

In the spring of 1945 U.S. military planners in Washington, on Guam, and in Manila were putting the finishing touches on the plan for what would have been the largest, and probably most costly, amphibious assaults in history—the invasion of Japan. U.S. military planning called for an assault on the southernmost home island of Kyushu on 1 November 1945, to be followed, if Japan had not surrendered, by an assault on the main island of Honshu about 1 April 1946. These assaults—dubbed Operations Olympic and Coronet, respectively—would each be larger than the D-day landings at Normandy in June 1944.

The first invasion target, Kyushu, was about twice the size of Massachusetts, with a population of some 10 million. Operation Olympic called for three corps landings on the southern portion of the island. From the landing sites, American forces would

The Largest That Never

By Norman Polmar

fight their way inland and link up to gain control of the southern half of the island—a line running through the towns of Tsuno on the eastern coast and Saito on the western coast. The southern half of Kyushu would then be used as a base for intensive air attacks and to support the subsequent invasion of Honshu and the march on Tokyo.

In July 1945 feigned and real preliminaries for Olympic began. Some U.S. soldiers and airmen worked on the props and scenarios for the complex deception plan, called Pastel II. And Admiral William F. Halsey's Third

The planned assaults on the Japanese home islands of Kyushu in November 1945 and Honshu in March 1945 were the largest amphibious operations ever undertaken. These tanks are passing a U.S. battleship providing shore bombardment during the Okinawa invasion of 1 April 1945.

NH 89358



Invasion . . . Was

Fleet—comprising 17 aircraft carriers, 8 fast battleships, 20 cruisers and 75 destroyers—started pounding the Japanese coast and battering Japanese air and naval forces. On 10 July Halsey's carrier planes struck Tokyo, encountering virtually no fighter opposition or antiaircraft fire. Vice Admiral John Shafroth led three of the battleships and two heavy cruisers with their destroyer escorts to within 29,000 yards of the coast of northern

Honshu; the Japanese could see them offshore.

The Third Fleet was to continue this first phase of Olympic preparation from 28 July (X-day minus 95) to 23 October (X-8). General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, commander of the ground forces involved in the campaign, would use X and Y to designate the assault days, because D-day had been too closely linked with the European war, which he disdained.

Scenes like this—Marine casualties at Iwo Jima—were major factors in President Truman's decision to use the atomic bombs against Japanese cities.

USMC



For the men of MacArthur's Sixth Army, the invasion became inevitable on 1 July when the Eighth Army took over the fighting on Luzon in the Philippines so that the Sixth Army could regroup, reequip and train for

Thousands of Japanese kamikazes flew in defense of their home islands. Their targets were offshore U.S. transports and landing ships, and possibly the carriers providing close air support for the landings, such as St. Lo (CVE 63), shown here struck by a suicider off the Philippines on 25 October 1944.

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Naval Aviation in WW II

Olympic. Organized fighting had ceased on Luzon, although major Japanese forces still held out in the mountains. As the Sixth Army's 11 Army divisions and support forces got ready on Luzon for its final campaign, its three Marine divisions rehearsed landings at their bases in Hawaii and the Marianas.

The U.S. invasion armada, which would be the largest ever to put to sea, began to assemble at ports throughout the Pacific. All together the plan called for a total of 1,371 transport, cargo and landing ships with a capacity to carry 539,300 personnel and 61,200 tanks and other vehicles.

Several tank landing ships (LSTs) were fitted out as miniature aircraft carriers to launch and recover Piper Cubs, popularly known as *Grasshoppers*, to spot fire for artillery after the guns went ashore. These ships would use a wire-trapeze system named for its inventor, Army officer 1st Lt. James H. Brodie.

Another 21 LSTs would carry thousands of units of blood and mobile blood distribution units. They, along with four evacuation transports, would carry wounded out of the beachhead area, either to major hospitals on Okinawa and Luzon, or transfer them at sea to white-painted hospital ships that would remain far offshore. Ordinarily, medical personnel did not carry arms. But a training document for the invasion noted that those going ashore would be trained and armed because the Japanese would not recognize any invader as a non-combatant.

The total carrying capacity of the assault fleet indicated, but did not define, the actual size of the ground forces that would be sent into Kyushu. The original planning by MacArthur's headquarters called for the Sixth Army to land 337,000 soldiers and 87,000 marines in the assault and its immediate follow-on operations. Those numbers, however, would periodically change as the planning progressed—as Army and Marine Corps unit organizations were changed and as additional troops were assigned to the Corps and Army commands that would participate in the landings.

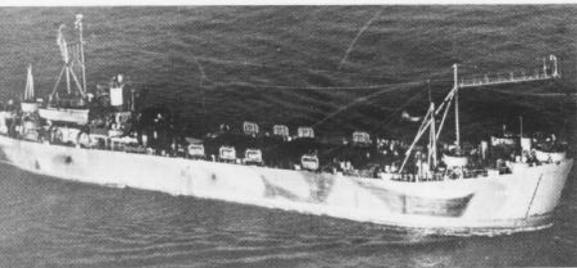
General MacArthur, in a message to Washington in mid-June 1945, used 681,000 as the "total force involved," with "one-half engaged the first 15 days and the entire strength thereafter." But his authorized postwar description of invasion plans, while discussing manpower in the broad Army terms of corps and divisions, did not produce an overall number. The Sixth Army, the command making the assault, listed the landing force as 337,000 soldiers and 87,000 marines and sailors in the assault and the immediate follow-on operations. MacArthur's chief of engineers used 549,503 as the total "force to be landed"—including engineers to build airfields and port facilities, Army Air Forces personnel to fly and maintain many hundreds of aircraft, and men to garrison the southern half of Kyushu to operate military prison camps and to provide services and military government for the captured Japanese civilian population. But this

figure did not include the three divisions of Marines, since they would provide for their own engineering needs.

Another planning document, which listed Sixth Army invasion units down to scout dog platoons, gave the total, including the three Marine divisions (59,898 men), as 382,937. To this was then added 49,382 medical, base construction, quartermaster and other service troops; 18,970 men assigned to military government tasks; and 35,857 men from the Far East Air Forces. When all of these numbers were added up, the total was 487,146, still far from the figures that MacArthur gave to Washington or the ones used by his chief of engineers—but still an impressive force. (MacArthur's 681,000 figure could have been obtained by adding the men of Navy and Army Air Forces supporting the invasion.)

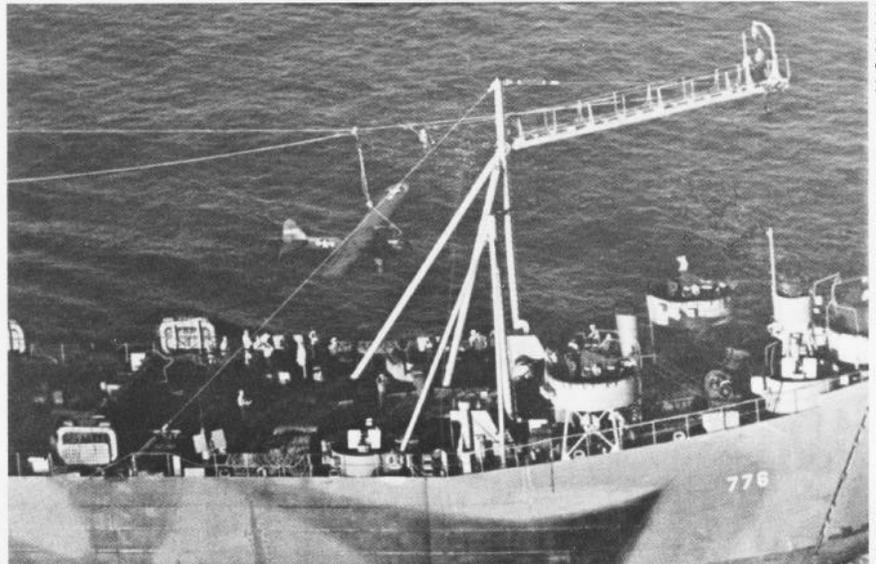
While this massive force was being assembled, plans were drawn up for Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet to focus on aircraft, airfields and shipping between Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu between 18 and 24 October. On the 24th two of his carrier groups would join the Fifth Fleet, under the command of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance; this was the first time since early 1942 that the two admirals and their fleets would be at sea fighting simultaneously.

The Fifth Fleet would include the British carrier force and, as assigned, antisubmarine and logistics groups. The Fifth Fleet would have the amphibious ships, covering and support forces, minesweepers, support



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During the Iwo Jima campaign, LST 776 launched and recovered Piper Cubs, called "Grasshoppers," using a wire-trapeze system named for its inventor, 1st Lt. James H. Brodie. The aircraft were used to spot fire for artillery after the guns went ashore.



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ships and a wing of flying boats and their tenders.

Also present off Kyushu would be the Seventh Fleet, under Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, which would be assigned ships and missions as appropriate by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the overall naval commander in the Pacific, and other commanders.

Beginning on 24 October (X-8), battleships, cruisers and destroyers would begin bombarding the landing beaches trying to knock out the elaborate Japanese coastal defenses. (Among the 11 old battleships moving in to pound the landing sites with 16-inch and 14-inch guns would be 7 resurrected veterans of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.) The effectiveness of shore bombardment had long been debated. Some, but rarely all, coastal defense positions were destroyed in the various naval bombardments in the Pacific amphibious assaults. Still, some were destroyed, and bombardments immediately prior to the landings invariably forced the defenders to cower in their bunkers, generally preventing them from firing on the landing craft.

The Olympic plan called for MacArthur's Far Eastern Air Forces, under General George C. Kenney, to cut off northern Kyushu from the invasion area to the south. Kenney's fighters and bombers were to take out the railroads and the paralleling *Kokudo*, or national highway, a two-lane gravel road that ran along the coasts and linked the island's cities. The railroad seemed to be particularly vulnerable for its tracks ran across numerous bridges and through tunnels. The highway and railroad network had so far remained solid enough for thousands of defenders to pass to the south.

On 27 October (X-5), elements of the Army's 40th Infantry Division and the 158th Regimental Combat Team were to begin landing on small islands lying off the west coast of Kyushu. These units probably would have met little opposition because the Japanese planned to throw nearly all they had into a fierce shore defense of Kyushu itself. The islands would be used for small craft to support the landing and as advance bases for PBM *Mariner* flying boats, which would perform reconnaissance and

search-and-rescue missions.

Subsequently, on X-day, the assault elements of nine divisions would storm ashore on three Kyushu beaches. No one expected that landings on any of these beaches would be unopposed, as had happened on some other island assaults. Indeed, U.S. intelligence revealed that the Japanese referred to their defense of Kyushu as the "Decisive Battle." The Japanese military leaders hoped to inflict enough casualties on the assaulting armies to force the United States to enter into negotiations to end the war.

The Japanese intended to start their defense at sea, sending kamikaze aircraft and Bakas (piloted, rocket-propelled bombs launched from bombers) out to the invasion fleet as it approached the beaches. Submarines carrying Kaitens (torpedoes carrying a pilot who used a periscope to navigate toward the target), would try to fire their "human torpedoes" as the fleet massed between Okinawa and Kyushu. Hundreds of Kaitens would go to sea. Japan's conventional submarines (they still had 60) would take suicidal chances to score a kill, as would the midget submarines, which were not suicide weapons but probably would have been used that way in the Decisive Battle. Other midget submarines were to be stored in well-camouflaged shoreside caves and tunnels, from which they were to be launched on rails for one-way raids on the invasion fleet.

Closer in, and probably during the landings, suicide boats would strike. Roaring out of hiding places as landing craft neared shore, the explosives-laden boats would aim at any craft carrying troops. The navy's *Shinyo* carried 550 pounds of explosives in its bow; the army's *Renraku-tei* carried two 240-pound depth charges set to explode six seconds after release.

Finally, there would be the usual underwater obstacles designed to rip open or hang up landing craft, as well as rows of *Fukuryu*, swimmers in diving gear operating 30 feet or so beneath the water. The outermost row of the suicide frogmen would hover near rows of mines anchored to the bottom. As the craft neared the

mines, the *Fukuryu* divers would release them. Many of the divers would die in the subsequent explosions, and the survivors would carry mines to landing craft that passed nearby. Some would have explosives attached to poles they would jam against the sides of landing craft.

The suicide planes would probably be held back until the invasion fleet was 20 or 30 miles from shore. The aerial suicide attacks would intensify around X-day when the fleet was taking up stations for the invasion. Plans were to have 10,500 kamikaze aircraft ready for massive attacks by early fall. (At the end of June 8,000 had been prepared for battle.) Japanese strategists, basing their optimism on magnified reports of kamikaze and Baka successes in the Philippines and Okinawa, estimated that "special attackers" would take out 30 to 50 percent of the invasion fleet. Captain Rikihei Inoguchi, an air staff officer, was more guarded. He estimated that in the Philippines only one of every six kamikaze planes hit a target; at Okinawa, the rate was one in nine. Off Kyushu, against intense U.S. fighter opposition, he expected a success rate of about 10 percent.

Once ashore, American troops would be confronted by a Japanese army on Kyushu numbering almost 600,000 men. Many of the combat units, however, were newly formed and the troops poorly trained and short of weapons and equipment. Short rations would also sap their fighting strength. But the tenacious Japanese defenses of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, which included paramilitary units, indicated that these men—some elderly and some just boys—would fight. Behind them, the civilian population would do its part—men and women who were armed and trained to throw themselves against the enemy with satchel charges, bamboo spears and even kitchen knives.

The estimates of U.S. casualties in the Kyushu landings varied greatly. For an 18 June 1945 meeting of President Truman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General MacArthur, who would command the landings in Japan, sent his casualty estimates: a total of 95,000 casualties—dead and wounded—for the expected 90-day campaign to seize the southern half

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of Kyushu. Not included in MacArthur's casualty number were another 12,000 nonbattle casualties, men who would fall out of the ranks because of disease and accidents.

The Army Chief of Staff, General of the Army George C. Marshall, feared that so high a casualty rate would make Truman put off the invasion. MacArthur lowered his estimates.

The Joint Chief's planning staff also prepared casualty estimates—one put the casualties as high as 132,000 men killed and wounded for the conquest of Kyushu. Almost 100,000 more Americans would be killed and wounded if the landings in Honshu followed. But these were, at best, educated guesses.

Many numbers were discussed at the 18 June meeting in the White House—leaving the impression that American casualties might reach as high as a quarter of a million.

President Truman continued the discussion of casualties in the Berlin suburb of Potsdam in July 1945, where the president met face-to-face, for the first time, with Soviet dictator Josef Stalin and British leader Winston Churchill. After learning details of the success of the atomic bomb test at Alamogordo, N.M., Truman met with his principal advisers on 22 July. It was apparently at this meeting that Truman wrote, "I asked General Marshall what it would cost in lives to land on the Tokyo plain and other places in Japan. It was his opinion that such an invasion would cost at a minimum one quarter of a million casualties and might cost as much as a million, on the American side alone, with an equal number of the enemy." The casualty numbers discussed at Potsdam added to Truman's growing conviction about the need to use the bomb.

A half million was a number used at the time by many U.S. wartime planners. On Luzon, the Sixth Army's medical staff—isolated from the politics of both Washington and Manila—estimated that casualties from the Kyushu assault and subsequent fighting to secure the southern half of the island would cost 394,000 Americans dead, wounded and missing. At Okinawa, in a battle that proffered many similarities to the fighting on

Kyushu, the U.S. Tenth Army suffered 7,613 soldiers and marines killed and missing, and 31,807 wounded. Using that same 1:4 ratio for the Kyushu battles, the Sixth Army could expect some 98,500 dead and 295,500 wounded.

Thus, there is no simple answer to the question "How many would have died?" if the war continued with American landings on Kyushu, possibly followed by an assault on the main island of Honshu.

Only briefly mentioned, but not discussed, at these meetings were potential casualties at sea. At Okinawa the Navy suffered 4,907 dead and 4,824 injured on board ships, most struck by kamikazes. Off Okinawa the primary targets of the Japanese attackers were destroyers, which served as radar pickets. The Japanese hoped to sink the destroyers to permit attacks on the transports offshore.

At Kyushu the Japanese targets of air, sea, and underwater suiciders would be the transports, cargo ships, LSTs and landing ships. Unlike the destroyers at Okinawa that were maneuvering and firing at attackers with their heavy gun batteries, the target ships off Kyushu, some packed with troops, would be moving slowly, if at all, as they disgorged troops and equipment. And, the kamikazes would have to fly only a few miles offshore, not the 350 miles to Okinawa.

Some estimates placed the losses off Kyushu aboard ship—both sailors and embarked troops—at 10 times the losses at Okinawa. In Olympic the suiciders might kill as many as 50,000 crewmen and troops and wound an equal number in ships and landing craft.

Also not mentioned in most discussions of casualties are the estimated 100,000 Allied prisoners of war in Japan. There is abundant evidence that the prisoners of war would have been killed when American troops landed in Japan.

But there was no invasion. At Potsdam in July, President Truman approved the use of atomic bombs against Japan. On 6 August the B-29 *Enola Gay* dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and three days later the B-29 *Bockscar* dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki. At noon on the

15th the voice of the Emperor of Japan was heard for the first time on the radio. In a recorded broadcast to his people, Emperor Hirohito declared, "To our good and loyal subjects: After pondering deeply the general trends of the world and the actual conditions obtaining in Our Empire today, we have decided to effect a settlement of the present situation..."

Then, referring to the immediate cause of his declaration, the Emperor continued that the "war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have turned against her interest. Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. . . ."

The largest amphibious assaults ever to be planned—Olympic and Coronet—would not be undertaken. Rather than support the invasion, Navy shore- and carrier-based aircraft began crossing the skies over Japan, seeking out prisoner of war camps and dropping bundles of food rather than bombs. ■

Norman Polmar, a well-known naval analyst and author, is coauthor with Thomas B. Allen of the recently published book *Codename Downfall: The Secret Plan to Invade Japan and Why President Truman Dropped the Bomb* (Simon & Schuster). See the book review on page 39.

50 Years Ago – WW II

10 Sep: *Midway* (CVB-41), first of the 45,000-ton class of aircraft carriers, was placed in commission at Newport News, Va., with Capt. Joseph F. Bolger in command.

17 Oct: A type designation letter K for pilotless aircraft was added to the basic designation system, replacing the previous class designation VK. Classes A, G and S within the type were assigned for pilotless aircraft intended for attack against aircraft, ground targets and ships, respectively.

U.S. Forces Scheduled to Assault Kyushu, 1 November 1945

Sixth Army

- 40th Infantry Division
- 158th Regimental Combat Team

I Corps

- 25th Infantry Division
- 33rd Infantry Division
- 41st Infantry Division

V Marine Amphibious Corps

- 2nd Marine Division
- 3rd Marine Division
- 5th Marine Division

IX Corps

- 81st Infantry Division
- 98th Infantry Division

XI Corps

- Americal Division (Infantry)
- 1st Cavalry Division
- 43rd Infantry Division

Follow-up Forces

- 11th Airborne Division
- 77th Infantry Division

Naval Forces

Only warships and amphibious ships are indicated below; several hundred minesweepers and auxiliary ships were also slated to participate in Olympic.

Third Fleet (Adm. William F. Halsey)

Fast Carrier Task Force

- 14 CV fast aircraft carriers (approx. 100 aircraft each)
- 6 CVL light aircraft carriers (approx. 35 aircraft each)
- 9 BB fast battleships (16-inch guns)
- 2 CB large cruisers (12-inch guns)
- 7 CA heavy cruisers (8-inch guns)
- 12 CL light cruisers (6-inch guns)
- 5 CLAA anti-aircraft cruisers (5-inch guns)
- 75 DD destroyers

Fifth Fleet (Adm. Raymond A. Spruance)

Amphibious Support Forces

- 12 CVE escort aircraft carriers (28-32 aircraft each)
- 11 OBB old battleships (14- and 16-inch guns)
- 10 CA heavy cruisers (8-inch guns)
- 15 CL light cruisers (6-inch guns)
- 36 DD destroyers
- 6 DE destroyer escorts

Attack Forces (to protect amphibious ships)

- 10 CVE escort aircraft carriers (28-32 aircraft each)
- 81 DD destroyers
- 122 DE destroyer escorts

Follow-up Forces (to protect follow-up amphibious ships)

- 16 DD destroyers
- 48 DE destroyer escorts

Hunter-Killer Groups (offensive antisubmarine forces)

- 4 CVE escort aircraft carriers (28-32 aircraft each)
- 24 DE destroyer escorts



AAF 58189
USN 354614 [inset]

Despite the current debate on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima (seen here) and Nagasaki and the end of the war, there can be no doubt that President Harry S. Truman and U.S. military leaders wanted to use the bomb to end the conflict in the Pacific with a minimum loss of American life. Inset: Although thousands of women and children were among the victims of the atomic devastation, Hiroshima was a military target. It was headquarters for the defense of southern Japan, a principal port for sending men and weapons to Kyushu, and it had a major naval air station and army depot.

Logistics Group (to protect oilers and ammunition ships)

- 10 CVE escort aircraft carriers (28-32 aircraft each)
- 1 CL light cruiser
- 12 DD destroyers
- 42 DE destroyer escorts

Amphibious Forces

- 95 AKA attack cargo ships (23,750 troops)
 - 17 AP troop transports (34,000 troops)
 - 210 APA attack transports (273,000 troops)
 - 68 APD destroyer transports (10,290 troops)
 - 4 APH evacuation transports (3,200 troops)
 - 16 LSD dock landing ships (3,840 troops)
 - 400 LSM medium landing ships (20,000 troops)
 - 555 LST tank landing ships (166,500 troops)
 - 6 LSV vehicle landing ships (4,800 troops)
- (Total lift capacity: 539,300 troops)

Seventh Fleet (Adm. Thomas C. Kinkaid)

Forces as assigned.

British Pacific Fleet

Carrier Force

- 4 CV fleet carriers (50-80 aircraft each)
- 1 BB fast battleship
- 3 CL light cruisers
- 2 CLAA anti-aircraft cruisers
- 18 DD destroyers