

Operation GALVANIC December 3

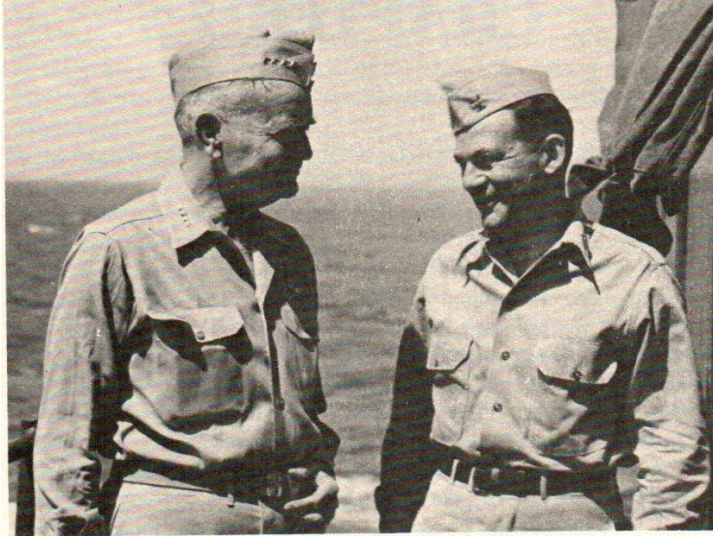
During World War II, the United States and Great Britain produced both strategic and tactical SIGINT. The central organizations, such as those at Bletchley Park, Arlington Hall Station, and the Navy Communications Annex, produced decrypts from high-grade enemy cryptosystems. This product was marked TOP SECRET ULTRA and was distributed to a very limited readership of senior Allied officers.

Additionally, teams of Army cryptologists, including intercept operators, cryptanalysts, and traffic analysts, worked just behind the front lines, exploiting the enemy's low level communications. The Navy placed the same sort of teams on the flagships of task forces and other major combat vessels to provide warning information prior to contact with the enemy and whatever signals intelligence could be gleaned during a battle itself.

A case in point was Operation GALVANIC, the amphibious assault on the Japanese-held Gilbert Islands, which was fought from November 6 to December 12, 1943. The islands of Tarawa and Makin were the principal objectives of this operation.

The Marine Corps planning staff for the operation had excellent strategic intelligence, including SIGINT, but once ashore, did not have good tactical data. However, the Navy, as it supported the landings did get good tactical intelligence from a detachment afloat.

One principle practiced by the Navy was to assign the same SIGINT team leader to the same task force commanders. Because of the hectic pace of command decisions during combat, it worked better if the commander and the team leader knew each other and they understood each other.



LCDR Slonim, right, conversing with Admiral William Halsey, task force commander

The senior SIGINT person for the GALVANIC task force was Lieutenant Commander (LCDR) Gilven Slonim. As a Japanese linguist, he had led the first SIGINT detachment afloat after the Japanese attack on Hawaii in December 1941. Further, Slonim had led detachments in subsequent amphibious operations and probably was the most experienced Navy tactical SIGINTer at the time.

As the operation began, the first task of the SIGINT detachment was to report when Japanese aircraft sighted a U.S. ship, since this meant the enemy would likely attack it in the near future. The nature of the ship deployments around the target islands during GALVANIC was so diffused that it often was difficult to associate a Japanese spotting report with a particular U.S. vessel. Nevertheless, the SIGINT detachment provided good warning information in most cases.

Once the landing force was ashore, the detachment watched Japanese requests for weather information between islands. This usually was another tipoff that air action was imminent.

As the battle unfolded, the Japanese carried out coordinated attacks, often by torpedo bombers. One American admiral remarked that these were the best tactical attacks he had seen by the Japanese so far in the war. However, the Japanese communicated with their aircraft in plain language, so U.S. SIGINT personnel kept American commanders well informed about enemy moves.

In one unusual case, at night, a flight of Japanese planes flew over the main U.S. naval task force. The SIGINT detachment reported their presence, but also reported that the enemy formation had not detected the American presence below them.

Once the landing forces had secured the landing field on Tarawa, allowing air operations from the base, the naval task force moved on, going off to attack Japanese positions on the Kwajalein atoll, from which the Japanese had been conducting bombing operations in support of their defense of Tarawa.

Two SIGINT units went with them to continue the tactical support.

508 CAPTION: U.S. naval task force commander LCDR Gilven Slonim is shown with Admiral William Halsey