

The first wave of LVT (A) 1s and LVT (A) 4s moving toward the beach at Peleliu.

Landing Vehicles Tracked

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PELELIU

ALTHOUGH the United States had naval bases in the Philippines and Hawaii in 1941, and in time of war expected to have access to British bases in Asia, there were no intermediate bases which could act as stepping stones to enable operations to be supported against an Asiatic enemy. World War II in the Pacific therefore became one of developing lines of communication which would continue to support operations against the Japanese as the line developed. Once a Japanese-held island was seized, it was exploited as a forward base for bombers and reconnaissance planes and sometimes as a full air or naval base to assist in holding those lines. The type of island landings the U.S. Marines and later the U.S. Army mounted in the Pacific was of necessity an amphibious assault defended by the enemy at the beach and it was at this point that the attacker was most vulnerable. The techniques worked out and exemplified by the time of the landing on Peleliu remained generally similar thenceforth in the Pacific.

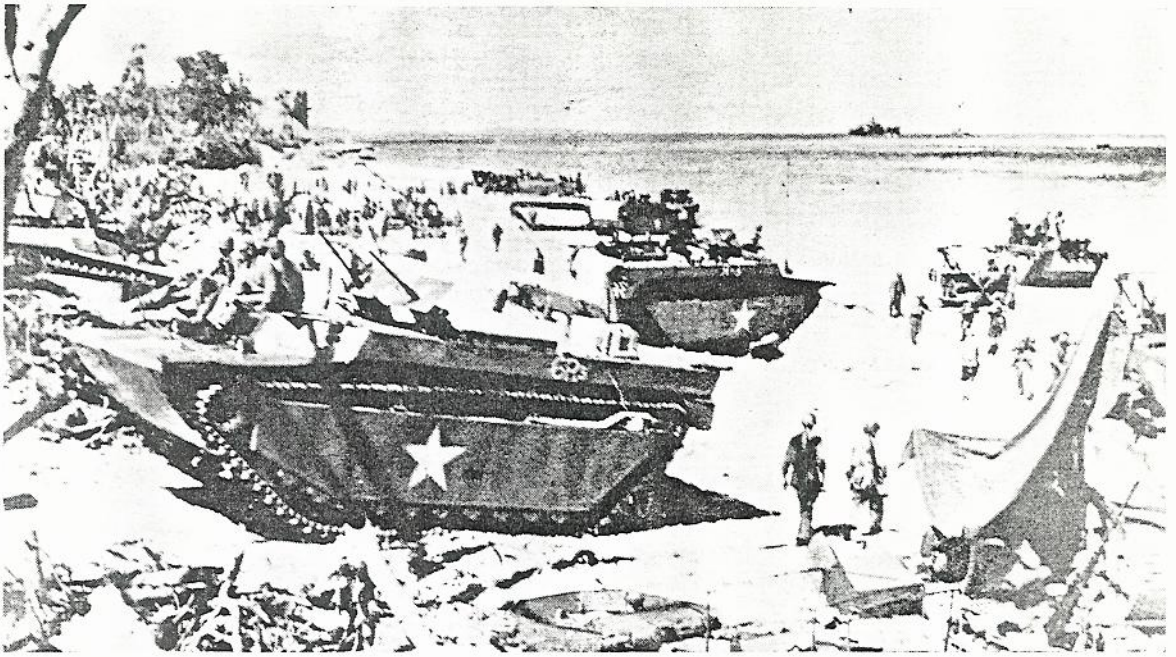
LVTs were first used logistically in the Guadalcanal assault in August 1942 for carrying supplies from ship to shore. They were first used tactically in the landing at Tarawa in November 1943. The pattern established there continued to develop. Also, because of Tarawa, Navy airmen were "shocked into a better understanding of their air support mission" and naval gunfire in the future also was to improve.

An assault was planned against Peleliu for September 15, 1944 and, in spite of knowledge that over 10,000 Japanese were dug in there, only one division of

Marines was available, partly because of overconfidence on the part of the division commander. Peleliu is a small coral island of about seven square miles, a part of the Palau group lying about 450 miles east of the Philippines. The southern part is relatively flat but has rugged coral outcroppings. The northern part is dominated by a jagged coral ridge about 550 feet in elevation, full of crags, escarpment and pinnacles. At the north tip is a mountain. Both the ridge and the mountain were honeycombed with caves and the Japanese had blasted out the coral to interconnect many of them. However, there was no advance intelligence of this. The ground was covered with thick scrub jungle with mangrove growth in the swamps. There are no rivers and the ground drains rapidly after rains.

It was decided to land on the southwest beaches because the flat terrain would permit tank and artillery employment. The 1st Marines supported by 15 medium tanks were to land on the left with two battalions in assault and one in reserve. The 5th Marines supported by nine medium tanks were to land on the center beach with two battalions in assault and one in support to land one hour later. Two battalions of the 7th Marines supported by six medium tanks were to land in columns on the right. One battalion of the regiment formed the division reserve. It was believed that Army troops in floating reserve also would be available if needed.

The 5th was to secure the airfield, the 1st was to wheel left and the 7th was to wheel right after landing. The attack was organized in waves, the first wave com-



The beach at Peleliu after the Beachhead had been established.

prising howitzer-armed LVT(A) 4s led in by rocket-firing gunboats. The other waves of LVTs carrying troops followed.

The troops came from widely separated points. The 1st Marines, for example, loaded at five different ports. Rehearsals thus could not be coordinated. Two battleships collided during a rehearsal and could not participate in the actual attack. Several other ships suffered collisions on the way. Because of the shortage of shipping, 16 of the 46 division medium tanks had to be left behind. All tanks had been waterproofed but some were diesel tanks just received and were new to the Marines.

The original LVT battalion was split to form two battalions and an additional provisional battalion was formed, adding vehicles and personnel as they became available from various sources. The officers were untrained in the use of LVTs and the enlisted men lacked combat experience. At the last minute, 50 new model LVTs or amtracs, as they were called, showed up.

An innovation for this operation was the provision of three LVTs mounting Navy Mark I flamethrowers capable of firing a jet or "rod" of thickened fuel some

100 yards. The plans for Peleliu contemplated assigning one such vehicle to each assault regiment. The radio of each tractor was set on the regimental command frequency of the regiment which it was to support. They were to land just behind the wave of LVT(A) 1s leading the 1st Marines and with the first wave of the 5th Marines. That for the 7th Marines was to stand off shore with 12 LVT(A) 1s near a small island on the left flank, ready to follow in to the beach. There were two additional LVTs to service the flame-thrower vehicles. One of these shipped water and sank three hours after the landing. The other came to the rescue but was unable to help.

In the actual landing the plan for using these flame-thrower vehicles broke down completely. The one with the 1st Marines stood by under fire on the beach for five hours waiting for orders from the regiment. The one with the 5th was ordered to stand off shore out of danger. After landing, all three stood by for the rest of the day. No use was made of them again on the second day. Beginning with the third day, they were assigned daily to the regiments and reported to their command posts to receive their instructions for each mission.

Another innovation at Peleliu was adopted as a result of previous tank casualties and landing delays. A letter from a Marine tank officer quoted in *Peleliu*, a Marine Corps combat monograph by Major Frank O. Hough, USMCR, described this as follows:

"An LVT was placed on each LCT (Landing Craft, Tank) to lead the tanks ashore. These LVTs were used to test the depth of the water, and as long as they propelled themselves along the bottom the tanks would follow, but if the LVTs became waterborne the tanks would stop until the LVTs could reconnoiter a safe passage. . . . Fuel, ammunition and maintenance supplies were loaded on these LVTs which enabled the tank units to have a mobile supply dump available to them upon reaching the beach."

LVT (A) 4s moving into the beach at Angaur Island as part of the first wave.

