

What Japan Has Waiting for Us

By **WILLIAM MCGAFFIN**

OKINAWA.

IT was midnight and the men worked swiftly in the darkness. With harsh oaths they toiled 100-pound shells into the battalion of 155's. Finally all was ready. Everyone drew back—everyone except the twelve men who would fire them. They picked up the lanyards. Fingers were pressed against ears.

They could not see what they were shooting at. Even if it had not been dark, they could not have seen. It was not only the miles that separated them from their target or the protective rise of ground about them that obstructed their view. Even the observers on the pine-clad promontory a couple of miles forward had caught only quick glimpses of it. And they never would have got the fix on it without their complicated instruments of detection, which probably could locate even a groundhog if he made a noise or a light. The sound-and-flash team, they were called. They were a valuable band of detectives in this dangerous nightly contest with a foe sometimes almost phantomlike.

The target for tonight was a powerful enemy gun doubly hidden. It was inside a cave which, in turn, was enfolded by the deep blackness of the night. Treacherous, it would slip out to strike without warning, then elude us in its cave when we would try to strike back. It was bold after dark and it had many tricks for avoiding our Long Toms—the long-barreled 155-mm. guns now waiting to spring.

The colonel himself had set this trap. He was eager to spring it, for the hidden gun had been cutting up our infantry cruelly for the last hour. There would be a flash, a long deceptive whisper, and then a stunning crash. Jagged pieces of hot metal would spray wide areas of our lines. Doughboys, trembling, would try to push themselves deeper into their foxholes. Some—the unlucky ones—would scream shrilly, an awful pain-filled wail, "I'm hit! I'm hit!" Then, "Corps-

The Jap's latest surprise in ground-fighting technique. From the scene of its tryout, a war correspondent tells what it is, how we met the challenge.

man! Corpsman!" And from the corpsmen, "Plasma! More plasma! Quick!" Then the screams would grow fainter as the morphine took hold.

Some would make no noise. They simply would lie still. Quite still. For they were dead. They were dead from the lunging shells of a 150-mm. gun, the largest caliber the Japs ever had used against us on land, almost as large as the Long Toms.

It was urgent to get this gun quickly, but this was not easy. For it ran back into its lair after every shot. The colonel had fired at what the detection instruments indicated was the exact location of the gun. But too late. It already was back in the cave and his shells fell impotently on bare ground.

The colonel knew he had the definite location of the gun. Therefore, the flaw must be in timing. He devised a time trap. "Load a battalion of Long Toms," he ordered, "and have the men stand by with their hands on the lanyards." Then, to his sound-and-flash Sherlocks high on the promontory, he said, "Next time you see the flash of that gun, pass the word instantly."

There was not long to wait. A sudden flare on the horizon, as of someone striking a match. The sharp command, "Fire!" spoken into a field telephone and repeated to the gunners a split second later two miles away. Eager hands jerked the lanyards. A thumping

roar like a chorus from hell. An ominous, rustling whisper. Then from behind enemy lines an abrupt giant mushrooming of flame.

The colonel waited before pronouncing his verdict. But caution was superfluous. He had caught the enemy gun square before it could get back into the cave. It would kill no more.

This was but one incident in the surprising big-gun challenge the Japanese launched from the caves of Okinawa, some 300-odd miles from the Japanese mainland. Because of its implications for the coming big show on the mainland of Japan, this duel of ours with disappearing cannon was closely watched by military strategists on our side and theirs too.

We did not ever have an easy time of it, even in this particular incident involving only one gun. It was a much tougher problem when the enemy opened up with several dozen at once—mass firing. This is an American specialty. The Jap was not supposed to know how to do it. He never had done it before. He does not do it now as well as we, but too well, at that. The effect of two dozen shells exploding almost simultaneously in a single area—mass firing—is exceedingly more disastrous than two dozen shells arriving one by one over a period of time.

The Japs had their military observers with the Wehrmacht. They saw what the results of our mass firing were. Another lesson the Jap copyist learned from us too well.

In the early phases on Okinawa, before we got all our artillery ashore, the Japs had more big guns on land than we, and more ammunition. We had giant naval guns firing 14-inch shells from battleships offshore. We had air superiority. And, eventually, we had more big guns on land than he. But he kept his guns alive to harass us in spite of our overwhelming strength. He kept them alive by taking them into thousands of caves prepared against the day of invasion—caves like those presumably ready in the rugged regions of China and Japan. (Continued on Page 69)



Just before dawn on Okinawa. The earth shakes, and the crewmen turn away from the blinding muzzle blast, as this Marine 155 howitzer resumes the duel of the big calibers by hurling another shell at a Jap gun nest somewhere over the horizon.

OFFICIAL U. S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO

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(Continued from Page 19)

To a dapper-mustached, hard-working brigadier general, J. R. (Bob) Sheetz, commander of the 24th Army Corps artillery, fell the job of exterminating these gun caves. General Sheetz set up for business in a group of sandbagged, semidugouts filled with maps, telephones, radios and hand-picked experts. It was an amazing control center. Here one simply picked up the telephone or microphone and spoke directly to a front-line gun position, to a battleship at sea, to a group of bombers waiting in the sky or to an observer in a Cub hovering over the enemy lines.

The whole story was charted on huge maps—co-ordinated maps. The map surface was divided into tiny squares, each representing 100 square yards, and each bearing a number. Here was 732A, for example. There was a red mark on 732A, signifying an enemy gun whose location had been phoned in from a field observer. The workers in the field had the same type of co-ordinated maps as headquarters. Complete synchrony was attained. Square 732A was marked in red until it was known definitely to be knocked out. Then a little white check mark was made next to the red.

General Sheetz, twisting his mustache as he studied his maps, looked not unlike a French artillery officer. Slightly deaf from years around guns, he worked with the French in the last war, when they were recognized masters of artillery. On Okinawa he made use of some of their tricks. But in all his years as an artilleryman he had not been up against a situation like this before.

The Japanese have fought with guns in caves before, but never on such a wholesale scale. It taught us new respect for Japanese artillery. The general admits he learned as he fought. He learned

that no matter how large your shell, unless you get a direct hit right in the front door of the cave, you can't destroy the gun inside.

Surprising things sometimes happened, though, from hits not right in the door. Once a volley of shells went through the roof of a cave and penetrated to the ammunition stores inside. The big gun itself was blown out of the cave like the shells it had been discharging.

The Japs are good at camouflage. Many a cave had a deceptively painted trap door. Sometimes it was impossible to detect such a gun position unless you had your glasses right on it when the trap door flopped open and the gun was rolled out.

Groupment Henderson, a mixed Marine and Army outfit specializing in counterbattery fire, made a rich haul one afternoon by accident. The air observer spotted a group of camouflaged light anti-aircraft guns. Marine Lt. Col. F. P. Henderson, who commands the groupment, began giving the enemy pieces the treatment he had found most effective. Before going for "destruction," with the 200-pound shells of his 8-inch howitzers, he ordered his Long Toms to walk volleys of their 100-pounders around in the area.

This knocks off camouflage, opens up a target and gains a by-product of personnel casualties. The results, however, never were so astonishing as on this day. For when the camouflage was knocked off, seven more guns were laid bare, seven formidable 150-mms. The light anti-aircraft guns, insignificant game in comparison, were there to protect the precious 150's. The colonel's 8-inchers proceeded to knock off the seven big guns.

If a cave looked as though it were being used by artillery, our guns bombarded it until it was sealed. But the caves did not always stay sealed. The antlike Japs, without powerful machinery such as our Seabees use to work their miracles, dug them open with hand shovels at astonishing speed. One of General Sheetz's

most exasperating problems was Cave 608, which the Japs dug open on him four times.

"I sealed it with eight-inch shells one night," said the general. "Next morning they had it open. In the afternoon I sealed it again. Next morning it was open again. I sealed it again, and they dug it open a third time. So I sent over a flight of planes with twelve two-thousand-pound bombs. Eight of the bombs hit right around the entrance and started a landslide. But they dug it open again."

In this great gun battle, which was one of the distinguishing features of Okinawa—our most difficult Pacific conquest to date—each side was spying from afar on the other with seven-league eyes almost the peer of Superman's. The Japanese had higher terrain during the entire first half of the battle. From ridge-top observation posts his observers were able to look down on our lines with elephantine-lensed telescopes. Through these even the notoriously weak Japanese eyes could practically read our mail.

General Sheetz had two kinds of eyes—air observers and the sound-and-flash teams. The air observers, in land-based Piper Cubs and carrier-based TBF's, could see by day, but not by night or in bad weather. The sound-and-flash teams could see at night, but were hampered until the foot soldiers captured observation posts with sufficient elevation and breadth for accurate triangulation.

The Cubs had the more dangerous job. These frail grasshoppers could not take much punishment. Several were lost. Most of the two-man pilot-observer teams were not so fortunate as the couple who parachuted down inside the enemy lines and ran back to our side before the Japs could capture or kill them. Or the two who managed to get back, both wounded, with half a wing shot off.

Midway in the battle, the Japs regrouped their anti-aircraft weapons around their big-gun caves and made it too costly for our Cubs to continue operation for a time. But the lapse was only temporary and American ingenuity provided another type of air observation during it.

Listening to the dialogue as a Cub spotter worked, you learned how individual attention was given to each gun cave. When the Cub observer arrived over the position, you heard him say, "I can see it now." He then gave the most detailed and specific possible location. Then he ordered the guns at the end of his short wave to open fire. A round was sent over. It did not hit. The observer kept walking the fire around until the range was right. When satisfied, he ordered, "Go for destruction." Six rounds came trompling over. The officer at the guns asked, "Well, how about it?" The Cub reported, "Not destroyed as yet. Continue destruction." This went on until the observer was able to report, "Destroyed. Cease fire. Mission accomplished."

The sound-and-flash team did not stick its neck out so far. But these remote-control gumshoes with their fascinating gadgets were an indispensable set of eyes and ears. The 400 men on the sound-and-flash team were commanded by Lt. Col. Frank B. Wolcott, who studied military science under General Sheetz at Princeton eighteen years ago and did not see the general again until the battle of Okinawa brought them together.

The general was enthusiastic about his two kinds of eyes. "There were two outstanding performances," he said. "Wolcott, who located literally hundreds of guns, was one. The Cub planes were the other. Without these two, I could not have worked."

Sheetz's opposite number, sitting in a cave command post behind the Shuri line, may have thought he had the general licked when he forced the Cubs to

quit for several days. But the general called in a courageous group of P-38 fighter-photo planes. Through them the general continued to get air observation—not by voice, but by picture. It was unhealthy even for a P-38 to linger over the target the way the Cubs had done. Instead, the P-38's would go in, strafing to keep the Japs down, and while their bullets were flying, their automatic gun cameras were clicking hundreds of close-detail pictures. But this was not so efficient as voice observation from planes. The general wanted his Cubs. He sent strike upon strike of bombers, to plaster the close-grouped anti-aircraft guns. Soon the guns had to scatter out as they were before. The Cubs went back to broadcasting.

The sound-and-flash teams used to pick up ten to fifteen new fixes a night. For night was when the Japanese ventured out of his hole. He felt safer in the dark. But his lovely night camouflage was not sufficient to conceal the orange flash of his guns.

Each night new positions would be fixed. They were not always new guns. Often they were only old ones moved to new places. Moving around was the only way the Jap could keep his guns alive. Each morning a plane looked over the new fixes. There always would be caves on the sites. And the general

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LIGHTNING-BUG QUOTA

By Owenita Sanderlin

Mothers lack imaginations,
Canning beans and suchlike
rations,
While the children, bearing jars,
Go out by night preserving stars.

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would patiently resume his cave extermination. Sometimes the Jap grew bold in daylight. Sometimes he would sneak the 150's out of their caves to grab and growl at concentrations of doughboys spotted behind our lines. But never if there were planes overhead.

Even the less vulnerable, less valuable mortars learned to fear our planes. The mortars carried the burden by day. One type, the new 320-mm. "ash can," dug forty-foot-wide craters and threw a freezing fear into the doughboys when it came wobbling over. But this, too, hid from our planes when they were overhead. The psychological power of our planes was so great that one day a group of unloaded bombers, starting home, kept the enemy guns down simply by making dry runs over them.

Before the battle ended, a technique was devised for using our planes effectively at night as well. "Hunter-killer" planes were sent out on nights when the weather permitted. They were armed with rockets and 100-pound bombs. They droned over the enemy lines until they spotted the flash of an enemy gun. Immediately they dived to bomb and strafe the spot. This was usually too inaccurate an attack to destroy a gun, but it would scare it into silence for hours.

One wild, tricky night taught Sheetz the desirability of having an extra weapon handy for emergencies. The general was trying to assist the infantry, stalled against the enemy line, to a breakthrough. For two days he poured it on with Long Toms, 8-inch howitzers, 14-inch naval guns, bombs—everything he had. In one day alone the general's artillery fired 92,700 rounds and the Navy warships pumped an additional 10,000 rounds. This fire, which set a record for the size of target involved, was

too much for the Jap. He sought a better 'ole for his guns several miles to the rear.

But he moved under at night, when our air observation was blind. The next day he was spotted in his new hide-outs. Whether he deliberately let himself be seen as part of his scheme or whether he took further evasive action as a consequence of being seen is difficult to say. In any event, he unexpectedly moved again that night. And at eleven P.M. he opened up from his new surprise positions. Scores of guns dropped a merciless barrage among the doughboys' fox-holes.

The general set Long Tom and his brothers to chasing the Jap in the holes where he was last seen. But the Jap barrage continued furiously. Soon it was apparent that Long Tom's wrath was being wasted on barren ground. The Jap had fled to a new hide-out. Then came the exasperatingly tedious job of finding out where. The sound-and-flash teams worked with desperate impatience. Hour upon hour it went on. It was a night the doughboys would not forget. One small sector of the front caught 4500 enemy rounds. It went on from eleven P.M. to four A.M.—five terrible hours.

"I confess he had me last night," the general told me the next morning. "The damned fool! You'd think he had more ammunition than I have, the way he was spending it on the doughboys all night."

The general continued in this caustic mood of self-examination, "He put one over on me, all right. But I learned a lesson."

The lesson was this: You have to lay down a heavy interdiction fire over roads and trails around the enemy's gun positions at night, so he can't move. The general had interdicted enemy roads before—that is, he had dropped a neutralizing barrage of shells on the roads to discourage traffic and try to destroy anything caught on them. But it had been too light. And he had not touched the trails—which was how the Jap had moved on this particular night.

The general grimly interdicted trails and roads with a heavy hand after that. But it was far from a 100 per cent success. With the courage of desperation, the Japs ran the nightly gamut of fire to new holes. In the end, upward of an estimated 500 Japanese guns were knocked out on Okinawa. It took weeks to get them all.

The strain on troop morale was another new factor we had not encountered before. Our divisions on Okinawa never had been under shelling by heavy artillery. They stood up well, considering their greenness to this type of ordeal, but a percentage of battle neuroses—shell shocks we called them in the last war—inevitably developed. Many had to be evacuated.

On Okinawa, these now-you-see-'em-now-you-don't guns proved to be a definite new threat to an American invading force. It was defeated eventually. But thoughtful strategists are wondering: If he could do what he did on Okinawa, what must he have waiting for us in Japan or China? He has tipped his hand now, showing us that he has large-caliber guns, that he knows how to mass-fire them and how to keep them alive indefinitely in caves.

And, though his air force and his fleet have been whittled down from their dangerous proportions, his big guns have hardly suffered at all. For he did not bring them out until Okinawa. It would seem a logical deduction that he has plenty waiting for us when we come into his homeland for the big show.

Military chroniclers of the future, perhaps, will see in Okinawa a sort of final testing ground of the Pacific, where new weapons and new ways of using them were tried and perfected for the great battles ahead. We shall need every bit of the experience we have gained here.