

# *Anticipation of the Battle, March 1944 to March 1945*

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The Battle of Okinawa, 1 April to 22 June 1945, is known to English-language readers through a variety of accounts, both official and commercial. Some of these works focus on operations, and some provide personal perspectives, so that most major features of the American experience on Okinawa are thoroughly known. However, another whole dimension of the Okinawa struggle is not as well known: Japan's Okinawa. To staff and line soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA), the events of Okinawa appeared quite differently than they did to their American counterparts. For the Japanese, the operational problems were different, the solutions were different, and the perceived results from day to day were different. American combat experiences on Okinawa teach us something about the lethality of modern warfare; Japan's experiences on Okinawa may teach us still more.

The Japanese Empire's strategic need to hold Okinawa was absolute. After U.S. air strikes on Truk in February 1944, Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ) assumed that the United States sooner or later would try to seize Okinawa as an advanced base for invading Japan itself and garrisoned the island with the newly organized 32d Army. As time went by, it became apparent that any U.S. assault on Okinawa would enjoy air superiority, artillery superiority, naval artillery cover, superior firepower on the line, and predominance in armor. Japan's 32d Army knew well in advance both where it would fight on Okinawa and that it would face overwhelming lethality.

Although the large Japanese garrison on Okinawa was as well supplied as it could be with men, provisions, and artillery, it was not well prepared at first with doctrine and training. Since Japan's Greater East Asian War began in 1937, its army had been conceived of and was a superior light infantry force. It relied on infiltration, maneuver, bold attack, and close combat to prevail over its lightly armed adversaries, the Chinese and European colonial garrisons. Beginning with Guadalcanal, however, Japan faced an adversary with more firepower than itself on limited island terrain. For an isolated Japanese island garrison subject to devastating offshore bombardment, maneuver and close combat skills were of little use. In fact, the IJA's received operational methods were completely inappropriate to the realities of most of the Pacific campaign, including Okinawa.

The latest trends in strategic doctrine being developed by IGHQ were also completely unsuitable as it turned out. IGHQ expected the defense of Okinawa to be achieved mainly by air power and envisioned Okinawa as a gigantic air base. In the eyes of IGHQ, 32d Army's mission was only to build the airstrips and then to provide service support for the air operations and security on the ground for the fields. In fact, however, severe shortages of planes and pilots made air defense of Okinawa unfeasible. The IJA's long-standing light infantry doctrine prescribed too little equipment for 32d Army at the same time that the new high-technology air strategy required far more state-of-the-art equipment than existed. The 32d Army was stranded between the two incompatible concepts.

How, then, did Japan's 32d Army cope with the problem of extreme lethality and its own doctrine's total inadequacy? The 32d Army Staff became locked in controversy over these problems, but in the end, ignoring their tradition and their superiors, they resolved to dig deep, contest the ground foot by foot, and use bold counterattack only selectively as an instrument of defense. Ultimately their methods resembled the fluid defense-in-depth tactics developed by German forces in World War I, though these methods would be used effectively here to oppose modern tanks and aircraft.

### *Early Preparations: The Air Strategy*

The Okinawa campaign began for Americans on 1 April 1945, the day U.S. forces landed (L day). For the Japanese high command, however, the defense of Okinawa began over a year before. American air strikes against Truk in February 1944 made it clear to Japanese strategists that the Marianas line could fall, leaving the Ryukyu line as the main zone of defense. There then began a year of operational analysis, political maneuvering, reorganization, facilities development, and supply stockage that would determine as much as anything else the performance of Japanese forces on Okinawa. Japanese commentators sometimes leave the impression that these preparations were all important for the outcome and that the particular battle events were of minor consequence. Surviving staff officers were convinced that decisions made the year before L day critically affected what happened.

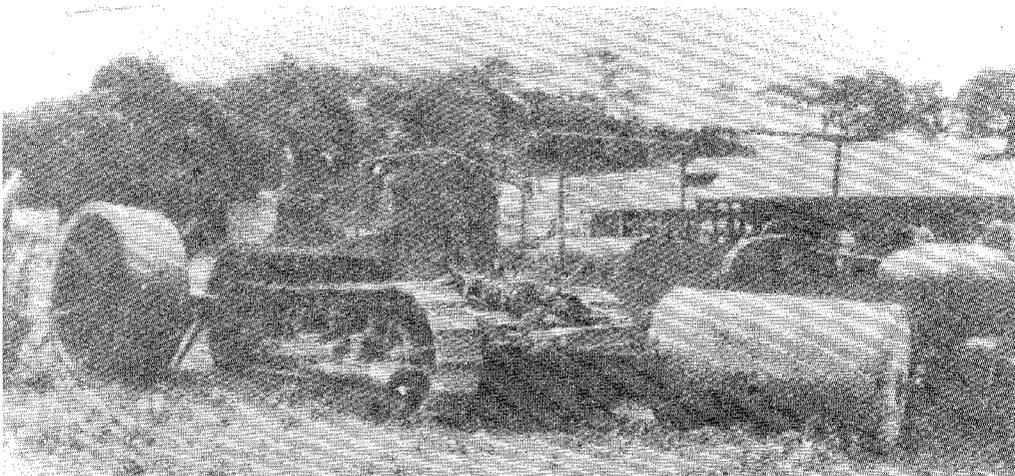
It was one of the peculiarities of the Okinawa campaign that the defenders knew long in advance the specific terrain where the battle was likely to be fought. Okinawa Island is only two to eighteen miles wide by sixty miles long—a small place for a violent clash of major powers, compared to, say, North Africa or the open Pacific. This battle area ensured that the fighting would be intense—densely packed forces supported by overwhelming firepower. These obvious facts conditioned the Japanese response.

In February 1944, just after the Truk air raids, IGHQ's "Outline of Preparations for the 'TEI-Go' Operation" provided for an increased defense presence in the area of the Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan. To this end IGHQ created the 32d Army headquarters late in March, to be located in Naha,

Okinawa. Its first commander, Lieutenant General Watanabe Masao, assumed his post on 1 April 1944, a year to the day before the Okinawa landings.<sup>1</sup>

The Ryukyus and Taiwan were to form a long zone of interprotective air bases under the TEI-Go and later plans. These bases were expected to defeat any American sea or air forces sent into the region. To avoid destruction from the air, each base was to consist of a cluster of airfields, such that if one were damaged others could be used immediately. Military and civilian crews were promptly set to work building the numerous fields. Thirteen base clusters had to be created, stretching in a line from Tachiarai in the northern Ryukyus to Pingting on Taiwan in the south.<sup>2</sup> IGHQ's extravagant scheme for the invulnerable air wall derived from its recent experiences on New Guinea. Japan's 4th Air Army there had no success destroying the Allied air base at Port Moresby because it consisted of six adjoining runways, protected by a dense radar and anti-air net. IGHQ concluded that this same style of aviation fortress could effectively guard the Ryukyu line against naval approaches.<sup>3</sup>

The only remaining tasks for ground forces were the defense of these facilities and their support anchorages and the unenviable work of building the fields.<sup>4</sup> Much of the energy of 32d Army would be absorbed almost up to L day building these air facilities. This was the more difficult since 32d Army had only two bulldozers and one earth roller.<sup>5</sup> Japan had produced dozers in small numbers at its Komatsu plant since 1943, but few had reached the front. Since soldiers were thus obliged to use shovels, hoes, straw baskets, and horse-drawn wagons, construction was slow. Moreover, because of U.S. submarine raiders, it was impossible for the Japanese to deliver the large quantities of fuel, ammunition, and anti-aircraft guns needed to operate the bases. Even more seriously, the planes themselves were not available.<sup>6</sup>



Tractor and rollers used by the Japanese on Okinawa

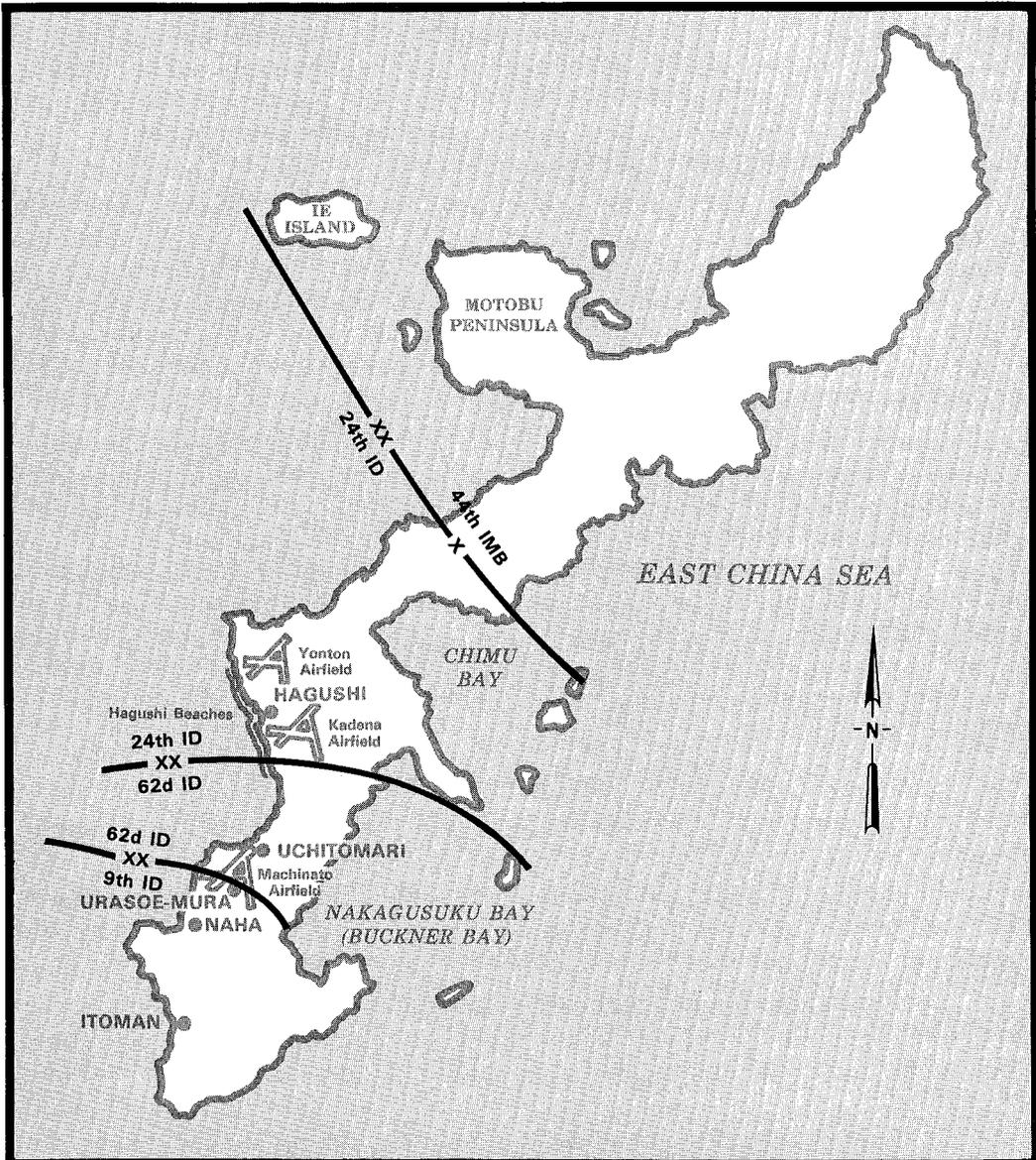
In May 1944, 32d Army had only enough forces to protect facilities on the island from small raids. The 32d Army Staff judged that American forces might assault Okinawa at any time in conjunction with a thrust into the Marianas or else might attack the Marianas first and not attack Okinawa until the spring of 1945. This meant that the 32d Army's Staff from the beginning lived with the apprehension of an immediate assault.<sup>7</sup>

IGHQ's TEI-Go plans were superseded in July 1944 by the SHO-Go plans in response to the loss of Saipan in that month. The several SHO-Go plans covered each area from northern Japan to the Philippines. The Philippines was covered by SHO-Go One and the Ryukyu area by SHO-Go Two. The plans called for 1,500 planes to swarm from China, Taiwan, and the Philippines in case U.S. forces entered the Ryukyu area.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, noting the loss of Saipan, IGHQ began rushing major ground forces to Okinawa. The 15th Independent Mixed Regiment was sent immediately by air in July 1944. (The 15th would later be absorbed by the 44th Independent Mixed Brigade [IMB].) The other major units that were sent to Okinawa in July and August were the 24th Division, the 62d Division, the 9th Division, and the 44th IMB, all infantry. Infantry elements were also sent to Miyako, Ishigaki, Tokuno, Daito, and other neighboring islands.<sup>9</sup>

The premise at this time was that most U.S. forces would be destroyed on the water and that Japanese resources would be abundant. Therefore, 32d Army's strategy was to occupy all of Okinawa in force and to destroy the invasion party on whichever beach it appeared (see map 1). The 44th IMB was placed on Motobu Peninsula and Ie Island. The 24th Division was on the plain facing the Hagushi beaches. The 62d Division was on the narrow neck of land north of Urasoe-Mura, and the 9th Division held the landmass south of Urasoe-Mura. If the Americans landed at Itoman, the 24th and 62d Divisions were to move to the south. If they landed at Hagushi, the 9th and 62d Divisions were to move to the north.<sup>10</sup> The tendency of 32d Army Staff after the autumn of 1944, however, would be to increasingly compress these forces until almost all were deployed south of Uchitomari and to make their operational plans increasingly defensive.

The rapid buildup of ground forces from July to August 1944 occurred because IGHQ felt Okinawa might be a target immediately after Saipan. But with American landings on Palau and Leyte in September and October, IGHQ realized that the Philippines, not Okinawa, was the Americans' next objective. The fierce fighting on Leyte, under the rubric of SHO-Go One, affected 32d Army in several ways. Rigorous drilling of troops was begun, including divisional maneuvers to every conceivable American landing point. Night attacks on bridges were practiced. Staffs at all levels studied positions and strategy. At the end of October artillery units practiced bombarding beachheads with live shells, a demonstration that reassured the prefectural governor and civilian observers more than it did the 32d Army Staff. Even so, the rigorous training served to restore the troops' and officers' confidence, which had wavered in the face of the early news from Leyte.<sup>11</sup>



Map 1. The IJA 32d Army positions, August–November 1944

Unfortunately, it was at this time that IGHQ chose to withdraw the elite 9th Division from Okinawa to participate in the Leyte battle. On 13 November 1944, 32d Army Staff members received a telegram from IGHQ instructing them to designate their best division for redeployment to the Philippines, which staff members agreed was the 9th. The staff vigorously protested this removal of the 9th Division at the staff meeting in Taipei where it was discussed in early November, and continued to protest it right up to L day. Survivors protest it still. The 32d Army Staff's resentment over this was the greater since the 9th Division was actually sent to Tai-

wan, not to the Philippines, Taiwan being another possible target of American landings and a competitor with Okinawa for scarce resources. The fact that Taiwan's 10th Area Army headquarters was just above 32d Army in the chain of command, and may have engineered the move selfishly, made these feelings of resentment all the greater.<sup>12</sup>

The unexpected removal of the organization's best division threw 32d Army's operational plans into turmoil. Ironically it had a highly advantageous effect on combat efficiency. It forced 32d Army to do more with less—to economize—something IJA staffs had rarely done in the past. Removal of the 9th Division must have jolted 32d Army Staff members into realizing that they alone were the masters of events on Okinawa: IGHQ had other interests to pursue.

Withdrawal of the 9th Division was a pivot of crisis for the 32d Army Staff that forced them into a comprehensive review not only of their operational plans but of their operational doctrine. The upshot of this crisis was a set of options, presented on 23 November 1944 by the senior operations officer, Colonel Yahara Hiromichi, to 32d Army chief of staff, Lieutenant General Cho Isamu. Yahara's options of 23 November represented just four possible dispositions of 32d Army's finite resources on Okinawa, but each of the four positions required a completely different operational doctrine! Yahara's four schemes covered every major method the Japanese would use in the Pacific fighting.

Yahara's four approaches were, in brief:

(1) After the 9th Division's removal, available forces should be spread thinly to defend all of Okinawa.

(2) Forces should be deployed only in the Nakagami area, namely, the level plains opposite the potential Hagushi landing beaches where the Yontan and Kadena airfields were located.

(3) Forces should be deployed only in the mountainous and easily defensible Shimajiri area, which is the southern landmass where the Japanese could still control the Naha port and interdict the northern airfields with artillery.

(4) Forces should be deployed in the Kunigami area, namely, the mountainous areas in the far north that were easily defensible and did not invite attack because they had no strategic value.

In sum, 32d Army could attempt to defend all of Okinawa or only the center, only the south, or only the north.<sup>13</sup>

These four respective options corresponded, roughly speaking, to Japanese methods on (1) Guadalcanal, where contact with the main American force was piecemeal, (2) Saipan, where suicidal attack in the open brought early defeat, (3) Iwo Jima (still to take place), where there would be a dogged dug-in defense near airfields the Americans needed, and (4) Luzon (also still to come), where Japanese forces would withdraw to the northern mountains and survive to the end of the war intact but strategically passive.



U.S. Marine Corps

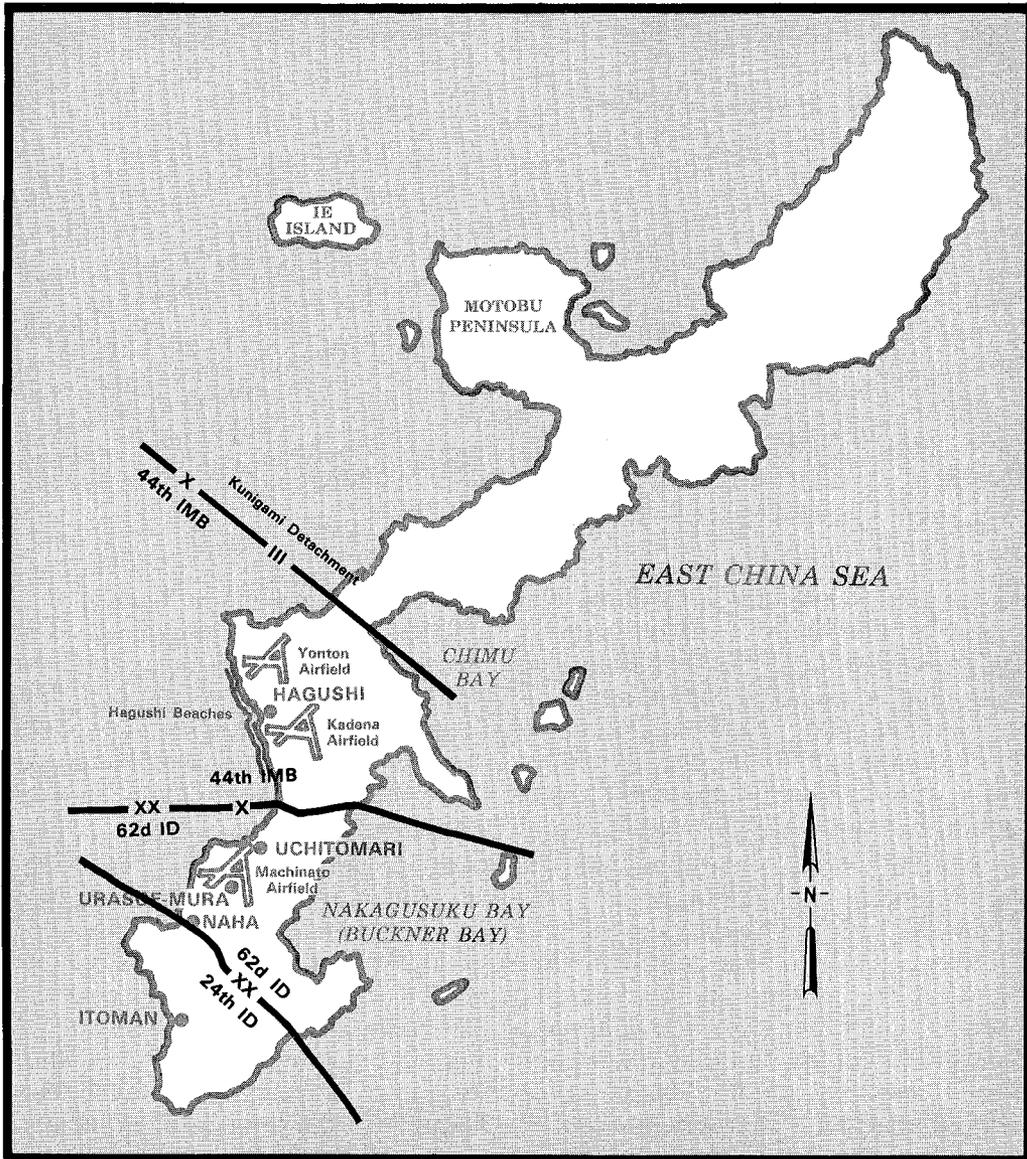
Yontan airfield after rehabilitation by U.S. forces

Yahara's memorandum of 23 November 1944 rejected the first option, defense of all Okinawa, as no longer feasible for lack of forces, even though IGHQ favored it. He rejected the second option, defense of the open Hagushi plain, even though it might briefly protect the IGHQ's treasured airfields, because 32d Army would be immediately annihilated. He rejected the fourth option, cowering in the northern hills, even though it would keep the army unharmed, because in strategic terms, it would totally waste the resources over which the 32d Army Staff was the steward.<sup>14</sup>

Instead, Yahara endorsed the third option, concentrating all forces in the defensible but strategically critical south. Chief of Staff Cho agreed and passed the proposal to the 32d Army commander, Lieutenant General Ushijima Mitsuru, who without comment adopted it as 32d Army policy. Although this change in deployment seemed workaday, it actually entailed a massive and controversial change in 32d Army's operational doctrine. It meant abandoning the IJA's heretofore cherished policy of "decisive battle," namely, seeking out the enemy aggressively in close combat, in favor of a "war of attrition." It meant deliberately discarding the priority of antinaval air defense that for ten months had been, and still would be, the cornerstone of IGHQ's Pacific strategy. The 32d Army Staff's new commitment to attri-

tion warfare in the south of the island was probably more important than any other event in making the IJA's performance on Okinawa, along with that on Iwo Jima, the most militarily effective of the Pacific war. The 32d Army Staff members were pleased with the new arrangement as a solid plan that would allow them to give a good account of themselves, and it was sent to the units on 26 November.<sup>15</sup>

The new plan contained five paragraphs. The 44th IMB was stationed on the Hagushi plain, the 62d Division was placed on the central isthmus, and the 24th Division was deployed on the southern end of the island (see



Map 2. The IJA 32d Army positions, December 1944—January 1945

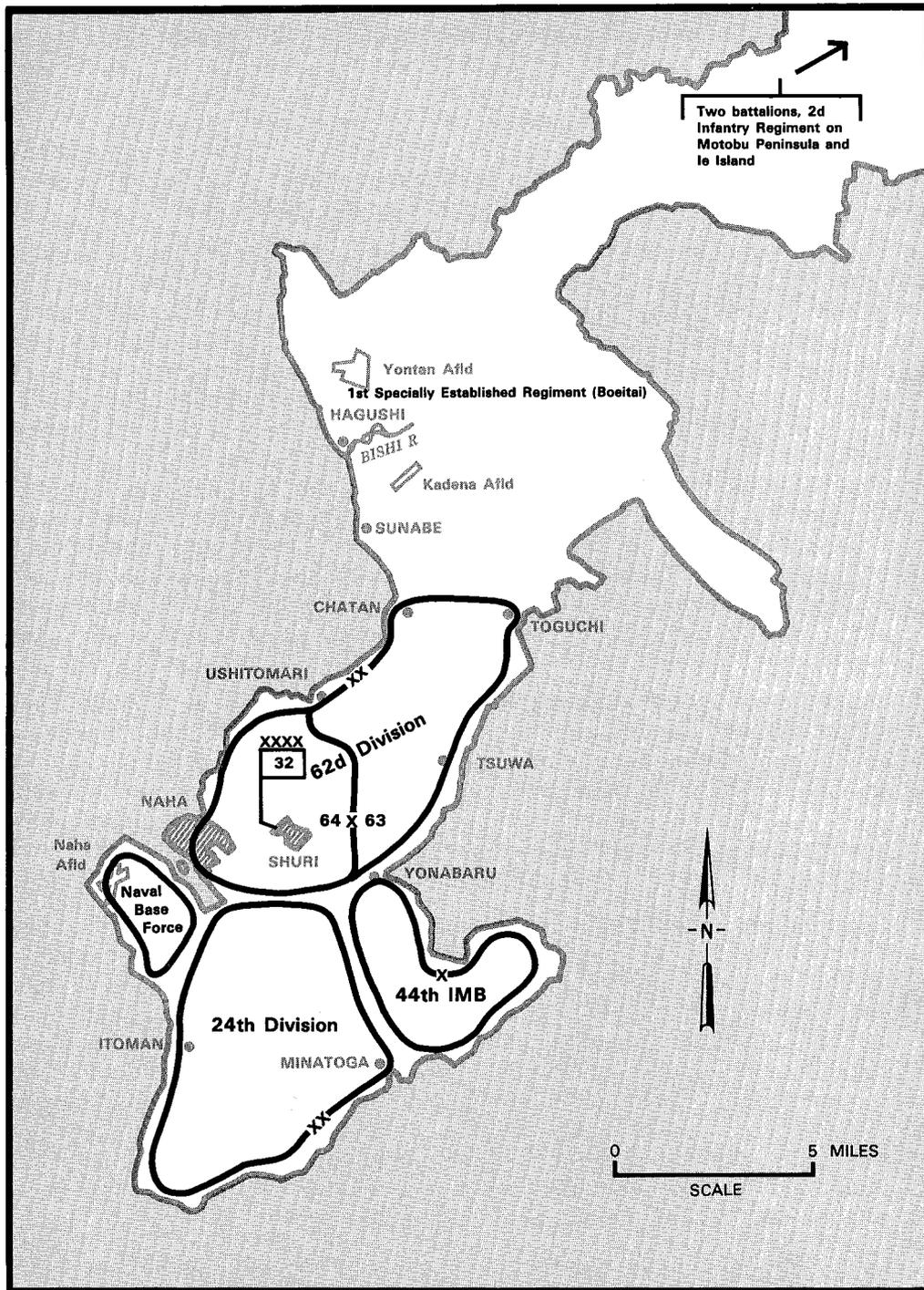
map 2). The Kunigami Detachment was the only unit north of the Hagushi plain and on the Motobu Peninsula. The enemy "was to be contained by a strategic delaying action," not openly attacked for a "decisive battle." To placate IGHQ, the 44th IMB was placed in positions covering the Yontan and Kadena airfields. It was supposed to protect the fields as long as possible if the Americans landed at Hagushi and to counterattack them if the occasion offered. In reality, however, the 32d Army Staff intended for 44th IMB merely to harass the Americans and fall back southward toward the 62d Division's lines. The 32d Army Staff also expected 44th IMB to prevent early seizure of the airfields by American airborne troops.<sup>16</sup>

The 62d Division, on the central isthmus, was to repel possible American landings on the beaches near the Machinato airfield. It was also to prepare to fight on a line facing north if the Americans landed at Hagushi and to join the 24th Division if the Americans landed near Itoman. Similarly, the 24th Division was expected to help defend against landings north of Itoman and to join the 62d Division if there was fighting on the Machinato beaches or to the north.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the Americans were to be met with a solid front if they landed anywhere on the rugged isthmus or the southern landmass, but they were not to be engaged heavily if they landed on the open Hagushi plain. Moreover, in case of an attack at Itoman or Machinato, the Americans were to be fired on from the nearby mountains, then driven off the beaches in a "decisive battle." This was believed reasonably possible because the mountains extended near the shore, offering good defensive protection and also denying to the landing force the room it needed for staging.<sup>18</sup>

In December 1944 the commander of 10th Area Army on Taiwan, General Ando Rikichi, summoned 32d Army Chief of Staff Cho to Taipei to justify the new dispositions. Ando favored annihilating the Americans on the beaches as earlier doctrine required. He acquiesced in the new November dispositions, however, perhaps because he knew the 32d Army Staff was still resentful over the recent loss of the 9th Division, which was what had necessitated the November redeployment.<sup>19</sup>

The new force dispositions were carried out in December, and the new lines were inspected by Operations Officer Yahara in January. Yahara's prevalent impression, however, was that the defenses were too thin to hold against concentrated attack. IJA doctrine required no more than six miles of front per division. The 32d Army's two and one-half divisions were covering thirty-six miles of front, of which twenty-four miles had to be actively defended. Yahara concluded that the division fronts would have to be shortened, and that the way to do this was to draw 44th IMB from the Hagushi plain south to share some of the area covered by the 62d Division (see map 3). The new arrangement was endorsed by Cho and Ushijima and sent to the divisional units on 15 January 1945.<sup>20</sup>

The dispositions of 15 January would endure until the American landings on 1 April. They represented a culmination of the tendency of the 32d Army Staff, facing the prospect of American firepower, to shorten its lines



Source: Roy E. Appleman, et al., *Okinawa: The Last Battle*, U.S. Army in World War II (1948; reprint, Washington, DC: Historical Division, Department of the Army, 1971), map VI.

Map 3. The IJA 32d Army positions, January—March 1945

and give up its offensive plans. In the end 32d Army only defended the southernmost one-eighth of the island and abandoned the sought-after Yontan and Kadena airfields uncontested. In the eyes of IGHQ, Okinawa was part of a multitheater, technology-intensive strategy in which 32d Army's specialized role was to defend the Yontan and Kadena airfields. The 32d Army Staff members' perceptions were simpler: 32d Army was about to be attacked and needed defensible positions to survive. The staff members had no confidence that air forces could interdict the Americans and instead thought simply in terms of denying the Americans free use of Okinawa facilities as long as possible. Their larger strategic assumptions were well informed and in fact were more sound than the air power schemes of IGHQ. Even so, the staff's final operational plans amounted to nothing more nor less than denying the enemy the ground, foot by foot.

On 23 January 1944, 32d Army received a message from IGHQ saying that the 84th Division in Himeji would be sent to Okinawa to replace the 9th Division, which 32d Army had just lost, as indeed IGHQ had promised to do in November when the 9th Division was withdrawn. That same evening, however, the 32d Army Staff received a second message saying the dispatch of the 84th Division had been rescinded. Lieutenant General Miyazaki, head of the strategy branch of the IGHQ, claimed that he agonized over the decision but was ultimately reluctant to send forces from the home islands when Japan itself might soon be under attack. Reasonable as this was, the decision did nothing for the morale of the forces on Okinawa and merely confirmed their conviction that IGHQ was not going to send them the resources they needed.<sup>21</sup>

Staff officers on Okinawa felt that their headquarters had abandoned them and that, eventually, they would be overwhelmed and destroyed by the Americans. They expected the Americans to land six to ten divisions against the Japanese garrison of two and a half divisions. The staff calculated that superior quality and numbers of weapons gave each U.S. division five or six times the firepower of a Japanese division. This meant that U.S. firepower on the ground would be twelve times Japanese firepower or more. To this would be added the Americans' abundant naval and air firepower. Understandably, January 1945 was a time of dark thoughts and sullen inaction for the 32d Army Staff.<sup>22</sup>

To alleviate this mood, Operations Officer Yahara prepared a pamphlet titled "The Road to Certain Victory" in which he argued that, through the use of fortifications, 32d Army could defeat the Americans' superior numbers and technology. Building and using tunnels, what he called "sleeping tactics," was the method he recommended as suitable and capable of success. Chief of Staff Cho deleted the few lines that were pessimistic and then had the pamphlet printed and distributed. The pamphlet's purpose was to get the troops and officers stirred up enough to work on their fortifications, which they now did in an environment of renewed optimism.<sup>23</sup>

Work on the caves now began with great vigor. "Confidence in victory will be born from strong fortifications" was the soldiers' slogan. The caves

meant personal shelter from the fierce bombardments that were sure to come, and they also offered a shimmering hope of victory. The combination was irresistible, and units began to work passionately on their own caves. Moreover, after frequent relocation, the units were finally in the positions where they would remain until the Americans landed. The 62d Division and the 24th Division would be in their final positions 100 days and the 44th IMB 50 days before L day.<sup>24</sup>

Enthusiasm was essential because of the great toil it took to create the caves. Just as 32d Army had only two bulldozers to make airfields, it had no mechanized tunneling equipment at all. Chief of Staff Cho repeatedly requested such equipment, so often, in fact, that "Cho's rock-cutters" became famous in the corridors of IGHQ. Still, none were sent. In lieu of cutting machines, the soldiers used trenching tools and shovels.<sup>25</sup>

Besides lacking cutting equipment, 32d Army lacked construction materials. It had no cement, no ironware, and no dynamite. The units had to rely entirely on wooden beams that they obtained themselves to shore up their shafts. This was not necessarily easy because there were no forests in the south of the island where the troops were now stationed. Pine forests were abundant in the mountainous north, however, so each unit was assigned its own lumbering district in the north. Several hundred men from each division were detailed as its lumbering squad. The problem remained, however, of how to move the several million logs that were needed over the forty or so miles from the forests to the forts. There was no railroad, and although 32d Army had trucks, the 10 October air raids on Naha had destroyed most of the gasoline. The trucks, therefore, could not be used for the vast work of moving the logs. The solution was for each unit to cut its own logs, then transport them in small native boats called *sabenis*. The divisions acquired seventy of these, which then plied the waters steadily from north to south. In January 1945, however, the Leyte-based B-24s that began flying over daily for reconnaissance also began strafing the boats. So the waterborne delivery of logs had to be switched from day to night, greatly lowering efficiency.<sup>26</sup>

Other problems cave builders found had to do with the quality of the soil. Local geological conditions made it possible for the finished tunnel positions to be highly resistant to fire, although these same conditions made building the tunnels difficult. The whole island south of Futema consisted of coral stone that was thirty to sixty feet thick and as hard as concrete. (This was not the case in the north, which was one of the reasons Yahara had seen fit to abandon the north in November.) Digging through the coral took tremendous toil, and soldiers wore their picks and trenching tools to stumps. Once through the coral crust, however, the earth was a soft red clay, relatively easy to penetrate. Besides that, there were natural caves in each area of the south that soldiers could take over and expand. Some of the natural caves could accommodate 1,000 men each. Soldiers felt the thick coral crust was as good as a ferroconcrete lid for their caves, and indeed the caves would protect their inhabitants completely from bomb and shell.<sup>27</sup>

The 32d Army intended to, and did, move its entire force underground. The caves were made large enough to hold all personnel, weapons, ammunition, provisions, and "all other material." Prior to November 1944 each unit had been expected to fashion its caves for three times its own numbers so that troops from other areas could be concentrated in any area and remain underground. This more ambitious goal had to be abandoned in November 1944, however, when the major troop shifts reduced the number of working days in each unit's new sector. Still, 32d Army built sixty miles of the underground fortifications.<sup>28</sup>

The 32d Army devised elaborate antitank construction plans. A system of antitank trenches was to be built. In addition there were to be foxholes on likely tank routes, antitank minefields, and the blockade and destruction of major tank routes. The projected antitank trench system was especially ambitious. Almost no progress was made building it, however, because 32d Army was obliged to devote its leftover construction energies to IGHQ's airfields.<sup>29</sup>

The 32d Army strove to strengthen personnel structure as well as its physical fortifications. It evacuated a portion of Okinawa's population of 435,000 to the main Japanese islands, partly for their safety and partly to prevent their consuming precious foodstuffs once communications with the outside were cut off. Eighty thousand Okinawans were moved to Kyushu on munitions vessels that were otherwise returning to Japan empty. Because transportation was scarce and the inhabitants reluctant, however, the army also began moving Okinawans from the populous southern half of the island, which was going to be contested, to the safer north. Thirty thousand old people and children were moved to the north by mid-March 1945, and 30,000 more when U.S. landings became imminent.<sup>30</sup>

The 32d Army Staff also wished to use as much of the indigenous population as it could in direct support of the war effort, so on 1 January 1945 it ordered total mobilization. All Okinawan males aged 18 to 45 were obliged to enter the Japanese service. Thirty-nine thousand were drafted, of whom 15,000 were used as nonuniformed laborers and 24,000 as rear-echelon troops called the Home Guard (*Boeitai*). Many of the *Boeitai* replaced sea based battalions and rear-area supply units that had been reorganized and equipped for frontline duty.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to these, 1,500 of the senior boys of the middle schools on Okinawa were organized into Iron and Blood Volunteer Units and assigned to frontline duty. Some of these students had been tried out in the signal service in the autumn of 1944 with good results, so the program was expanded. Since the fall of 1944, 600 senior students of the girls' middle schools also had been given training in the medical service.<sup>32</sup>

Okinawa's economy produced sweet potatoes to feed the cows and pigs, and imported rice from Taiwan to feed the human population. The 32d Army resolved that the livestock would be slaughtered for food and that the populace and army would subsist on the sweet potatoes, thus making the island self-sufficient in food. (Replacing rice with sweet potatoes, the poor man's

food, was distasteful to soldier and civilian alike for cultural reasons.) The 32d Army went further and produced alcohol from the sweet potatoes for use as auto and truck fuel, at the rate of 300 drums a month.<sup>33</sup>

### *IJA Main Units: Heavy and Light Divisions*

The principal army units on hand as of March 1945 were 32d Army headquarters, 24th Infantry Division, 62d Infantry Division, and 44th Independent Mixed Brigade, plus 5th Artillery Command and 27th Tank Regiment. In addition to these were some sixty antiair, machine-gun, and engineering units ranging from battalion to company size. The largest of these was the so-called 11th Shipping Group, whose 19 units boasted some 9,000 men, most of them in Sea Raiding Base Battalions, meaning that their job was to send one-man motorboats filled with explosives against the invasion fleet.<sup>34</sup>

The 32d Army headquarters was itself a formidable force with 7,075 men. Of these, 1,070 were in the headquarters itself, to which were attached 1,912 in a signal regiment, 204 in an army hospital, 1,167 in a field freight depot, and so on. The 32d Army was formed by IGHQ on 22 March 1944 as the main command unit for Okinawa. From 11 August 1944, it was commanded by Lieutenant General Ushijima Mitsuru and based in Naha.<sup>35</sup>

The first of the main combat units to reach Okinawa was the 24th Division, a heavy division. It was organized in December 1939, assigned to 32d Army on 18 July 1944, and disembarked on Okinawa from Manchuria on 5 August 1944. Its commander was Lieutenant General Amamiya Tatsumi. The 24th, a triangular division with three regiments, three battalions per regiment, and three companies per battalion, was organized and equipped for strategic warfare against mechanized and well-armed Russian forces of the sort the IJA clashed with at Nomonhan in 1939. It had abundant combat support units, with artillery, engineer, transport, and reconnaissance elements organic at regimental level. Each regiment, battalion, and company had its own artillery unit, and each battalion also boasted an antitank gun company. The transport regiment included three motor transport companies. In a word, the 24th, with its firepower, mobility, specialization, and consistent triangular structure was fashioned for large-scale operations with another modern army (see figure 1).<sup>36</sup>

Very different from the 24th was the 62d Division, a light division. The 62d was formed in June 1943 in Shansi, China; was assigned to 32d Army on 24 July 1944; was concentrated at Shanghai from North China on 13 August 1944; left Shanghai on 16 August; and disembarked at Naha on 19 August. Commanded by Lieutenant General Fujioka Takeo, the 62d was a pentagonal division with a proliferation of small autonomous rifle units and little else. It had two brigades, with five battalions per brigade and five rifle companies per battalion. Although it had engineer, medical, and signal units at division level, it had no organic artillery above company level, little firepower, and little mechanized transport. The 62d Division was



really just ten clusters of rifle companies, a very light division (see figure 2).<sup>37</sup>

The 62d Division was so different in concept from the highly structured, heavily equipped 24th Division that it might have belonged to an entirely different army. In fact, it did belong to a different army. The 24th Division had been organized by the Kwantung Army to face Soviet armor on the Manchurian plain shortly after the Nomonhan incident in 1939. The 62d Division, on the other hand, had been organized by the Central China Expeditionary Army for use as a counterinsurgency force and antilight infantry force. It was the only major unit to have seen action before Okinawa, and during most of its service, its two brigades had been autonomous and not part of a division at all.

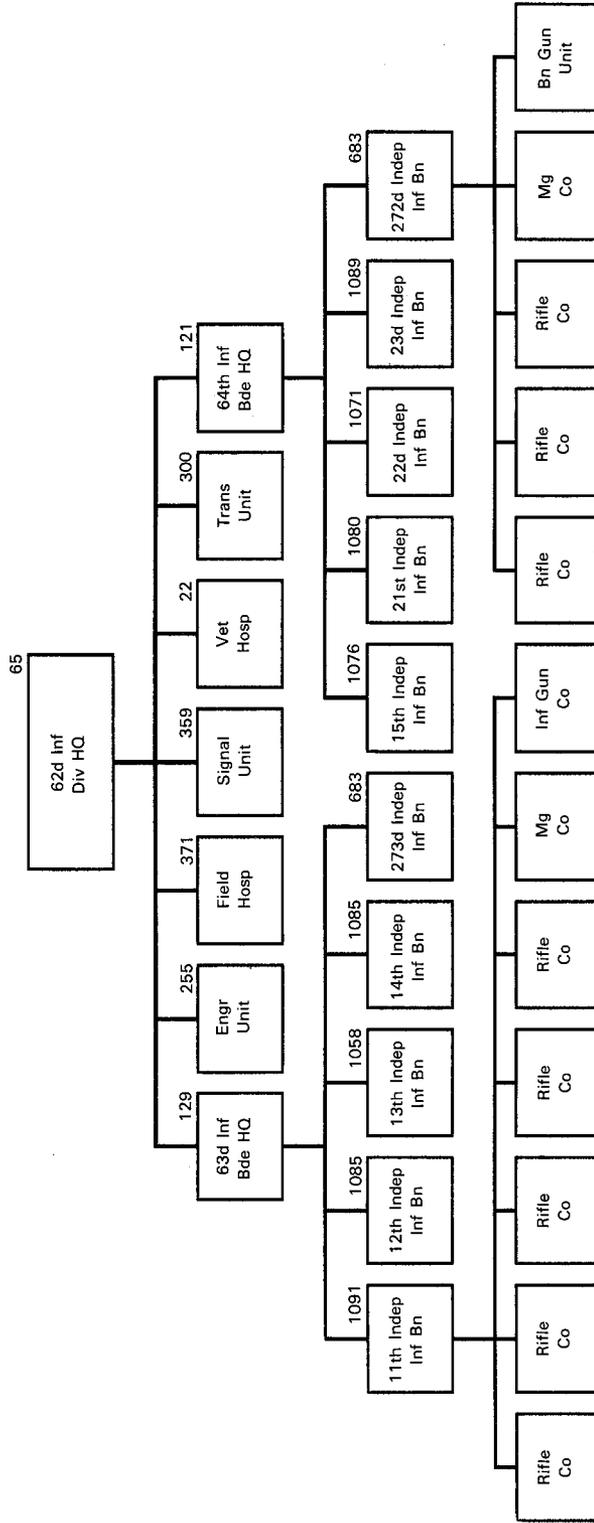
In reality, 24th Division was organized to face state-of-the-art Russian armored columns in Manchuria, but 62d Division was organized to fight furtive rural guerrillas in China. These two military tasks were so different that the Japanese army headquarters responsible had evolved completely different organizational structures for their constituent divisions. In the event, of course, the lethal Okinawa battleground would present challenges that resembled neither the mechanized war of the north nor the guerrilla war of the south.<sup>38</sup>

### *Other Units*

The third major combat unit that would fight on Okinawa was the 44th Independent Mixed Brigade, commanded by Major General Suzuki Shigeki. The 44th IMB was organized on Kyushu, but its headquarters, 2d Infantry Regiment, brigade artillery, and engineering units were sunk by a U.S. submarine while en route to Okinawa on 29 June 1944. These elements were thus reconstituted between July and September and dispatched again, this time more successfully. The 15th Independent Mixed Regiment was formed on Okinawa on 6–12 July 1944 by airlift from Japan. It was assigned to the 44th IMB on 22 September 1944. Both the 2d Infantry Regiment and the 15th Independent Mixed Regiment portions of the 44th IMB were triangular in organization, with artillery units attached at every level from company up (see figure 3).<sup>39</sup>

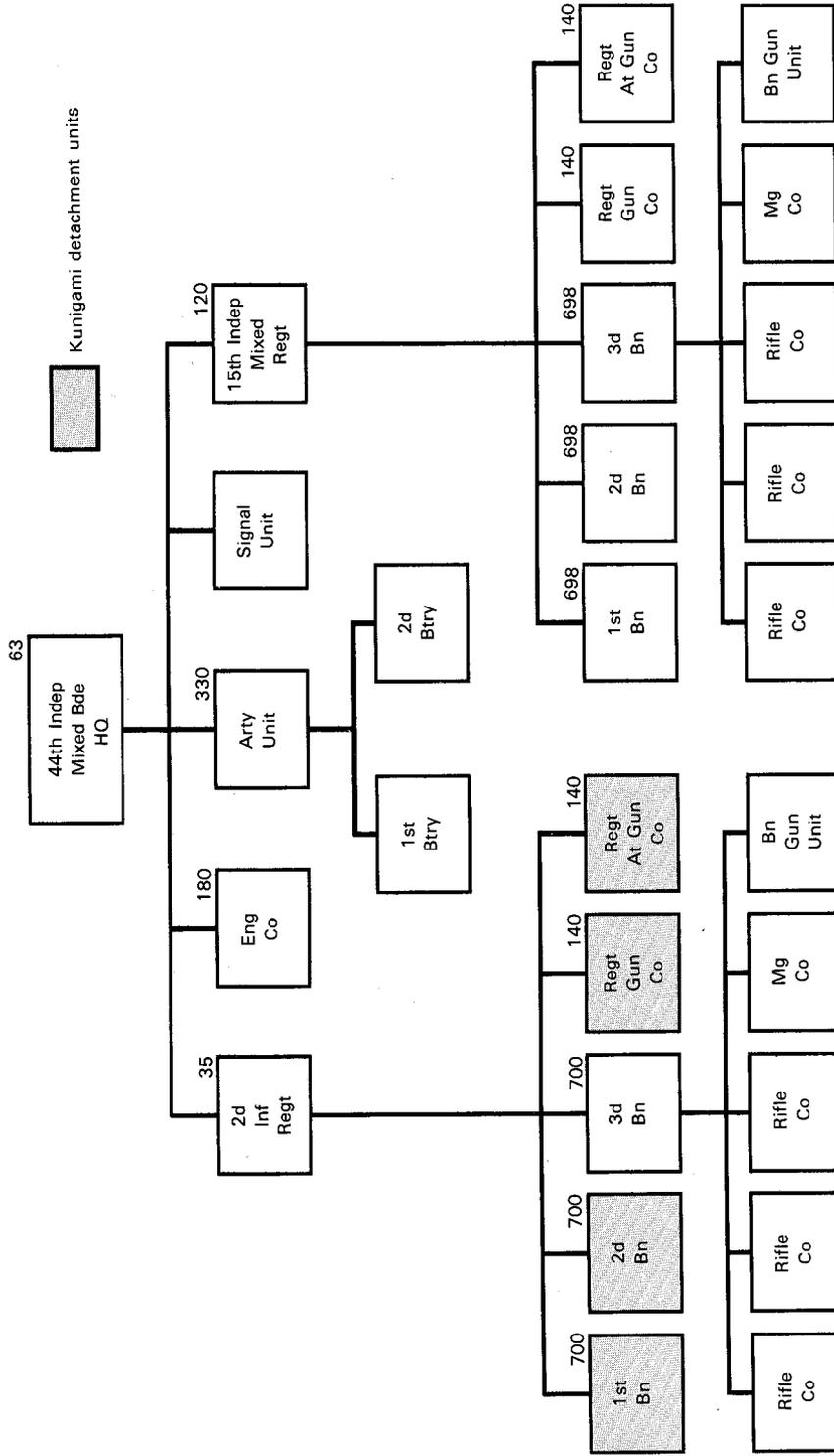
Artillery on Okinawa was concentrated under the 5th Artillery Command. The 5th Artillery was about brigade sized, with 5,300 men. It included, besides its headquarters, four artillery regiments and three mortar battalions. The artillery regiments used 150-mm howitzers and 150-mm cannons. The 1st Independent Artillery Mortar Regiment had twenty-four 320-mm spigot mortars.<sup>40</sup>

The lavish artillery arrangements were due to the efforts of Operations Officer Yahara, who had asked IGHQ for the guns and for the 5th Artillery Command to control them. Yahara intended to conceal all the artillery in the center of the southern defense positions so that all of 32d Army's firepower could be concentrated at once on any part of the front that might be engaged. Though 32d Army had far less artillery than the Americans, it



Source: Nichols and Shaw, *Okinawa*, 58.

Figure 2. Organization of the IJA 62d Infantry Division, March 1945



Source: Nichols and Shaw, *Okinawa*, 56.

Figure 3. Organization of the 44th Independent Mixed Brigade and Kunigami Detachment

could in this way get the maximum effect from what it did have. To direct this ambitious project Yahara requested and got the noted artilleryist Lieutenant General Wada Kojo.<sup>41</sup>

The 5th Artillery Command's headquarters (almost 150 officers and troops) was assigned to Okinawa on 22 August 1944 and arrived there on 22 October. The subordinate regiments, some of which came from Japan and some from Manchuria, arrived at various times between July and December.<sup>42</sup> The only armored unit that the 32d Army had was the 27th Tank Regiment of 750 men. The regiment, consisting of a medium tank company with fourteen tanks, a light tank company with thirteen tanks, a tractor-drawn artillery battery, an infantry company, a maintenance company, and an engineering platoon, arrived in Okinawa from Manchuria on 12 July 1944.<sup>43</sup>

Besides the main line units, there were several independent specialized commands that answered directly to the 32d Army headquarters, including the 21st Antiaircraft Artillery Command with its seven antiaircraft battalions, the 11th Shipping Group with several shipping engineer regiments and sea-raiding battalions, the 19th Air Sector Command that supervised assorted aviation service units, and the 49th Line of Communications Command with several independent motor transport companies. Besides these units, there were four independent machine-gun battalions, four independent antitank battalions, and an independent engineer battalion that were parceled out as needed to the main line units.<sup>44</sup>

The Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) had almost 9,000 men at the Oroku Naval Air Base adjacent to Naha. Of these, 3,400 were in the Okinawa Naval Base Force and others in various maintenance or construction units. Among the naval units, only the 150 troops in the 81-mm mortar battery had been trained for ground combat prior to arriving in Okinawa. The naval forces, under Rear Admiral Ota Minoru, were to be under army jurisdiction once the Americans landed.<sup>45</sup>

## *Reorganization*

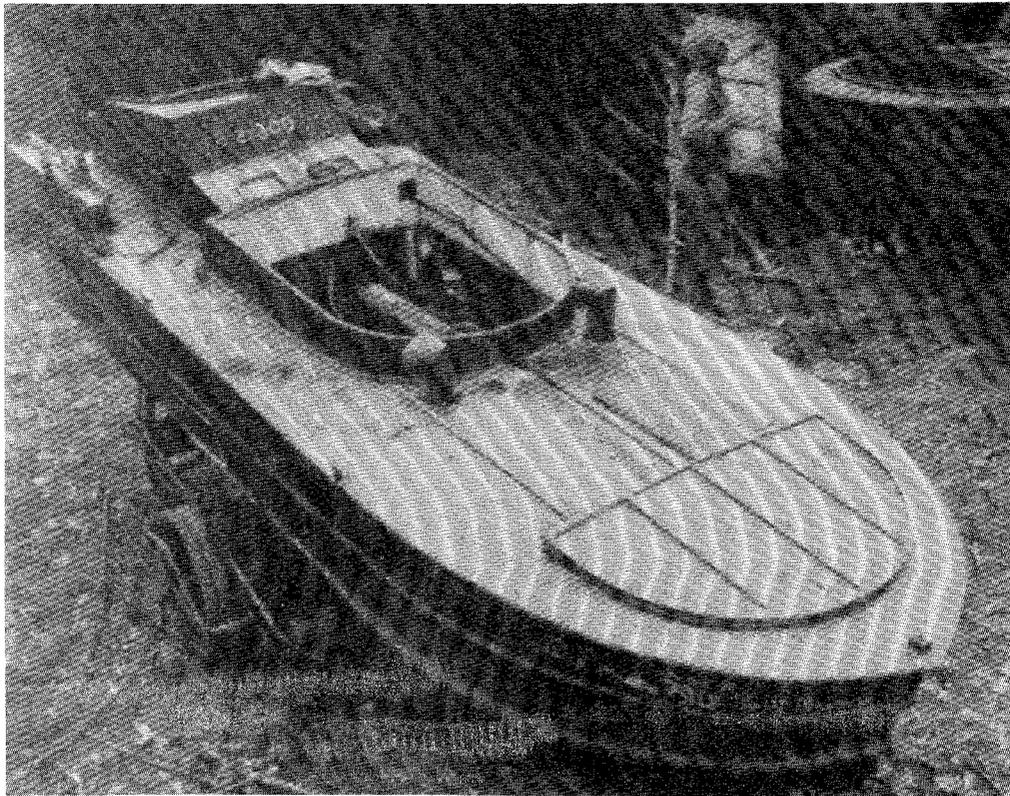
The total strength of the Japanese forces on Okinawa was about 100,000; 67,000 of these were in the IJA, 9,000 were in the IJN, and 24,000 were impressed Okinawans used mostly in service support roles. The strengths of the IJA main units were 32d Army headquarters, 1,070; 32d Army direct service units, 6,005; 24th Division, 14,360; 62d Division, 11,623; and 44th IMB, 4,485. These units accounted for only 38,000 of the IJA's 67,000-man complement, however. The remaining 29,000 men were in the specialized antiaircraft, sea-raiding, and airfield battalions.<sup>46</sup>

It occurred to the 32d Army Staff, however, that these richly manned service units should be reorganized for ground combat, given the anticipated nature of the coming struggle. Between 13 and 20 February 1945, the 1st, 2d, 3d, 26th, 27th, 28th, and 29th Sea-Raiding Base Battalions were restructured and became the 1st, 2d, 3d, 26th, 27th, 28th, and 29th Independent Battalions. By February, these seven battalions' motorboat bases had al-

ready been built, and the base forces of 900 men each had little to do. Therefore, only motorboat pilot and maintenance companies were left at the bases, and the remaining 600 men per battalion were withdrawn for use as light infantry battalions. Each independent battalion had three companies of 150 to 180 men each, and their men were already trained and furnished with rifles and grenades. To this was added only four light machine guns and two heavy grenade launchers apiece. The seven independent battalions, with about 4,500 troops altogether, were then distributed to the 24th and 62d Divisions and to the 44th IMB.<sup>47</sup>

On 21 March, 32d Army Staff issued an order that reorganized almost all service support units for ground combat and placed them under the command of the 62d and 24th Divisions. The 19th Air Sector Command, for example, became the 1st Specially Established Regiment and was assigned to defend, under 62d Division, the same Yontan and Kadena airfields it had recently built and maintained.<sup>48</sup>

The 1st Specially Established Brigade was created from elements of the 49th Line of Communications Command and placed under that unit's headquarters commander. It consisted of the 2d, 3d, and 4th Specially Established Regiments and was made up of line of communications, field ord-



U.S. Marine Corps

Special attack (*kamikaze*) motorboats prepared by the Japanese for use on Okinawa

nance depot, and field freight depot units respectively. It was stationed in the Naha-Yonabaru area under the command of the 62d Division.<sup>49</sup>

The 2d Specially Established Brigade was created under the 11th Shipping Group commander. Its 5th and 6th Specially Established Regiments were drawn from leftover sea raiders and Home Guards (native Okinawans drafted and put in military units) and elements of the 11th Shipping Group respectively. The 2d Specially Established Brigade was stationed on the southwestern end of Okinawa under the command of the 24th Division.<sup>50</sup>

This reorganization of 21 March added 14,000 men to ground combat strength, leaving only 10,500 of the 67,000 IJA force in specialized service roles. Even among these 10,500, the 3,000 men of the seven antiaircraft battalions were assigned antitank and other direct-fire artillery roles on the infantry line once hostilities began. This entailed line use of seventy 7.5-mm antiaircraft guns and 100 antiaircraft automatic cannons.<sup>51</sup>

The 9,000 IJN troops on Oroku were also reorganized for ground combat at the end of March. This force was oriented almost entirely to naval and naval air activities. The 13-mm and 25-mm antiaircraft batteries in the Okinawa Naval Base Force were able to convert their guns easily for ground service as direct-fire weapons. But this and other naval units suffered from a lack of appropriate infantry equipment, especially individual weapons, as well as from a complete lack of training for ground fighting. Even so, the Oroku force was all reorganized into battalions headed by naval lieutenants and companies headed by lieutenants junior grade.<sup>52</sup>

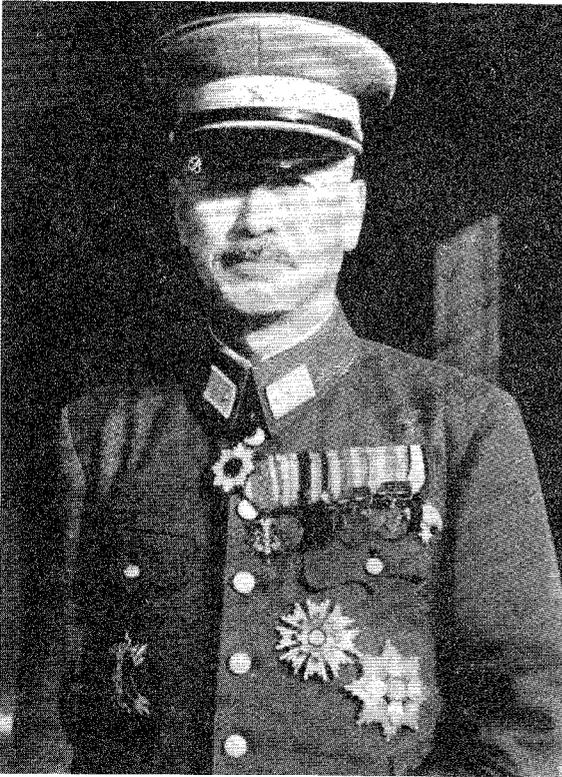
In short, as the battle approached in February and March of 1945, 4,500 men from sea-raiding units, 14,000 men from various shipping and communications units, and 3,000 men from antiaircraft units, a total of 21,500 men of the 29,000 not already in major line units, were reorganized for potential service on the infantry line. To this total, 9,000 naval troops were also added. Almost all these units were light infantry, however, armed only with rifles and the few machine guns and mortars 32d Army had to distribute. These units were not trained for infantry combat, and many of their troops remained in rear-area auxiliary roles until late in the battle when the original line units were badly depleted.

### *The 32d Army's Leadership: Heroism Versus Realism*

The individual personalities on an army staff, despite their influence on the outcome of battle, are often forgotten. This was not the case in the IJA 32d Army, however. In the 32d Army Staff, two very different tendencies were present, each represented by a highly placed staff member. The entire strategy of the Okinawa battle on the Japanese side was worked out by the interaction of these two officers' factions and their conflicting policies. Who were the leading lights of the 32d Army Staff, and what strategic principles did they represent?

The 32d Army commander was Lieutenant General Ushijima Mitsuru, who was appointed on 8 August 1944 and arrived at his post two days later.<sup>53</sup> By a routine command rotation, he replaced Lieutenant General

Imperial Japanese Army official photo. Used with permission.



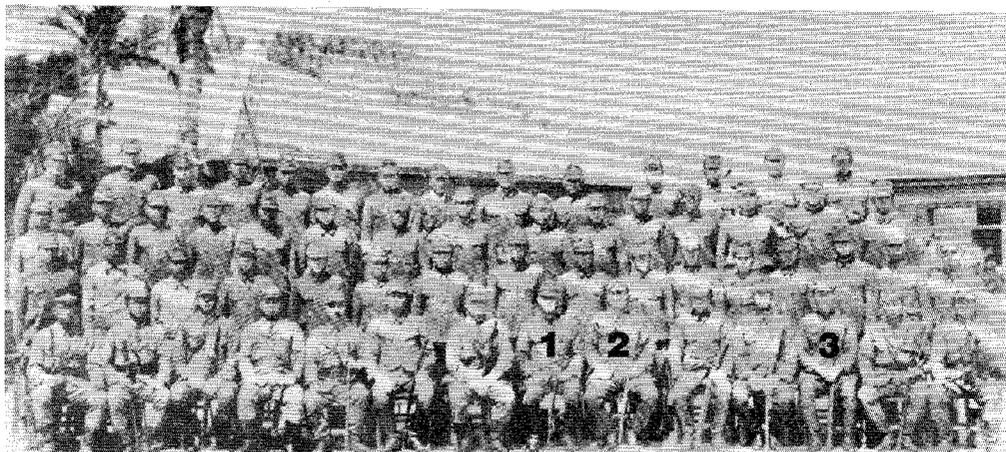

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Lieutenant General  
Ushijima Mitsuru,  
commander, 32d Army

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Watanabe Masao, who had been commander since 32d Army's inception on 22 March 1944. Ushijima graduated from the Japanese Military Academy (JMA) at Zama in 1908, was a former vice minister in the Ministry of the Army, and had been an infantry commander in Burma early in the war. In 1944 he was serving as commandant of the Japanese Military Academy. He was a quiet commander who ordinarily approved whatever policy his staff presented to him. His chosen role was to provide moral support to subordinates and if need be to help them reach agreement and resolve differences. In sum he was a transcendent leader in the mainstream of the Japanese tradition. He would not become embroiled in the disputes that divided the 32d Army Staff but would at times help to mend them.<sup>54</sup>

The man with overall responsibility for 32d Army's day-to-day operations was its chief of staff, Lieutenant General Cho Isamu (JMA, 1916). Cho had had an extraordinary career. As a captain in 1930, he had belonged to the right-wing extremist Cherry Society. He was involved in several attempted military coups d'état, including one in October 1931 in which he agreed to become chief of the Tokyo police if the coup succeeded. For his involvement in this episode, he was sent to Manchuria, and later in 1938, he took part in the clash with Soviet forces at Lake Khasan, near the northeast Korean border, and did some of the negotiating with the



IJA 32d Army Staff in early February 1945. In the front row are (1) Lieutenant General Ushijima Mitsuru, (2) Lieutenant General Cho Isamu, and (3) Colonel Yahara Hiromichi

Russians. He won fame throughout the IJA by dozing on a hillside with great snores in plain view of the Soviet enemy.

In early 1944 Cho was brought from the general headquarters of the Kwantung Army to Tokyo to participate in the projected recapture of Saipan. When IGHQ abandoned that idea on 27 June, it sent him to Okinawa on 1 July to analyze the strategic situation. On 5 July he wired IGHQ that Okinawa needed three divisions to protect it, plus 30,000 bags of cement for building extensive cave fortifications. These requests may or may not have been prompted by the staff already on Okinawa, but they did conform closely to the main outlines of actual defense arrangements later. In any case Cho was appointed chief of staff of the 32d Army on 8 July 1944.<sup>55</sup>

Cho drank generously and when intoxicated would perform a dance with his samurai sword. He liked having fine cuisine and good scotch in his headquarters. He was enthusiastic and communicated that enthusiasm to those around him. He harbored strong resentments against those who crossed him, but only briefly. In short he was a man of strong feeling and aggressive personality who believed infinitely in his cause and in the capabilities of the IJA. He also tended to base strategic judgments on his enthusiasms rather than on a cool appreciation of reality.<sup>56</sup>

Cho's chief subordinate was the senior operations officer, Colonel Yahara Hiromichi (JMA, 1923). Yahara had been with the 32d Army since its inception on 22 March 1944 and prior to that had attended the Japanese War College; served ten months at Fort Moultrie in the United States; served as a staff officer in China, Malaya, and Burma; and taught at the JMA. By personality and inclination he was the opposite of Cho. He was seen by colleagues as introspective and aloof but good at his business, which was crafting operations. For him war was a science whose practice demanded cool rationality. When Cho was made Yahara's superior on 8 July, there

was some soul-searching among the IGHQ staff as to whether that was a good idea, but the staff at last decided it was.<sup>57</sup>

In the event, Yahara and Cho would often have different views on what operations should be carried out, with the rest of the 32d Army Staff supporting one man or the other. The two men had very different assumptions about the nature of ground combat and what factors were most important in determining its outcome. Observing the drama between Cho and Yahara and throwing the consensual weight of the headquarters one way or the other was the rest of 32d Army Staff: six lieutenant colonels and majors on the central staff of 32d Army who were privy to the main operational decisions, as well as four colonels and a major who headed weapons, administration, medical, and legal branches of the 32d Army headquarters (see appendix A).<sup>58</sup>

### *The Locus of Authority in the 32d Army Staff*

IJA staffs did not reach decisions in the same manner as U.S. Army staffs. In the U.S. Army, a unit commander would hear the evidence from his staff, then decide on a course of action. In the IJA, however, unit commanders had only a symbolic function. The commander was expected only to carry the burden of spiritual responsibility on his shoulders, manage contacts between his unit and superiors, and offer moral support to his subordinates. Practical responsibility for the unit as a whole lay in the hands of its chief of staff. Tasks relating to operations were delegated to the senior staff officer, whose position was similar to a U.S. G3 but who had far more influence than his U.S. counterpart because of the commander's passivity. When trying to arrive at an operational decision, the rest of the staff was expected to provide information and insights and to discuss the issue at hand in the context of a staff meeting. The chief of staff would articulate the policy chosen, and then the whole staff was supposed to agree by consensus that the course chosen was right. The senior staff officer would then draw up the plans and oversee their implementation.

Compared to American practice, this system gave more power to the staff, especially the junior members, and meant that staff discussions tended to shape more directly the content of command decisions. The commander himself was aware of the issues and was present at staff meetings to bless the results, but ordinarily he did not intervene as long as the decision-making process was working. These unique IJA staff practices sprang in part from the German example, which had been influential in the IJA's formative decades, and in part from indigenous traditions of consensus decision making. In the Okinawa campaign, these practices governed the staff-meeting environment in which crucial decisions were reached in a struggle of words between Cho and Yahara.

### *Ground or Air*

In March 1945, 32d Army requested that IGHQ allow the destruction of the Yontan and Kadena airfields on the grounds that the airfields were

impossible to defend. A brigade could delay their seizure for no more than several days and then only at the cost of thousands of lives. Therefore, 32d Army argued, it was better to destroy the airfields, which would deny their use to the enemy for ten days at no cost of life. IGHQ approved the request, so destruction began on 10 March 1945 "using the air units in the area" and was largely completed by the end of the month.<sup>59</sup>

Destroying the airfields marked a dramatic turnaround of IGHQ's earlier policy. Prior to this time IGHQ had expected the defense of Okinawa to be accomplished mainly by air power and had envisioned Okinawa as a giant air base complex. In this, IGHQ had been at odds with the 32d Army Staff from the beginning. The 32d Army, expecting imminent American landings, saw Okinawa in terms of a land-based defense. It had no confidence that Japanese air power would have the desired effect of limiting the American approach.

IGHQ, on the other hand, under its TEI-Go plan of April to July 1944 saw Okinawa only as an air base to help defend the Marianas line. Under the SHO-Go plan of July to November 1944, which recognized the need for ground defense of Okinawa, it was still assumed that many of the invading Americans would be stopped in the water by 1,500 suicide planes gathered for that purpose in China, Taiwan, and the Philippines. Even the TEI-Go plans of November 1944 to April 1945 still laid heavy emphasis on the use of suicide air attacks against the U.S. fleet, albeit launched from Kyushu and Taiwan, not Okinawa. The 32d Army's Yahara felt this air-oriented policy, which built airfields without protecting them, was tantamount to building airfields for the enemy.<sup>60</sup>

In July and August 1944 Cho and Yahara, from their vantage point on Okinawa, were doubtful of the efficacy of Japanese air power and directed all the energies of their then just-arriving main units to building fortifications. The building of airfields, IGHQ's priority, was left to Okinawan laborers. During August 1944, IGHQ sent several emissaries of lieutenant general rank to Okinawa to inspect the airfields' progress. When the pace was discovered to be slow, they severely castigated Cho and threatened to dissolve the whole 32d Army Staff. Faced with this eventuality, Cho finally did devote enough resources to building the airfields so that they were mostly completed by the end of September 1944.<sup>61</sup>

When the 44th IMB withdrew from the Hagushi plain in February 1945—leaving Yontan and Kadena airfields unprotected—the 6th Air Army, the element of 10th Area Army on Taiwan responsible for Okinawa's air defense, complained bitterly. The 32d Army asked for more troops if it had to defend the airfields, but was denied. A compromise was worked out with IGHQ whereby 32d Army was permitted to interdict American use of the airfields by long-range artillery fire.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, the 32d Army wished to have a number of suicide attack planes based on Okinawa to strike the U.S. fleet suddenly when it came within sixty miles. IGHQ promised 32d Army 300 planes for this, but the delivery schedule fell behind and few planes were actually available when the landing day came.<sup>63</sup>

Throughout the long period of waiting, March 1944 to March 1945, IGHQ relied on an air strategy that assumed abundant supplies and equipment would be available. But the strategy became increasingly implausible as time went by, especially to the 32d Army Staff members, who knew what had happened on Saipan and on Iwo Jima and who knew the outcomes of the air battles of the Philippine Sea and of Taiwan. For IGHQ to reverse its policy at the eleventh hour, early March 1945, meant that in the end even IGHQ recognized that an air defense strategy was hopeless and that Okinawa would have to be held by fighting on the ground. Reliance on high-technology air power to avoid a decisive encounter on the ground proved a fantasy, a fantasy appreciated first by ground officers in the area about to be overrun.

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