and the ~~the~~ Mariannas . It was an invaluable asset .

In 1943 , also , the Japanese Fleet was about the same strength as ours , and they were not supporting any amphibious operations as we began doing . The Japanese Fleet had a pretty big loss at RABAUl , in New Britain , when ^{in aircraft} ~~Admiral HALSEY's~~ ^{some of our carriers loaned to Adm. Halsey} Task Force of carriers made ^{Nov. 1943} ~~a hit-and-run~~ attacks in early 1942 . ^{They} HALSEY's planes managed to destroy a lot of Japanese planes and pilots that they were never able to replace . And they tried hard . This was ^{LIKE} ~~the~~ pilots they lost at Midway . The cream of their aviators was out . It had repercussions all down the line and in 1945 , when they resorted to the Kamikaze , they were

obliged to recruit anybody who could fly a plane , give him a one-way load of gas and tell him : "Now, you just go and attack ! "

The plans for the Ellice , the Gilberts and the Marshalls had been carefully ^{drawn} planned , but as is usual in this sort of operation , had to be slightly changed in the course of action.

We moved in on Makin and Tarawa Atolls simultaneously on November 20th , 1943 . Admiral TURNER and General Holland SMITH had decided to concentrate first on Makin , which was north of Tarawa , because it lay only 190 miles from the nearest enemy base in the Marshalls . In the Marshalls , the Japanese had still considerable air power that had to be neutralized and we feared for the Invasion Fleet the permanent threat of enemy surface ships and submarines . This is why we wanted ~~planned~~ both these operations , but specially Makin , to go at lightning speed . We thought we could take Makin in one single day and then , withdraw the Fleet from possible enemy attack . As it turned out , while a number of Carriers were ^{efficiently} pounding/away at all the land-based Japanese air forces in the Gilberts and the southern Marshalls , it took three days to secure Makin . On November 23rd , 1943 , our assault troops of 6,500 managed to ^{seize} ~~secure~~ little ~~Butari~~ Butaritari island , the main island and headquarters of the atoll at the cost of 64 dead and 152 wounded . Out of 800 Japanese defenders comprising 284 naval infantry and an assortment of non-combatant construction troops and Korean laborers , all of the defenders were wiped out except one Japanese infantryman and 104 laborers who were taken prisoners . Considering that

that we had a superiority of 23 to 1 , we could not label this a perfect operation . However , Tarawa was going to give us even more trouble . Tarawa , with its two-mille long only fortified island of the Atoll , was the strong point and administrative center of the Japanese occupied Gilberts. Betio Island was like a fortress . Its defender , Rear Admiral Keiji SHIBASAKI , often boasted that it could not be conquered by a million men in a hundred years . It actually took us three days to capture impregnable Betio . This time , however , the costs were higher : out of the 2,600 elite Japanese Naval infantry , the 1,000 construction workers equipped and trained to fight and the 1,200 Korean laborers , only one japanese officer and 16 enlisted men surrendered and we captured no more than one hundred~~7~~ laborers . We had committed 18,300 Marine and Naval personnel to the capture of Tarawa . ~~Of these 18,300 were casualties~~ We had more than 1,000 killed and an overall casualty list slightly exceeding 3,000 . Many details of the landing operations had gone wrong .

The storming of Tarawa proved a bitter school for amphibious assault , completing the lessons we had already learned in the Solomons , at Guadalcanal , and in the early New Guinea operations . But we were learning effectively the techniques that were to carry us accross the heavily defended beaches of the Central Pacific . From our Navy point of view , however , neither at Makin or at Tarawa did we get a first class anchorage . We were to find one , later in the Marshalls .

For the moment it didn't bother us too much . We would refuel our ships at fixed points where the oilers would be at the eastward of the Gilberts . The operation wasn't long enough to have us worried over food and supplies . Japanese submarines were a threat but we were able to control that . We had , however , to send our ships back and forth ~~between~~ to Pearl Harbor were they could replenish in ammunition and fuel .

When I returned from the Gilberts to Pearl Harbor to make the last plans for the Marshalls, the first thing I had to argue about was the date the operation would take place . I had ^{previously} given the date of the 1st of Febraury/as ¹⁹⁴⁴ the earliest date that we could meet and said : " We need a practical date from the time-space factor to enable us to bring troops and ships from all over the Pacific Ocean." At Pearl Harbor I discovered that in spite of my recommendation the date had been shoved up by Washington to the 15th of January . I said : "But we cannot make this date : it is a physical impossibility from the time-space factor point of view ." Finally , after strong arguments , Washington agreed to give us the 31st of January. I met this date by landing the first troops on unfortified islands off the two main objectives in the north and the south end of Kwajalein .

All the plans had been made in Pearl Harbor and when time came to implement them I ^{liked} used to go myself to the various ^{points of importance} spots . But I made it a rule for myself to interfere as little as possible with the execution and refrain from Monday morning quarterbacking .

The first operation plan issued by Admiral NIMITZ in mid-October 1943 , called for simultaneous assaults on Maloelap and Wotje Atolls , the two Marshallese bases nearest Pearl Harbor, and on Kwajalein Atoll , the Japanese headquarters at the center of the archipelago . After the shock of Tarawa , General SMITH, Admiral TURNER and myself recommended that this decision be reconsidered in view of the fact that we ~~had~~ did not have enough troops and support to take three places at the same time . SMITH and TURNER favored taking Maloelap and Wotje first which would be developed into american bases to support a later assault on Kwajalein . NIMITZ replied , to our astonishment , that we were to take Kwajalein ^{only} alone .

This , I felt , would leave Kwajalein , once taken , at the mercy of Japanese air attack from Maloelap , Wotje , Mili and Jaluit . I requested permission , then , to take undefended Majuro Atoll , in the eastern Marshalls , which would provide a protected fleet anchorage until we had Kwajalein , and a base whence aircraft could cover communications between Kwajalein and the Gilberts . NIMITZ granted me that request . I must say that the direct attack on Kwajalein took the Japanese by surprise as they didn't expect it at all .

The attack forces of our Fifth Amphibious Force comprised nearly 300 vessels bringing 53,000 assault troops , half soldiers half marines , and 31,000 garrison personnel . It moved in on Kwajalein on January 29th , 1944 from the north , to hit the islands of Roi and Namur , and in the south , to hit Kwajalein. We had learned our lesson in Tarawa . While our Fast Carriers concentrated with their 750 planes on keeping all Japanese air-

-craft out of the air , and their airfields constantly pounded in such places as Maloelap , Jaluit , Mili , Kwajalein and even Eniwetok , the landings took place . They were very successful, for , in the afternoon of February 4th , all effective resistance had ended . Our casualties , this time , were 177 killed and approximately a 1,000 wounded while on the Japanese side , out of 8,000 personnel , of which a little more than 2,000 were trained combat troops, we captured only 145 Korean laborers and 49 Japanese prisoners of war .

After we had taken the Gilberts and the Marshalls we really did not know where to go next . We had not touched to a great number of fortified Atolls with Japanese ~~aircraft~~ airfields on them . These remained a threat to our positions. If we had had to take these one by one off these islands in the Marshalls it would have been pretty tough . We didn't even have good and reliable information about them , of the type the amphibious people insist on , except some photographs that had been made by ^{our} carrier-based aircraft , and these weren't too good . ^{TP} We had always been incapable of solving ^{one major} a main problem, which was to know exactly what was the depth of the waters ^{of} ~~the beaches over which the landings were to be made~~ or the defense build-up of the beaches wherever we went .

← Fortunately we discovered on Kwajalein a ^{batch} bunch of very confidential Japanese charts that covered all the places that they had and that we didn't know about . It was a tremendous break and they proved to be very useful .

I had always been very impressed by the importance of ~~the~~ Eniwetok , the outlying island of the Marshalls to the westward . It was 1,000 miles from the Mariannas which were ,

in turn , in close touch with the mainland of Japan . Eniwetok was of great strategic importance . It was the center of the main Japanese Air line of communication . In other words their aircraft flew down from Japan through Iwo Jima , down to the Mariannas , over to Eniwetok , and they would litterally fan out from there to all the other islands of the Marshalls . I had figured that if we could take Eniwetok early we could interrupt this aerial pipeline and therefore prevent an air build-up against us in the Marshalls .

However , I had orders from Washington , as soon as I had taken Kwajalein , to send my ships of the Fifth Fleet ~~down south~~ to the South Pacific to take part in a new operation down there. Such a move would jeopardize my plan . In Pearl Harbor , just before I had left for the Kwajalein operation , we had received the first photographs of Eniwetok . They were impressive . I remember telling Admiral NIMITZ : " I wish that we could go and take this place before it gets heavily built-up and much harder to take , but I suppose this won't be possible if the Fleet is to go south !"

Well , Kwajalein went so fast that I received a message from Admiral NIMITZ .: " What do you think , after all , about taking Eniwetok ? " I immediately took a boat and went over to see Admiral Kelly TURNER and General Holland SMITH and I told them : " How about Eniwetok ? " They both agreed that we had to try and do it . I reported back to NIMITZ and the decision was taken .

Eniwetok ^{one of} , the largest of the Marshalls , was , however , in an exposed position : 1,000 milles from the Marianas , less the

700 milles from Truk and less than 600 milles from Ponape . To prevent interference with the new operation , these bases had to be neutralized . Truk , for example , was an archipelago of islands surrounded by a coral reef and provided one of the world's finest anchorages . Its reputation for impregnability while under Japanese mandate had earned it such names as " the Japanese Pearl Harbor" or the "Gibraltar of the Pacific."

^{Admiral} General HILL was to leave Kwajalein with his expeditionary force to take Eniwetok while myself , leading the 45,000 tons Battleships "Iowa" and "New Jersey" with two heavy cruisers and four destroyers , and Admiral Marc MITSCHER's Task Force 58 , met around TRUK on February 17th . MITSCHER's planes hit repeatedly the harbor area while I made a wide sweep around the island to prevent ennemy vessels that tried to escape to do so . Admiral NIMITZ had sent me ten submarines to help me close the net . The results were impressive : in the course of this two-day attack , our forces managed to destroy 200 japa- nese airplanes , damaging 70 more , and to sink 15 japa- nese naval vessels , including Admiral KOGA's two cruisers and four of his destroyers , 19 cargo vessels and five tankers . We only lost 25 aircraft and the carrier "Intrepid" was badly hit by a night-flying torpedoe plane in the only counter-attack that Truk was able to launch during the whole operation .

A little later , Admiral MITSCHER Task Force 58 made a quick raid on the Marianas to neutralize Japanese airpower in Guam , Tinian and Saipan . Not only did he manage to wipe out the newly arrived bomber force that had just come in from Japan ahead of its fighter escort , but he also succeeded in

getting very valuable photographs of airfields and beaches suitable for our next assault on the Marianas . Both these missions were a great success, for we managed that way to isolate Eniwetok and prevent any interference whatsoever from Japanese aircraft . Simultaneously , the invasion of Eniwetok went ahead as scheduled . The conquest of the island took three days and wasn't , as usual , too easy . But we succeeded there in stopping for good the pipeline of aircraft that was flowing into the Marshalls . The enemy bases of Wotje , Maloelap , Milui and Jaluit , although still very heavily defended , were neutralized . We let them ^{die} "rot on the vine" . Cut off from supply and reinforcement , except by submarine , they were no longer considered threats on our rear . On the contrary , they proved useful as live targets for newly arrived ^{air} ~~live~~/reinforcements .

Admiral NIMITZ awarded me my fourth star . And I returned to Pearl Harbor once again to make plans for the Marianas . The plans we devised were of great magnitude . We were really nearing the Japanese mainland and had to expect very heavy resistance . The invasion of Saipan took place nine days after the Normandy landings but the problems of logistics were , in some respects , far more complex . We had to project in the Marianas overwhelming power more than 3,000 miles west of Pearl Harbor and 1,000 miles from Eniwetok , the most westerly American anchorage in the Central Pacific . And still , we only had three months to prepare for the operation . The invasion of Europe had required two years of preparation .

from Majuro Bay

On June 6th , 1944 , I left on the "Indiannapolis"/with Task Force 58 and Admiral MITSCHER on the "Lexington" . I had under my command a total of 535 ships carrying more than 127,000 troops , two-thirds of them being Marines . The plan called for a landing on Saipan , followed by a another landing on nearby Tinian and a later one on Guam .

Saipan was 14 milles long and yet , it had to be taken quickly from its 32,000 defenders . It was almost certain that the Japanese/^{reaction}would be extremely strong both on land and at sea and in the air . The operation on Saipan started on June 15th.

On the 16th , however , I was informed , by one of my submarine's reports , that a Japanese fleet was approaching . The Japanese , in the past , had always made their attacks with their carriers from different directions . My mission was namely to protect our invading forces the best I could . I took a boat and went over immediately to see Admiral TURNER and General SMITH .

- " How is the situation ashore " , I said ? Can you get these ships out of this Saipan anchorage , out of harm's way , to the east ? The Japs are coming after us ."

Admiral TURNER told me that he couldn't possibly do it, that the landings ashore were proceeding badly , that the situation was even critical , and that he still needed to pour on the island more landing troops , reinforcements and ammunition .

- " Well" , I said , "get everything that you don't absolutely need out of here to the eastward and I will join up with MITSCHER and Task Force 58 and try to keep the Japs off your neck."

To cover our Marianas operation , I had sent part of TF 58 to bomb Japanese airfields on Iwo Jima from where they could have come and disturb us . I had to recall them . Simultaneously both MITSCHER and I set out to the westward in expectation of the Japanese Fleet . We didn't know exactly where it would come from and had to ^{be} very ~~xxxxx~~ careful . I sent ^{was search} patrol planes out ^{to the westward} in every ~~direction~~ to try to locate that Fleet but without success. At night , after having proceeded westward ^{all day} , we had to return eastward to avoid the possibility of Japanese vessels going ^{by} between us . The Japanese had longer range aircraft than we had and they were favored by easterly winds . Admiral OZAWA , I learned later , expected his Guam-based airforces to strike at us in the back while he and his carriers would close in and finish us off from the west . He also planned to run a "bomb-shuttle" from his carriers to the Marianas and back which , if it had worked , would have imperiled us considerably . Fortunately our bombers and fighter bombers had succeeded in completely flattening out the japanese airfields both on Guam and Tinian so that this danger could be finally discounted . But OZAWA didn't know it and launched his planes against us on the early morning of June 19th . We detected them on radar when they were 150 miles away and had time to launch every available fighter that we had (they were 450) against the 45 bombers , 8 torpedo planes and 16 "Zekes" from the three light carriers of Admiral Takeo KURITA. MITSCHER ordered all his bombers out of the way . Our fighters waited for them at high altitude and destroyed 25 of them . Anti aircraft gunfire did the rest . Only 27 japanese planes returned to their carriers .

The second raid , 128 planes from OZAWA's Main Body , was met 50 milles out by our "Hellcats" and cut down to half size . Our ships did the rest so that only 31 planes returned to their carriers . Of the 47 planes of the third raid , most failed to find us , did little damage and suffered seven losses . Finally OZAWA sent a fourth raid of 82 planes in three groups . The first one was intercepted far out and cut in half ; the second reached our carriers , did very little damage and was almost totally wiped out ; as for the third one , which headed for Guam , it suffered 30 losses from our "Hellcats" while 19 survivors who tried to land on Guam crashed on the cratered runways . This fight lasted eight hours altogether . Our flyers immediately nicknamed it the "Marianas Turkey shoot" .

During the two days that this naval-air battle lasted , our submarines managed to do heavy damage to the Japanese Fleet . I went out in pursuit with MITSCHER who , daringly , sent some ~~fighters~~ ^{attack groups} late in the afternoon to strike at the Jap ~~carriers~~ ^{fleet} . They managed to get a few hits but all had trouble when they returned . They were badly damaged or short of fuel . I remember that MITSCHER ordered all his ships lit up to help the pilots come in for a landing . I had done it once during the Battle of Midway . This heavy engagement ^{off the Marianas} , where we decimated Japanese naval-air power , became known afterwards as the Battle of the Philippines sea .

When it became apparent that the Japs were fleeing , we returned and concentrated once more on the Saipan landing , soon to be followed by the invasion of Tinian and Guam .

On Saipan the fight was long and difficult . It ended

near the end of July . The capture of Saipan had cost us 16,500 casualties , including 3,400 killed , mostly in the first days . Tinian and Guam were much less costly because we were able to pound them from the beginning , and with great efficiency , with everything we had . In the case of Guam , for instance , 13 days of sustained , methodical bombings , had demoralized the defenders and knocked out most of their artillery . Altogether , conquest of the southern Marianas cost us 5,000 dead as against 60,000 Japanese . But we had succeeded in cutting air staging lines between Japan and the Carolines while acquiring logistics bases from which our submarines could attack Japanese lines of communication and our B-29's could blast the industrial installations in and around Tokyo . For Japan , the loss of the Marianas meant the beginning of the end . Yet , the absolute refusal of Japanese troops to surrender even when completely overpowered , and the mass suicides of Japanese civilians on ~~Saipan~~ Saipan in order to avoid capture , led many people to believe that the only way Japan could be beaten was by direct invasion and virtual extermination of her Armed Forces and population .

Immediately after the Marianas , I returned to Pearl Harbor after ~~having~~ turning over the command of the Central Pacific Force , which was known as the Fifth Fleet , to Admiral HALSEY . The Fifth Fleet , incidentally , became the Third Fleet , although they were the same ships , but this fooled the Japs for a while : they thought we had two Fleets operating against them .

In early september 1944 , Admiral NIMITZ called me and said:
-." The next operation is going to be Formosa and Amoy. You just hop in a plane , go back to California to see your family , and be back here in a couple of weeks."

-." I don't like Formosa" , I said .

-." What would you rather do?", replied NIMITZ .

-." I would prefer taking Iwo Jima and Okinawa ".

-." Well", said NIMITZ , "It's going to be Formosa."

Back in southern California , when I was preparing to return to Pearl Harbor , I was told to delay my trip and attend the CINPAC COMINCH Conference in San Francisco at the end of september . I went up there , and while I was waiting in the Conference room for Admiral KING to appear , Admiral Forrest SHERMAN , who was a very able and fine War Plans Officer , handed me over a sheet of paper and said : " Read it carefully and tell me what you think of it." So I read it . I knew Forrest Sherman pretty well and handed it back to him in saying : " I wouldn't change a word of it ! " The paper in question recommended that we drop the idea of taking Formosa and Amoy but that we take Iwo Jima and Okinawa instead . The reason given was that the Army did not have enough service troops to develop an island the size of Formosa but had enough , on the other hand , to handle ~~Iwo Jima~~ and Okinawa . When Admiral KING entered the Room , Admiral NIMITZ presented him with this recommendation for change . I don't know why , but he was a great believer in the values of Formosa . He argued a lot but finally gave in and said ~~xxxx~~ he would recommend it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington , which he did.

Back in Pearl Harbor , I had to work on the plans which involved , once again , tremendous logistics problems . The main problem was supplies . I had asked Admiral ^{Mimitz} KING to provide me with some ~~important~~ means of transferring heavy ammunition , heavy bombs and shells ^{from} on our ammunition ships at sea . Failure to find a way to resupply our forces at sea would have forced us to run back and forth to Ulithi , to the Marianas or even to Pearl Harbor . It was 1,000 milles back to Eniwetok where we had an excellent anchorage . "This is too close to Japan," I said "for any of our ships to go home." Finally , ships were speciall; outfitted for the occasion . We even ^{organized} started Service Squadron 6 to operate at sea to supply the need to the Fast Carrier Task Force a repair and escort squadron identical ~~in~~ ^{to} our most valuable ~~while~~ ^{remained in an anchorage with repair facilities} Service Squadron 10 which ~~followed~~ ^{and supplies of all kinds} followed us north with oilers , tankers , repair ships , floating drydocks , everything that we needed including mail and movies .

I remember , when I had told General Holland SMITH that we were going into Iwo Jima , what was his reply . He said : " It will be the toughest place we have had to take . I don't know what ~~any~~body wants it for , but I'll take it." This left certain doubts in my head as to whether Iwo Jima would be worth what it cost us .

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In January , I went back to Ulithi . I relieved Bill HALSEY and took over once again the Command of the Fifth Fleet. I was still thinking about what Holland SMITH had told me . So I arranged to have a conference aboard my Flagship , the "Indianapolis" , with General Curtis LeMAY , who was in charge of the B-29's of the 21st Bomber Command . I had many details to discuss with LeMAY , namely support of my Iwo Jima operation . The

first thing I asked him was : "What do you think about the value of Iwo Jima ?" Curtis LeMAY looked at me and replied immediately : "Oh ! But it's going to be of tremendous ~~importance~~ ^{value} to me . Without Iwo Jima , I couldn't bomb Japan effectively ." This took a load off my mind . LeMAY explained to me that his B-29's , which were already operating from Guam and Tinian , had a hard time bombing Japan . First they had to fly over the Volcano-Bonin Islands where they were spotted by Jap observers . Jap fighters waited for them when they appeared over Japan . Secondly , because of the distance , ^{the fuel load,} /and the very high altitude at which they had to fly , they could not take off with their full bomb capacity . Once we would have Iwo Jima , he said , his B-29's could top-off with fuel on the island on their return trip from Japan , get any damaged planes repaired , and , as a direct consequence , take more bombs .

Iwo Jima was scheduled for the middle of february 1945 ; Okinawa for six weeks later . On the 16th of February , determined to inflict damage to the mainland of Japan and relieve our attacking forces on the island , I took ~~the Fleet~~ Task Force 58 with Admiral MITSCHER to the vicinity of Tokyo . This was the first Fleet air-attack on Tokyo since the Jimmy DOOLITTLE raid of early 1942 . I told MITSCHER that I wanted to hit airfields , planes , aircraft factories . I said : "I am tired of fighting them all along the perimeter if we can get them out of here !" I wanted to have a two , maybe three day strike up there , and all the weather reports told us it was going to be fine . Instead , we had the damnedest , rottenest

weather I could think of . It stormed so much that we were only able to destroy 40 or 50 enemy planes before I ordered the Task Force to turn back and head for Iwo Jima to lend some support to the operation . But I promised to return and finish what we had started .

All our weather reports in this area came from the Russians and they were absolutely no good . They were telling us things that never existed . The weather was coming down from Mainland China and Manchuria towards the southeast , in our direction , and this is why we had to ask them . We only had a few submarines ~~planted~~^{around} in the Sea of Japan but they provided sketchy and sometimes inaccurate reports . They were not allowed to operate freely .

At Iwo Jima the landing forces were running into serious trouble . B-24's of the Seventh Air Force had bombed Iwo for to soften it up ^{altitude} 74 consecutive days/but high/bombing was not very successful on this little ~~island~~ volcanic ash heap where Lieutenant General Tadamichi KURIBAYASHI had expertly dug in , in pillboxes and everywhere , 14,000 elite troops and 7,000 naval personnel . The battle on Iwo Jima was bloody and difficult . The only way to dislodge the Japs was to go in and get them with grenades, flame-throwers or napalm, one by one . We had planned on a five day operation . It actually took us a month of vicious fighting to reach our goal . We only captured 200 prisoners of war . But for once , our losses were ^{greater} superior than the enemy's : we had 19,000 casualties and over 7,000 dead . The expected counter-attack from Japan came on the 21st . 20 Kamikaze came in with their escort fighters and hit the "Saratoga" and the "Bismarck Sea" .

But we took the island . Now came the turn of Okinawa which we all knew would be even tougher . I had to return to Ulithi , our big Navy Base , to replenish before proceeding again for the operation . The plan called for a two-day strike at ~~the~~ Kyushyu to neutralize Japanese air and sea power in the area before the landings started . On March 19th , the second day of the strike , MITSCHER and I were fortunate enough to get our TF 58 aircraft over Kure Naval Base , the second largest Japanese naval base on the mainland . ~~The weather, unfortunately, was again very bad, even worse than the first time. But we did some damage.~~ The same day , at 7:00 o'clock in the morning , while I was ~~sitting on deck~~ⁱⁿ of my Flagship , the "Indianapolis" , I saw a lot of smoke coming up in the next Task Group . It was the Carrier "Franklin" that had just been hit by a Kamikaze . She exploded and burned until 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon when we were able to give her a tow line . Two bombs had penetrated ~~in~~ her hangar deck when she was launching planes and set off a tremendous series of explosions that took the lives of 800 of her crew . ~~At this point, the Japs started using the Kamikaze as a kind of a last resort.~~ Later on , during the Okinawa campaign , ~~they~~^{the Japanese} succeeded in inflicting a lot of damage on our ships .

The day before the landings on Okinawa took place , on March 31st it became my turn to be hit . A Kamikaze crashed on my old Flagship , the "Indianapolis" , and released a bomb that went down several decks and exploded ~~beneath in the~~^{near an} oil and fresh water tanks , blowing up two holes in the hull . I liked the "Indianapolis" and she was salvaged . I used her because she had

enough speed to operate with the fast carriers . But she was old and not valuable and as a result I could take her any place I wanted to , in support of the landings , and during heavy bombardments . She eventually was sunk a little later by a Japanese submarine in the Philippine Sea , between Guam and Leyte , after successfully completing her last mission , which was to carry the first atomic bomb from San Francisco to the Marianas on the first leg of its trip to Japan .

As a result of this Kamikaze hit , I had to shift my Flag to ^{an} ~~another~~ old battleship , the "New Mexico" . Two weeks later , two Kamikaze planes coming from Formosa attacked us ^{at anchor off Okinawa} ~~while we were taking ammunition at sea~~ . One of them landed in the water just astern of the "New Mexico" while the other one came in from the starboard ^{side} and took out a nest of 20m/m guns that were on deck . It went down in ^{to} the fire room and ~~disabled~~ ^{disabled} ~~and 3 of her 4 boilers~~ ^{litterally blew everything up inside} . We had about 60 people killed and 120 wounded . ^{The captain} I immediately called for volunteers to man the anti-aircraft batteries on deck ^{the crews of} which , ^{by this} ~~time~~ , had been pretty well wiped out . The response ^{he} I had was typical of the spirit of our sailors : all the men in the boiler rooms ^{and the turrets} volunteered . And believe me , it was risky . When you are on deck and these Kamikaze flew directly into you , the only thing that you have ~~for~~ protection is your tin hat ! During the Okinawa campaign Task Force 58 had to stay 92 days at sea . During this time , the Fifth Fleet had 15 vessels , none larger than a destroyer , sunk by air attack only . We also had more than 200 other vessels badly damaged , some beyond repair , by the Kamikaze . 5,000 people

were killed aboard the ships and more than 10,000 wounded . It was one of our toughest experiences of the war .

Okinawa was declared secured on June 21st , 1945, although the troops had to continue mopping-up operations until the end of the month . The landings had taken place on April 1st when Admiral Turner started unloading the 182,000 troops of his Joint Expeditionary Force from his 1,300 ships that had come from all over the Pacific . Okinawa was well defended . The Japs had more than 100,000 men , of which 67,000 were regular , well-trained , Imperial Army troops . ^{As} Like on Iwo Jima our Marines had to dislodge them one by one from their caves and inter-connecting pillboxes with grenades and flame-throwers . The fighting was terrible . We took 11,000 prisoners only and had , on our side , 13,000 dead . The way all this looked , it seemed like a bloody , hellish prelude to the forthcoming invasion of Japan .

Admiral NIMITZ , near the end of May , due to the strain that had been put upon all of us by nearly two months of continuous operations , replaced Admiral Turner, ~~and~~ Mitscher and myself in the midst of the campaign . Okinawa , we all knew , would be taken . He ~~then~~ ordered me back to Pearl Harbor , ~~via~~ Guam , to help in the planning of the next operation .

The ~~following~~ plan called for an invasion of ~~the~~ Kyushu~~s~~ in November of 1945 , with an assault on Honshu and an advance on the Tokyo plain to follow in March , 1946 .

This was definitely an operation to which I was strongly opposed . Not only did I think that we wouldn't accomplish

much that way that couldn't be gained with more time in other ways , but I was certain that it would be extremely tough and bloody . When you are making war , Time is sometimes fighting for the ennemy but it is also sometimes fighting for you . If Time is fighting for the ennemy , it is better to push the war . When you reach the stage where Time is on your side , you can slow down and let it assist you . This was not , however , the conclusion that had been reached in Washington or in General MacArthur's Headquarters . He wanted the Army to land in Japan, provided the Japanese had not surrendered by that time . As I said , I was strongly opposed to this from the beginning . A long time before , when Admiral NIMITZ had told me : "Now , where would you like to go ?" , I pointed on the map a place on the coast of China north of Formosa and south of the Yangtze River where I wanted to make a landing . There , we had an excellent Fleet anchorage and we could inflict a lot of damage to the Japanese Forces at relatively little expense . Their line of supply to the south , because of MacArthur's presence in the Philippines , was practically cut off . Once we had taken Okinawa we had gambled that no more japanese shipping would be able to go up the Yangtze to supply their troops in China . If we had built new airfield on the Chinese mainland we would have been able to fly missions all inside China , disrupting the railroad system , and inflicting great damage to japanese air and sea power all around Japan including Korea . I had emphatically told NIMITZ : "It would be wiser

not to make any landings in Japan for the time being and let the Japs "stew in their juice" and ~~xxxx~~ "die on the vine" like we have done in so many places previously ." I had told him ^{this} ~~that~~ while we were making the plans for Okinawa and Iwo Jima and never knew what had happened with this project until much later . I learned then that Admiral NIMITZ had favored the idea and that Admiral KING had also agreed . However , the Army and General MacArthur had insisted on going into Japan . This , I felt , would have been a terribly bloody , unnecessary proposition .

I was very glad in a sense when , finally , the two atomic bombs that we dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki decided the Japanese to surrender . It is impossible to know how long the war would have lasted , but it is certain that the Bomb shortened it by a great length .

I had heard much about General MacArthur during the war but had never met him personally . I saw him for the first time after V-J Day when Admiral NIMITZ ordered me to go to Manila with my ^{flagship} ~~Fleet~~ and ^{be ready to assist} ~~pick up~~ our occupation forces ⁱⁿ ~~to bring~~ ^{moving} ~~them~~ to Japan . MacArthur had let me know that he did not want me to pay him any official calls . I was simply to come and have ^{to his office and later} lunch with him and Mrs. MacArthur at his ~~Head~~ [^]quarters , which I did . My staff , before I saw him , had told me that MacArthur would do all the talking and that I would be unable to get a word in . Actually , it happened the other way around : he said very little , he let me do all the talking and he was extremely kind . I had a lot of respect and admiration for him . He was a wonderful man .

I remember talking the situation over with him . I discovered immediately that he was not going to be pushed into an early occupation of Japan until everything was ready . He didn't want any flare-ups at the end of the war and wanted things to be arranged before he would start the real occupation .

I do not think that there was anybody in the United States who could have handled the very delicate situation in Japan the way MacArthur did .

Admiral Raymond A. SPRUANCE