

# *Attack and Retreat, May 1945*

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Tactical methods on the Shuri line followed the tanks-versus-caves pattern through most of the Okinawa campaign. Tactical realities suddenly changed, however, on the morning of 4 May, when much of the IJA 32d Army left its caves to launch a major assault on U.S. lines. The Japanese decision to leave their safe cave fortresses for attack was, and still is, controversial. Both the issues and the personalities surrounding the 4 May offensive were similar to those of the modest 12 April offensive. However, pressure from IGHQ and 10th Area Army, a crucial element in the 12 April decision, was absent this time. Instead, Chief of Staff Cho and Operations Officer Yahara collided directly over what for 32d Army was a perpetual dilemma of doctrine.

On 22 April, the IJA 24th Division and the 44th IMB had been moved north to support the deteriorating 62d Division, displacing its right flank and forming a second line in its left rear respectively. Colonel Yahara, having at last resolved the north-south problem and formed a sturdy defensive line, was content with the situation. The 32d Army was implementing the kind of solid attrition defense Yahara had envisioned from the start. Despite their 10-to-1 advantage in firepower and 2-to-1 advantage in manpower, the Americans' advance was being held to a modest 100 yards per day. Moreover, by the end of April, the 32d Army had become the only Japanese force to maintain organized resistance to an American island landing for over thirty days.

Yahara's optimism about 32d Army's achievements was shared by only a minority of the 32d Army Staff, however. Most of the other members suffered from a growing feeling of gloom, which fueled a growing sentiment for a bold attack that might break them out of the status quo. Unlike Yahara, who thought they were doing well with what they had, other members were preoccupied with absolute failure. The 32d Army was being pushed inexorably back, and the eventual result of the current policy would be that all of them would perish and Okinawa would be lost. The somber mood of the staff was aggravated by conditions in the headquarters cave. American lines were getting closer, and shells fell thick around its entrances. Repeatedly, sentries posted there were killed. Smoke from exploding shells was pulled into the ventilator shaft, which caused great consternation when

someone would yell "gas attack," sending the whole complement running for gas masks. The inherent stress of the situation, especially the element of certain death, was beginning to take its toll on everyone.<sup>1</sup>

### *The 29 April Meeting*

In this environment, Lieutenant General Cho called a staff meeting on 29 April to discuss operations. Cho spoke firmly in favor of an offensive, for he had apparently made up his mind well before the meeting since he had already on 27 April asked Major Jin, the staff member in charge of air strategy, to begin research on a possible advance. Cho argued that in the present state of affairs, the Americans had the upper hand. If the status quo continued, the 32d Army eventually would be wiped out. The solution was to use their surplus resources for an offensive while they still could. In this way, they might break out of the current deadlock and avoid certain defeat.<sup>2</sup>

At this meeting, only Yahara spoke for continuing the war of attrition and avoiding an offensive. Yahara pointed out that in modern warfare a superiority of 3 to 1 was usually needed for successful attack. "To take the offensive with inferior forces . . . is reckless and would lead to certain defeat," he said. Second, the high ground around Minami-Uebaru had already fallen into American hands, giving them a major advantage in defensive terrain. Third, Yahara argued, a hasty offensive would fail, with thousands needlessly lost. Then, 32d Army's reduced forces would be unable to hold Okinawa for a long period and unable to delay the U.S. invasion of Japan. A hasty attack would cause 32d Army to fail in its duty.<sup>3</sup>

Major Jin, the aviation staff member, then spoke. Jin had favored greater efforts to protect the Yontan and Kadena airfields from the start. Jin, like Cho, described the need for an offensive and its possible success. The other young staff members were silent. Cho then declared again that he hoped for an attack to snatch life from the midst of death. At this, Yahara left the room. All the other staff members then agreed to launch an offensive.<sup>4</sup>

The 29 April staff meeting was as bitterly argued as the two earlier strategy meetings on 3 and 10 April had been. Like the April meetings, it did not settle the issue for Yahara. He continued to oppose an offensive, and Cho continued to favor one. Cho then tried this time to manage Yahara by sheer emotional force. At dawn on 30 April, before Yahara "had time to splash water on his face," Cho appeared at his quarters. Cho squeezed Yahara's hand and said with genuine enthusiasm that there had been nothing but trouble between them in the past and that they would probably both die together on Okinawa. Cho then asked if Yahara, on this one occasion, would go along with the offensive. As Cho spoke, his tears fell abundantly. Yahara was deeply moved, despite his aloof reputation, and before long he was weeping too. He was overcome by Cho's sudden display of emotion and said, "I consent."<sup>5</sup>

Lest this dose of sentimental pressure still not be enough, Lieutenant General Ushijima, commander of 32d Army, took Yahara aside in the staff room the same day and sternly counseled him not to undermine support for the attack. Mild-mannered Ushijima never spoke to anyone in this way, and Yahara sensed that Cho was also behind this chastisement. Yahara said he thought the offensive was a meaningless suicide attack but that he would support it since it was decided. Ushijima replied quietly that, of course, the offensive would be an honorable death attack.<sup>6</sup>

Even Yahara went along with the attack plans by the end of April, in public at least. There are a number of reasons why an immediate offensive was decided on even though its military use was doubtful. One of these was Cho's forceful personality, which sometimes simply overwhelmed those about him. Another was that the received doctrine of the IJA for many years had been to secure quick victory by attack, especially flank attack followed by close fighting. Cadets at the IJA Academy were taught that one Japanese division with a robust spirit of attack could defeat three Soviet divisions with superior equipment. Officers raised in this tradition had an exaggerated faith in the effectiveness of attack. Such habits of mind no doubt contributed to 32d Army's decision for an offensive.<sup>7</sup>

A third reason for the 32d Army's decision to attack was the spirit of gloom surrounding the staff. The staff's feeling of frustration at their resources being worn down to naught by the American advance caused them all to welcome a long-odds gamble that would at least give them hope. The attack would provide psychological relief from the stress of continuous defeat. Unfortunately, this was relief for the 32d Army Staff only. The 62d Division, steadily in combat, suffered stresses worse than the psychological kind and, in any case, was not to be active in the offensive. The 24th Division, meant to carry out the attacks, had felt no stress needing relief because it had not yet been exposed to combat. On this point, the 32d Army Staff may be criticized. Its mounting of a major offensive to relieve its own psychological discomfort was improper.<sup>8</sup>

### *Honorable Death Attack and Ritual Suicide*

After the 29 April meeting, Ushijima spoke for the first time in terms of an honorable death attack. Honorable death (*gyokusai*) and ritual disembowelment (*seppuku* or *hara-kiri*), self-destruction for units and individuals respectively, were a powerful part of Japanese military culture. Honorable death, literally "smashing the [imperial] jewel," meant that a unit fought until its last member died in combat, resisting the temptation to flee or surrender. Every school child was taught famous historical instances of the phenomenon. The concept probably evolved out of the conditions of Japan's Warring States period (1470–1600), when whole units sometimes fled or changed sides, but where the samurai closest to their feudal masters were expected to fight to the death and where soldiers were normally tortured and killed if taken alive. The Japanese may have felt more threatened than other societies by the possibility that the ordinary soldier would flee from

battle and therefore had strong injunctions against flight. Being captured also raised a suspicion of disloyalty and selfishness. The samurai or officer who quit fighting to surrender put his personal convenience ahead of his cause, which showed a deeply flawed character. Related to this was the traditional treatment of war prisoners, which was that they were either killed, tortured and killed, or incarcerated with so few amenities that they soon died in captivity. That prisoners were worthy of respect and might be exchanged was an idea that did not exist in the Japanese mind. Rather, the Japanese believed, and with no soul searching, that for a unit to perish in combat was both very honorable and very expedient.

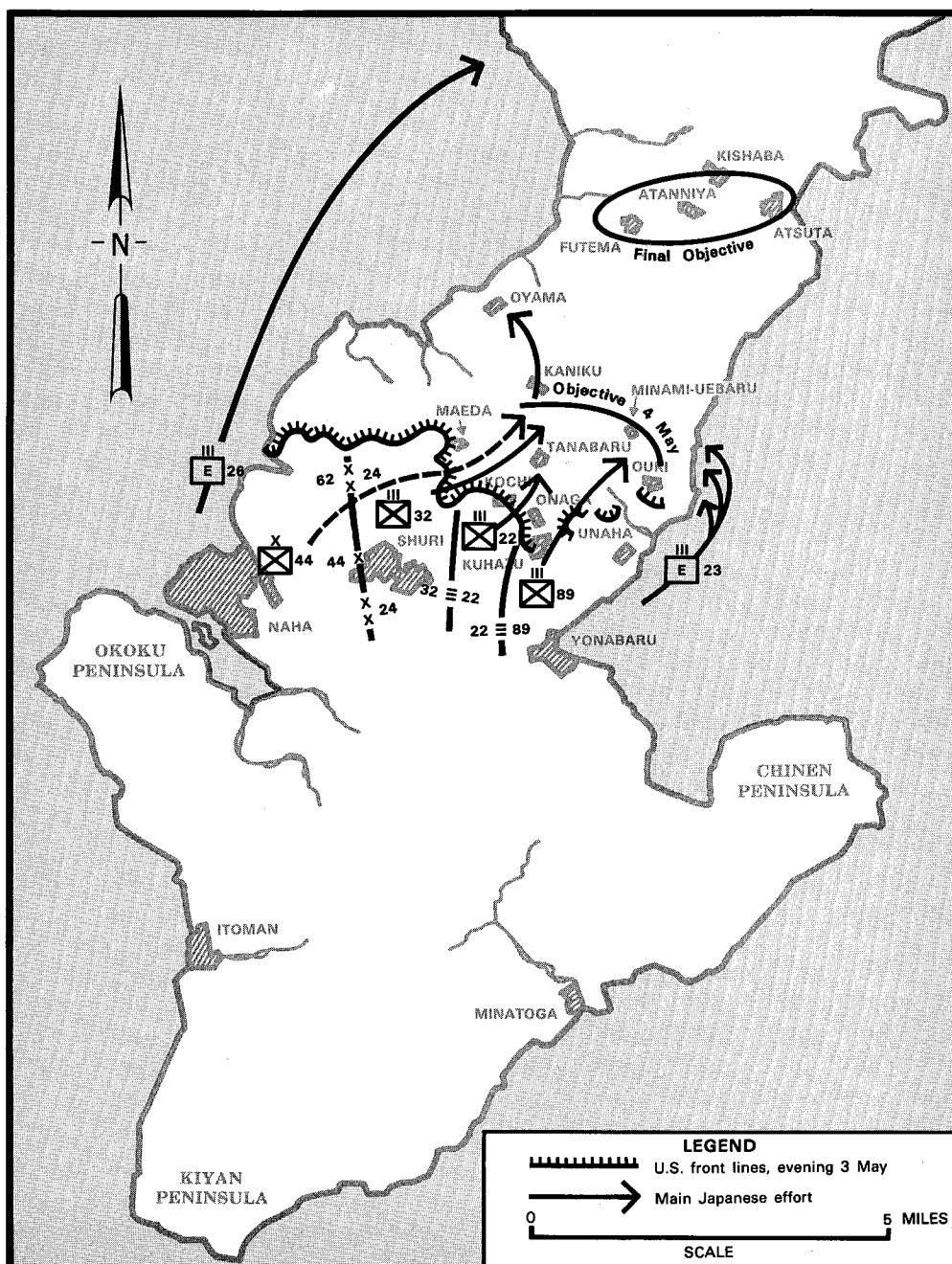
The notion of individual suicide for soldiers derived from similar considerations. The samurai or officer in danger of being captured alive was expected to take his own life, according to proper ritual forms if possible. If honorable death attacks failed, the officer and, in the 1940s, the private soldier as well, were obliged to commit suicide. This showed sincerity, avoided harsh captivity, and prevented the enemy from using captives to manipulate those still uncaptured. The tradition of suicide also may have relieved psychological stress, paradoxically, because its suffering was brief, self-administered, and held no loss of dignity, and because the soldier entering combat knew from the outset that nothing worse than that need happen to him. Suicide to avoid capture also helped guarantee normal military benefits for the victim's surviving family.

The IJA 32d Army thought increasingly in terms of honorable death attack and suicide in the latter part of the Okinawa campaign. Honorable death and ritual suicide held not only a practical military appeal but also a romantic appeal because of popular cultural traditions. Yahara opposed premature resort to honorable death, however, and often said so. He felt it was self-indulgent to make operational decisions because of romantic sentiment toward suicide and equally self-indulgent to seek an early and glorious escape instead of facing the heavy operational burdens still at hand.

### *Preparing the 4 May Offensive*

Once the commanders had agreed on an offensive and formally scheduled it for 4 May, it was up to Yahara to draft the plans with the help of staff members Nagano and Kusumaru. Yahara performed this task diligently but still had not abandoned his wish to minimize the ill effects of the offensive, and so he inserted a minor change likely to have a major consequence. The ambitious battle plan, in eight items, provided for counterlandings in the American rear by the 23d and 26th Shipping Engineer Regiments on the east and west coasts respectively (see map 7). The 62d Division, holding the left half of the Japanese line, was to maintain its position, then go on the offensive once attacking units on its right had broken through. The 24th Division was to provide the main weight of the offensive and punch through on the right half of the line. The preparatory barrage was to begin at 0450, on 4 May, and last for thirty minutes. The 24th

Division was then expected to sweep past the Tanabaru escarpment to the Minami-Uebaru hill and eventually reach Futema.<sup>9</sup>



Map 7. Plan for the IJA 4 May offensive

The 44th IMB was to shift on 3 May from its reserve line behind the 62d Division to a position northeast of Shuri. On 4 May when the 24th Division went forward, the 44th IMB was to drive northwest through the opening to the coast town of Oyama, thus cutting off the U.S. 1st Marine Division from retreat. Also, the IJN's infantry force was to put together four elite battalions and hold them in readiness, and the commander of 32d Army, as the lines moved forward, was to move his headquarters to Maeda.<sup>10</sup>

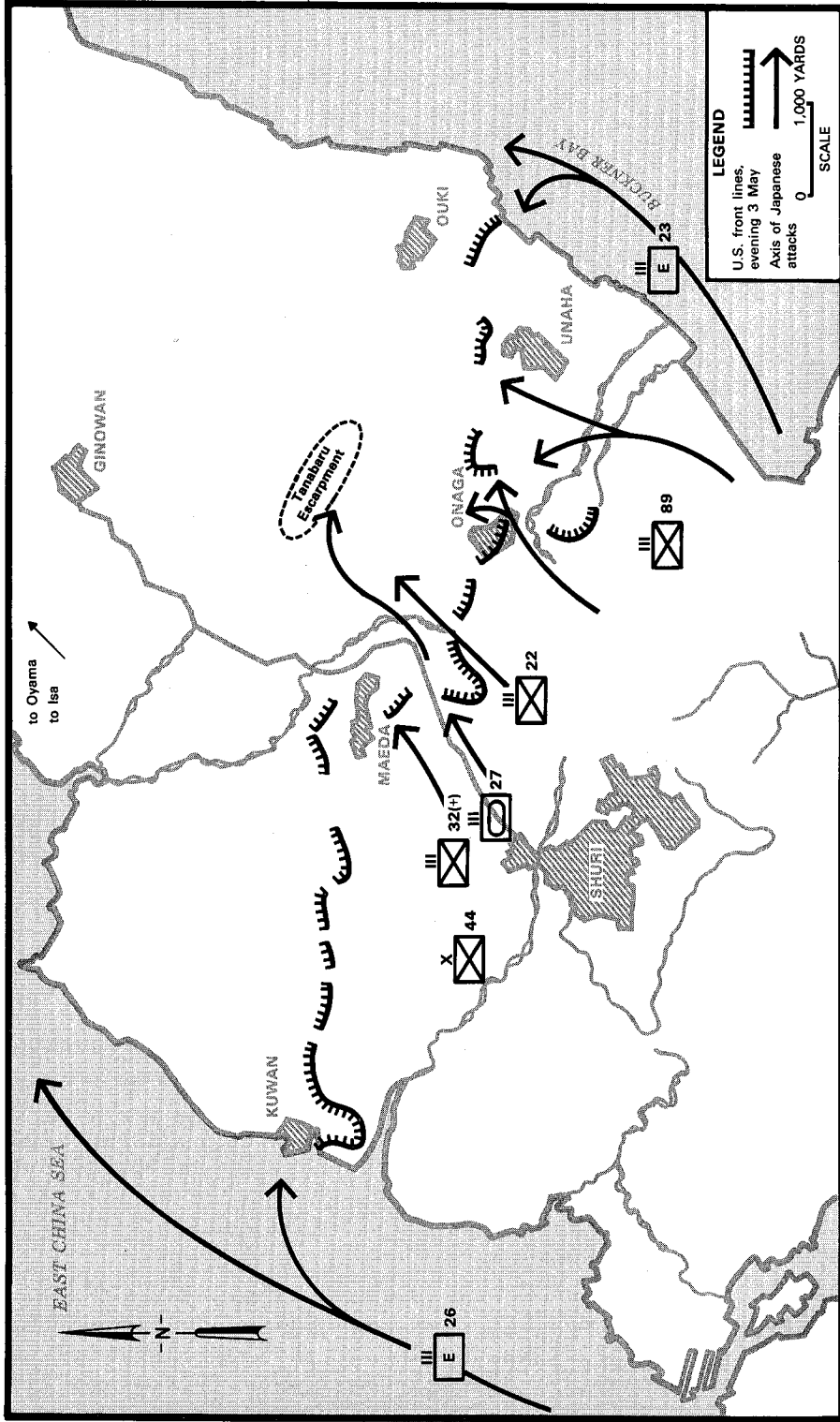
The small, but critical, adjustment Yahara made in the plans was that he would have had the 44th IMB move on 4 May, not 3 May. This change of a digit meant that 44th IMB would not be on hand in time to participate in the attack, thus reducing the attack force by a third. Yahara's objective was, in fact, to hold 44th IMB out of the battle and thereby reduce casualties. Cho caught the change in the first draft of the plans, however, and required Yahara to restore the original date. Yahara has earned both sympathy and criticism for altering the 44th IMB's movement date. He was doing what he thought was in the best interests of the army. But he was also personally subverting duly promulgated orders on which his superiors and the rest of the staff had agreed. Even though later events proved Yahara's judgment to be right, commentators have pointed to the impropriety of his conduct.<sup>11</sup>

Once the plans had been set and preparations were suitably underway, Ushijima and Cho held a previctory banquet in their chambers of the headquarters cave. The guests were nine general officers only. Electric lights blazed, and food and drink were plentiful. Cho's skilled chef prepared a feast from the pantry of canned goods. Fine Scotch came out of Ushijima's store. The headquarters office girls came dressed attractively to serve and pour, and smiles and laughter were inexhaustible. Ushijima and the rest, in high spirits, congratulated each other on the next day's certain victories. Yahara was reminded of Wellington's ball before Waterloo, and other officers aware of the banquet perhaps were too.<sup>12</sup>

### *Results of the 4 May Offensive*

Even as Ushijima's banquet was going on, offensive operations had begun. The 26th and 23d Shipping Engineer Regiments set out up the west and east coasts. Also, small groups of soldiers with light machine guns infiltrated behind U.S. lines on the night of 3 May to attack Americans as they became visible at dawn.<sup>13</sup>

The main attack by the 24th Division began on schedule. The artillery opened at 0450, 4 May, and 24th Division's advance began soon after. By 0530, 89th Regiment had penetrated the sector northeast of Onaga village and attacked on the right toward Unaha (see map 8). The 32d Regiment on the left was to follow and capture the hill touching Maeda village's east end and then move forward to take the Tanabaru escarpment. The 22d Regiment in the 24th Division's center was to go forward and lay smoke,



Source: Appleman, *Okinawa*, map XXXIII.

Map 8. The IJA 4 May offensive

then attack toward Onaga, joining itself to the left flank of the 89th Regiment.<sup>14</sup>

On the morning of 4 May, all of this seemed to go forward splendidly. The staff officers of 32d Army, including Yahara, were all smiles and congratulations. Ushijima joked that perhaps it was now time to move his headquarters forward to Maeda. After noon, realistic battle reports began to come in from the combat units, however, and spirits were again dampened. Adding to this effect was the fact that the Japanese artillery fire that had dominated in the morning no longer did so, and instead a heavy American counterbombardment had begun.<sup>15</sup>

The 89th Regiment on the far right had moved forward a few thousand yards before being blocked by the U.S. 7th Infantry Division. The 89th Regiment was damaged severely in the open by concentrated land, naval, and air bombardment: it lost half its strength. The IJA 22d Regiment in the center had even less luck, its advance being delayed by its task of laying smoke, and it suffered especially when the smoke unexpectedly cleared. American sources say the attacks were contained by 0800 on 4 May, and Japanese sources indicate that forward movement on the right had ceased by 1200.<sup>16</sup>

On the left flank of the 24th Division's line, the 32d Regiment was supposed to capture Maeda hill, then sweep forward and secure the Tanabaru escarpment. The 32d, however, became entangled with the rightmost elements of the IJA 62d Division (see map 6 in chapter 2), causing the confused combat in the vicinity of Maeda hill to become more so, and the attack on Maeda failed.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, the 44th IMB was in position northwest of Shuri ready to begin its drive toward Oyama as soon as the 32d Regiment opened a breach in the American lines. Saddened by the great casualties and by the failure of the 24th Division's attacks, Major General Suzuki, commander of the 44th IMB, asked to be thrown into the assault. Yahara told him, however, that Maeda hill was not yet sufficiently occupied for the 44th to move. It would only heighten the needless sacrifice and still not achieve a strategic breakthrough.<sup>18</sup>

On the night of 4–5 May, the 32d Regiment, 24th Division, achieved an unexpected success, however. Its 1st Battalion, under Captain Ito Koichi, had arbitrarily abandoned the hopeless frontal attacks it was ordered to make during the day and instead spent its time carefully reconnoitering the American positions. This allowed it during the night to infiltrate eastward across the Ginowan-Shuri road undetected and then to penetrate a half mile into the American rear to the Tanabaru escarpment. By dawn on 5 May, Ito's battalion held Tanabaru in force.<sup>19</sup>

Achieving brilliant results with only lackluster orders was not accidental with Captain Ito. He observed that, since there were so few radios in use, the 32d Army Staff made its orders based on the tardy reports of foot messengers. The orders were based on false assumptions of where the front line was, a recurring problem because the front line was irregular, not con-



tinuous, and constantly shifting. Ito thus acquired the habit of walking his lines each night to discover where his and the Americans' positions were. This allowed him to adjust his response to orders in an advantageous manner. This method, although unorthodox, stood Ito's battalion in good stead on 4 May.<sup>20</sup>

The IJA 27th Tank Regiment was also active in the Maeda hill sector at the left end of the 24th Division's line. This was the only occasion where the Japanese used tanks in an offensive role on Okinawa. The tank regiment also had little success trying to break through at Maeda, however. It penetrated to the far side of the Maeda heights on 5 May but was unable to contact the infantry unit there that was supposed to support it in the joint attack. It therefore returned to its 4 May positions. Some Japanese observers felt the 27th Tank Regiment had achieved an advantageous position on Maeda hill during the day of 4 May and that it and the supporting infantry elements in the area therefore ought not have been recalled the next day. Nevertheless, when the 27th Tank Regiment did withdraw, it had only six tanks remaining, all of which were then converted to earth-covered pillboxes southwest of Shuri.<sup>21</sup>

The 26th and 23d Shipping Engineer Regiments fared even worse than the tank units. The 26th Engineers were supposed to move up the west coast on the night of 3—4 May and land at Oyama, well behind the American lines. There they were to link up with the 44th IMB when it swept into Oyama. The 26th Shipping Engineer Regiment mistook its mark, however, and turned into the coast at Kuwan, a point lying just behind the American front line and heavily defended. At 0200, elements of the U.S. 1st Marine Division opened fire on the barges of the 26th Engineers and fired machine guns abundantly on the Japanese trying to reach shore over the reefs. All of the boats were destroyed, and the few IJA soldiers who reached Kuwan were easily mopped up. A fragment of the 26th landed farther north at Isa, but these too were easily destroyed.<sup>22</sup>

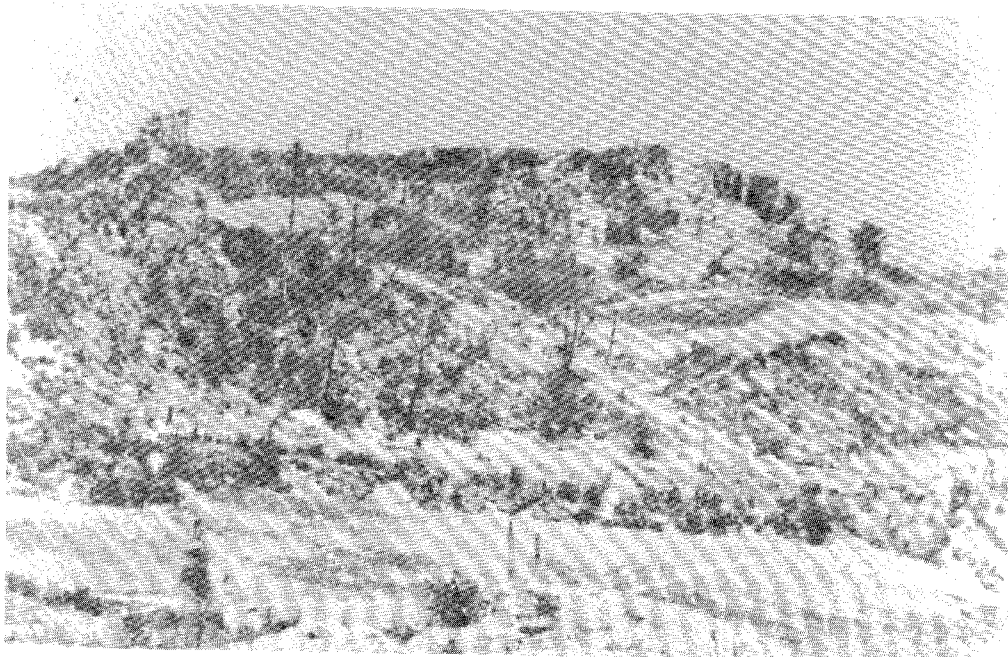
The 23d Shipping Engineer Regiment, moving along the east coast at the same time, did no better. It landed just behind the U.S. 7th Infantry Division line near Ouki as planned but being exposed on the flat coastland was easily contained and destroyed by the 7th Division.<sup>23</sup>

The Japanese staff, however, had no knowledge of these disasters, apparently because the shipping units were in too much disarray to report. During the morning of 4 May the staff still assumed the counterlanding forces were enjoying success, and on 5 May these units were called back by radio, even though by that time they had ceased to exist. They "disregarded the order and fought to the last man," as an IJA staff officer later put it, though, in fact, they had "fought to the last man" the day before.<sup>24</sup>

By 5 May the forward motion of the 24th Division's offensive had completely stopped. The depleted 62d Division on the western half of the isthmus had not been able to move at all. The 44th IMB, though poised for action, was not even sent on its planned arc northwest to Oyama. The only bright

spot was that, at dawn, the 1st Battalion of the 32d Regiment, 24th Division, under Captain Ito Koichi, held the Tanabaru escarpment.

When the 1st Battalion reached the Tanabaru heights, it sent a visual light signal to 32d Army, since its radio cryptographers had been lost. But Colonel Yahara doubted on the basis of this one signal that they were really there. Since Yahara administered operations, this guaranteed that Ito's battalion would remain unsupported and isolated. Yahara always erred on the side of caution, and Ito somehow always survived it.<sup>25</sup>



The Tanabaru escarpment. Captain Ito Koichi's 1st Battalion, 32d Regiment, held this position on 5-6 May.

At dawn on 5 May, the American forces counterattacked Ito and a fierce firefight ensued that lasted two days. The IJA 1st Battalion dug in on the heights, reoccupied the caves in the area, and vigorously defended them when the U.S. 17th Infantry Regiment counterattacked. The Japanese used machine guns, mortars, grenades, and a 75-mm pack howitzer they had brought with them, as well as captured American weapons. They cut telephone wires between the U.S. 17th Infantry Regiment and its battalions and cut off all access of that regiment to its own rear through the town of Tanabaru. On the night of the 6th, Ito's men made their way back to Japanese lines in accord with an order issued to them at noon on 6 May. The U.S. 17th Infantry Regiment calculated that the IJA 1st Battalion had lost 462 men.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, the news on 5 May was so discouraging that, at 1800, Ushijima, the 32d Army commander, took it on himself to suspend the entire offensive

and recalled all units to their pre-4 May positions. He thus spared Cho and other staff officers from having to make this humiliating decision. Ushijima summoned Yahara and told him of the planned retreat. That night, the order was sent by coded radio to all units. Ushijima told Yahara that Yahara had been right after all, that the attack had failed, and that he would give Yahara more latitude in the future. He said that he had promised Minister of the Army Sugiyama and IJA Chief of Staff Umezu that he would not execute a premature honorable death attack and that, although the army had suffered heavy casualties, he would fight on with the remaining forces. Cho also rose to this occasion and helped soothe the anger and frustration of Jin and the others over halting the attack on which so much had been wagered. The young staff officers gave in temporarily to tears of despair.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, the casualties suffered in the 4 May offensive were quite large, even though there were no operational gains. In two days, the 32d Army had lost 7,000 men of its original 76,000-man force. The 62d Division had only one-fourth of its strength remaining, the 24th Division three-fifths, and the 44th IMB four-fifths. Moreover, the capability of the 5th Artillery Command was sharply reduced. Many of its tubes were lost because they were moved out of their caves toward the front lines to give better support for the offensive. Besides that, a large volume of shells had been expended so that the daily ration of shells per gun was reduced from fifty to fifteen per day. Overall, artillery firepower was thus reduced to about 50 percent of its original strength.<sup>28</sup>

All in all, while the 4–5 May offensive was a catastrophe, it was a brilliant catastrophe in the sense that it was a bold and imaginative stroke. It was useful for morale before it happened because it gave hope to staff members who were aware of the plans for it. It also may have had some value in keeping American commanders off-balance, forcing them to keep more guard details in rear areas and the like, though there is little evidence of this. A bold surprise is often advantageous in a campaign, even against long odds. That proved not to be the case for the 4 May offensive, however. The Japanese lost precious troops and materiel and, from then on, would have to rely more and more on converted service forces. The spirit of hope was also a casualty. A pall of gloom settled back on the 32d Army Staff after the 4 May offensive, and it never lifted.

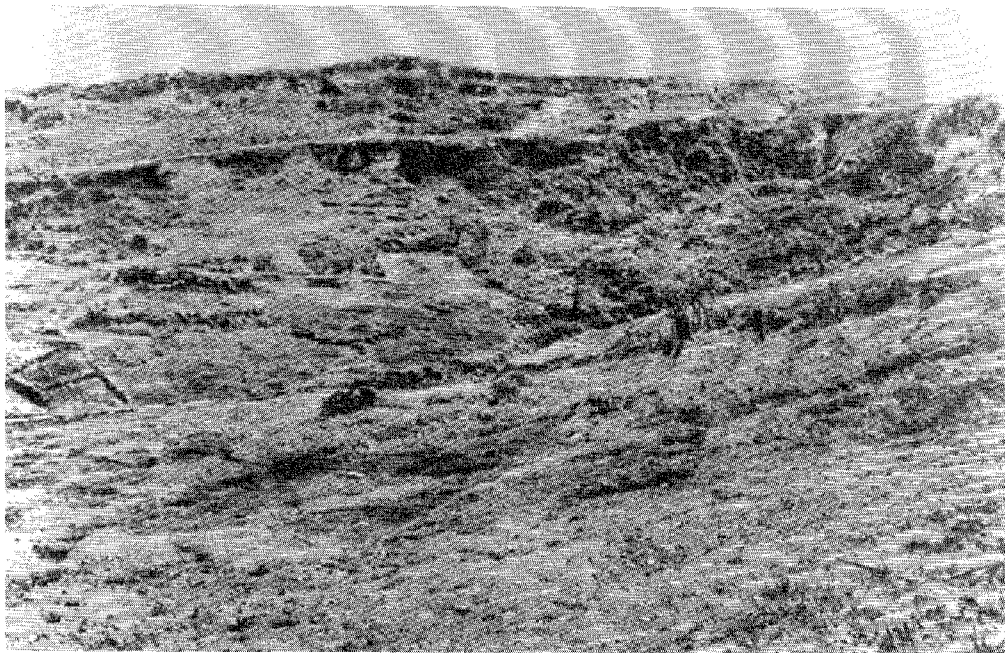
### *The 29 May Withdrawal*

After the suspension of the 4 May offensive, American forces again took the initiative and made deep incursions into the Japanese lines along both the east and west coasts. By 22 May, the 32d Army Staff was again debating what should be done. The answer that ultimately emerged was that all of 32d Army would withdraw to the Kiyau Peninsula in the south, form a new line, and fight on. The withdrawal would demonstrate two characteristic features of 32d Army's performance: first, its being torn still between romantic self-sacrifice and rational economy of force, and second, its aptitude for deft and effective maneuver in stressed circumstances.

After the failure of the 4 May offensive, 32d Army's only plan was to hold its lines. Since that approach was failing, Cho and others decided an appeal should be made to IGHQ for a massive air attack on the American fleet that would disrupt the U.S. Tenth Army's supply and cause its advance to falter. Major Jin Naomichi, the aviation staff officer, was ordered on 10 May to carry this plea to Tokyo. Jin was also to report on the state of affairs on Okinawa and the combat lessons learned. Yahara, although he did not interfere, opposed this plan on the grounds that with six divisions ashore, the American campaign would not be much affected by such additional air support as IGHQ could muster. The ten aggressive kamikaze attacks already launched on U.S. shipping around Okinawa had had only a limited effect on the ground fighting. Moreover, Yahara felt it would appear self-serving to ask that planes husbanded for the final defense of the homeland be used up instead on the Okinawa campaign. Yahara nonetheless attended Jin's farewell at Shuri and gave him a notebook to deliver to his father-in-law, a retired IJA lieutenant general. Jin was supposed to return to Tokyo by seaplane, but when the plane was unable to put down because of rough water, he set out by night in an ordinary fishing boat. The main consequence of Jin's voyage to Tokyo was that he himself, a leading advocate of sacrificial attack, survived the Okinawa campaign. News of his safe arrival in Tokyo caused some ambiguous feelings among his colleagues who remained in harm's way, however.<sup>29</sup>

Soon after Jin's departure, another sign appeared indicating that 32d Army's days were numbered. Several dozen young women were present in the Shuri cave headquarters, as they might be in any secure IJA office facility, working at routine clerical tasks. The staff members felt that, although it was their duty to die with the army, it was not the duty of these young women to do so. The women were therefore ordered to make their way out of the Shuri underground and rejoin the civilian elements of the Okinawa population. The young women protested that they were prepared to die when they came to the headquarters and that they were being sent away just because they were women. Nonetheless, they were made to feel they had to obey the commander's order and depart. As they scrambled out of the cave with their rucksacks in tow, the soldiers shouted after them things like "you may get yourself killed, but don't let anything happen to that fabulous face." This helped relieve the tension for a while. Ushijima and Cho, sensing the end, gave the young women as personal gifts their few treasured items of fine ceramic ware.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, the U.S. Tenth Army resumed its offensive on 11 May. Through sustained pressure and hard fighting for particular objectives such as Conical Hill on the east coast and Sugar Loaf on the west coast, the Americans pushed the whole Japanese line back a half mile by 21 May. They achieved especially deep lodgments on the two extreme flanks, which was their intention. Especially on the eastern flank, elements of the U.S. 96th Infantry Division had probed as far as Sugar Hill and were close to turning the Japanese flank at Yonabaru.<sup>31</sup>



Reverse slope of Wana Ridge. U.S. forces captured this position only 1,000 yards northwest of the Shuri command cave on 21—23 May.

The 32d Army faced the same situation it had in mid-April. Its line was crumbling at both ends and about to collapse. This time, however, there were no reserves available to bring forward, once more placing the 32d Army Staff in a dilemma. Yahara, who had responsibility for the army's operations, felt withdrawal to the Kiyau Peninsula would be best. By this time, however, his relations with Cho had become so adversarial that he dared not even mention this solution. Instead he arranged for a junior staff member, Major Nagano Hideo, to submit to Cho a short position paper that spelled out abundant pros and cons but tended to favor the Kiyau withdrawal. Cho characteristically preferred an unyielding defense of the Shuri area where the 32d Army already was.<sup>32</sup>

To resolve the question, Cho convened a meeting of all major unit chiefs of staff on 22 May. The meeting considered three proposals. The first was to encircle Shuri and prepare a concentrated defense. Such a position would be too concentrated to hold the 50,000 surviving troops and the many long-range guns that were still intact, however. Moreover, such a restricted area would be extremely vulnerable to artillery fire.<sup>33</sup>

The second option considered was to withdraw from the Shuri line to the Chinen Peninsula. The Chinen was favorable as defensive terrain. It offered obstacles to easy tank movement and was encircled by sea and cliffs that would make amphibious envelopment more difficult. But the Chinen did not have good road access, which would hamper Japanese transport. Besides that, the Americans, who were already breaking through on

the east, threatened the withdrawal routes to the eastward-lying Chinen Peninsula. The main difficulty with the Chinen, however, was that its defenses had been developed earlier by the relatively small 44th IMB. It therefore did not have caves enough or stored stockpiles enough to accommodate the entire 32d Army.<sup>34</sup>

The third possibility was to withdraw and form a line across the Kiyon Peninsula. The Kiyon had two defensible peaks, Yaeju-Dake and Yuza-Dake. Much of the coastal front was protected by thirty- to forty-meter-high precipices to frustrate amphibious landings in the rear. Having been developed by the larger 24th Division, the Kiyon had caves and stockpiles enough to provide for the entire 32d Army. The major disadvantage was that much of the terrain was open and even, thus allowing tanks to move freely. This terrain defect was the more serious since by this time 32d Army's antitank guns and mines, and for that matter its best antitank soldiers, already had been lost.<sup>35</sup>

Each chief of staff at the 22 May meeting was asked which alternative his unit favored. Colonel Ueno, chief of staff of the 62d Division, spoke first, in urgent tones. He said that the 62d Division had nearly exhausted its resources, above ground and below, and lacked the energy and means for a withdrawal. Moreover, the division had several thousand wounded that it could not bear to leave behind. Therefore, the men in the 62d Division wished to be allowed honorable death on the Shuri line. Most of their friends had already died there. The other 32d Army Staff officers, hearing Colonel Ueno's plea, were deeply moved.<sup>36</sup>

The chief of staff of the 24th Division, Colonel Kitani, then spoke, describing the advantages of moving the army to the Kiyon Peninsula. He pointed out that the 24th Division's 24th Transportation Regiment still had eighty trucks intact that could be used to move the army. A staff officer of the 44th IMB then gave his opinion in favor of moving the army to the Chinen Peninsula. In fact, each unit's chief of staff wished the new line placed in the area where each unit had developed its own respective fortifications before the battle began. Each unit apparently wished to fight on familiar ground and in familiar works.<sup>37</sup>

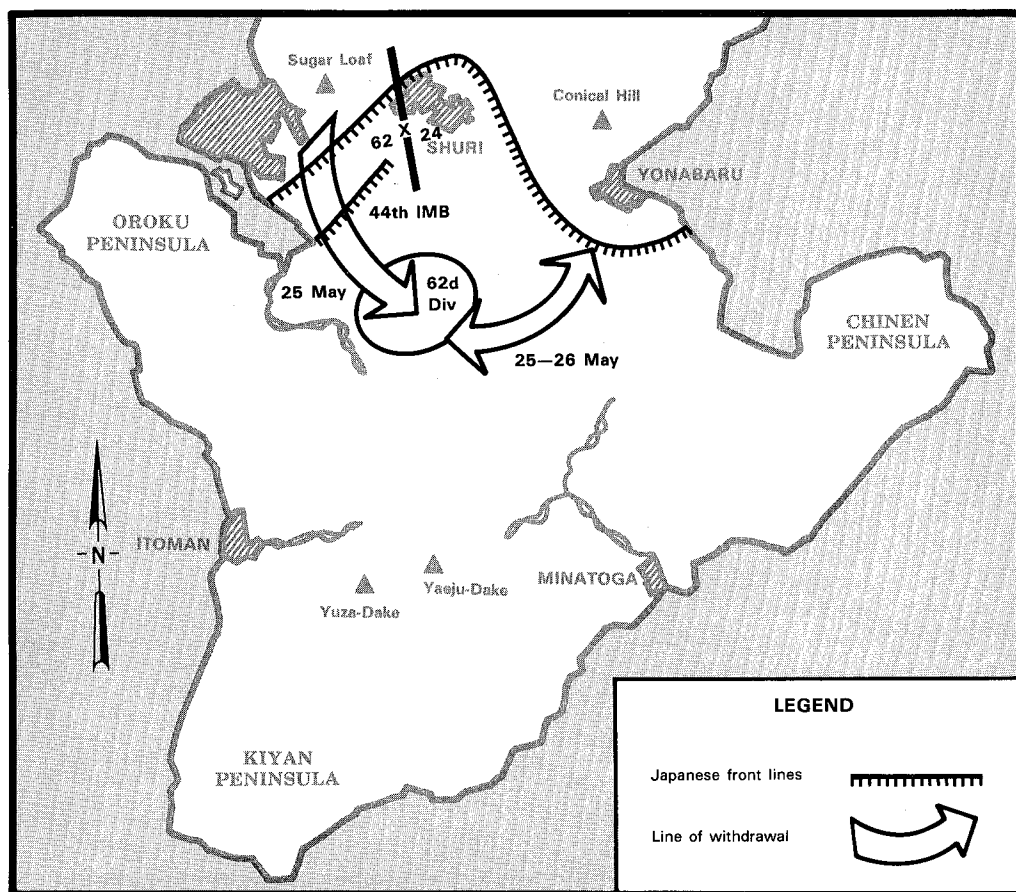
After the meeting was dismissed Yahara carried his recommendation to Cho, not changed by the meeting, that 32d Army should withdraw to a new line across the Kiyon Peninsula. He challenged the point of view of Colonel Ueno and the 62d Division that they should fight on around Shuri. He said that seeking honorable death at Shuri because comrades had died there was pure sentimentality. The Shuri position, once surrounded, would be indefensible and lead to a military disaster. Okinawa forces would fail to delay the coming struggle for the homeland. To die casually and with no good results was barbaric. The army's policy had to be realistic, and that meant moving to the Kiyon Peninsula.<sup>38</sup>

Yahara was evidently braced for another struggle with Cho over whether spiritual or operational priorities should prevail, but unnecessarily. The likable and unpredictable Cho straightforwardly agreed with the recommenda-

tion and wisely refrained from commenting on the argument. Retreat to Kiyau thus became 32d Army's policy on the next day, 23 May, when endorsed by Commander Ushijima. Movement of the wounded and munitions was to begin at once.<sup>39</sup>

The 32d Army Staff was eager to conduct the retreat from Shuri in such a way that the Americans did not break through the Shuri line and destroy the Japanese forces in detail while they were moving. In fact the Japanese would be so successful at this that the Americans had no idea a retreat was taking place until the day before it was completed. The 32d Army Staff was especially concerned that the Americans' deep inroads along the east coast near Yonabaru might produce an American breakthrough at the east end of the line. The U.S. 77th Infantry Division in that case could sweep westward and cut off the Japanese retreat, thus encircling large portions of the Japanese force, which would be caught in the open.

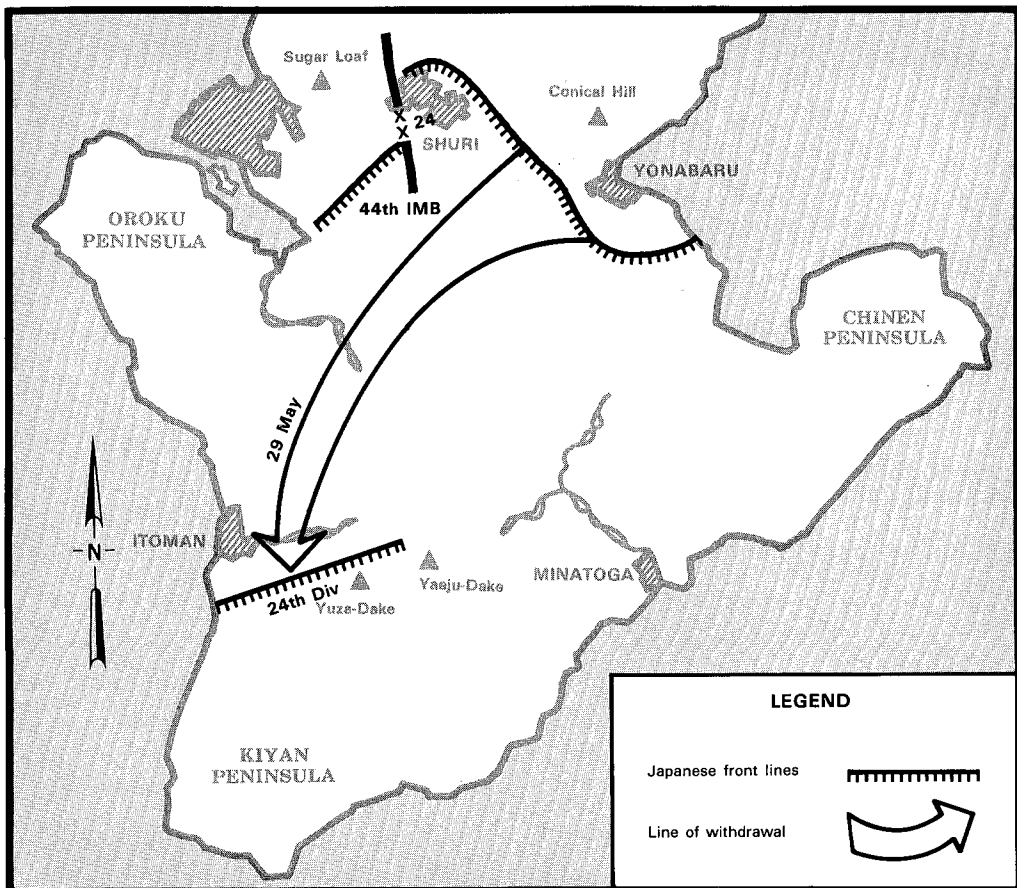
To prevent this, the remaining men of the 62d Division were to withdraw behind the Shuri lines on 25 May and attack the Yonabaru salient, thus containing the U.S. 77th Infantry Division and pushing it back away from the retreat routes (see map 9). This would allow the retreat of the



Map 9. Preliminary withdrawal of the 62d Division, 25 May 1945

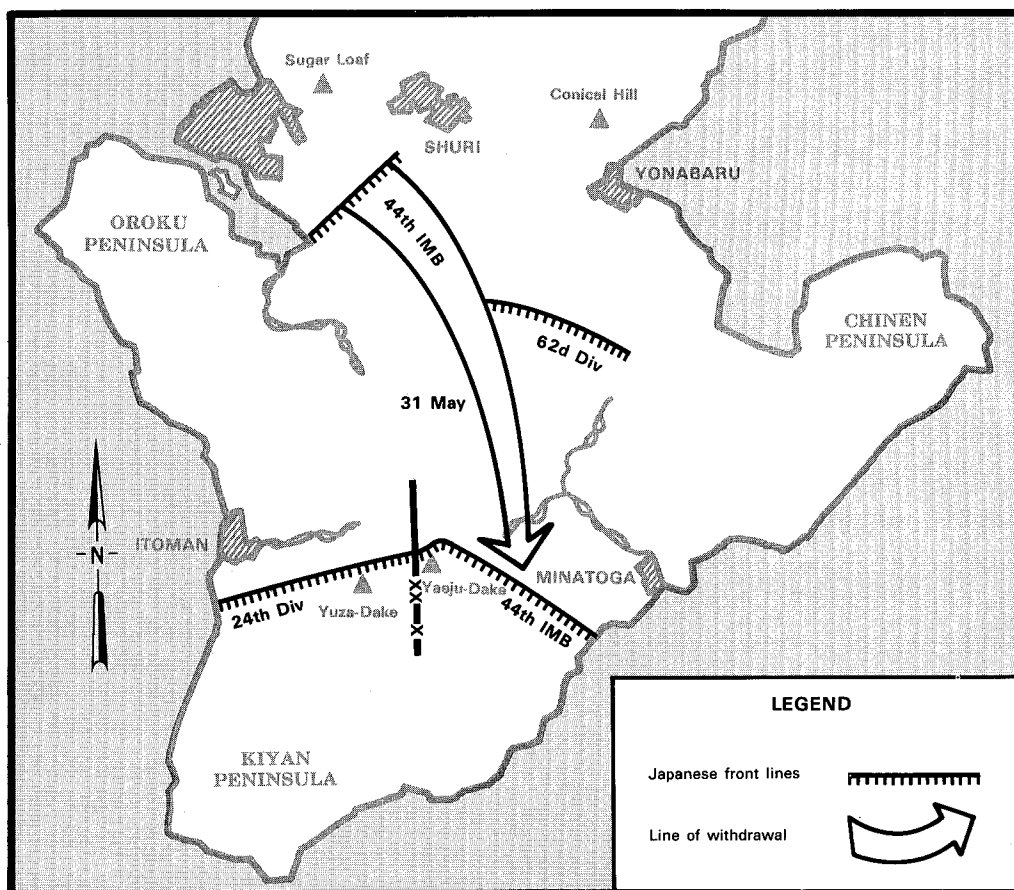
main IJA line units on 29 May. In the event IJA 62d Division withdrew south of Shuri on the night of 24–25 May and did attack American positions at Yonabaru on the night of 25–26 May. This did not hurl the Americans back, but it did slow the U.S. 77th Infantry Division's forward progress and prevented its achieving an untimely breakthrough. The impression this made on the American commanders, who were unaware of the imminent retreat, was that the Japanese were fighting fiercely to maintain existing lines.<sup>40</sup>

After the east flank was somewhat stabilized, the IJA 24th Division pulled back from the northeast part of the line to the southwest on 29 May (see map 10). The 44th IMB pulled away from the northwest part of the line to the southeast on 31 May (see map 11). The 62d Division completed its withdrawal from its intermediate lines south of Shuri to a reserve area south of the new Kiyau lines on 4 June (see map 12). The 24th Division was also required to leave behind a screening force, which fell back to successively southward positions according to a timetable, reaching the Kiyau position also on 4 June.<sup>41</sup>



Map 10. Withdrawal of the 24th Division, 29 May 1945

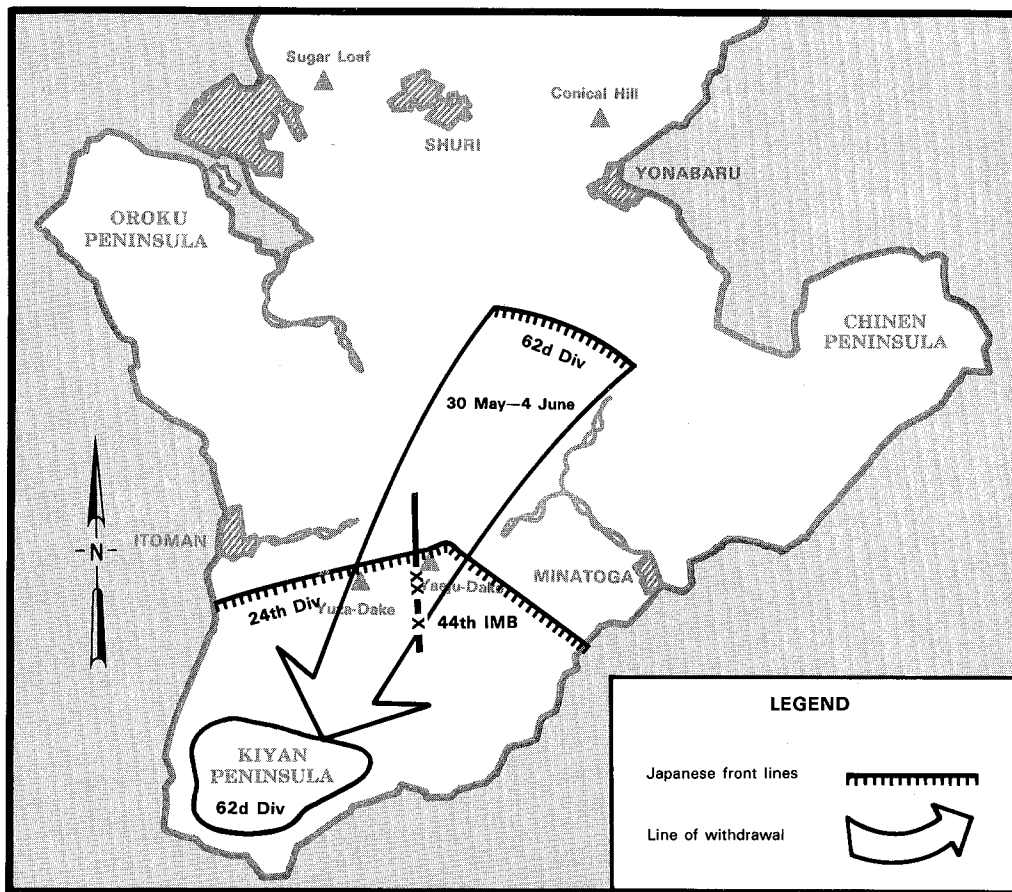




Map 11. Withdrawal of the 44th Independent Mixed Brigade, 31 May 1945

The withdrawal of 29 May to 4 June was completed in an orderly way, and the American forces did not inflict heavy losses by pursuit. These advantages were achieved by the retreat's being carefully planned and because the spring rainy season began in the last week of May, a little later and harder than usual. This hampered American tanks and reconnaissance aircraft. The rains also hampered the Japanese retreat transport, however, and turned the shafts of IJA caves into "small rivers." All of the Japanese movements were carried out under cover of darkness, and the 24th Transport Regiment of the 24th Division performed yeoman service with its eighty trucks.<sup>42</sup>

The Japanese withdrawal to fresh lines in the south succeeded in part because the Americans did not make an early concerted effort to break through the Shuri shell. On 26 May American aerial observers noted men, artillery, and armor moving south, but they also reported a large column moving north. This latter force was probably the IJA rear-area garrison units that were called up from the Chinen Peninsula to aid in the 25–26 May attacks on Yonabaru. Since the American analysts were not aware of



Map 12. Final withdrawal of the 62d Division, 4 June 1945

an overall pattern of southerly movement, they concluded that the Japanese were using the bad weather to cover an overdue rotation of reserve and frontline troops.<sup>43</sup>

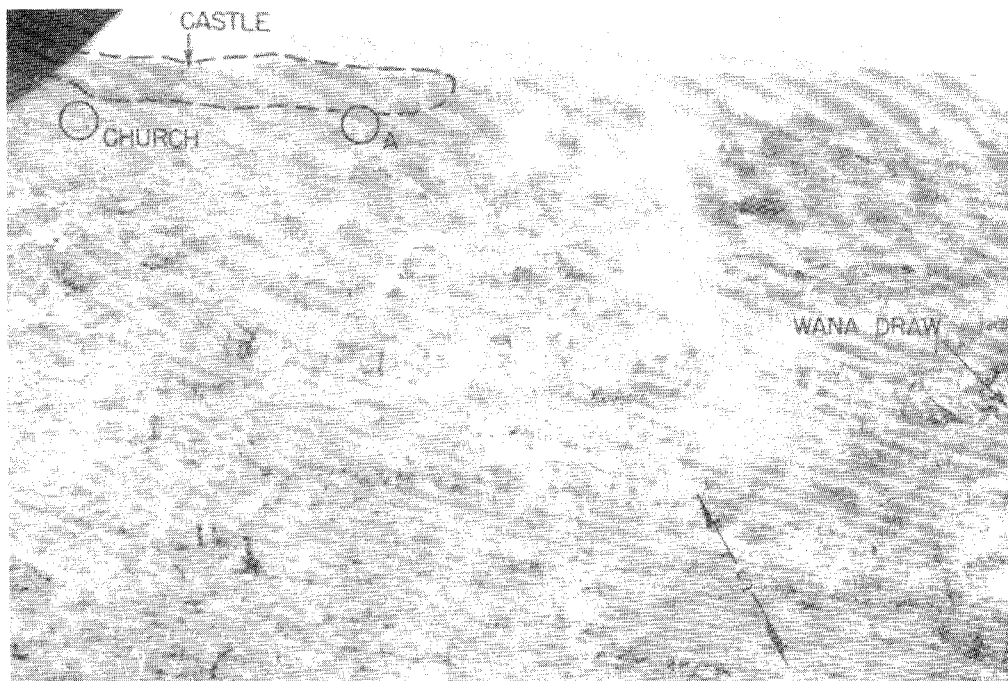
Visibility on 29 May was zero, and air observation was impossible. Nevertheless, by 30 May, because of vacated IJA positions found west of Shuri and other accumulating bits of evidence, U.S. Tenth Army intelligence finally reached a consensus that the Shuri lines were being abandoned. But the Americans did not know where the new lines were and assumed they were about two miles behind the old ones, just enough to straighten out the salients the Americans had built up on the east and west.<sup>44</sup>

American forces elbowed into Shuri on 31 May, completing the reduction of the formidable Shuri line. They realized by this time that they were dealing only with a rear guard. The American force prepared to pursue the Japanese southward on 1 June, but by this time, the 44th IMB, the last IJA unit in the vicinity, had already completed its withdrawal. Moreover, given the sheltered nature of the Japanese defenses, it was impossible for the Americans to move forward safely if even a few Japanese remained in



A U.S. convoy in early June. Mud from spring rains hampered both the IJA withdrawal and the U.S. pursuit.

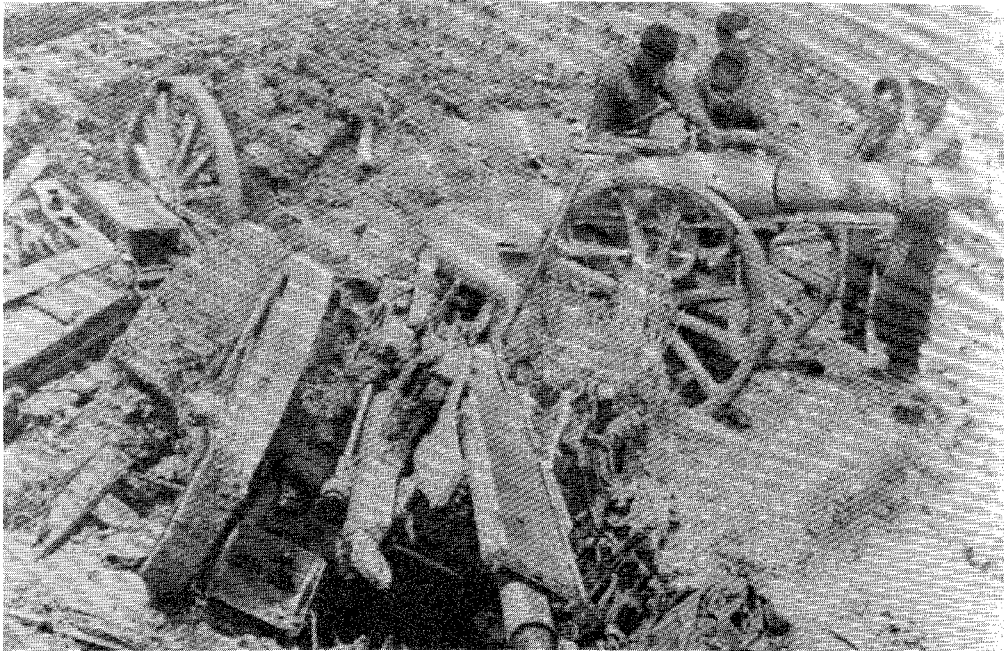
the pillbox caves. Those last few had to be eliminated, and that inevitably took days. The problem remained even after the Shuri line fell, because the IJA 62d Division and the 24th Division's rear guard both manned intermediate positions between Shuri and the Kiyon area. Even though the IJA screening forces were few, safe and rapid forward pursuit by the Americans was impossible. In the upshot, U.S. Tenth Army units were not aligned and ready to engage the new Kiyon lines until 6 June.<sup>45</sup>



Shuri Ridge, site of the IJA 32d Army command cave (arrow), captured by U.S. forces on 31 May. Photograph of 23 May shows this area, formerly a town and fields, already rubble by fire.

The Japanese thus succeeded in moving all their units intact to the south, and the Americans were unable to annihilate any through the rapid pursuit strategists dream of. Nonetheless, the IJA losses in the execution of this operation were staggering. When the 32d Army Staff took stock on 4 June of forces on hand, there were only 30,000 men left of the 50,000 men who had been present two weeks before. The 32d Army had lost 40 percent of its personnel in the one-week retreat, some through the 62d Division's aggressive attacks against the Americans at Yonabaru, some in the interdictive artillery fire directed at the Japanese on the roads, some in the countless, hopeless rear-guard defenses. Although historians have never made much of this, one must wonder if the smoothly executed retreat was really well advised or allowed the Japanese to resist for a longer period. Yahara, who condemned the heavy losses (7,000 men) of the 4 May offensive he opposed, had no self-criticism for the far heavier losses of the 29 May retreat that he sponsored.<sup>46</sup>

IJA staff officers noted that the 30,000 men who did survive now included few trained combat troops. Only 20 percent of the combat troops present on 1 April were still able to fight. Most of the personnel surviving after 4 June were service support and construction troops. Moreover, the retreat resulted in heavy losses of infantry weapons other than personal firearms. Only one-fifth of the machine guns and one-tenth of the heavier weapons survived. Hand grenades and mines were now almost exhausted. Only the large field guns that were kept in the rear with the 5th Artillery



Some troops and materiel were hit by interdictive fire in the 24 May—4 June retreat, including these IJA 150-mm howitzers

Command were relatively unscathed. Half of these were still intact, including sixteen 150-mm howitzers.<sup>47</sup>

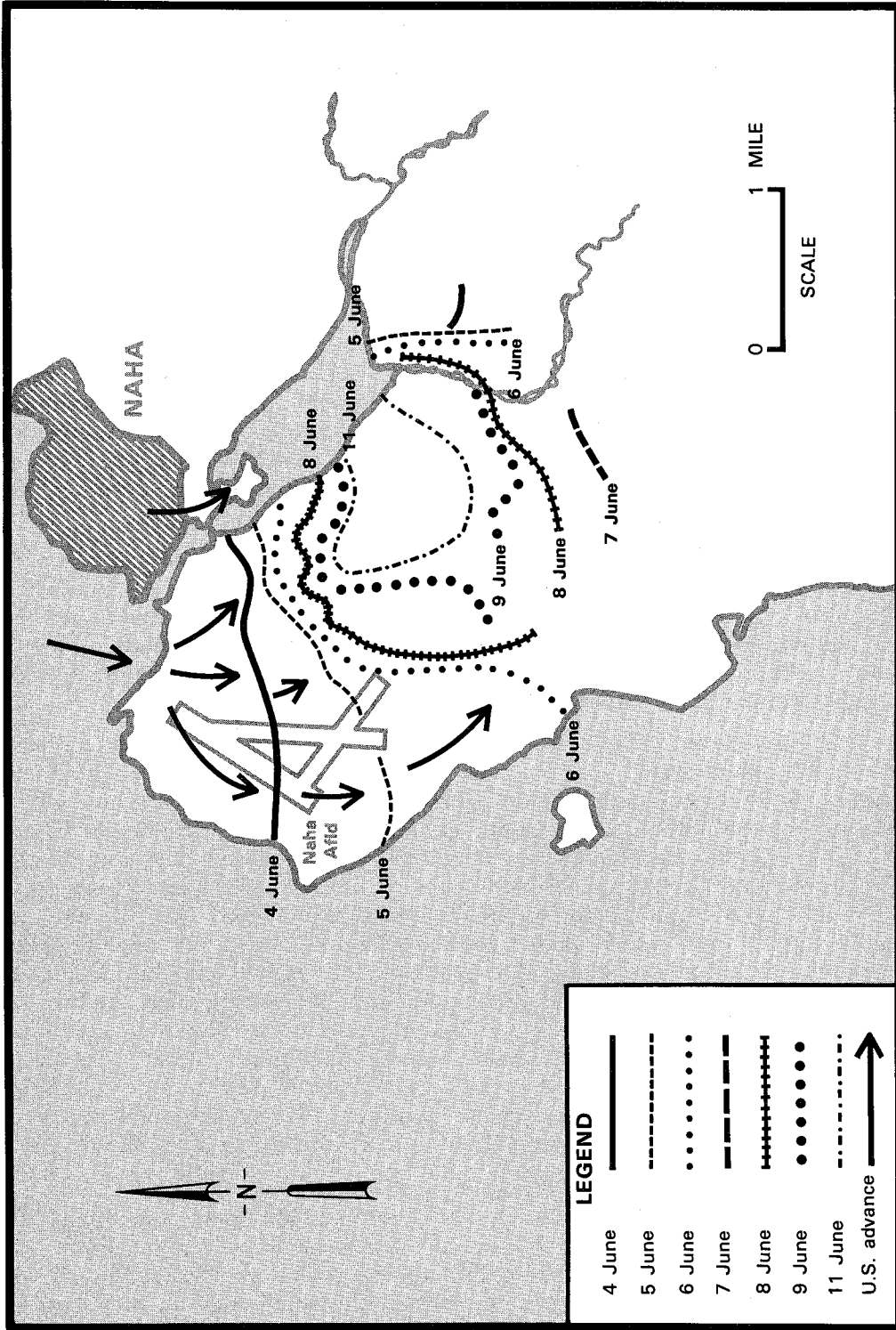
Officers of the upper echelons also survived. Though company-grade officers serving in line companies were almost wiped out, battalion commanders and their staffs were nearly untouched. All but fourteen battalion-level staff members were still at their posts on 4 June. This allowed for maximum organizational cohesion in spite of the heavy losses on the line. Even so, these men were becoming increasingly exposed by the savage fighting, a staff without an army.<sup>48</sup>

The 32d Army on the Kiyau Peninsula was, in men and weapons, a diminished army, an army aware that its days of organized resistance were numbered. The army's final drama was played out in microcosm by the Okinawa Naval Base Force on Oroku Peninsula from 26 May to 13 June. The Naval Base Force, under Rear Admiral Ota Minoru, was positioned from the beginning of the campaign on Oroku Peninsula where it defended the naval port and air station. This force had developed elaborate seaward coastal defenses in cave emplacements and also land defense fortifications as other units had on Okinawa.

There were 8,825 IJN officers and sailors in the Naval Base Force as well as 1,100 Okinawan Home Guards, a total of 9,925 men. Of this total, however, only a few hundred had been initially trained and equipped for ground combat. All the rest were in signals, torpedo maintenance, naval stores, and the like. In short, the Oroku naval detachment, although it faced a seasoned ground combat force, was not one itself.<sup>49</sup>

On 26 May, as orders for the retreat to the Kiyau were being disseminated, the Naval Base Force received a radio message stating that it should destroy its heavy weapons and withdraw to the Kiyau Peninsula on 2 June. Ota misinterpreted the order, however, and moved his force to the Kiyau on 28 May. Almost immediately after reaching the new positions in the Kiyau, however, the naval force returned to its former base on Oroku without permission. Apparently, the Naval Base Force staff did not like the new positions and wished during its last stand to occupy the more familiar positions it had prepared and in that part of the island that had traditionally belonged to the navy. The 32d Army Staff, on hearing these sentiments expressed by Ota, was pleased to authorize the naval elements' return to the Oroku base after the fact, despite having just been ordered to leave it. The 32d Army accounts of this episode vary, but one may assume 32d Army was trying to alleviate its very serious faux pas of having ordered the Naval Base Force to die in army lines rather than defending its own base.<sup>50</sup>

The U.S. 6th Marine Division landed on Oroku's north coast on the morning of 4 June, and a pitched battle ensued that lasted ten days. The Okinawa Naval Base Force in the few days since its return to Oroku had resumed the defensive positions it had spent months preparing. The attacking U.S. Marines faced caves and sited machine-gun nets as they had on the Shuri line.



Map 13. The battle line on Oroku Peninsula, 4—13 June 1945

Although few of these IJN troops were trained for ground warfare, they were extremely resourceful in converting air and antiship equipment to ground use. The Japanese used 200-mm naval guns against tanks and fired 200-mm antiship rockets into the Marines' lines. The Marines called the rockets "locomotives from hell" because of the din, though, like the 320-mm mortars they had little fragmentation and caused few casualties. The Naval Base Force also used mines and mortars abundantly against the advancing Marines. Perhaps most effective, however, was its deployment of 252 machine guns, many of them taken from damaged aircraft. Even though this was a force not trained for ground combat, its resourcefulness and ample equipment allowed it to inflict casualties on the Americans at a rate comparable to that on the Shuri line.<sup>51</sup>

Even so, the U.S. 6th Marine Division pushed the Japanese Naval Base Force back down the peninsula and encircled it at the east end of the peninsula's base by 11 June (see map 13). Ota sent his farewell telegram to 32d Army on 11 June, and his headquarters sent its last message to 32d Army at 1600, 12 June. The IJN line broke on 12 June, and by 13 June organized resistance by the IJN had ceased. One hundred fifty-nine members of the Japanese Naval Base Force surrendered, the first time this occurred on Okinawa. Rear Admiral Ota Minoru and five of his aides committed suicide in the Oroku headquarters cave at 0100, 13 June.<sup>52</sup>

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