Moving up

on Tokyo

The landing on Iwo Jima brings us to the Volcano and Bonin groups—ideal bases for attacking Japan and flank protection for our Guam-Saipan bases

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Now that our troops have landed there, the Japs probably will change their minds—or at least their talk—about the Bonin and Volcano Islands. Until our arrival, the Japs always insisted that these clusters of volcanic rock were part of their homeland.

With the Izu Shichito group, the Bonin and Volcano Islands form the Southern Islands running for 800 miles south of Tokyo. For an idea of their strategic importance, take a look at the map on this page. These three groups are on the shortest straight-line approach to the Japanese mainland, ideally situated for naval and air assault of the enemy home front. At their southern extremity, this string is only 340 miles north of the most northerly unit of the Marianas, although our big Marianas bases are farther south.

Softening up of the Jap installations (mostly air-force) on the Bonin and Volcano Islands began on June 16, 1944, when U. S. carrier planes struck three bases there during the Battle of Saipan. Since then, attacks on the islands have been mentioned almost daily in the communiques, right up to the time our forces landed there.

Before that, little was known of defense installations in the Southern Islands except for what had been learned by aerial photographs and observations from U. S. submarines. On Iwo Jima, also known as Sulphur Island, largest and central unit of the three Volcano Islands, the Japs have had their major air base. It is 150 miles south of the Bonins, 775 miles south of Tokyo. Only five miles long, it is the only island in the Southern chain large enough for a bomber field.

The 27 islands in the Bonins, totaling only 30 square miles in land area, are stretched out along 100 miles of some of the deepest ocean valleys in the world. Nimitz's raiders met impressively strong resistance last summer from fighter fields on Chichi Jima, or Peel Island, largest of the cluster, and Haha Jima, second largest. Chichi is the site of Futami Ko, or Port Lloyd, capital of the Bonins, which has the only sizable harbor in the Southern chain. It is 580 miles from Tokyo, the last important bastion protecting the capital from south and east.

Military observers previously had guessed that the Bonins were being used by the Japs as a link in the supply lines to their expeditionary forces in New Guinea and the Netherlands East Indies. But after Guam, Saipan and Tinian—three other links in the chain—fell to our troops, the Bonins became valueless to the Japs for this purpose. They will be extremely useful to us, however. This usefulness was recognized by Commodore Perry in 1853. After stopping off there on his way to force open the Japanese Empire, he reported:

(image added)

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to force open the Japanese Empire, he reported: "The occupation of the principal ports of those islands, for the accommodation of our ships of war, and for the safe resort of merchant vessels of whatever nation, would be a measure not only justified by the strictest rules of moral law but by the laws of stern necessity."

Little is known about the tiny Izu Shichito Islands, which run a dotted line in the ocean right up to Tokyo Bay. Most of them are too small for military bases, although the larger ones, perhaps Hachijo and Miyake, may provide fighter strips.

THE entire Southern chain is in one of the most active volcanic areas on earth. Earthquakes, sometimes several in the same day, toss up islets out of the ocean only to submerge them again later. There are unpredictable typhoons and frequent fog, and the climate is semi-tropical. Most of the small harbors are in extinct volcano craters. Lava cliffs throughout the chain range from 500 to over 1,400 feet high.

The Volcano Islands are rather barren, with steep cliffs and sandy beaches. Only 1,000 persons lived on Iwo Jima before the war, with 200 on Kita Iwo to the north and Minami Iwo to the south, although all three likely were heavily garrisoned afterward.

Unlike the Volcano Islands, the Bonins are covered with lush vegetation. Giant ferns, palms, mulberry, cedar, white oak, ironwood, sandalwood and boxwood abound. Sugar cane, bananas, pineapples and tropical vegetables are grown. In the thick forests are many bats, monkeys and other small animals, while the waters teem with fish and turtles. In the same latitude as Miami, the Bonins have an annual average temperature of 72 degrees. January and February are the coolest months and May the rainiest. The prewar civilian population was 6,000, a lot for such a narrow corner, and the wartime population undoubtedly has been many times greater.

Geographers have divided the Bonins into three smaller groupings: the Parry Islands in the north, the Beechey Islands in the middle and the Coffins in the south. Most of the islands had Spanish or English names before the Japanese gave them names of their own. The word Bonin is derived from the Japanese *bu min to*, meaning "islands without people," but the Japs call the islands Ogasawara Gunto, after a Jap explorer who landed there in 1593.

The Japanese did not discover the group. It was first sighted in 1543 by the Spaniard Villalobos, who was followed by a Portuguese mariner. The Bonins remained uninhabited until the nineteenth century. A Capt. Beechey claimed them for the British in 1827, and three years later the British consul at Honolulu sponsored colonization by Americans, Europeans and Hawaiians.

When Perry visited the southernmost group of the Bonins 23 years later, he found Nathaniel Savory, an American, governing the small colony of Hawaiians, one Englishman, a Dane and an Italian. Perry claimed the islands for the United States, renaming them for Coffin, an American whaling-ship captain, who had touched there in 1823. The U. S. at that time did not particularly want any distant colonies that required naval protection and never pressed the claim. Perry's coaling depot became a Jap base.

While America was preoccupied with her Civil War, the Japanese attempted to colonize the Bonins but failed because rice could not be raised there. In 1875, they tried again with 40 colonists. About 90 descendants of Savory's pioneers were still living there. Twenty years later the population had grown to 5,000, and the original settlers had either quit or intermarried with the Japs.

After 1904, few persons outside leading Japanese military circles knew accurately what was going on in this new Jap colony. In that year, foreign settlements were forbidden in the Bonins, probably because Japan was fortifying these

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rocky bits of land as they were the Marshalls, Carolines and Marianas.

Despite their promises at the 1922 Washington Disarmament Conference, the Japs went on strengthening the Bonin installations, and in the last 20 years outsiders weren't allowed ashore. The Japs made one exception: an Anglican bishop was permitted to visit the island yearly to perform marriages and christenings for the few Christians left. That, too, was ended in 1935.

During the first World War, Vice Adm. Von Spee of the German fleet hid two armored and two light cruisers in the Bonins in 1914. From that base, these vessels roved the Pacific, raiding British shipping, and eventually got back to Germany despite an ocean-wide hunt by their foe.

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