Operation Galvanic Part II. Inter-service rivalry probably reached it's peak during the inter-war years because the services were drawn-down to a minimum after the First World War and competed bitterly for scarce funding. World War II, particularly in the amphibious assaults of Pacific Theater, required an unprecedented level of cooperation between the Army, Navy and Marine Corps but this did little to cool the hatreds which were now exacerbated by major differences in the tactical doctrine of each service. Operation Galvanic, an sea/air/land operation to take the Gilbert Islands brought these tensions to a head.

The Navy conceived the United States Marine Corps as a shipboard security force but prescient Marine Officers realized after the World War I Gallipoli disaster that a crack amphibious infantry force would be essential to winning any conflict in far off countries. The unique nature of amphibious warfare put naval forces in danger during the landing phase because vessels supporting the landing had to remain close to shore and patrol at slow speeds, exposing them to enemy submarines and aircraft. The Marine Corps developed an infantry doctrine to minimize the navy's time offshore, emphasizing rapid paced assaults to seize and occupy a beachhead, then hold it until reinforcements could be landed to continue offensive operations on a large scale. Of course, with aggressive infantry movements, came increased exposure to enemy fire and heavy casualties.

The Army had a completely different infantry doctrine, which was suited to the its role of continental, large-scale warfare. Army infantry movements were slower, more deliberate advances over a wide, straight front. In continental warfare, any salient (bulge) in the front exposed infantrymen to flanking attack (attack from the sides) and these were avoided at the cost of speed of advance. Army infantry doctrine reduced overall exposure and thus minimized casualties but as it would turn out, was not particularly suited to amphibious landings where naval assets were required to support them over long periods from positions close to shore.

Makin Island, the second target of Operation Galvanic, was captured by the Japanese on 10 December, 1941, for use as a seaplane base and lightly defended. On 17 August 1942, a raid by 211 marine raiders, led by LTC Evans Carlson, destroyed the Makin's small garrison to divert the enemy's attention from Guadalcanal. The Carlson raid only served to alert the Japanese to the strategic importance of the Gilberts and they increased their force on Makin to some 800 troops (about half being construction workers, mostly Korean forced laborers.) The army committed about 6500 soldiers to take Makin as compared with 18,000 marines assigned to take Tarawa with it's 5,000 defenders. As with Tarawa, a long air and sea bombardment preceded the invasion. Fast carrier task forces had been at sea for some weeks prior to the landings, bombing Japanese air and naval bases to prevent them from mounting a counter force against the landings. Augmented with battleships for shore bombardment, the carriers were pulled in close offshore to cover the landing, steaming slowly through a small operational area in constant danger. This danger was to have been mitigated by a rapid capture of Makin, expected to take no more than one day.

When elements of the Army's 27th Infantry Division hit the beaches of Makin Island on 20 November 1943, they fought according Army doctrine - carefully prepping assaults on individual enemy positions and mopping up behind, all while maintaining a straight front line. This resulted in a slow, deliberate advance taking 5 days to reduce a garrison one tenth the size of Betio. Only 66 soldiers were killed taking Makin, Japanese losses were about 400. (The economy of Army infantry warfare was a feature of MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Theater. MacArthur captured New Guinea and the Philippines with fewer soldiers killed in each operation than the battle of Okinawa.)

Makin would have been low cost, slow and easy Army victory had it not been an amphibious operation on a remote island in a lake stocked with Japanese predatory fish. As the Army took it's time reducing Makin, naval commanders offshore seethed as their ships were unable to maneuver during this time, presenting nearly stationary targets for Japanese submarines.

Japan had one unchallenged advantage throughout the Pacific war – torpedoes. The Japanese "Long Lance" oxygen powered torpedo had 4 times the range of American designs and were practically invisible because they did not leave a trail of bubbles like ours did. American torpedoes could be tracked back to their firing point, placing ships in grave danger. Japanese contact fuses worked perfectly, although they did have some tendency to falsely detonate if they crossed a large ship's wake. (One of the worst scandals of World War II was the poor performance of American torpedoes which constantly failed to explode. It took years of buck-passing before this deficiency was even officially acknowledged, let alone corrected.) Japanese torpedo tactics were developed by Captain Tameichi Hara, a destroyer skipper who developed a mathematical model of a surface torpedo attack which he translated to an effective tactic. Hara's theory was adopted by the Imperial Japanese Navy and he was assigned to instruct captains in his tactic at the IJN academy at Eta Jima - with devastating results. Japanese torpedo attacks resulted in the majority of American naval losses in surface actions against the IJN. Japanese submarine-launched torpedoes were equally effective.

As the Battle of Makin dragged on, American naval officers afloat were becoming more and more vexed with the slowness of the army operation. Then, on 24 November 1943, the seething hatred amongst Army and Navy officers boiled over. Attached to the invasion fleet, the Escort Carrier, Liscome Bay, (CVE-56) cruised slowly 20 miles off Butaritari Island, where an artillery firebase was set up to support the Makin advance. The Japanese submarine, I-175, in the area looking for targets of opportunity, found a perfect victim as the slowly moving carrier loomed in its periscope. I-175 fired a spread of torpedoes - one found its mark. It struck the Liscome Bay in the worst possible place, the aerial bomb magazine. A horrific explosion ripped through the entire vessel which sank in 23 minutes and with it, 644 officers and sailors. Among the dead was Doris Miller who, at Pearl Harbor, became the first African-American to be awarded the Navy Cross. Total naval casualties at Makin were 697, including 43 killed in a turret fire aboard the Battleship Mississippi. Naval losses represented 40 percent of U.S. casualties during Operation Galvanic. Although blaming the sinking of the Liscome Bay on the slowness of the army operation is debatable, the incident would fuel the fires of inter-service hatred for the remainder of the war and boil over again during the battle of Saipan where slower moving army troops fought alongside more rapidly advancing marines and in falling behind, left the marine flanks exposed.

Operation Galvanic achieved it's military objectives and the attention of U.S. Navy turned to the Marshall islands where the next forward base would be established. Navy Seabees went to work on Betio and Makin as soon as the shooting stopped, building airfields and port facilities and barracks to house the thousands of support troops who would keep supplies moving forward. As 1944 dawned, American commanders deemed victory in the Pacific possible, by June 1944, it would become inevitable.

As late as 2015, in the independent island nation of Kiribati, remains of U.S. Marines killed on Betio were still being found and identified. Few Japanese families ever learned the fate of their children – so systematic and brutal was their slaughter, that only after 50 years could USMC veterans talk in detail of the battle. In America, young patriots today still strive to earn the right to wear the Globe and Anchor insignia of the United States Marine Corps which will forever symbolize the valor and sacrifice of that horrible battle fought 75 years ago on the tiny atoll of Tarawa.