



Up the Rock on Iwo the Hard Way

Mt Suribachi was swarming with Japs—till D plus 4.

By LtCol Robert Hugh Williams

COMBAT Team 28 cut rapidly across Iwo Jima, then in four days secured the southern part of the island. It was uphill all the way—the hard way—in the fight up Suribachi.

D-day, 19 Feb, dawned bright and clear with a moderate sea. A wave of 11 armored amphibian tractors landed at H-hour, 0900, followed closely by LT 128 under LtCol Jackson B. Butterfield, in four waves of amphibian tractors five minutes apart, the first hitting the beach at 0902. Landing Team 227 came in simultaneously on the right, but on his left LtCol Butterfield had an exposed flank. A series of sand terraces prevented the LVTs from advancing more than a few yards inland. The assault platoons of B and C Companies, under Capt Dwayne E. Mears and Capt Phil E. Roach respectively, landed in the second wave [after the LVT(A)s] and proceeded to drive across the island. Only light mortar and small arms fire resisted their approach to the beach, but as soon as the assault platoons reached the second terrace about 50 yards inland, enemy small arms and machine-gun fire increased and casualties mounted.

The remainder of B and C Companies were in the third wave. These two assault companies continued to drive ahead. Most of A Company, under Capt Aaron G. Wilkins, landed in the fourth wave and moved to the south, taking up positions to the rear of B Company's left to protect the open left flank and neutralize enemy fires coming from Suribachi. Enemy fire grew hotter as the last waves of LT 128 landed.

As the assault companies pressed on to high ground in the middle of the island they encountered a strong defensive front of mutually supporting pillboxes and blockhouses which had been little damaged by naval gunfire or bombing.

At 1035, Lt Wright, 1st Platoon B Company, reached the west beach with four of his men, and Lt Bates, 2d Platoon, C Company, did so shortly afterward with six men. The attack developed in such a way that some elements, a fire team here, a squad or a platoon there, would be held up temporarily until a blockhouse or an emplacement was knocked out while others could move. This see-saw advance caused small groups of men to become separated from their platoons, and prompted an excessive estimate of casualties which was rectified late in the day.

Two 37-mm platoons and the 75-mm half-track platoon of the Regimental Weapons Company landed in the sixth wave at 0922, immediately set up

Commanded by Col Harry B. Liversedge, Combat Team 28 landed at H-hour as the left flank element of the V Amphibious Corps, and was joined later that day by Landing Team 328, in 5th-MarDiv Reserve, which landed on Division order.

C Company, 5th Engineer Bn, C Company, 5th Tank Bn, C Company, 5th Medical Bn and a Detachment of the 5th Joint Assault Signal Company were attached to CT 28. The 3d Bn, 13th Marines, a 105-mm howitzer bn, was in direct support but not attached. A platoon of engineers was with each Landing Team but the Tank Company constituted a separate Task Group which landed on CT order and E Company of Landing Team 228 was designated CT Reserve. A 37-mm platoon of the Regimental Weapons Company was attached to each Landing Team and the 75-mm half-track platoon was attached to LT 128. A Section of the 3d Provisional Rocket Detachment to man four trucks mounting 4.5 launchers remained initially under CT control.

near the beach and opened fire on enemy targets towards Suribachi and on the slope of the mountain itself. The 37-mm guns came ashore in weasels.

Landing Team 228, LtCol Chandler W. Johnson, landed in three waves of amphibian tractors beginning at 0935. It moved to the left, and, taking up positions facing Mt Suribachi, relieved A Company in protecting the left flank, gradually extended its right to keep contact with LT 128, and prepared to attack south on CT order. Enemy mortar fire was increasing on the beach.

Col Liversedge landed with his command group with the last wave of LT 228. Meanwhile Landing Team 328 under LtCol Charles E. Shepard, Jr., was released to Combat Team control and landed in three waves of LCVPs at about 1300. It went into an assembly position 200 yards inland.

Verbal orders were issued for the attack south. All day, naval gunfire, mortars, 37-mm guns, 75-mm half-tracks and machine-guns, as well as artillery when it got ashore, had been used to neutralize enemy fires from the Mt Suribachi area which en-

filaded the advance across the island. LtCol H. T. Waller's 3d Bn, 13th Marines, landed in DUKWs early in the afternoon, set up immediately upon landing and gave stout artillery support. They began firing about 1420. Most of their fire was direct, on very short range. One battery on the beach had to cease firing every few moments to allow engineer dozers to pass in front of the guns to cut a road up the terrace.

THE rocket platoon had trouble as soon as it landed. The one-ton trucks could not negotiate the soft sand and enemy mortars began to concentrate on them. One truck swamped in the surf. Before Lt Bushe could fire a bombardment, two more were temporarily put out of action by mortars. But the fourth and last opened up.

The close support afforded LT 228 by an LCI(G) helped greatly. While the RA line was still a flank rather than a front this little vessel came to within 150 yards of the beach and remained there for hours, pumping 40-mm shells into enemy positions just south of RA.

After noon enemy mortar and machine-gun fire increased on the beach and seriously impeded Landing Team 328, which was moving into position on the right of Landing Team 228. Many men were hit getting out of the boats and moving inland. Companies were pinned down and the time allowed by the book for a battalion to issue orders, make necessary reconnaissances, and move into position after receipt of orders to attack, proved insufficient.

Col Liversedge's order involved a coordinated attack to seize the volcano with the 2d and 3d Land-

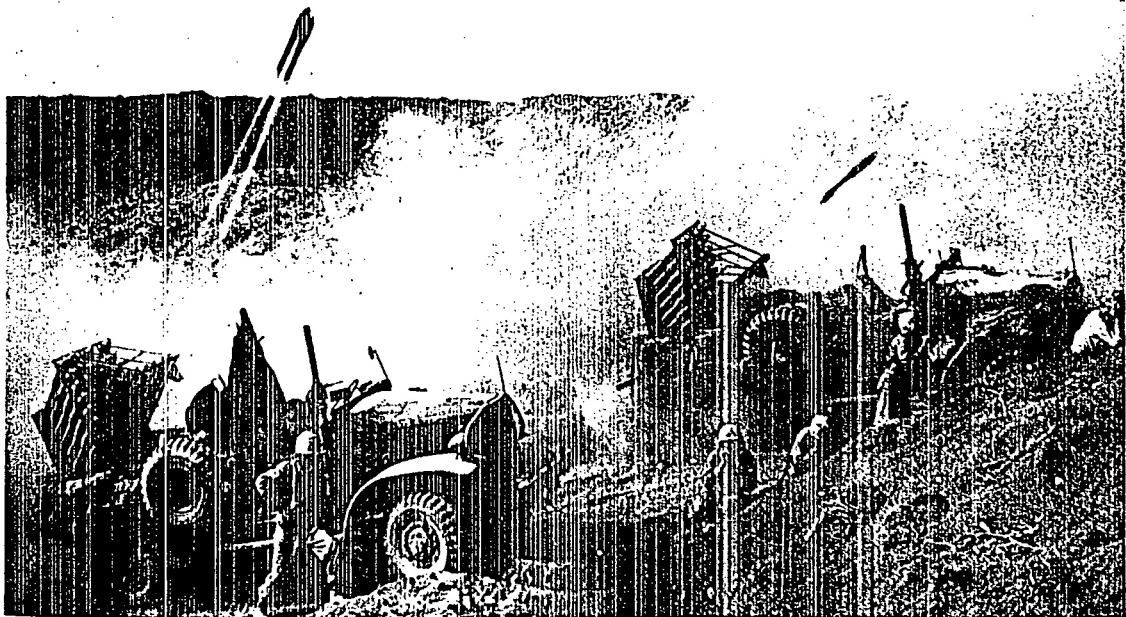
ing Teams in assault, the 3d on the right, the front extending across the island. All possible supporting fires and an air strike were brought to bear on enemy positions to the south. Landing Team 128 with E Company, 28th Marines, and C Company, 5th Tank Bn attached, continued to mop up and reduce many emplacements and blockhouses, bypassed in the rapid advance across the island. The hour for the attack south was originally set for 1545, but was delayed one hour.

The short winter day was far spent when the advance began at 1645, and stubborn resistance was encountered. A heavily fortified area extended from what was now our front to the base of Mt Suribachi, 600 yards away. Only negligible gains were made. Orders were shortly issued to dig in for the night.

Just before dark, at about 1800 on D-day, the Combat Team command post moved to temporary night defensive position. Landing Team 128 had suffered the heaviest.

Orders were received from the Division to continue the attack at 0830 on 20 February. Enemy mortar and artillery fire fell intermittently all night. Almost constant illumination by star shells and 60-mm mortars kept down Jap infiltration. At 2315 an enemy barge landed on the west beach in the zone of LT 128, and 39 Japs were killed trying to get ashore.

A heavy air strike, and naval, artillery and rocket preparations preceded the attack on 20 Feb which got off on time, although the tanks which supported both LT 128 and LT 328 were late because the tank maintenance section had not yet come ashore



All but one unit of Bushe's platoon had trouble, but other rocket trucks got ashore and pounded Jap emplacements. They used hit-and-run tactics to dodge counterfire.

and the tank crews had had to fight with their tanks all the preceding day and repair them at night.

Progress was slow. An advance of but from 150 to 200 yards could be made through a maze of blockhouses, pillboxes and emplacements which had to be destroyed with flamethrowers and demolitions, with the help of the tanks. LT 128 continued mopping up along the west beach, killing 73 Japs. Not many dead Japs were found the first two days. The enemy removes his dead when possible. However, when our lines reached the base of the volcano and the enemy became more active with night infiltration, hundreds of bodies had to be buried and many more were sealed in caves and underground chambers. In one cave alone there were 69 dead Japs, most of whom had apparently been carried there after having been badly wounded. Marine casualties for the day were moderate. Mortar and artillery fire continued to fall on our positions throughout the night.

Orders were received to continue the attack at 0825 the next day. The front of LT 328 was too extended, so Col Liversedge again committed LT 128 on the right of LT 328, assigning it a single company front. A 40-plane strike, using bombs, rockets and strafing, preceded King-hour. This strike was brought within 100 yards of our assault platoons. Naval gunfire and artillery also did their part. All units began the attack on time, but little progress was made until the tanks could be brought up. Toward 1100, real progress was being made, all companies and all platoons of Landing Teams 228 and 328 were committed and we were well into the main defenses of Mt Suribachi. By 1400, after repulsing local counterattacks to the front, LT 128 and LT 328 were close to the base of the mountain and LT 228 was advancing elements of two companies around the base of the mountain on a ledge 50 or 60 feet above the water while a platoon of D Company moved along the water's edge.

ON D+3, air strikes, naval gunfire and artillery could no longer be used. The visibility was poor and in the afternoon a cold pouring rain thoroughly drenched all hands. LT 228 sent a strong combat patrol around to the southern tip of the island and LT 328 did the same around the other side, but friendly fire prevented them from making contact at the southern end. Neither patrol met serious resistance. A bad pocket in a depression, about 150 yards across, lay between LT 328 and the

mountain. Tanks, flamethrowers and demolition teams worked on it all day. All companies spent much of the day in destroying bypassed emplacements and pillboxes.

On D+4, after a cold, wet night, operations were resumed. The weather was fine. Col Liversedge had ordered LT 228 to secure and occupy the crest of the volcano and send a strong combat patrol around the base to make contact with LT 128. LT 128 was ordered to attack around the base in its Zone of Action. It was impossible to scale the mountain on that side. LT 328 was ordered to continue mopping up the pocket at the base of the mountain and support the advance of the other landing team. The morning was quiet. It was apparent that we were going to encounter little organized resistance. A four-man patrol went halfway up the mountain and reported no resistance. A 40-man patrol led by 1stLt H. C. Schrier of E Company then started up the mountain in single file, followed after an interval of about 40 minutes by most of F Company led by Capt Arthur H. Naylor, Jr. Some resistance was encountered around the rim of the volcano. Several Japs were killed, then at 1020 the American flag was raised above the northeast rim of the crater by members of Lt Schrier's patrol. The word quickly spread to every officer and man on Iwo Jima and all the ships. Within a few minutes, a hundred thousand pairs of eyes looked toward Mt Suribachi to see Old Glory fly for the first time over territory which had been a part of the inner defenses of the Japanese Empire. At 1130 elements of LT 728 and LT 228 met at the southern tip of the island. Casualties for the day were light.

As for the enemy, 590 dead were counted by our burial parties and a conservatively estimated 815 were sealed in caves. Altogether the engineers sealed 180 caves and cave entrances in the Suribachi area, and infantry assault squads and demolition teams destroyed over 200 installations including blockhouses, pillboxes and covered emplacements.

That night, LT 128 and LT 228 extended their lines around Suribachi's base so that it was completely encircled. We anticipated infiltration from the enemy remaining in the tunnels and caves which honeycombed the lower part of the mountain, and the following morning 122 additional enemy dead were counted in front of and within our lines. Mopping up continued several days, but the capture of the formidable lava mass had been accomplished.

Captured Jap Docs Go Back to Work

Twenty-eight Japanese doctors and corpsmen have left the Prisoner of War stockade on Guam for Okinawa to help U. S. Naval doctors treat more than 150,000 civilian internees rounded up there.

These Japs volunteered to go even as far as the Japanese mainland. Their interest, they said, was based purely upon their profession—the saving of life. The medical men are reservists, draftees.