

CLOSING IN:
MARINES IN THE
SEIZURE OF IWO JIMA

MARINES IN
WORLD WAR II
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

BY COLONEL JOSEPH H. ALEXANDER
U.S. MARINE CORPS (RET)



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Marines of Company E, 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, lower the first flag raised over Mount Suribachi, while other men raise a second flag which became the subject of Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal's world-famous photograph. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 112718.



A Marine flamethrower operator moves forward to assault a Japanese pillbox on Motoyama Airfield. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111006.

Closing In: Marines in the Seizure of Iwo Jima

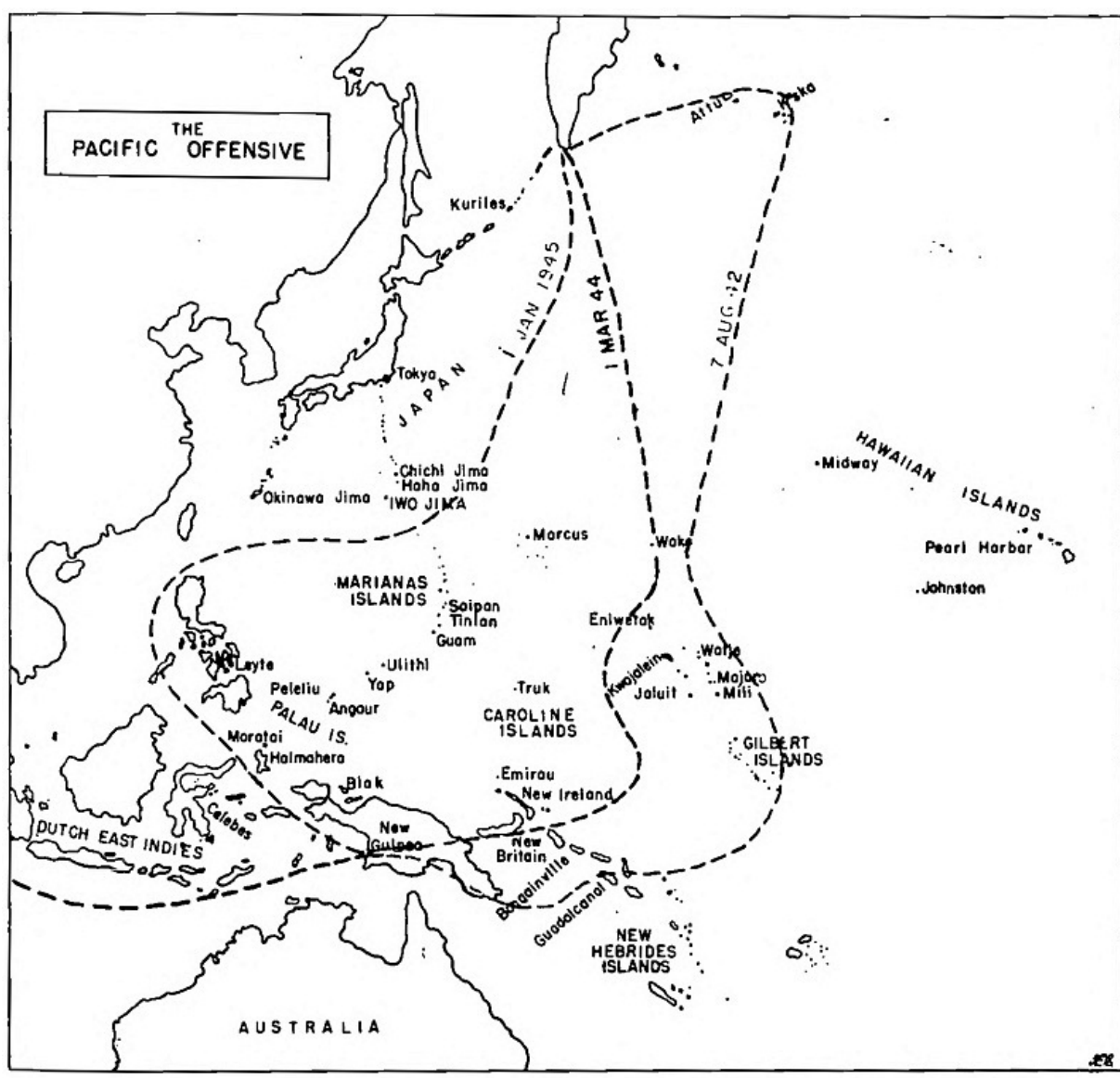
by Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret)

Sunday, 4 March 1945, marked the end of the second week of the U.S. invasion of Iwo Jima. By this point the assault elements of the 3d, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions were exhausted, their combat efficiency reduced to dangerously low levels. The thrilling sight of the American flag being raised by the 28th Marines on Mount Suribachi had occurred 10 days earlier, a lifetime on “Sulphur Island.” The landing forces of the V Amphibious Corps (VAC) had already sustained 13,000 casualties, including 3,000 dead. The “front lines” were a jagged serration across Iwo’s fat northern half, still in the middle of the main Japanese defenses. Ahead the going seemed all uphill against a well-disciplined, rarely visible enemy.

In the center of the island, the 3d Marine Division units had been up most of the night repelling a small but determined Japanese counterattack which had found the seam between the 21st and 9th Marines. Vicious close combat had cost both sides heavy casualties. The counterattack spoiled the division’s preparations for a morning advance. Both regiments made marginal gains against very stiff opposition.

To the east the 4th Marine Division had finally captured Hill 382, ending its long exposure in “The Amphitheater,” but combat efficiency had fallen to 50 percent. It would drop another five points by nightfall. On this day the 24th Marines, supported by flame tanks, advanced a total of 100 yards, pausing to detonate more than a ton of explosives against enemy cave positions in that sector. The 23d and 25th Marines entered the most difficult terrain yet encountered, broken ground that limited visibility to only a few feet.

Along the western flank, the 5th Marine Division had just seized Nishi Ridge and Hill 362-B the previous day, suffering more than 500 casualties. It too had been up most of the night engaging a sizeable force of infiltrators. The Sunday morning attacks lacked coordination, reflecting the division's collective exhaustion. Most rifle companies were at half-strength. The net gain for the day, the division reported, was "practically nil."



THE
PACIFIC OFFENSIVE

But the battle was beginning to take its toll on the Japanese garrison as well. General Tadamichi Kuribayashi knew his *109th Division* had inflicted heavy casualties on the attacking Marines, yet his own losses had been comparable. The American capture of the key hills in the main defense sector the day before deprived him of his invaluable artillery observation sites. His brilliant chief of artillery, Colonel Chosaku Kaido, lay dying. On this date Kuribayashi moved his own command post from the central highlands to a large cave on the northwest coast. The usual blandishments from Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo reached him by radio that afternoon, but Kuribayashi was in no mood for heroic rhetoric. “Send me air and naval support and I will hold the island,” he signalled. “Without them I cannot hold.”



Marine Corps Art Collection

“Silence in the Gorge,” an acrylic painting on masonite by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, USMCR (Ret), who as private first class was wounded during the battle.

That afternoon the fighting men of both sides witnessed a harbinger of Iwo Jima’s fate. Through the overcast skies appeared a gigantic silver bomber, the largest aircraft anyone had ever seen. It was the Boeing B-29 Super Fortress “Dinah Might,” crippled in a raid over Tokyo, seeking an

emergency landing on the island's scruffy main airstrip. As the Americans in the vicinity held their breaths, the big bomber swooped in from the south, landed heavily, clipped a field telephone pole with a wing, and shuddered to a stop less than 50 feet from the bitter end of the strip. Pilot Lieutenant Fred Malo and his 10-man crew were extremely glad to be alive, but they didn't stay long. Every Japanese gunner within range wanted to bag this prize. Mechanics made field repairs within a half hour. Then the 65-ton Superfort lumbered aloft through a hail of enemy fire and headed back to its base in Tinian. The Marines cheered.

The battle of Iwo Jima would rage on for another 22 days, claiming eleven thousand more American casualties and the lives of virtually the entire Japanese garrison. This was a colossal fight between two well-armed, veteran forces—the biggest and bloodiest battle in the history of the United States Marine Corps. From the 4th of March on, however, the leaders of both sides entertained no doubts as to the ultimate outcome.

Assault Preparations

Iwo Jima was one of those rare amphibious landings where the assault troops could clearly see the value of the objective. They were the first ground units to approach within a thousand miles of the Japanese homeland, and they were participating directly in the support of the strategic bombing campaign.

The latter element represented a new wrinkle on an old theme. For 40 years the U.S. Marines had been developing the capability for seizing advanced naval bases in support of the fleet. Increasingly in the Pacific War—and most especially at Saipan, Tinian, and now Iwo Jima—they were seizing advanced airbases to further the strategic bombing of the Japanese home islands.

American servicemen had awaited the coming of the B-29s for years. The “very-long-range” bombers, which had become operational too late for the European War, had been striking mainland Japan since November 1944. Results proved disappointing. The problem stemmed not from the pilots or planes but rather from a vexing little spit of volcanic rock lying halfway along the direct path from Saipan to Tokyo—Iwo Jima. Iwo’s radar gave the Japanese defense authorities two hours advance notice of every B-29 strike. Japanese fighters based on Iwo swarmed up to harass the unescorted Superforts going in and especially coming home, picking off those bombers crippled by anti-aircraft (AA) fire. As a result, the B-29s had to fly higher, along circuitous routes, with a reduced payload. At the same time, enemy bombers based on Iwo often raided B-29 bases in the Marianas, causing some damage.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff decided Iwo Jima must be captured and a U.S. airbase built there. This would eliminate Japanese bombing raids and the early warning interceptions, provide fighter escorts throughout the most dangerous portion of the long B-29 missions, and enable greater payloads at longer ranges. Iwo Jima in American hands would also provide a welcome

emergency field for crippled B-29s returning from Tokyo. It would also protect the flank of the pending invasion of Okinawa. In October 1944 the Joint Chiefs directed Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, CinCPac, to seize and develop Iwo Jima within the ensuing three months. This launched Operation Detachment.

The first enemy in the campaign would prove to be the island itself, an ugly, barren, foul-smelling chunk of volcanic sand and rock, barely 10 square miles in size. Iwo Jima means “Sulphur Island” in Japanese. As described by one Imperial Army staff officer, the place was “an island of sulphur, no water, no sparrow, no swallow.” Less poetic American officers saw Iwo’s resemblance to a pork chop, with the 556-foot dormant volcano Mount Suribachi dominating the narrow southern end, overlooking the only potential landing beaches. To the north, the land rose unevenly onto the Motoyama Plateau, falling off sharply along the coasts into steep cliffs and canyons. The terrain in the north represented a defender’s dream: broken, convoluted, cave-dotted, a “jungle of stone.” Wreathed by volcanic steam, the twisted landscape appeared ungodly, almost moon-like. More than one surviving Marine compared the island to something out of Dante’s *Inferno*.

Forbidding Iwo Jima had two redeeming features in 1945: the military value of its airfields and the psychological status of the island as a historical possession of Japan. Iwo Jima lay in Japan’s “Inner Vital Defense Zone” and was in fact administered as part of the Tokyo Prefecture. In the words of one Japanese officer, “Iwo Jima is the doorkeeper to the Imperial capital.” Even by the slowest aircraft, Tokyo could be reached in three flight hours from Iwo. In the battle for Iwo Jima, a total of 28,000 Americans and Japanese would give their lives in savage fighting during the last winter months of 1945.

No one on the American side ever suggested that taking Iwo Jima would be an easy proposition. Admiral Nimitz assigned this mission to the same team which had prevailed so effectively in the earlier amphibious assaults in the Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas: Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commanding the Fifth Fleet; Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, commanding the Expeditionary Forces; and Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill, commanding the Attack Force. Spruance added the highly regarded Rear Admiral William H. P. Blandy, a veteran of the Peleliu/Angaur landings, to command the Amphibious Support Forces, responsible for

minesweeping, underwater demolition team operations, and preliminary naval air and gun bombardment.

As usual, “maintaining unremitting military pressure on the enemy” meant an accelerated planning schedule and an overriding emphasis on speed of execution. The amphibious task force preparing to assault Iwo Jima soon found itself squeezed on both ends. Hill and Blandy had a critical need for the amphibious ships, landing craft, and shore bombardment vessels currently being used by General Douglas MacArthur in his reconquest of Luzon in the Philippines. But bad weather and stiff enemy resistance combined to delay completion of that operation. The Joint Chiefs reluctantly postponed D-day for Iwo Jima from 20 January 1945 until 19 February. The tail end of the schedule provided no relief. D-Day for Okinawa could go no later than 1 April because of the approach of the monsoon season. The constricted time frame for Iwo would have grave implications for the landing force.

The experienced V Amphibious Corps under Major General Harry Schmidt, USMC, would provide the landing force, an unprecedented assembly of three Marine divisions, the 3d, 4th, and 5th. Schmidt would have the distinction of commanding the largest force of U.S. Marines ever committed in a single battle, a combined force which eventually totalled more than 80,000 men. Well above half of these Marines were veterans of earlier fighting in the Pacific; realistic training had prepared the newcomers well. The troops assaulting Iwo Jima were arguably the most proficient amphibious forces the world had seen.

Unfortunately, two senior Marines shared the limelight for the Iwo Jima battle, and history has often done both an injustice. Spruance and Turner prevailed upon Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, then commanding Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific, to participate in Operation Detachment as Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops. This was a gratuitous billet. Schmidt had the rank, experience, staff, and resources to execute corps-level responsibility without being second-guessed by another headquarters. Smith, the amphibious pioneer and veteran of landings in the Aleutians, Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas, admitted to being embarrassed by the assignment. “My sun had almost set by then,” he stated, “I think they asked me along only in case something happened to Harry Schmidt.” Smith tried to keep out of Schmidt’s way, but his subsequent

decision to withhold commitment of the 3d Marines, the Expeditionary Troops reserve, remains as controversial today as it was in 1945.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109649

Burdened with heavy packs and equipment, Marine communicators dash for cover while advancing under heavy fire during the drive inland from the beaches.

Holland Smith was an undeniable asset to the Iwo Jima campaign. During the top-level planning stage he was often, as always, a “voice in the wilderness,” predicting severe casualties unless greater and more effective preliminary naval bombardment was provided. He diverted the press and the visiting dignitaries from Schmidt, always providing realistic counterpoints to some of the rosier staff estimates. “It’s a tough proposition,” Smith would say about Iwo, “That’s why we are here.”

General Schmidt, whose few public pronouncements left him saddled with the unfortunate prediction of a 10-day conquest of Iwo Jima, came to resent the perceived role Holland Smith played in post-war accounts. As he would forcibly state:

I was the commander of all troops on Iwo Jima at all times. Holland Smith never had a command post ashore, never issued a single order ashore, never spent a single night ashore.... Isn’t it important from an historical standpoint that I commanded the

greatest number of Marines ever to be engaged in a single action in the entire history of the Marine Corps?

General Smith would not disagree with those points. Smith provided a useful role, but Schmidt and his exceptional staff deserve maximum credit for planning and executing the difficult and bloody battle of Iwo Jima.

The V Amphibious Corps achievement was made even more memorable by the enormously difficult opposition provided by the island and the enemy. In Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi [see [sidebar](#)], the Americans faced one of the most formidable opponents of the war. A fifth-generation *samurai*, hand-picked and personally extolled by the Emperor, Kuribayashi combined combat experience with an innovative mind and an iron will. Although this would be his only combat against American forces, he had learned much about his prospective opponents from earlier service in the United States. More significantly, he could appraise with an unblinking eye the results of previous Japanese attempts to repel American invasions of Japanese-held garrisons. Heroic rhetoric aside, Kuribayashi saw little to commend the “defend-at-the-water’s-edge” tactics and “all-or-nothing” *Banzai* attacks which had characterized Japan’s failures from Tarawa to Tinian. Kuribayashi, a realist, also knew not to expect much help from Japan’s depleted fleet and air forces. His best chances, he concluded, would be to maximize Iwo’s forbidding terrain with a defense in depth, along the pattern of the recent Biak and Peleliu defensive efforts. He would eschew coast defense, anti-landing, and *Banzai* tactics and instead conduct a prolonged battle of attrition, a war of nerves, patience, and time. Possibly the Americans would lose heart and abandon the campaign.

Such a seemingly passive policy, even that late in the war, seemed revolutionary to senior Japanese Army and Navy leaders. It ran counter to the deeply ingrained warrior code, which viewed the defensive as only an unpleasant interim pending resumption of the glorious offensive in which one could destroy the enemy with sword and bayonet. Even Imperial General Headquarters grew nervous. There is some evidence of a top-level request for guidance in defending against American “storm landings” from Nazi Germany, whose sad experience in trying to defend Normandy at the water’s edge had proven disastrous. The Japanese remained unconvinced.

Kuribayashi needed every bit of his top connections with the Emperor to keep from being summarily relieved for his radical proposals. His was not a complete organizational victory—the Navy insisted on building gun casemates and blockhouses along the obvious landing beaches on Iwo—but in general he prevailed.

Kuribayashi demanded the assistance of the finest mining engineers and fortifications specialists in the Empire. Here again, the island favored the defender. Iwo's volcanic sand mixed readily with cement to produce superior concrete for installations; the soft rock lent itself to rapid digging. Half the garrison lay aside their weapons to labor with pick and spade. When American heavy bombers from the Seventh Air Force commenced a daily pounding of the island in early December 1944, Kuribayashi simply moved everything—weapons, command posts, barracks, aid stations—underground. These engineering achievements were remarkable. Masked gun positions provided interlocking fields of fire, miles of tunnels linked key defensive positions, every cave featured multiple outlets and ventilation tubes. One installation inside Mount Suribachi ran seven stories deep. The Americans would rarely see a live Japanese on Iwo Jima until the bitter end.

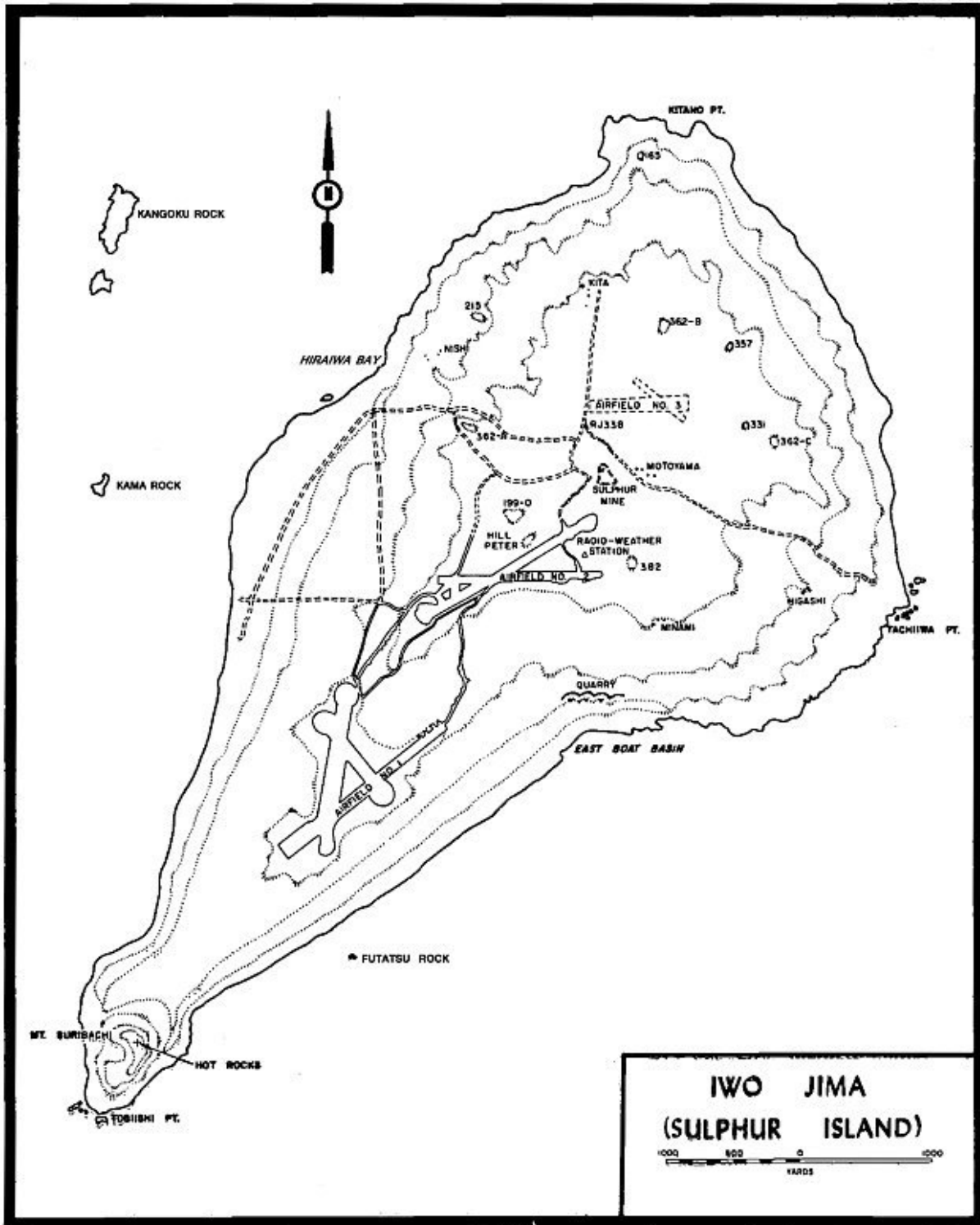
American intelligence experts, aided by documents captured in Saipan and by an almost daily flow of aerial photography (and periscope-level pictures from the submarine *Spearfish*), puzzled over the “disappearing act” of the Japanese garrison. Trained photo interpreters, using stereoscopic lenses, listed nearly 700 potential targets, but all were hardened, covered, masked. The intelligence staffs knew there was no fresh water available on the island. They could see the rainwater cisterns and they knew what the average monthly rainfall would deliver. They concluded the garrison could not possibly survive under those conditions in numbers greater than 12,000 or 13,000. But Kuribayashi's force was twice that size. The men existed on half-rations of water for months before the battle began.

Unlike earlier amphibious assaults at Guadalcanal and Tarawa, the Americans would not enjoy either strategic or tactical surprise at Iwo Jima. Japanese strategists concluded Iwo Jima would be invaded soon after the loss of the Marianas. Six months before the battle, Kuribayashi wrote his wife, “The Americans will surely invade this Iwo Jima ... do not look for my return.” He worked his men ruthlessly to complete all defensive and training preparations by 11 February 1945—and met the objective. His was

a mixed force of veterans and recruits, soldiers and sailors. His artillerymen and mortar crews were among the best in the Empire. Regardless, he trained and disciplined them all. As the Americans soon discovered, each fighting position contained the commander's "Courageous Battle Vows" prominently posted above the firing apertures. Troops were admonished to maintain their positions and exact 10 American lives for every Japanese death.

General Schmidt issued VAC Operation Plan 5-44 on 23 December 1944. The plan offered nothing fancy. Mount Suribachi dominated both potential beaches, but the 3,000 yards of black sand along the southeastern coast appeared more sheltered from the prevailing winds. Here the V Amphibious Corps would land on D-day, the 4th Marine Division on the right, the 5th on the left, the 3d in reserve. The initial objectives included the lower airfield, the west coast, and Suribachi. Then the force would swing into line and attack north, shoulder to shoulder.

Anticipation of a major Japanese counterattack the first night influenced the landing plan. "We welcome a counterattack," said Holland Smith, "That's generally when we break their backs." Both Schmidt and 4th Marine Division commander Major General Clifton B. Cates knew from recent experience at Tinian how capable the Japanese were at assembling large reserves at potential soft points along a fresh beachhead. The assault divisions would plan to land their artillery regiments before dark on D-day in that contingency.



IWO JIMA

(SULPHUR ISLAND)

The physical separation of the three divisions, from Guam to Hawaii, had no adverse effect on preparatory training. Where it counted most—the proficiency of small units in amphibious landings and combined-arms assaults on fortified positions—each division was well prepared for the forthcoming invasion. The 3d Marine Division had just completed its participation in the successful recapture of Guam; field training often extended to active combat patrols to root out die-hard Japanese survivors. In Maui, the 4th Marine Division prepared for its fourth major assault landing in 13 months with quiet confidence. Recalled Major Frederick J. Karch, operations officer for the 14th Marines, “we had a continuity there of veterans that was just unbeatable.” In neighboring Hawaii, the 5th Marine Division calmly prepared for its first combat experience. The unit’s newness would prove misleading. Well above half of the officers and men were veterans, including a number of former Marine parachutists and a few Raiders who had first fought in the Solomons. Lieutenant Colonel Donn J. Robertson took command of the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, barely two weeks before embarkation and immediately ordered it into the field for a sustained live-firing exercise. Its competence and confidence impressed him. “These were professionals,” he concluded.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 112392

“Dinah Might,” the first crippled B-29 to make an emergency landing on Iwo Jima during the fighting, is surrounded by Marines and Seabees on 4 March 1945.

Among the veterans preparing for Iwo Jima were two Medal of Honor recipients from the Guadalcanal campaign, Gunnery Sergeant John “Manila John” Basilone and Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Galer. Headquarters Marine Corps preferred to keep such distinguished veterans in the states for morale purposes, but both men wrangled their way back overseas—Basilone leading a machine gun platoon, Galer delivering a new radar unit for employment with the Landing Force Air Support Control Unit.

The Guadalcanal veterans would only shake their heads at the abundance of amphibious shipping available for Operation Detachment. Admiral Turner would command 495 ships, of which fully 140 were amphibiously configured, the whole array 10 times the size of Guadalcanal’s task force. Still there were problems. So many of the ships and crews were new that each rehearsal featured embarrassing collisions and other accidents. The new TD-18 bulldozers were found to be an inch too wide for the medium landing craft (LCMs). The newly modified M4A3 Sherman tanks proved so heavy that the LCMs rode with dangerously low freeboards. Likewise, 105mm howitzers overloaded the amphibious trucks (DUKWs) to the point of near-unseaworthiness. These factors would prove costly in Iwo’s unpredictable surf zone.

These problems notwithstanding, the huge force embarked and began the familiar move to westward. Said Colonel Robert E. Hogaboom, Chief of Staff, 3d Marine Division, “we were in good shape, well trained, well equipped and thoroughly supported.”

On Iwo Jima, General Kuribayashi had benefitted from the American postponements of Operation Detachment because of delays in the Philippines campaign. He, too, felt as ready and prepared as possible. When the American armada sailed from the Marianas on 13 February, he was forewarned. He deployed one infantry battalion in the vicinity of the beaches and lower airfield, ordered the bulk of his garrison into its assigned fighting holes, and settled down to await the inevitable storm.

An aerial view of Iwo Jima before the landing clearly shows “pork chop” shape. Mount Suribachi, in the right foreground, is at the southern end of the island.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 413529



Two contentious issues divided the Navy-Marine team as D-day at Iwo Jima loomed closer. The first involved Admiral Spruance’s decision to detach Task Force 58, the fast carriers under Admiral Marc Mitscher, to

attack strategic targets on Honshu simultaneously with the onset of Admiral Blandy's preliminary bombardment of Iwo. The Marines suspected Navy-Air Force rivalry at work here—most of Mitscher's targets were aircraft factories which the B-29s had missed badly a few days earlier. What the Marines really begrudged was Mitscher taking all eight Marine Corps fighter squadrons, assigned to the fast carriers, plus the new fast battleships with their 16-inch guns. Task Force 58 returned to Iwo in time to render sparkling support with these assets on D-day, but two days later it was off again, this time for good.



Col William P. McCahill Collection

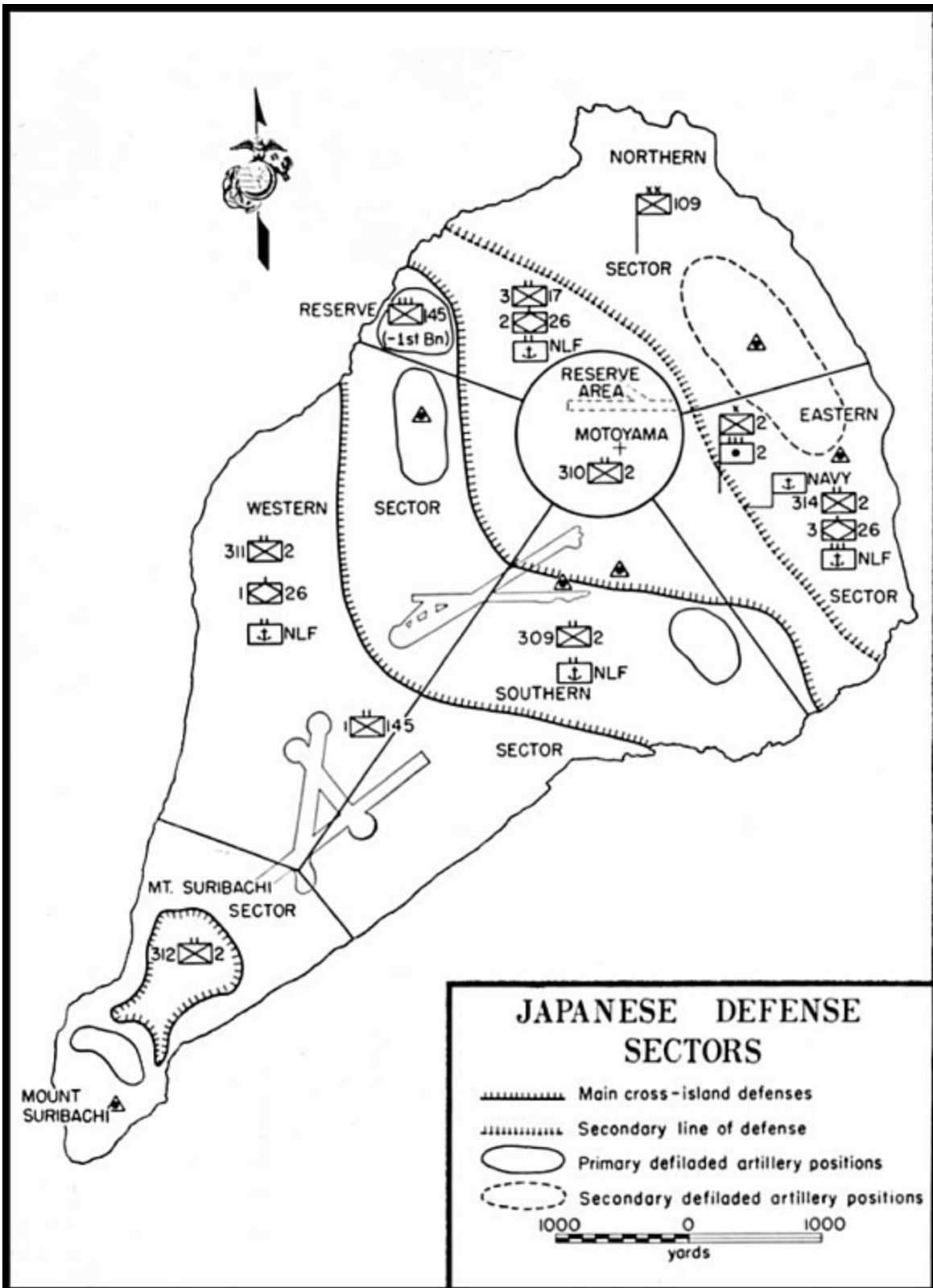
A Marine inspects a Japanese coastal defense gun which, although protected by steel-reinforced concrete, was destroyed in prelanding naval gunfire bombardments.

The other issue was related and it concerned the continuing argument between senior Navy and Marine officers over the extent of preliminary naval gunfire. The Marines looked at the intelligence reports on Iwo and requested 10 days of preliminary fire. The Navy said it had neither the time nor the ammo to spare; three days would have to suffice. Holland Smith and Harry Schmidt continued to plead, finally offering to compromise to four days. Turner deferred to Spruance who ruled that three days prep fires, in

conjunction with the daily pounding being administered by the Seventh Air Force, would do the job.

Lieutenant Colonel Donald M. Weller, USMC, served as the FMFPAC/Task Force 51 naval gunfire officer, and no one in either sea service knew the business more thoroughly. Weller had absorbed the lessons of the Pacific War well, especially those of the conspicuous failures at Tarawa. The issue, he argued forcibly to Admiral Turner, was not the weight of shells nor their caliber but rather time. Destruction of heavily fortified enemy targets took deliberate, pinpoint firing from close ranges, assessed and adjusted by aerial observers. Iwo Jima's 700 "hard" targets would require time to knock out, a lot of time.

Neither Spruance nor Turner had time to give, for strategic, tactical, and logistical reasons. Three days of firing by Admiral Blandy's sizeable bombardment force would deliver four times the amount of shells Tarawa received, and one and a half times that delivered against larger Saipan. It would have to do.



JAPANESE DEFENSE SECTORS

In effect, Iwo's notorious foul weather, the imperviousness of many of the Japanese fortifications, and other distractions dissipated even the three days' bombardment. "We got about thirteen hours' worth of fire support during the thirty-four hours of available daylight," complained Brigadier General William W. Rogers, chief of staff to General Schmidt.

The Americans received an unexpected bonus when General Kuribayashi committed his only known tactical error during the battle. This occurred on D-minus-2, as a force of 100 Navy and Marine underwater demolition team (UDT) frogmen bravely approached the eastern beaches escorted by a dozen LCI landing craft firing their guns and rockets. Kuribayashi evidently believed this to be the main landing and authorized the coastal batteries to open fire. The exchange was hot and heavy, with the LCIs getting the worst of it, but U.S. battleships and cruisers hurried in to blast the casemate guns suddenly revealed on the slopes of Suribachi and along the rock quarry on the right flank.

That night, gravely concerned about the hundreds of Japanese targets still untouched by two days of firing, Admiral Blandy conducted a "council of war" on board his flagship. At Weller's suggestion, Blandy junked the original plan and directed his gunships to concentrate exclusively on the beach areas. This was done with considerable effect on D-minus-1 and D-day morning itself. Kuribayashi noted that most of the positions the Imperial Navy insisted on building along the beach approaches had in fact been destroyed, as he had predicted. Yet his main defensive belts criss-crossing the Motoyama Plateau remained intact. "I pray for a heroic fight," he told his staff.

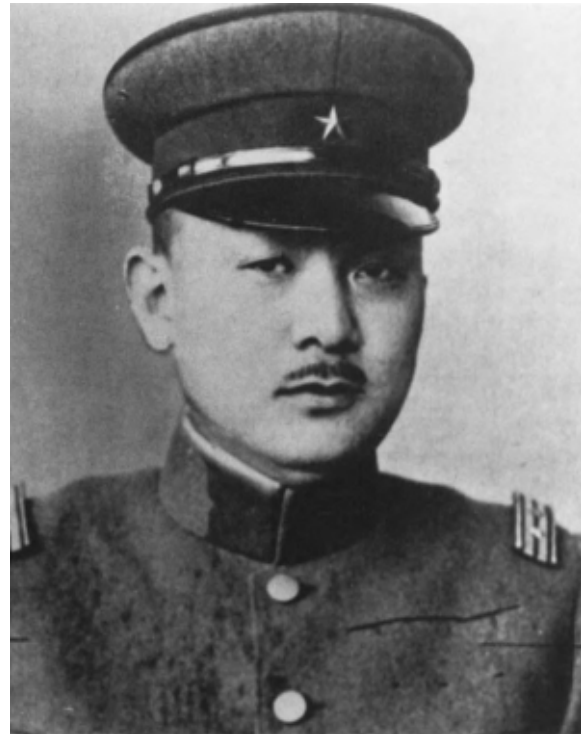
On board Admiral Turner's flagship, the press briefing held the night before D-day was uncommonly somber. General Holland Smith predicted heavy casualties, possibly as many as 15,000, which shocked all hands. A man clad in khakis without rank insignia then stood up to address the room. It was James V. Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy. "Iwo Jima, like Tarawa, leaves very little choice," he said quietly, "except to take it by force of arms, by character and courage."

[Sidebar ([page 6](#)):]

The Japanese Commander

In the estimation of Lieutenant Colonel Justice M. Chambers, USMC, a battalion commander (3/25) whose four days ashore resulted in the Purple Heart and the Medal of Honor: “On Iwo Jima, one of their smartest generals commanded, a man who did not believe in the Banzai business; each Jap was to kill ten Marines—for awhile they were beating their quotas.” Chambers was describing Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, Imperial Japanese Army, Commanding General, *109th Division* and Commander, *Ogasawara Army Group*. The U.S. Marines have rarely faced a tougher opponent.

Kuribayashi, 53, a native of Nagano Prefecture, had served the Emperor as a cavalry officer since graduating from the Military Academy in 1914. He spent several years as a junior officer posted to the Japanese Embassies in America and Canada. With the advent of war in Asia, Kuribayashi commanded a cavalry regiment in combat in Manchuria and a brigade in northern China. Later, he served as chief of staff of the *Twenty-third Army* during the capture of Hong Kong. Favored by the Emperor, he returned from China to command the *Imperial Guards Division* in Tokyo. After the fall of Saipan in June 1944, he was



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 152108

LtGen Tadamichi Kuribayashi, Imperial Japanese Army.

assigned to command the defensive fortress of Iwo Jima.

Kuribayashi was a realist. He saw Iwo Jima's crude airstrips as a net liability to the Empire, at best providing nuisance raids against the B-29s, certain to draw the attention of American strategic planners. Iwo Jima's airfields in American hands would pose an enormous threat to Japan. Kuribayashi saw only two options: either blow up the entire island, which proved infeasible, or defend it to the death. To do the latter effectively he adapted a radical defensive policy, foregoing the water's-edge linear tactics and suicidal *Banzai* attacks of previous island battles. This stirred controversy at the highest levels—Imperial Headquarters even asked the Nazis for advice on repelling American invasions—as well as among Kuribayashi's own officers. Kuribayashi made some compromises with the semi-independent naval forces on the island, but sacked 18 senior army officers, including his own chief of staff. Those who remained would implement their commander's policy to the letter.

Doomed without naval or air support, Kuribayashi nevertheless proved to be a resolute and resourceful field commander. His only tactical error was to authorize the sector commander to engage the U.S. task force covering underwater demolitions team operations on D-2. This became a gift to the attackers, for it revealed to American gunners the previously masked batteries which otherwise would have slaughtered the assault waves on D-day.

Japanese accounts indicate Kuribayashi committed *hara-kari*, the Japanese ritual suicide, in his cave near Kitano Point on 23 March 1945, the 33d day of the battle. "Of all our adversaries in the Pacific," said General Holland M. Smith, USMC, "Kuribayashi was the most redoubtable." Said another Marine, "Let's hope the Japs don't have any more like him."

D-Day

Weather conditions around Iwo Jima on D-day morning, 19 February 1945, were almost ideal. At 0645 Admiral Turner signalled “Land the landing force!”



From the Japanese position overlooking the landing beaches and Airfield No. 1, the enemy observers had an unobstructed view of the entire beachhead. From a field sketch by Cpl Daniel L. Winsor, Jr., USMCR, S-2, 25th Marines.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Shore bombardment ships did not hesitate to engage the enemy island at near point-blank range. Battleships and cruisers steamed as close as 2,000

yards to level their guns against island targets. Many of the “Old Battleships” had performed this dangerous mission in all theaters of the war. Marines came to recognize and appreciate their contributions. It seemed fitting that the old *Nevada*, raised from the muck and ruin of Pearl Harbor, should lead the bombardment force close ashore. Marines also admired the battleship *Arkansas*, built in 1912, and recently returned from the Atlantic where she had battered German positions at Point du Hoc at Normandy during the epic Allied landing on 6 June 1944.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 14284

Members of the 4th Marine Division receive a last-minute briefing before D-day.

Lieutenant Colonels Weller and William W. “Bucky” Buchanan, both artillery officers, had devised a modified form of the “rolling barrage” for use by the bombarding gunships against beachfront targets just before H-Hour. This concentration of naval gunfire would advance progressively as the troops landed, always remaining 400 yards to their front. Air spotters would help regulate the pace. Such an innovation appealed to the three division commanders, each having served in France during World War I. In

those days, a good rolling barrage was often the only way to break a stalemate.

The shelling was terrific. Admiral Hill would later boast that “there were no proper targets for shore bombardment remaining on Dog-Day morning.” This proved to be an overstatement, yet no one could deny the unprecedented intensity of firepower Hill delivered against the areas surrounding the landing beaches. As General Kuribayashi would ruefully admit in an assessment report to Imperial General Headquarters, “we need to reconsider the power of bombardment from ships; the violence of the enemy’s bombardments is far beyond description.”

The amphibious task force appeared from over the horizon, the rails of the troopships crowded with combat-equipped Marines watching the spectacular fireworks. The Guadalcanal veterans among them realized a grim satisfaction watching American battleships leisurely pounding the island from just offshore. The war had come full cycle from the dark days of October 1942 when the 1st Marine Division and the Cactus Air Force endured similar shelling from Japanese battleships.

The Marines and sailors were anxious to get their first glimpse of the objective. Correspondent John P. Marquand, the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, recorded his own first impressions of Iwo: “Its silhouette was like a sea monster, with the little dead volcano for the head, and the beach area for the neck, and all the rest of it, with its scrubby brown cliffs for the body.” Lieutenant David N. Susskind, USNR, wrote down his initial thoughts from the bridge of the troopship *Mellette*: “Iwo Jima was a rude, ugly sight.... Only a geologist could look at it and not be repelled.” As described in a subsequent letter home by Navy Lieutenant Michael F. Keleher, a surgeon in the 25th Marines:

The naval bombardment had already begun and I could see the orange-yellow flashes as the battleships, cruisers, and destroyers blasted away at the island broadside. Yes, there was Iwo—surprisingly close, just like the pictures and models we had been studying for six weeks. The volcano was to our left, then the long, flat black beaches where we were going to land, and the rough rocky plateau to our right.

The commanders of the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions, Major Generals Clifton B. Cates and Keller E. Rockey, respectively, studied the island through binoculars from their respective ships. Each division would land two reinforced regiments abreast. From left to right, the beaches were designated Green, Red, Yellow, and Blue. The 5th Division would land the 28th Marines on the left flank, over Green Beach, the 27th Marines over Red. The 4th Division would land the 23d Marines over Yellow Beach and the 25th Marines over Blue Beach on the right flank. General Schmidt reviewed the latest intelligence reports with growing uneasiness and requested a reassignment of reserve forces with General Smith. The 3d Marine Division's 21st Marines would replace the 26th Marines as corps reserve, thus releasing the latter regiment to the 5th Division.

Schmidt's landing plan envisioned the 28th Marines cutting the island in half, then turning to capture Suribachi, while the 25th Marines would scale the Rock Quarry and then serve as the hinge for the entire corps to swing around to the north. The 23d Marines and 27th Marines would capture the first airfield and pivot north within their assigned zones.

General Cates was already concerned about the right flank. Blue Beach Two lay directly under the observation and fire of suspected Japanese positions in the Rock Quarry, whose steep cliffs overshadowed the right flank like Suribachi dominated the left. The 4th Marine Division figured that the 25th Marines would have the hardest objective to take on D-day. Said Cates, "If I knew the name of the man on the extreme right of the right-hand squad I'd recommend him for a medal before we go in."

The choreography of the landing continued to develop. Iwo Jima would represent the pinnacle of forcible amphibious assault against a heavily fortified shore, a complex art mastered painstakingly by the Fifth Fleet over many campaigns. Seventh Air Force Martin B-24 Liberator bombers flew in from the Marianas to strike the smoking island. Rocket ships moved in to saturate nearshore targets. Then it was time for the fighter and attack squadrons from Mitscher's Task Force 58 to contribute. The Navy pilots showed their skills at bombing and strafing, but the troops naturally cheered the most at the appearance of F4U Corsairs flown by Marine Fighter Squadrons 124 and 213 led by Lieutenant Colonel William A. Millington from the fleet carrier *Essex*. Colonel Vernon E. Megee, in his shipboard capacity as air officer for General Smith's Expeditionary Troops staff, had

urged Millington to put on a special show for the troops in the assault waves. “Drag your bellies on the beach,” he told Millington. The Marine fighters made an impressive approach parallel to the island, then virtually did Megee’s bidding, streaking low over the beaches, strafing furiously. The geography of the Pacific War since Bougainville had kept many of the ground Marines separated from their own air support, which had been operating in areas other than where they had been fighting, most notably the Central Pacific. “It was the first time a lot of them had ever seen a Marine fighter plane,” said Megee. The troops were not disappointed.

Laden with battle-ready V Amphibious Corps Marines, LSMs (landing ship, medium) head for Iwo’s beaches. Landing craft of this type were capable of carrying five Sherman tanks. In the left background lies smoke-covered Mount Suribachi.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109598

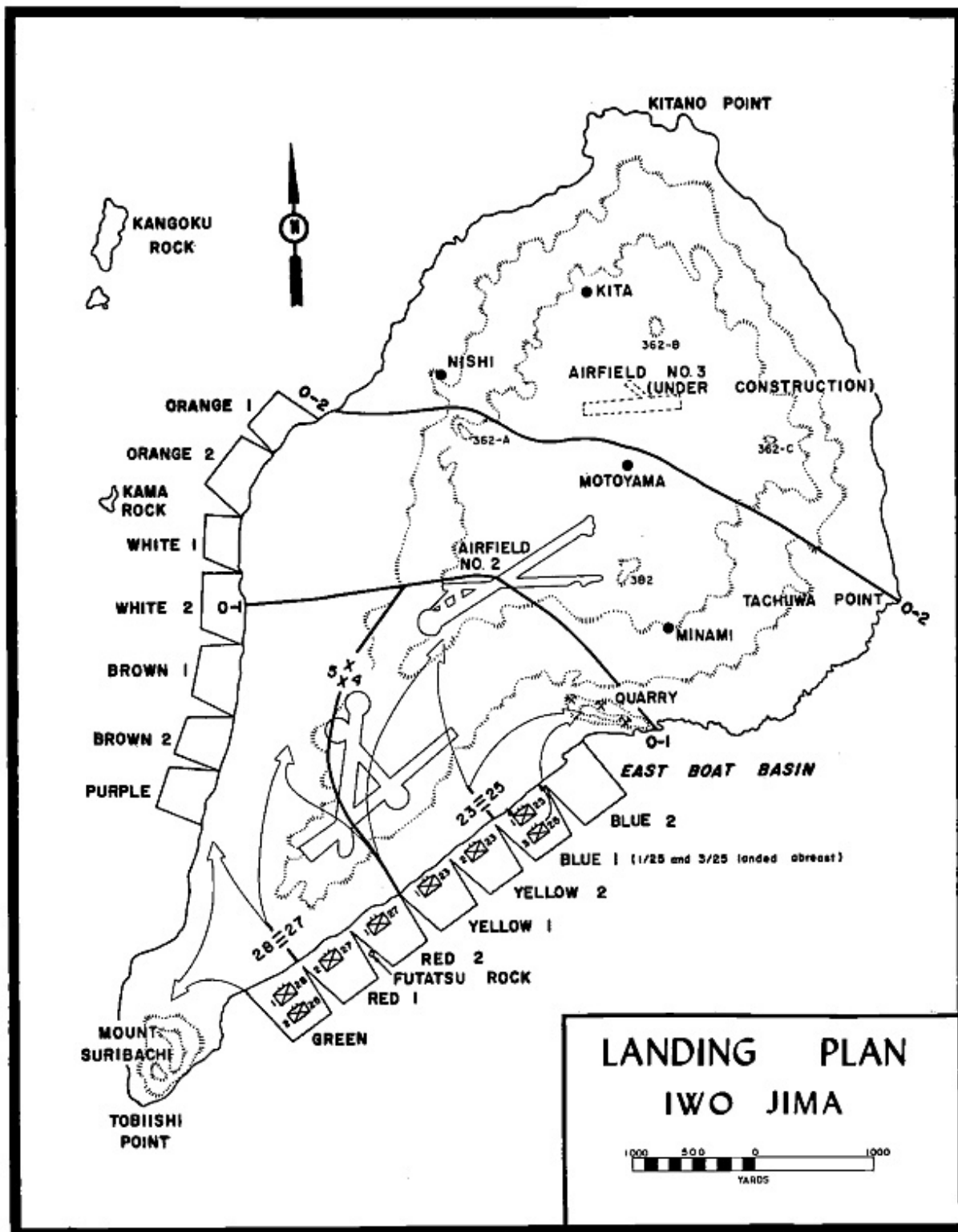


The planes had barely disappeared when naval gunfire resumed, carpeting the beach areas with a building crescendo of high-explosive shells. The ship-to-shore movement was well underway, an easy 30-minute run for the tracked landing vehicles (LVTs). This time there were enough LVTs to do the job: 68 LVT(A)4 armored amtracs mounting snub-nosed 75mm cannon leading the way, followed by 380 troop-laden LVT 4s and

LVT 2s. The waves crossed the line of departure on time and chugged confidently towards the smoking beaches, all the while under the climactic bombardment from the ships. Here there was no coral reef, no killer neap tides to be concerned with. The Navy and Marine frogmen had reported the approaches free of mines or tetrahedrons. There was no premature cessation of fire. The “rolling barrage” plan took effect. Hardly a vehicle was lost to the desultory enemy fire.

The massive assault waves hit the beach within two minutes of H-hour. A Japanese observer watching the drama unfold from a cave on the slopes of Suribachi reported, “At nine o’clock in the morning several hundred landing craft with amphibious tanks in the lead rushed ashore like an enormous tidal wave.” Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Williams, executive officer of the 28th Marines, recalled that “the landing was a magnificent sight to see—two divisions landing abreast; you could see the whole show from the deck of a ship.” To this point, so far, so good.

The first obstacle came not from the Japanese but the beach and the parallel terraces. Iwo Jima was an emerging volcano; its steep beaches dropped off sharply, producing a narrow but violent surf zone. The soft black sand immobilized all wheeled vehicles and caused some of the tracked amphibians to belly down. The boat waves that closely followed the LVTs had more trouble. Ramps would drop, a truck or jeep would attempt to drive out, only to get stuck. In short order a succession of plunging waves hit the stalled craft before they could completely unload, filling their sterns with water and sand, broaching them broadside. The beach quickly resembled a salvage yard.



LANDING PLAN IWO JIMA

E. L. Wilson

LANDING PLAN

IWO JIMA

E.L. Wilson

The infantry, heavily laden, found its own “foot-mobility” severely restricted. In the words of Corporal Edward Hartman, a rifleman with the 4th Marine Division: “the sand was so soft it was like trying to run in loose coffee grounds.” From the 28th Marines came this early, laconic report: “Resistance moderate, terrain awful.”

The rolling barrage and carefully executed landing produced the desired effect, suppressing direct enemy fire, providing enough shock and distraction to enable the first assault waves to clear the beach and begin advancing inward. Within minutes 6,000 Marines were ashore. Many became thwarted by increasing fire over the terraces or down from the highlands, but hundreds leapt forward to maintain assault momentum. The 28th Marines on the left flank had rehearsed on similar volcanic terrain on the island of Hawaii. Now, despite increasing casualties among their company commanders and the usual disorganization of landing, elements of the regiment used their initiative to strike across the narrow neck of the peninsula. The going became progressively costly as more and more Japanese strongpoints along the base of Suribachi seemed to spring to life. Within 90 minutes of the landing, however, elements of the 1st Battalion, 28th Marines, had reached the western shore, 700 yards across from Green Beach. Iwo Jima had been severed—“like cutting off a snake’s head,” in the words of one Marine. It would represent the deepest penetration of what was becoming a very long and costly day.

The other three regiments experienced difficulty leaving the black sand terraces and wheeling across towards the first airfield. The terrain was an open bowl, a shooting gallery in full view from Suribachi on the left and the rising tableland to the right. Any thoughts of a “cakewalk” quickly vanished as well-directed machine-gun fire whistled across the open ground and mortar rounds began dropping along the terraces. Despite these difficulties, the 27th Marines made good initial gains, reaching the southern and western edges of the first airfield before noon. The 23d Marines landed over Yellow Beach and sustained the brunt of the first round of Japanese combined arms fire. These troops crossed the second terrace only to be

confronted by two huge concrete pillboxes, still lethal despite all the pounding. Overcoming these positions proved costly in casualties and time. More fortified positions appeared in the broken ground beyond. Colonel Walter W. Wensinger's call for tank support could not be immediately honored because of trafficability and congestion problems on the beach. The regiment clawed its way several hundred yards towards the eastern edge of the airstrip.

No assault units found it easy going to move inland, but the 25th Marines almost immediately ran into a buzz-saw trying to move across Blue Beach. General Cates had been right in his appraisal. "That right flank was a bitch if there ever was one," he would later say. Lieutenant Colonel Hollis W. Mustain's 1st Battalion, 25th Marines, managed to scratch forward 300 yards under heavy fire in the first half hour, but Lieutenant Colonel Chambers' 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, took the heaviest beating of the day on the extreme right trying to scale the cliffs leading to the Rock Quarry. Chambers landed 15 minutes after H-hour. "Crossing that second terrace," he recalled, "the fire from automatic weapons was coming from all over. You could've held up a cigarette and lit it on the stuff going by. I knew immediately we were in for one hell of a time."



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110128

Tracked landing vehicles (LVTs), jam-packed with 4th Marine Division troops, approach the Line of Departure at H-hour on D-day. In the center rear can be seen the control vessels which attempted to maintain order in the landing.

This was simply the beginning. While the assault forces tried to overcome the infantry weapons of the local defenders, they were naturally blind to an almost imperceptible stirring taking place among the rocks and crevices of the interior highlands. With grim anticipation, General Kuribayashi's gunners began unmasking the big guns—the heavy artillery, giant mortars, rockets, and anti-tank weapons held under tightest discipline for this precise moment. Kuribayashi had patiently waited until the beaches were clogged with troops and material. Gun crews knew the range and deflection to each landing beach by heart; all weapons had been preregistered on these targets long ago. At Kuribayashi's signal, these hundreds of weapons began to open fire. It was shortly after 1000.

H-hour at Iwo Jima, 19 February 1945.

Department of Defense Photo (USN) NH65311



The ensuing bombardment was as deadly and terrifying as any of the Marines had ever experienced. There was hardly any cover. Japanese artillery and mortar rounds blanketed every corner of the 3,000-yard-wide beach. Large-caliber coast defense guns and dual-purpose anti-aircraft guns firing horizontally added a deadly scissors of direct fire from the high ground on both flanks. Marines stumbling over the terraces to escape the rain of projectiles encountered the same disciplined machine-gun fire and mine fields which had slowed the initial advance. Casualties mounted appallingly.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110109

Marines of the 4th Division pour ashore from their landing craft on Yellow and Blue Beaches on D-day. Enemy fire had not hit this assault wave yet as it landed.

As soon as it hit the beach on the right side of the V Amphibious Corps line, the 25th Marines was pinned down by accurate and heavy enemy fire. Meanwhile, landing craft, supplies, and vehicles pile up in the surf behind Marines.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110108





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111691

5th Division Marines land on Red and Green Beaches at the foot of Mount Suribachi under heavy fire coming from enemy positions overlooking the black sand terraces. The 28th Marines had not yet wheeled to the left towards Suribachi.

With bullets and artillery shells screaming overhead, Marines crawl along the beaches and dig into the soft volcanic ash for cover from the deadly fire. Note the geyser of water as a shell lands close to a landing craft headed into the beach.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109618



Two Marine combat veterans observing this expressed a grudging admiration for the Japanese gunners. “It was one of the worst blood-lettings of the war,” said Major Karch of the 14th Marines. “They rolled those artillery barrages up and down the beach—I just didn’t see how anybody could live through such heavy fire barrages.” Said Lieutenant Colonel Joseph L. Stewart, “The Japanese were superb artillerymen.... Somebody was getting hit every time they fired.” At sea, Lieutenant Colonel Weller tried desperately to deliver naval gunfire against the Japanese gun positions shooting down at 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, from the Rock Quarry. It would take longer to coordinate this fire: the first Japanese barrages had wiped out the 3d Battalion, 25th Marines’ entire Shore Fire Control Party.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111115

Marines pull their ammunition cart onto the beach from their broached landing craft on D-day, all the while under heavy enemy fire. Some troops did not make it.

As the Japanese firing reached a general crescendo, the four assault regiments issued dire reports to the flagship. Within a 10-minute period, these messages crackled over the command net:

1036: (From 25th Marines) “Catching all hell from the quarry. Heavy mortar and machine gun fire.”

1039: (From 23d Marines) “Taking heavy casualties and can’t move for the moment. Mortars killing us.”

1042: (From 27th Marines) “All units pinned down by artillery and mortars. Casualties heavy. Need tank support fast to move anywhere.”

1046: (From 28th Marines) “Taking heavy fire and forward movement stopped. Machine gun and artillery fire heaviest ever seen.”

The landing force suffered and bled but did not panic. The profusion of combat veterans throughout the rank and file of each regiment helped the rookies focus on the objective. Communications remained effective. Keen-eyed aerial observers spotted some of the now-exposed gun positions and directed naval gunfire effectively. Carrier planes screeched in low to drop napalm canisters. The heavy Japanese fire would continue to take an awful toll throughout the first day and night, but it would never again be so murderous as that first unholy hour.

Marine Sherman tanks played hell getting into action on D-day. Later in the battle these combat vehicles would be the most valuable weapons on the battlefield for the Marines; this day was a nightmare. The assault divisions embarked many of their tanks on board medium landing ships (LSMs), sturdy little craft that could deliver five Shermans at a time. But it was tough disembarking them on Iwo's steep beaches. The stern anchors could not hold in the loose sand; bow cables run forward to "deadmen" LVTs parted under the strain. On one occasion the lead tank stalled at the top of the ramp, blocking the other vehicles and leaving the LSM at the mercy of the rising surf. Other tanks bogged down or threw tracks in the loose sand. Many of those that made it over the terraces were destroyed by huge horned mines or disabled by deadly accurate 47mm anti-tank fire from Suribachi. Other tankers kept coming. Their relative mobility, armored protection, and 75mm gunfire were most welcome to the infantry scattered among Iwo's lunar-looking, shell-pocked landscape.

Shore party Marines man steadying lines while others unload combat cargo from boats broached in the surf. Note the jeep, one of the first to come ashore, bogged down axle-deep in the soft black volcanic ash, not to be moved till later.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110593



Both division commanders committed their reserves early. General Rockey called in the 26th Marines shortly after noon. General Cates ordered two battalions of the 24th Marines to land at 1400; the 3d Battalion, 24th Marines, followed several hours later. Many of the reserve battalions suffered heavier casualties crossing the beach than the assault units, a result of Kuribayashi's punishing bombardment from all points on the island.

Mindful of the likely Japanese counterattack in the night to come—and despite the fire and confusion along the beaches—both divisions also ordered their artillery regiments ashore. This process, frustrating and costly, took much of the afternoon. The wind and surf began to pick up as the day wore on, causing more than one low-riding DUKW to swamp with its precious 105mm howitzer cargo. Getting the guns ashore was one thing; getting them up off the sand was quite another. The 75mm pack howitzers fared better than the heavier 105s. Enough Marines could readily hustle

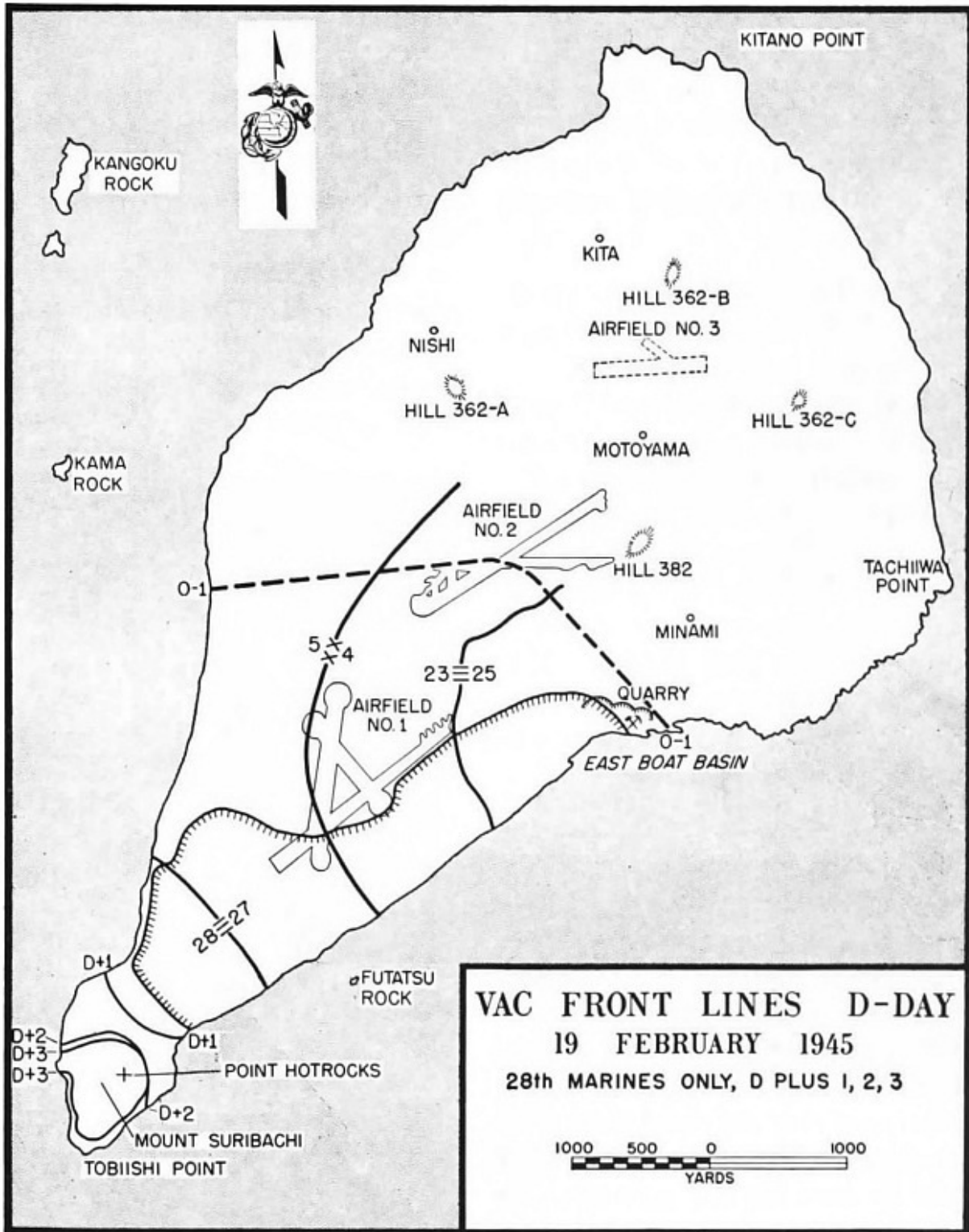
them up over the terraces, albeit at great risk. The 105s seemed to have a mind of their own in the black sand. The effort to get each single weapon off the beach was a saga in its own right. Somehow, despite the fire and unforgiving terrain, both Colonel Louis G. DeHaven, commanding the 14th Marines, and Colonel James D. Waller, commanding the 13th Marines, managed to get batteries in place, registered, and rendering close fire support well before dark, a singular accomplishment.

Japanese fire and the plunging surf continued to make a shambles out of the beachhead. Late in the afternoon, Lieutenant Michael F. Keleher, USNR, the battalion surgeon, was ordered ashore to take over the 3d Battalion, 25th Marines aid station from its gravely wounded surgeon. Keleher, a veteran of three previous assault landings, was appalled by the carnage on Blue Beach as he approached: “Such a sight on that beach! Wrecked boats, bogged-down jeeps, tractors and tanks; burning vehicles; casualties scattered all over.”



Marine Corps Combat Art Collection

In “Flotsam and Jetsam,” an acrylic painting on masonite by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, he portrays the loss of his sergeant to mortar fire on the beach on D-day.



VAC FRONT LINES D-DAY

19 FEBRUARY 1945

28th MARINES ONLY, D PLUS 1, 2, 3

On the left center of the action, leading his machine gun platoon in the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines' attack against the southern portion of the airfield, the legendary "Manila John" Basilone fell mortally wounded by a Japanese mortar shell, a loss keenly felt by all Marines on the island. Farther east, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Galer, the other Guadalcanal Medal of Honor Marine (and one of the Pacific War's earliest fighter aces), survived the afternoon's fusillade along the beaches and began reassembling his scattered radar unit in a deep shell hole near the base of Suribachi.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109601

As D-day on Iwo Jima comes to a close, the landing beaches are scenes of death and destruction with LVTs and landing craft wallowing in the waves and tracked and wheeled vehicles kept out of action, unable to go forward.

Late in the afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel Donn J. Robertson led his 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, ashore over Blue Beach, disturbed at the intensity of fire still being directed on the reserve forces this late on D-day. “They were really ready for us,” he recalled. He watched with pride and wonderment as his Marines landed under fire, took casualties, stumbled forward to clear the beach. “What impels a young guy landing on a beach in the face of fire?” he asked himself. Then it was Robertson’s turn. His boat hit the beach too hard; the ramp wouldn’t drop. Robertson and his command group had to roll over the gunwales into the churning surf and crawl ashore, an inauspicious start.

The bitter battle to capture the Rock Quarry cliffs on the right flank raged all day. The beachhead remained completely vulnerable to enemy direct-fire weapons from these heights; the Marines had to storm them before many more troops or supplies could be landed. In the end, it was the strength of character of Captain James Headley and Lieutenant Colonel “Jumping Joe” Chambers who led the survivors of the 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, onto the top of the cliffs. The battalion paid an exorbitant price for this achievement, losing 22 officers and 500 troops by nightfall.

The two assistant division commanders, Brigadier Generals Franklin A. Hart and Leo D. Hermle, of the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions respectively, spent much of D-day on board the control vessels marking both ends of the Line of Departure, 4,000 yards off shore. This reflected yet another lesson in amphibious techniques learned from Tarawa. Having senior officers that close to the ship-to-shore movement provided landing force decision-making from the most forward vantage point. By dusk General Hermle opted to come ashore. At Tarawa he had spent the night of D-day essentially out of contact at the fire-swept pierhead. This time he intended to be on the ground. Hermle had the larger operational picture in mind, knowing the corps commander’s desire to force the reserves and artillery units on shore despite the carnage in order to build credible combat power. Hermle knew that whatever the night might bring, the Americans now had more troops on the island than Kuribayashi could ever muster. His presence helped his division forget about the day’s disasters and focus on preparations for the expected counterattacks.

Japanese artillery and mortar fire continued to rake the beachhead. The enormous spigot mortar shells (called “flying ashcans” by the troops) and

rocket-boosted aerial bombs were particularly scary—loud, whistling projectiles, tumbling end over end. Many sailed completely over the island; those that hit along the beaches or the south runways invariably caused dozens of casualties with each impact. Few Marines could dig a proper foxhole in the granular sand (“like trying to dig a hole in a barrel of wheat”). Among urgent calls to the control ship for plasma, stretchers, and mortar shells came repeated cries for sand bags.

Veteran Marine combat correspondent Lieutenant Cyril P. Zurlinden, soon to become a casualty himself, described that first night ashore:

At Tarawa, Saipan, and Tinian, I saw Marines killed and wounded in a shocking manner, but I saw nothing like the ghastliness that hung over the Iwo beachhead. Nothing any of us had ever known could compare with the utter anguish, frustration, and constant inner battle to maintain some semblance of sanity.

Personnel accounting was a nightmare under those conditions, but the assault divisions eventually reported the combined loss of 2,420 men to General Schmidt (501 killed, 1,755 wounded, 47 dead of wounds, 18 missing, and 99 combat fatigue). These were sobering statistics, but Schmidt now had 30,000 Marines ashore. The casualty rate of eight percent left the landing force in relatively better condition than at the first days at Tarawa or Saipan. The miracle was that the casualties had not been twice as high. General Kuribayashi had possibly waited a little too long to open up with his big guns.

The first night on Iwo was ghostly. Sulfuric mists spiraled out of the earth. The Marines, used to the tropics, shivered in the cold, waiting for Kuribayashi’s warriors to come screaming down from the hills. They would learn that this Japanese commander was different. There would be no wasteful, vainglorious *Banzai* attack, this night or any other. Instead, small teams of infiltrators, which Kuribayashi termed “Prowling Wolves,” probed the lines, gathering intelligence. A barge-full of Japanese *Special Landing Forces* tried a small counterlanding on the western beaches and died to the man under the alert guns of the 28th Marines and its supporting LVT crews. Otherwise the night was one of continuing waves of indirect fire from the highlands. One high velocity round landed directly in the hole occupied by

the 1st Battalion, 23d Marines' commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Haas, killing him instantly. The Marines took casualties throughout the night. But with the first streaks of dawn, the veteran landing force stirred. Five infantry regiments looked north; a sixth turned to the business at hand in the south: Mount Suribachi.

[Sidebar ([page 10](#)):]

The Assault Commanders at Iwo Jima

Four veteran Marine major generals led the sustained assault on Iwo Jima: Harry Schmidt, Commanding General, V Amphibious Corps; Graves B. Erskine, CG, 3d Marine Division; Clifton B. Cates, CG, 4th Marine Division; and Keller E. Rockey, CG, 5th Marine Division. Each would receive the Distinguished Service Medal for inspired combat leadership in this epic battle.

General Schmidt was 58 at Iwo Jima and had served the Corps for 36 years. He was a native of Holdrege, Nebraska, and attended Nebraska Normal College. Expeditionary assignments kept him from service in World War I, but Schmidt saw considerable small unit action in Guam, China, the Philippines, Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua, plus four years at sea. He attended the Army Command and General Staff College and the Marine Corps Field Officers' Course. In World War II, General Schmidt commanded the 4th Marine Division in the Roi-Namur and Saipan operations, then assumed command of V Amphibious Corps for the Tinian landing. At Iwo Jima he would command the largest force of Marines ever committed to a single battle. "It was the highest honor of my life," he said.

*MajGen Harry Schmidt,
USMC*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC)
11180



*MajGen Graves B. Erskine,
USMC*

Marine Corps Historical Collection



General Erskine was 47 at Iwo Jima, one of the youngest major generals in the Corps. He had served 28 years on active duty by that time. A native of Columbia, Louisiana, he graduated from Louisiana State University, received a Marine Corps commission, and immediately deployed overseas for duty in World War I. As a platoon commander in the 6th Marines, Erskine saw combat at Belleau Wood, Chateau-Thierry, Soissons, and St. Mihiel, during which he was twice wounded and awarded the Silver Star. In the inter-war years he served in Haiti, Santo Domingo, Nicaragua, Cuba, and China. He attended the Army Infantry

School and the Army Command and General Staff College. In World War II, Erskine was chief of staff to General Holland M. Smith during campaigns in the Aleutians, Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas. He assumed command of the 3d Marine Division in October 1944.

General Cates, 51 at Iwo, had also served the Corps during the previous 28 years. He was one of the few Marine Corps general officers who held combat command at the platoon, company, battalion, regiment, and division levels in his career. Cates was born in Tiptonville, Tennessee, and attended the University of Tennessee. In World War I, he served as a junior officer in the 6th Marines at Belleau Wood, Soissons, St. Mihiel, and Blanc Mont, and was awarded the Navy Cross, two Silver Stars, and two Purple Hearts

*MajGen Clifton B. Cates,
USMC*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC)
38595



for his service and his wounds.

Between wars, he served at sea and twice in China. He attended the Army

Industrial College, the Senior Course at Marine Corps Schools, and the Army War College. In World War II he commanded the 1st Marines at Guadalcanal and the 4th Marine Division at Tinian. Three years after Iwo Jima, General Cates became the 19th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

MajGen Keller E. Rockey,
USMC

Department of Defense Photo (USMC)
A32295



General Rockey was 56 at Iwo Jima and a veteran of 31 years of service to the Corps. He was born in Columbia City, Indiana, graduated from Gettysburg College, and studied at Yale. Like his fellow division commanders, Rockey served in France in World War I. He was awarded the Navy Cross as a junior officer in the 5th Marines at Chateau-Thierry. A second Navy Cross came later for heroic service in Nicaragua. He also served in Haiti and two years at sea. He attended the Field Officers' Course at Quantico and the Army Command and General Staff Course. He spent the first years of World War II at Headquarters Marine Corps in Washington, first as Director, Division

of Plans and Policies, then as Assistant Commandant. In February 1944 General Rockey assumed command of the 5th Marine Division and began preparing the new organization for its first, and last, great battle of the war.

Three Marine brigadier generals also played significant roles in the amphibious seizure of Iwo Jima: William W. Rogers, corps chief of staff; Franklin A. Hart, assistant division commander, 4th Marine Division; and Leo D. Hermle, assistant division commander, 5th Marine Division.

Suribachi

The Japanese called the dormant volcano Suribachi-yama; the Marines dubbed it “Hotrocks.” From the start the Marines knew their drive north would never succeed without first seizing that hulking rock dominating the southern plain. “Suribachi seemed to take on a life of its own, to be watching these men, looming over them,” recalled one observer, adding “the mountain represented to these Marines a thing more evil than the Japanese.”

Colonel Kanehiko Atsuchi commanded the 2,000 soldiers and sailors of the Suribachi garrison. The Japanese had honeycombed the mountain with gun positions, machine-gun nests, observation sites, and tunnels, but Atsuchi had lost many of his large-caliber guns in the direct naval bombardment of the preceding three days. General Kuribayashi considered Atsuchi’s command to be semiautonomous, realizing the invaders would soon cut communications across the island’s narrow southern tip. Kuribayashi nevertheless hoped Suribachi could hold out for 10 days, maybe two weeks.

Some of Suribachi’s stoutest defenses existed down low, around the rubble-strewn base. Here nearly 70 camouflaged concrete blockhouses protected the approaches to the mountain; another 50 bulged from the slopes within the first hundred feet of elevation. Then came the caves, the first of hundreds the Marines would face on Iwo Jima.

The 28th Marines had suffered nearly 400 casualties in cutting across the neck of the island on D-day. On D+1, in a cold rain, they prepared to assault the mountain. Lieutenant Colonel Chandler Johnson, commanding the 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, set the tone for the morning as he deployed his tired troops forward: “It’s going to be a hell of a day in a hell of a place to fight the damned war!” Some of the 105mm batteries of the 13th Marines opened up in support, firing directly overhead. Gun crews fired from positions hastily dug in the black sand directly next to the 28th Marines

command post. Regimental Executive Officer Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Williams watched the cannoneers fire at Suribachi “eight hundred yards away over open sights.”

A dug-in Marine 81mm mortar crew places continuous fire on Japanese positions around the slopes of Mount Suribachi preparatory to the attack of the 28th Marines.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109861



As the Marines would learn during their drive north, even 105mm howitzers would hardly shiver the concrete pillboxes of the enemy. As the prep fire lifted, the infantry leapt forward, only to run immediately into very heavy machine-gun and mortar fire. Colonel Harry B. “Harry the Horse” Liversedge bellowed for his tanks. But the 5th Tank Battalion was already having a frustrating morning. The tankers sought a defilade spot in which to rearm and refuel for the day’s assault. Such a location did not exist on Iwo Jima those first days. Every time the tanks congregated to service their vehicles they were hit hard by Japanese mortar and artillery fire from virtually the entire island. Getting sufficient vehicles serviced to join the

assault took most of the morning. Hereafter the tankers would maintain and re-equip their vehicles at night.



Colonel William P. McCahill Collection

The crew of the Sherman tank "Cairo" awaits a repair crew to replace its tread after it hit a Japanese mine. Note wooden sheathing on sides of vehicle to protect against magnetic mines. Damaged vehicles became prime enemy targets.

This day's slow start led to more setbacks for the tankers; Japanese antitank gunners hiding in the jumbled boulders knocked out the first approaching Shermans. Assault momentum slowed further. The 28th Marines overran 40 strongpoints and gained roughly 200 yards all day. They lost a Marine for every yard gained. The tankers unknowingly

redeemed themselves when one of their final 75mm rounds caught Colonel Atsuchi as he peered out of a cave entrance, killing him instantly.

Elsewhere, the morning light on D+1 revealed the discouraging sights of the chaos created along the beaches by the combination of Iwo Jima's wicked surf and Kuribayashi's unrelenting barrages. In the words of one dismayed observer:

The wreckage was indescribable. For two miles the debris was so thick that there were only a few places where landing craft could still get in. The wrecked hulls of scores of landing boats testified to one price we had to pay to put our troops ashore. Tanks and half-tracks lay crippled where they had bogged down in the coarse sand. Amphibian tractors, victims of mines and well-aimed shells, lay flopped on their backs. Cranes, brought ashore to unload cargo, tilted at insane angles, and bulldozers were smashed in their own roadways.

Bad weather set in, further compounding the problems of general unloading. Strong winds whipped sea swells into a nasty chop; the surf turned uglier. These were the conditions faced by Lieutenant Colonel Carl A. Youngdale in trying to land the 105mm-howitzer batteries of his 4th Battalion, 14th Marines. All 12 of these guns were preloaded in DUKWs, one to a vehicle. Added to the amphibious trucks' problems of marginal seaworthiness with that payload was contaminated fuel. As Youngdale watched in horror, eight DUKWs suffered engine failures, swamped, and sank with great loss of life. Two more DUKWs broached in the surf zone, spilling their invaluable guns into deep water. At length Youngdale managed to get his remaining two guns ashore and into firing position.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110319

Like some recently killed prehistoric monsters, these LVTs lie on their sides, completely destroyed on the beach by Japanese mines and heavy artillery fire.

General Schmidt also committed one battery of 155mm howitzers of the corps artillery to the narrow beachhead on D+1. Somehow these weapons managed to reach the beach intact, but it then took hours to get tractors to drag the heavy guns up over the terraces. These, too, commenced firing before dark, their deep bark a welcome sound to the infantry.

Concern with the heavy casualties in the first 24 hours led Schmidt to commit the 21st Marines from corps reserve. The seas proved to be too rough. The troops had harrowing experiences trying to debark down cargo nets into the small boats bobbing violently alongside the transports; several fell into the water. The boating process took hours. Once afloat, the troops circled endlessly in their small Higgins boats, waiting for the call to land. Wiser heads prevailed. After six hours of awful seasickness, the 21st Marines returned to its ships for the night.

Even the larger landing craft, the LCTs and LSMs, had great difficulty beaching. Sea anchors needed to maintain the craft perpendicular to the breakers rarely held fast in the steep, soft bottom. "Dropping those stern anchors was like dropping a spoon in a bowl of mush," said Admiral Hill.

Hill contributed significantly to the development of amphibious expertise in the Pacific War. For Iwo Jima, he and his staff developed armored bulldozers to land in the assault waves. They also experimented with hinged Marston matting, used for expeditionary airfields, as a temporary roadway to get wheeled vehicles over soft sand. On the beach at Iwo, the bulldozers proved to be worth their weights in gold. The Marston matting was only partially successful—LVTs kept chewing it up in passage—but all hands could see its potential.

“Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,” acrylic on masonite, is by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, wounded in his arm on D+2 and evacuated from Iwo Jima.

Marine Corps Combat Art Collection



Admiral Hill also worked with the Naval Construction Battalion (NCB) personnel, Seabees, as they were called, in the attempt to bring supply-laden causeways and pontoon barges ashore. Again the surf prevailed, broaching the craft, spilling the cargo. In desperation, Hill’s beachmasters turned to round-the-clock use of DUKWs and LVTs to keep combat cargo flowing. Once the DUKWs got free of the crippling load of 105mm howitzers they did fine. LVTs were probably better, because they could cross the soft beach without assistance and conduct resupply or medevac missions directly along the front lines. Both vehicles suffered from

inexperienced LST crews in the transport area who too often would not lower their bow ramps to accommodate LVTs or DUKWs approaching after dark. In too many cases, vehicles loaded with wounded Marines thus rejected became lost in the darkness, ran out of gas and sank. The amphibian tractor battalions lost 148 LVTs at Iwo Jima. Unlike Tarawa, Japanese gunfire and mines accounted for less than 20 percent of this total. Thirty-four LVTs fell victim to Iwo's crushing surf; 88 sank in deep water, mostly at night.

Once ashore and clear of the loose sand along the beaches, the tanks, half-tracks, and armored bulldozers of the landing force ran into the strongest minefield defenses yet encountered in the Pacific War. Under General Kuribayashi's direction, Japanese engineers had planted irregular rows of antitank mines and the now-familiar horned antiboat mines along all possible exits from both beaches. The Japanese supplemented these weapons by rigging enormous makeshift explosives from 500-pound aerial bombs, depth charges, and torpedo heads, each triggered by an accompanying pressure mine. Worse, Iwo's loose soil retained enough metallic characteristics to render the standard mine detectors unreliable. The Marines were reduced to using their own engineers on their hands and knees out in front of the tanks, probing for mines with bayonets and wooden sticks.

While the 28th Marines fought to encircle Suribachi and the beachmasters and shore party attempted to clear the wreckage from the beaches, the remaining assault units of the VAC resumed their collective assault against Airfield No. 1. In the 5th Marine Division's zone, the relatively fresh troops of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, and the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, quickly became bloodied in forcing their way across the western runways, taking heavy casualties from time-fuzed air bursts fired by Japanese dual-purpose anti-aircraft guns zeroed along the exposed ground. In the adjacent 4th Division zone, the 23d Marines completed the capture of the airstrip, advancing 800 yards but sustaining high losses.



Marine Corps Historical Collection

Marines advance warily on Airfield No. 1 towards wrecked Japanese planes in which enemy snipers are suspected of hiding. The assault quickly moved on.

Some of the bitterest fighting in the initial phase of the landing continued to occur along the high ground above the Rock Quarry on the right flank. Here the 25th Marines, reinforced by the 1st Battalion, 24th Marines, engaged in literally the fight of its life. The Marines found the landscape, and the Japanese embedded in it, unreal:

There was no cover from enemy fire. Japs dug in reinforced concrete pillboxes laid down interlocking bands of fire that cut whole companies to ribbons. Camouflage hid all enemy positions. The high ground on either side was honeycombed with layer after layer of Jap emplacements.... Their observation was perfect; whenever a Marine made a move, the Japs would smother the area in a murderous blanket of fire.

The second day of the battle had proven unsatisfactory on virtually every front. To cap off the frustration, when the 1st Battalion, 24th Marines, finally managed a breakthrough along the cliffs late in the day their only reward was two back-to-back cases of “friendly fire.” An American air strike inflicted 11 casualties; misguided salvos from an unidentified gunfire support ship took down 90 more. Nothing seemed to be going right.

The morning of the third day, D+2, seemed to promise more of the same frustrations. Marines shivered in the cold wind and rain; Admiral Hill twice had to close the beach due to high surf and dangerous undertows. But during one of the grace periods, the 3d Division's 21st Marines managed to come ashore, all of it extremely glad to be free of the heaving small boats. General Schmidt assigned it to the 4th Marine Division at first.

The 28th Marines resumed its assault on the base of Suribachi, more slow, bloody fighting, seemingly boulder by boulder. On the west coast, the 1st Battalion, 28th Marines, made the most of field artillery and naval gunfire support to reach the shoulder of the mountain. Elsewhere, murderous Japanese fire restricted any progress to a matter of yards. Enemy mortar fire from all over the volcano rained down on the 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, trying to advance along the eastern shore. Recalled rifleman Richard Wheeler of the experience, "It was terrible, the worst I can remember us taking. The Jap mortarmen seemed to be playing checkers and using us as squares." The Marines used Weasels, handy little tracked vehicles making their first field appearance in this battle, to hustle forward flame-thrower canisters and evacuate some of the many wounded.



Colonel William P. McCahill Collection

Flamethrower teams look like futuristic fighters as they leave their assembly area heading for the front lines. The casualty rate for flamethrower operators was high, since they were prime targets for Japanese fire because of the profile they had with the flamethrowers strapped to their backs. When they fell, others took their places.

That night the amphibious task force experienced the only significant air attack of the battle. Fifty *kamikaze* pilots from the 22d *Mitate Special Attack Unit* left Katori Airbase near Yokosuka and flung themselves against the ships on the outer perimeter of Iwo Jima. In desperate action that would serve as a prelude to Okinawa's fiery engagements, the *kamikazes* sank the escort carrier *Bismarck Sea* with heavy loss of life and damaged several other ships, including the veteran *Saratoga*, finally knocked out of the war. All 50 Japanese planes were expended.

It rained even harder on the fourth morning, D+3. Marines scampering forward under fire would hit the deck, roll, attempt to return fire—only to discover that the loose volcanic grit had combined with the rain to jam their weapons. The 21st Marines, as the vanguard of the 3d Marine Division, hoped for good fortune in its initial commitment after relieving the 23d Marines. The regiment instead ran headlong into an intricate series of Japanese emplacements which marked the southeastern end of the main

Japanese defenses. The newcomers fought hard all day to scratch and claw an advance of 200 net yards. Casualties were disproportionate.

In the attack of the 28th Marines on the dominating height, a 37mm guncrew fires at caves at the foot of Suribachi suspected of holding Japanese gun positions.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110139



On the right flank, Lieutenant Colonel Chambers continued to rally the 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, through the rough pinnacles above the Rock Quarry. As he strode about directing the advance of his decimated companies that afternoon, a Japanese gunner shot him through the chest. Chambers went down hard, thinking it was all over:

I started fading in and out. I don't remember too much about it except the frothy blood gushing out of my mouth.... Then somebody started kicking the hell out of my feet. It was [Captain James] Headley saying, "Get up, you were hurt worse on Tulagi!"

Captain Headley knew Chambers' sucking chest wound portended a grave injury; he sought to reduce his commander's shock until they could get him out of the line of fire. This took doing. Lieutenant Michael F.

Keleher, USNR, now the battalion surgeon, crawled forward with one of his corpsmen. Willing hands lifted Chambers on a stretcher. Keleher and several others, bent double against the fire, carried him down the cliffs to the aid station and eventually on board a DUKW making the evening's last run out to the hospital ships. All three battalion commanders in the 25th Marines had now become casualties. Chambers would survive to receive the Medal of Honor; Captain Headley would command the shot-up 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, for the duration of the battle.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110177

From the time of the landing on Iwo Jima, attacking Marines seemed to be moving uphill constantly. This scene is located between Purple Beach and Airfield No. 2.

A lone Marine covers the left flank of a patrol as it works its way up the slopes of Mount Suribachi. It was from this vantage point on the enemy-held height that Japanese gunners and observers had a clear view of the landing beaches.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A419744



By contrast, the 28th Marines on D+3 made commendable progress against Suribachi, reaching the shoulder at all points. Late in the day combat patrols from the 1st Battalion, 28th Marines, and the 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, linked up at Tobiishi Point at the southern tip of the island. Recon patrols returned to tell Lieutenant Colonel Johnson that they found few signs of live Japanese along the mountain's upper slopes on the northside.

At sundown Admiral Spruance authorized Task Force 58 to strike Honshu and Okinawa, then retire to Ulithi to prepare for the Ryukyuan campaign. All eight Marine Corps fighter squadrons thus left the Iwo Jima area for good. Navy pilots flying off the 10 remaining escort carriers would pick up the slack. Without slighting the skill and valor of these pilots, the quality of close air support to the troops fighting ashore dropped off after this date. The escort carriers, for one thing, had too many competing missions, namely combat air patrols, anti-submarine sweeps, searches for downed aviators, harassing strikes against neighboring Chichi Jima. Marines on Iwo Jima complained of slow response time to air support requests, light payloads (rarely greater than 100-pound bombs), and high delivery altitudes (rarely below 1,500 feet). The Navy pilots did deliver a number of napalm bombs. Many of these failed to detonate, although this was not the fault of the aviators; the early napalm “bombs” were simply old wing-tanks filled with the mixture, activated by unreliable detonators. The Marines also grew concerned about these notoriously inaccurate area weapons being dropped from high altitudes.

By Friday, 23 February (D+4), the 28th Marines stood poised to complete the capture of Mount Suribachi. The honor went to the 3d Platoon (reinforced), Company E, 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, under the command of First Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier, the company executive officer. Lieutenant Colonel Johnson ordered Schrier to scale the summit, secure the crater, and raise a 54"×28" American flag for all to see. Schrier led his 40-man patrol forward at 0800. The regiment had done its job, blasting the dozens of pillboxes with flame and demolitions, rooting out snipers, knocking out the masked batteries. The combined-arms pounding by planes, field pieces, and naval guns the past week had likewise taken its toll on the defenders. Those who remained popped out of holes and caves to resist Schrier's advance only to be cut down. The Marines worked warily up the steep northern slope, sometimes resorting to crawling on hands and knees.

Part of the enduring drama of the Suribachi flag-raising was the fact that it was observed by so many people. Marines all over the island could track the progress of the tiny column of troops during its ascent (“those guys oughta be getting flight pay,” said one wag). Likewise, hundreds of binoculars from the ships offshore watched Schrier's Marines climbing ever upward. Finally they reached the top and momentarily disappeared from

view. Those closest to the volcano could hear distant gunfire. Then, at 1020, there was movement on the summit; suddenly the Stars and Stripes fluttered bravely.

Lusty cheers rang out from all over the southern end of the island. The ships sounded their sirens and whistles. Wounded men propped themselves up on their litters to glimpse the sight. Strong men wept unashamedly. Navy Secretary Forrestal, thrilled by the sight, turned to Holland Smith and said, “the raising of that flag means a Marine Corps for another five hundred years.”

Three hours later an even larger flag went up to more cheers. Few would know that Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal had just captured the embodiment of the American warfighting spirit on film. *Leatherneck* magazine photographer Staff Sergeant Lou Lowery had taken a picture of the first flag-raising and almost immediately got in a firefight with a couple of enraged Japanese. His photograph would become a valued collector’s item. But Rosenthal’s would enthrall the free world.

Captain Thomas M. Fields, commanding Company D, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, heard his men yell “Look up there!” and turned in time to see the first flag go up. His first thought dealt with the battle still at hand: “Thank God the Japs won’t be shooting us down from behind any more.” Meanwhile, the 14th Marines rushed their echo and flash-ranging equipment up to the summit. The landing force sorely needed enhanced counterbattery fire against Kuribayashi’s big guns to the north.

The Marines who raised the first flag were Lieutenant Schrier; Platoon Sergeant Ernest T. Thomas, Jr.; Sergeant Henry O. Hansen; Corporal Charles W. Lindberg; and Privates First Class Louis C. Charlo and James Michels. The six men immortalized by Joe Rosenthal’s photograph of the second flag-raising were Sergeant Michael Strank, Pharmacist’s Mate 2/c John H. Bradley, Corporal Harlon H. Block, and Privates First Class Ira H. Hayes, Franklin R. Sousley, and Rene A. Gagnon.

The 28th Marines took Suribachi in three days at the cost of more than 500 troops (added to its D-day losses of 400 men). Colonel Liversedge began to reorient his regiment for operations in the opposite direction, northward. Unknown to all, the battle still had another month to run its bloody course.

[Sidebar ([page 26](#)):]

Rosenthal's Photograph of Iwo Jima Flag-Raising Quickly Became One of the War's Most Famous

There were two flags raised over Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima, but not at the same time. Despite the beliefs of many, and contrary to the supposed evidence, none of the photographs of the two flag-raising was posed. To begin with, early on the morning of 23 February 1945, four days after the initial landings, Captain Dave E. Severance, the commander of Company E, 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, ordered Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier to take a patrol and an American flag to the top of Suribachi. Staff Sergeant Louis R. Lowery, a *Leatherneck* magazine photographer, accompanied the patrol. After a short fire fight, the 54"-by-28" flag was attached to a long piece of pipe, found at the crest of the mountain, and raised. This is the flag-raising which Lowery photographed. As the flag was thought to be too small

The six men who participated in the second or "famous" flag-raising on Mount Suribachi were Marines, joined by a medical corpsman. They were Sgt Michael Strank; Pharmacist's Mate 2/c John H. Bradley, USN; Cpl Harlon H. Block; and PFCs Ira H. Hayes, Franklin R. Sousley, and Rene A. Gagnon. AP photographer Joe Rosenthal recalls stumbling on the picture accidentally: "I swung my camera around and held it until I could guess that this was the peak of the action, and shot.... Had I posed that shot, I would, of course, have ruined it.... I would have also made them turn their heads so that they could be identified ... and nothing like the existing picture would have resulted."

Associated Press



flag was thought to be too small to be seen from the beach below, another Marine from the battalion went on board *LST 779* to obtain a larger flag. A second patrol then took this flag up to Suribachi's top and Joe Rosenthal, an Associated Press photographer, who had just come ashore, accompanied it.



As Rosenthal noted in his oral history interview, "... my stumbling on that picture was, in all respects, accidental." When he got to the top of the mountain, he stood in a decline just below the crest of the hill with Marine Sergeant William Genaust, a movie cameraman who was killed later in the campaign, watching while a group of five Marines and a Navy corpsman fastened the new flag to another piece of pipe. Rosenthal said that he turned from Genaust and out of the corner of his eye saw the second flag being raised. He said, "Hey, Bill. There it goes." He continued: "I swung my camera around and held it until I could guess that this was the peak of the action, and shot."

Some people learned that Rosenthal's photograph was of a second flag-raising and made the accusation that it was posed. Joe Rosenthal: "Had I posed that shot, I would, of course, have ruined it.... I would have also made them turn their heads so that they could be identified for [Associated Press] members throughout the country, and nothing like the existing picture would have resulted."

Later in the interview, he said: "This picture, what it means to me—and it has a meaning to me—that has to be peculiar only to me ... I see all that blood running down the sand. I see those awful, impossible positions to take in a frontal attack on such an island, where the batteries opposing you are not only staggered up in front of you, but also standing around at the sides as you're coming on shore. The awesome situation, before they ever reach that peak. Now, that a photograph can serve to remind us of the contribution of those boys—

that was what made it important, not who took it.”

Rosenthal took 18 photographs that day, went down to the beach to write captions for his undeveloped film packs, and, as the other photographers on the island, sent his films out to the command vessel offshore. From there they were flown to Guam, where the headquarters of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet/Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, was situated, and where the photos were processed and censored. Rosenthal’s pictures arrived at Guam before Lowery’s, were processed, sent to the States for distribution, and his flag-raising picture became one of the most famous photographs ever taken in the war, or in any war.—*Benis M. Frank*

The Drive North

The landing force still had much to learn about its opponent. Senior intelligence officers did not realize until 27 February, the ninth day of the battle, that General Kuribayashi was in fact on Iwo Jima, or that his fighters actually numbered half again the original estimate of 13,000.

For Kuribayashi, the unexpectedly early loss of the Suribachi garrison represented a setback, yet he occupied a position of great strength. He still had the equivalent of eight infantry battalions, a tank regiment, two artillery and three heavy mortar battalions, plus the 5,000 gunners and naval infantry under his counterpart, Rear Admiral Toshinosuke Ichimaru. Unlike other besieged garrisons in the Central Pacific, the two Japanese services on Iwo Jima functioned well together.



Marine Corps Historical Collection

Marine half-track scores a hit on a Japanese strongpoint with its 75mm gun.

Kuribayashi was particularly pleased with the quality of his artillery and engineering troops. Colonel Chosaku Kaido served as Chief of Artillery

from his seemingly impregnable concrete blockhouse on a promontory on the east central sector of the Motoyama Plateau, a lethal landmark the Marines soon dubbed “Turkey Knob.” Major General Sadasue Senda, a former artillery officer with combat experience in China and Manchuria, commanded the *2d Independent Mixed Brigade*, whose main units would soon be locked into a 25-day death struggle with the 4th Marine Division. Kuribayashi knew that the *204th Naval Construction Battalion* had built some of the most daunting defensive systems on the island in that sector. One cave had a tunnel 800 feet long with 14 separate exits; it was one of hundreds designed to be defended in depth.

The Japanese defenders waiting for the advance of the V Amphibious Corps were well armed and confident. Occasionally Kuribayashi authorized company-sized spoiling attacks to recapture lost terrain or disrupt enemy assault preparations. These were not suicidal or sacrificial. Most were preceded by stinging artillery and mortar fires and aimed at limited objectives. Kuribayashi’s iron will kept his troops from large-scale, wasteful *Banzai* attacks until the last days. One exception occurred the night of 8 March when General Senda grew so frustrated at the tightening noose being applied by the 4th Marine Division that he led 800 of his surviving troops in a ferocious counterattack. Finally given a multitude of open targets, the Marines cut them down in a lingering melee.

For the first week of the drive north, the Japanese on Iwo Jima actually had the attacking Marines outgunned. Japanese 150mm howitzers and 120mm mortars were superior to most of the weapons of the landing force. The Marines found the enemy direct fire weapons to be equally deadly, especially the dual-purpose antiaircraft guns and the 47mm tank guns, buried and camouflaged up to their turrets. “The Japs could *snipe* with those big guns,” said retired Lieutenant General Donn J. Robertson. The defenders also had the advantage of knowing the ground.

The drive north by the 3d Battalion, 28th Marines, enters rugged terrain. Under heavy Japanese fire, this attack netted only 200 yards despite supporting fires.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111988



Not surprisingly, most casualties in the first three weeks of the battle resulted from high explosives: mortars, artillery, mines, grenades, and the hellacious rocket bombs. *Time* correspondent Robert Sherrod reported that the dead at Iwo Jima, both Japanese and American, had one thing in common: “They all died with the greatest possible violence. Nowhere in the Pacific War had I seen such badly mangled bodies. Many were cut squarely in half.”

Close combat was rough enough; on Iwo Jima the stress seemed endless because for a long time the Marines had no secure “rear area” in which to give shot-up troop units a respite. Kuribayashi’s gunners throughout the Motoyama Plateau could still bracket the beaches and airfields. The enormous spigot mortar shells and rocket bombs still came tumbling out of the sky. Japanese infiltrators were drawn to “softer targets” in the rear. Anti-personnel mines and booby traps, encountered here on a large scale for the first time in the Pacific, seemed everywhere. Exhausted troop units would stumble out of the front lines seeking nothing more than a helmet-full of water in which to bathe and a deep hole in which to sleep. Too often the men had to spend their rare rest periods repairing weapons, humping ammo, dodging major-caliber incoming, or having to repel yet another nocturnal Japanese probe.

General Schmidt planned to attack the Japanese positions in the north with three divisions abreast, the 5th on the left, the 3d (less the 3d Marines) in the center, and the 4th on the right, along the east coast. The drive north officially began on D+5, the day after the capture of Suribachi. Prep fires along the high ground immediately north of the second airfield extended for a full hour. Then three regimental combat teams moved out abreast, the 26th Marines on the left, the 24th Marines on the right, and the 21st Marines again in the middle. For this attack, General Schmidt consolidated the Sherman tanks of all three divisions into one armored task force commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William R. "Rip" Collins. It would be the largest concentration of Marine tanks in the war, virtually an armored regiment. The attack plan seemed solid.

The Marines soon realized they were now trying to force passage through Kuribayashi's main defensive belt. The well-coordinated attack degenerated into desperate, small-unit actions all along the front. The 26th Marines on the left, aided by the tanks, gained the most yardage, but it was all relative. The airfield runways proved to be lethal killing zones. Marine tanks were bedeviled by mines and high-velocity direct fire weapons all along the front. On the right flank, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander A. Vandegrift, Jr., son of the Commandant, became a casualty. Major Doyle A. Stout took command of the 3d Battalion, 24th Marines.

During the fighting on D+5, General Schmidt took leave of Admiral Hill and moved his command post ashore from the amphibious force flagship *Auburn* (AGC 10). Colonel Howard N. Kenyon led his 9th Marines ashore and into a staging area. With that, General Erskine moved the command post of the 3d Marine Division ashore; the 21st Marines reverted to its parent command. Erskine's artillery regiment, the 12th Marines under Lieutenant Colonel Raymond F. Crist, Jr., continued to land for the next several days. Schmidt now had eight infantry regiments committed. Holland Smith still retained the 3d Marines in Expeditionary Troops reserve. Schmidt made the first of several requests to Smith for release of this seasoned outfit. The V Amphibious Corps had already suffered 6,845 casualties.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110604

Expended shells and open ammunition boxes testify to the heavy supporting fire this water-cooled, .30-caliber Browning machine gun poured on the enemy as Marines advanced in the furious and difficult battle for the heights of Suribachi.

The next day, D+6, 25 February, provided little relief in terms of Japanese resistance. Small groups of Marines, accompanied by tanks, somehow made it across the runway, each man harboring the inescapable feeling he was alone in the middle of a gigantic bowling alley. Sometimes holding newly gained positions across the runway proved more deadly than the process of getting there. Resupply became nearly impossible. Tanks were invaluable; many were lost.

Schmidt this day managed to get on shore the rest of his corps artillery, two battalions of 155mm howitzers under Colonel John S. Letcher. Well-

directed fire from these heavier field pieces eased some of the pressure. So did call fire from the cruisers and destroyers assigned to each maneuver unit. But the Marines expressed disappointment in their air support. The 3d Marine Division complained that the Navy's assignment of eight fighters and eight bombers on station was "entirely inadequate." By noon on this date General Cates sent a message to Schmidt requesting that "the Strategic Air Force in the Marianas replace Navy air support immediately." Colonel Vernon E. Megee, now ashore as Air Commander Iwo Jima and taking some of the heat from frustrated division commanders, blamed "those little spit-kit Navy fighters up there, trying to help, never enough, never where they should be."

In fairness, it is doubtful whether any service could have provided effective air support during the opening days of the drive north. The Air Liaison Parties with each regiment played hell trying to identify and mark targets, the Japanese maintained masterful camouflage, frontline units were often "eyeball-to-eyeball" with the enemy, and the air support request net was overloaded. The Navy squadrons rising from the decks of escort carriers improved thereafter, to the extent that their conflicting missions would permit. Subsequent strikes featured heavier bombs (up to five hundred pounds) and improved response time. A week later General Cates rated his air support "entirely satisfactory." The battle of Iwo Jima, however, would continue to frustrate all providers of supporting arms; the Japanese almost never assembled legitimate targets in the open.

"The Japs weren't *on* Iwo Jima," said Captain Fields of the 26th Marines, "they were *in* Iwo Jima."

Richard Wheeler, who survived service with the 28th Marines and later wrote two engrossing books about the battle, pointed out this phenomenon:

This was surely one of the strangest battlefields in history, with one side fighting wholly above the ground and the other operating almost wholly within it. Throughout the battle, American aerial observers marveled at the fact that one side of the field held thousands of figures, either milling around or in foxholes, while the other side seemed deserted. The strangest thing of all was that the two contestants sometimes made troop movements simultaneously

in the same territory, one maneuvering on the surface and the other using tunnels beneath.

As the Marines struggled to wrest the second airfield from the Japanese, the commanding terrain features rising to the north caught their attention. Some would become known by their elevations (although there were *three* Hill 362s on the island), but others would take the personality and nicknames assigned by the attackers. Hence, the 4th Marine Division would spend itself attacking Hill 382, the “Amphitheater,” and “Turkey Knob” (the whole bristling complex became known as “The Meatgrinder”). The 5th Division would earn its spurs and lose most of its invaluable cadre of veteran leaders attacking Nishi Ridge and Hills 362-A and 362-B, then end the fighting in “The Gorge.” The 3d Division would focus first on Hills Peter and 199-Oboe, just north of the second airfield, then the heavily fortified Hill 362-C beyond the third airstrip, and finally the moonscape jungle of stone which would become known as “Cushman’s Pocket.”

Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Cushman, Jr., a future Commandant, commanded the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines at Iwo Jima. Cushman and his men were veterans of heavy fighting in Guam, yet they were appalled by their first sight of the battlefield. Wrecked and burning Sherman tanks dotted the airstrips, a stream of casualties flowed to the rear, “the machine-gun fire was terrific.” Cushman mounted his troops on the surviving tanks and roared across the field. There they met the same reverse-slope defenses which had plagued the 21st Marines. Securing the adjoining two small hills—Peter and 199-Oboe—took the 3d Marine Division three more days of intensely bitter fighting.

General Schmidt, considering the 3d Division attack in the center to be his main effort, provided priority fire support from Corps artillery, and directed the other two divisions to allocate half their own regimental fire support to the center. None of the commanders was happy with this. Neither the 4th Division, taking heavy casualties in The Amphitheater as it approached Hill 382, nor the 5th Division, struggling to seize Nishi Ridge, wanted to dilute their organic fire support. Nor was General Erskine pleased with the results. The main effort, he argued, should clearly receive the main fire. Schmidt never did solve this problem. His Corps artillery was too light; he needed twice as many battalions and bigger guns—up to 8-inch

howitzers, which the Marine Corps had not yet fielded. He had plenty of naval gunfire support available and used it abundantly, but unless the targets lay in ravines facing to the sea he lost the advantage of direct, observed fire.

“The Grenade,” an acrylic painting on canvas by Col Charles H. Waterhouse.

Marine Corps Combat Art Collection



Schmidt's problems of fire support distribution received some alleviation on 26 February when two Marine observation planes flew in from the escort carrier *Wake Island*, the first aircraft to land on Iwo's recaptured and still fire-swept main airstrip. These were Stinson OY single-engine observation planes, nicknamed "Grasshoppers," of Lieutenant Tom Rozga's Marine Observation Squadron (VMO) 4, and they were followed the next day by similar planes from Lieutenant Roy G. Miller's VMO-5. The intrepid pilots of these frail craft had already had an adventurous time in the waters off Iwo Jima. Several had been launched precariously from the experimental Brodie catapult on *LST 776*, "like a peanut from a slingshot." All 14 of the planes of these two observation squadrons would receive heavy Japanese fire in battle, not only while airborne but also while being serviced on the airstrips as well. Yet these two squadrons (and elements of

VMO-1) would fly nearly 600 missions in support of all three divisions. Few units contributed so much to the eventual suppression of Kuribayashi's deadly artillery fire. In time the mere presence of these small planes overhead would influence Japanese gunners to cease fire and button up against the inevitable counterbattery fire to follow. Often the pilots would undertake pre-dawn or dusk missions simply to extend this protective "umbrella" over the troops, risky flying given Iwo's unlit fields and constant enemy sniping from the adjacent hills.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110922

A Marine dashes past a fallen Japanese killed a short time earlier, all the while himself a target of searching enemy fire, during heavy fighting in the north.

The 4th Marine Division finally seized Hill 382, the highest point north of Suribachi, but continued to take heavy casualties moving through The Amphitheater against Turkey Knob. The 5th Division overran Nishi Ridge, then bloodied itself against Hill 362-A's intricate defenses. Said Colonel Thomas A. Wornham, commanding the 27th Marines, of these defenses: "They had interlocking bands of fire the likes of which you never saw." General Cates redeployed the 28th Marines into this slugfest. On 2 March a Japanese gunner fired a high-velocity shell which killed Lieutenant Colonel

Chandler Johnson immediately, one week after his glorious seizure of Suribachi's summit. The 28th Marines captured Hill 362-A at the cost of 200 casualties.

On the same day Lieutenant Colonel Lowell E. English, commanding the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, went down with a bullet through his knee. English was bitter. His battalion was being rotated to the rear. "We had taken very heavy casualties and were pretty well disorganized. I had less than 300 men left out of the 1200 I came ashore with." English then received orders to turn his men around and plug a gap in the front lines. "It was an impossible order. I couldn't move that disorganized battalion a mile back north in 30 minutes." General Erskine did not want excuses. "You tell that damned English he'd better be there," he told the regimental commander. English fired back, "You tell that son of a bitch I will be there, and I was, but my men were still half a mile behind me and I got a blast through the knee."

On the left flank, the 26th Marines mounted its most successful, and bloodiest, attack of the battle, finally seizing Hill 362-B. The day-long struggle cost 500 Marine casualties and produced five Medals of Honor. For Captain Frank C. Caldwell, commanding Company F, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, it was the worst single day of the battle. His company suffered 47 casualties in taking the hill, including the first sergeant and the last of the original platoon commanders.

Overall, the first nine days of the V Amphibious Corps drive north had produced a net gain of about 4,000 yards at the staggering cost of 7,000 American casualties. Several of the pitched battles—Airfield No. 2, Hill 382, Hill 362-B, for example—would of themselves warrant a separate commemorative monograph. The fighting in each case was as savage and bloody as any in Marine Corps history.

“Fire in the Hole,” an acrylic painting on untempered masonite by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, reflects the extensive use of TNT to blast Japanese caves.

Marine Corps Combat Art
Collection



This was the general situation previously described at the unsuspected “turning point” on 4 March (D+13) when, despite sustaining frightful losses, the Marines had chewed through a substantial chunk of Kuribayashi’s main defenses, forcing the enemy commander to shift his command post to a northern cave. This was the afternoon the first crippled B-29 landed. In terms of American morale, it could not have come at a better time. General Schmidt ordered a general standdown on 5 March to enable the exhausted assault forces a brief respite and the opportunity to absorb some replacements.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111933

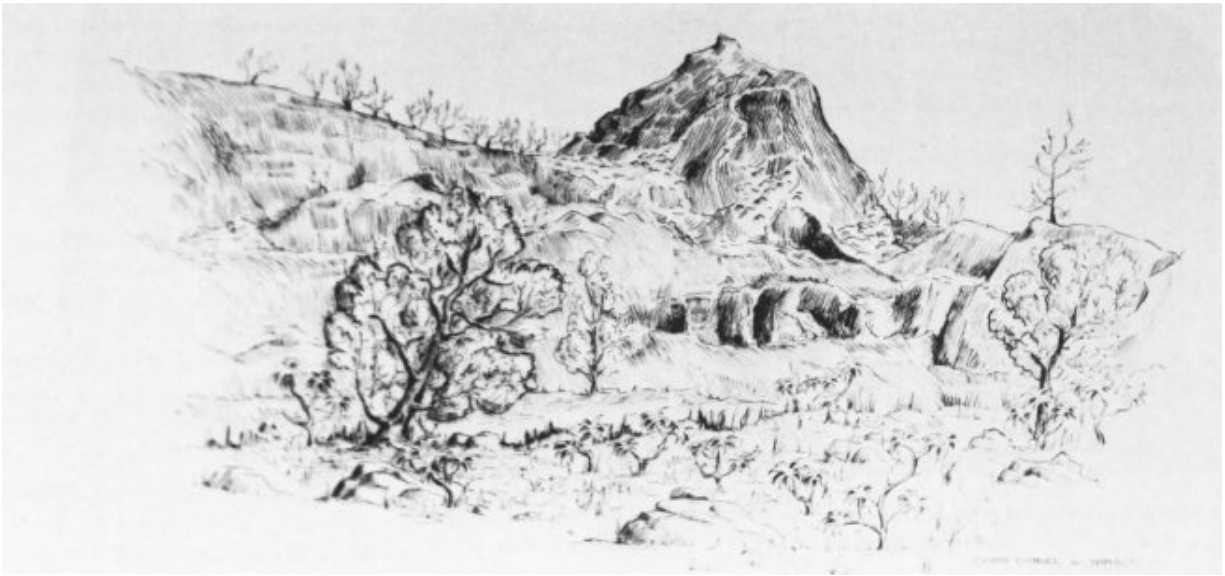
The 3d Battalion, 28th Marines, finds the terrain on Iwo Jima more broken and forbidding than the black sands of the beaches as they advance in a frontal attack northward against unremitting fire from determined Japanese troops.

The issue of replacement troops during the battle remains controversial even half a century later. General Schmidt, now faced with losses approaching the equivalent of one entire division, again urged General Smith to release the 3d Marines. While each division had been assigned a replacement draft of several thousand Marines, Schmidt wanted the cohesion and combat experience of Colonel James M. Stuart's regimental combat team. Holland Smith believed that the replacement drafts would suffice, presuming that each man in these hybrid units had received sufficient infantry training to enable his immediate assignment to front-line outfits. The problem lay in distributing the replacements in small, arbitrary numbers—not as teamed units—to fill the gaping holes in the assault battalions. The new men, expected to replace invaluable veterans of the

Pacific War, were not only new to combat, but they also were new to each other, an assortment of strangers lacking the life-saving bonds of unit integrity. “They get killed the day they go into battle,” said one division personnel officer in frustration. Replacement losses within the first 48 hours of combat were, in fact, appalling. Those who survived, who learned the ropes and established a bond with the veterans, contributed significantly to the winning of the battle. The division commanders, however, decried the wastefulness of this policy and urged unit replacements by the veteran battalions of the 3d Marines. As General Erskine recalled:

I asked the question of Kelly Turner and Holland Smith and the usual answer was, “You got enough Marines on the island now; there are too damn many here.” I said, “The solution is very easy. Some of these people are very tired and worn out, so take them out and bring in the 3d Marines.” And they practically said, “You keep quiet—we’ve made the decision.” And that was that.

Most surviving senior officers agreed that the decision not to use the 3d Marines at Iwo Jima was ill-advised and costly. But Holland Smith never wavered: “Sufficient troops were on Iwo Jima for the capture of the island ... two regiments were sufficient to cover the front assigned to General Erskine.” On 5 March, D+14, Smith ordered the 3d Marines to sail back to Guam.



Marine Corps Historical Collection

“Turkey Knob,” the outcropping which anchored the positions of the Japanese 2d Mixed Brigade against the advance of the 4th Marine Division for many days, was sketched by Cpl Daniel L. Winsor, Jr., USMCR, S-2 Section, 25th Marines.

Weary troops of Company G, 2d Battalion, 24th Marines, rest in a ditch, guarded by a Sherman tank. They are waiting for the tanks to move forward to blast the numerous pillboxes between Motoyama Airfields No. 1 and No. 2.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109666



Holland Smith may have known the overall statistics of battle losses sustained by the landing force to that point, but he may not have fully appreciated the tremendous attrition of experienced junior officers and senior staff noncommissioned officers taking place every day. As one example, the day after the 3d Marines, many of whose members were veterans of Bougainville and Guam, departed the amphibious objective area, Company E, 2d Battalion, 23d Marines, suffered the loss of its seventh company commander since the battle began. Likewise, Lieutenant Colonel Cushman's experiences with the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, seemed typical:

The casualties were fierce. By the time Iwo Jima was over I had gone through two complete sets of platoon leaders, lieutenants. After that we had such things as artillery forward observers commanding companies and sergeants leading the platoons, which were less than half-strength. It was that bad.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110626

A light machine gun crew of Company H, 2d Battalion, 27th Marines, hugs the ground and takes advantage of whatever cover it can from an enemy gunner.

Lieutenant Colonel English recalled that by the 12th day the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, had “lost every company commander.... I had one company exec left.” Lieutenant Colonel Donn Robertson, commanding the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, lost all three of his rifle company commanders, “two killed by the same damned shell.” In many infantry units, platoons ceased to exist; depleted companies were merged to form one half-strength outfit.

[Sidebar ([page 29](#)):]

The Japanese 320mm Spigot Mortar

One of the unique Japanese weapons that Marines encountered on Iwo Jima was the 320mm spigot mortar. These enormous defensive weapons were emplaced and operated by the Japanese Army's *20th Independent Mortar Battalion*.

The mortar tube, which had a small cavity at the muzzle, rested on a steel baseplate which, in turn, was supported by a wooden platform. Unlike a conventional mortar, the five-foot long projectile was placed over the tube instead of being dropped down the barrel. The mortar shell had a diameter of nearly 13 inches, while the mortar tube was little more than 10 inches wide. The weapon could hurl a 675-pound shell a maximum of 1,440 yards. The range was adjusted by varying the powder charge, while changes in deflection were accomplished by brute force: shoving and pushing the base platform.

Although the tubes only held out for five or six rounds, enough shells were lobbed onto Marine positions to make a lasting impression on those who suffered through that campaign. According to a platoon leader who served with the 28th Marines, the spigot mortar (referred to as “the screaming Jesus” in his unit) was always afforded a healthy respect and, along with the eight-inch Japanese naval rocket, remains one of his most vivid memories of Iwo Jima. General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., who commanded the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, at Iwo Jima and went on to become the 25th Commandant of the Marine Corps, recalled that the tumbling projectile's inaccuracy made it that much more terrifying. “You could see it coming,” he said, “but you never knew where the hell it was going to come down.”

Kenneth L. Smith-Christmas



[Sidebar ([page 32](#)):]

Marine Corps Air Support During Iwo Jima

For a few special moments just prior to the landing on D-day at Iwo Jima the Marines' long-cherished vision of an integrated air-ground team seemed to have been realized. As assault troops neared the beach in their tracked amphibian vehicles, dozens of Marine Vought F4U Corsairs swept low over the objective, paving the way with rockets and machine-gun fire. "It was magnificent!" exclaimed one observer. Unfortunately, the eight Marine fighter squadrons present at Iwo that morning came from the fast carriers of Task Force 58, not the amphibious task force; three days later TF 58 left for good in pursuit of more strategic targets. Thereafter, Navy and Army Air Force pilots provided yeoman service in support of the troops fighting ashore. Sustained close air support of amphibious forces by Marine air was once again postponed to some future combat proving ground.

Other Marine aviation units contributed significantly to the successful seizure of Iwo Jima. One of the first to see action was Marine Bombing Squadron (VMB) 612, based on Saipan, whose flight crews flew North American PBJ Mitchell medium bombers in nightly, long-range rocket attacks against Japanese ships trying to resupply Iwo Jima from other bases in the Volcano and Bonin Islands. These nightly raids, combined with U.S. Navy submarine interdictions, significantly reduced the amount of ammunition and fortification material (notably barbed wire) delivered to Iwo Jima's defenders before the invasion.

The contributions of the pilots and aerial spotters from three Marine observation squadrons (VMOs-1, -4 and -5) are described at length in the

Marine LtCol Donald K. Yost in his F4U Corsair takes off from the flight deck of the Cape Gloucester (CVE 109) to provide close air support to the fighting troops

text. Flying in to Iwo initially from escort carriers, or launched precariously by the infamous “Brodie Slingshot” from *LST 776*, or eventually taking off from the captured airstrips, these intrepid crews were quite successful in spotting enemy artillery and mortar positions, and reporting them to the Supporting Arms Control Center. When Japanese antiaircraft gunners managed to down one of the “Grasshoppers,” Marines from all points of the island mourned.

ashore. This was one of a number of Marine aircraft flown at Iwo Jima.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 262047



Marine transport aircraft from Marine Transport Squadrons (VMR) 952, 253, and 353 based in the Marianas delivered critical combat cargo to the island during the height of the battle. The Marines frequently relied on aerial delivery before the landing force could establish a fully functional beachhead. On D+10, for example, VMR-952 air-dropped critically needed mortar shells, machine gun parts, and blood within Marine lines. On 3 March, Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm S. Mackay, CO of VMR-952, brought in the first Marine transport to land on the island, a Curtiss Commando R5C loaded with ammunition. All three squadrons followed suit, bringing supplies in, taking wounded men out.

On 8 March, Marine Torpedo Bomber Squadron (VMTB) 242 flew in to Iwo Jima from Tinian to assume responsibility for day and night anti-submarine patrols from the departing escort carrier force.

Colonel Vernon E. Megee, USMC, had the distinction of commanding the first Landing Force Air Support Control Unit, a milestone in the evolution of amphibious command and control of supporting arms. Megee came ashore on D+5 with General Schmidt, but the offloading process was still in such disarray that he could not assemble his communications jeeps for another five days. This did little to deter Megee. Using “borrowed” gear, he quickly moved inland, coordinating the efforts of the Air Liaison Parties, encouraging the

Navy pilots to use bigger bombs and listening to the complaints of the assault commanders. Megee's subsequent work in training and employing Army P-51 Mustang pilots in direct support was masterful.

Before the battle's end, General Kuribayashi transmitted to Tokyo 19 "lessons learned" about the problems of defending against an American amphibious assault. One of these axioms said: "The enemy's air control is very strong; at least thirty aircraft are flying ceaselessly from early morning to night above this very small island."

The Bitter End

The American drive north continued after the 5 March standdown, but the going never got any easier. The nature of enemy fire changed—fewer big guns and rockets, less observed fire from the highlands—but now the terrain grew uglier, deteriorating into narrow, twisted gorges wreathed in sulfur mists, lethal killing zones. Marine casualties continued to mount, but gunshot wounds began to outnumber high-explosive shrapnel hits. The persistent myth among some Marine units that Japanese troops were all near-sighted and hence poor marksmen ended for good at Iwo Jima. In the close-quarters fighting among the badlands of northern Iwo Jima, Japanese riflemen dropped hundreds of advancing Marines with well-aimed shots to the head or chest. “Poor marksmen?” snorted Captain Caldwell of Company F, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, “The Japs we faced all fired ‘Expert.’”

Mopping up the caves with grenades and Browning automatic rifles, Marines flush out remaining Japanese hidden in Iwo Jima's numerous and interconnecting caves.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 142472



Supporting arms coordination grew more effective during the battle. Colonel “Buzz” Letcher established what some have identified as the first corps-level Supporting Arms Coordination Center (SACC), in which senior representatives of artillery, naval gunfire, and air support pooled their talents and resources. While Letcher lacked the manpower and communications equipment to serve as corps artillery officer and simultaneously run a full-time SACC, his efforts represented a major advancement in this difficult art. So did Colonel Vernon Megee’s Landing Force Air Support Control Unit, which worked in relative harmony with the fledgling SACC. Instances of friendly fire still occurred, perhaps inevitably on that crowded island, but positive control at the highest level did much to reduce the frequency of such accidents. In terms of response time, multiple-source coordination probably worked better at the division level and below. Most infantry battalions, for example, had nothing but praise for the Air Liaison Parties, Shore Fire Control Parties, and artillery forward observer teams which deployed with each maneuver unit.



Marine Corps Combat Art Collection

“The Target,” by Col Charles H. Waterhouse.

While the Marines remained angry at the paucity of the overall preliminary naval bombardment of Iwo Jima, all hands valued the continuous and responsive support received from D-day onward. Many of the gunfire ships stood in close—frequently less than a mile offshore—to deliver along the flanks and front lines, and many took hits from masked Japanese coast defense batteries. There were literally no safe zones in or around the island. Two aspects of naval gunfire at Iwo Jima rate special mention. One was the extent to which the ships provided illumination rounds over the battlefield, especially during the early days before landing force artillery could assume the bulk of these missions. The second unique aspect was the degree of assistance provided by the smallest gunships, frequently modified landing craft armed with 4.2-inch mortars, rockets, or 20mm guns. These “small boys” proved invaluable, especially along the northwest coast where they frequently worked in lock-step with the 5th Marine Division as it approached The Gorge.

While the Marines comprised the bulk of the landing force at Iwo Jima, they received early and increasing support from elements of the U.S. Army. Two of the four DUKW companies employed on D-day were Army units. The 138th Antiaircraft Artillery Group provided 90mm AA batteries around

the newly captured airfields. Major General James E. Chaney, USA, who would become Island Commander, Iwo Jima, at the battle's end, landed on D+8 with advance elements of the 145th Infantry.

As far as the Marines on the ground were concerned, the most welcome Army units flew into Iwo Jima on 6 March (D+15). This was the 15th Fighter Group, the vanguard of VII Fighter Command destined to accompany the B-29s over Tokyo. The group included the 47th Fighter Squadron, a seasoned outfit of North American P-51 Mustangs. Although the Army pilots had no experience in direct air support of ground troops, Colonel Megee liked their "eager-beaver attitude" and willingness to learn. He also appreciated the fact that the Mustangs could deliver 1,000-pound bombs. Megee quickly trained the Army pilots in striking designated targets on nearby islands in response to a surface-based controller. In three days they were ready for Iwo Jima. Megee instructed the P-51 pilots to arm their bombs with 12-second delay fuzes, attack parallel to the front lines, and approach from a 45-degree angle. Sometimes these tactics produced spectacular results, especially along the west coast, where the big bombs with delayed fuzes blew the sides of entire cliffs into the ocean, exposing enemy caves and tunnels to direct fire from the sea. "The Air Force boys did a lot of good," said Megee. With that, the escort carriers departed the area and left close air support to the 47th Fighter Squadron for the duration of the battle.

While technically not a "supporting arm," the field medical support provided the assault Marines primarily by the Navy was a major contributor to victory in the prolonged battle. The practice of integrating surgeons, chaplains, and corpsmen within the Fleet Marine Force units continued to pay valuable dividends. In many cases company corpsmen were just as tough and combat-savvy as the Marines they accompanied. In all cases, a wounded Marine immediately knew "his" corpsman would move heaven and earth to reach him, bind his wounds, and start the long process of evacuation. Most Marines at Iwo Jima would echo the sentiments of Staff Sergeant Alfred I. Thomas, a half-track platoon commander in the 25th Marines: "We had outstanding corpsmen; they were just like family."

Unfortunately, the luxury of having first-rate medical assistance so close to the front lines took a terrible toll. Twenty-three doctors and 827

corpsmen were killed or wounded at Iwo Jima, a casualty rate twice as high as bloody Saipan.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110902

Navy corpsmen tend a Marine who was shot in the back by enemy sniper fire.

Rarely had combat medical support been so thoughtfully prepared and provided as at Iwo Jima. Beyond the crude aid stations, further toward the rear, Navy and Army field hospitals arose. Some Marines would be wounded, receive treatment in a field hospital tent, recuperate in a bunker, and return to the lines—often to receive a second or third wound. The more seriously wounded would be evacuated off the island, either by direct air to Guam, or via one of several fully staffed hospital ships which operated around the clock within the amphibious objective area. Within the first month of the fighting on Iwo Jima, 13,737 wounded Marines and corpsmen were evacuated by hospital ship, another 2,449 by airlift.

Installed in an abandoned Japanese dugout several thousand yards behind the fighting, 4th Marine Division surgeons operated on those badly wounded Marines and Navy corpsmen who might not have survived a trip to the hospital ship.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111506



For a wounded Marine, the hazardous period came during the first few minutes after he went down. Japanese snipers had no compunctions about picking off litter crews, or corpsmen, or sometimes the wounded man himself as his buddies tried to slide him clear of the fire. One of the most celebrated examples of casualty evacuation occurred after a Japanese sniper shot Corporal Edwin J. Canter, a rocket truck crew chief in the 4th Marine Division, through the abdomen. The rocket trucks always drew an angry fusillade of counterbattery fire from the Japanese, and Canter's friends knew they had to get him away from the launch site fast. As a nearby

motion picture crew recorded the drama, four Marines hustling Canter down a muddy hillside heard the scream of an incoming shell, dumped the wounded man unceremoniously and scattered for cover. The explosion killed the film crew and wounded each of the Marines, including Canter, again. The film footage survived, appeared in stateside newsreels—and eventually became part of the movie “Sands of Iwo Jima.” Canter was evacuated to a hospital ship, thence to hospitals in Guam, Hawaii, and the States. His war had ended.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110852

As the fighting moved inland, the beaches of Iwo Jima became very busy places with the continual incoming flow of supplies. Note the many roads leading off the beaches over which trucks, LVTs, and DUKWs headed to the front lines.

Meanwhile the beachmasters and shore party personnel performed spectacular feats to keep the advancing divisions fully armed and equipped. It is difficult to imagine the scope of logistical management and sheer, back-breaking work required to maintain such a high volume of supplies and equipment moving over such precarious beaches. A single beach on the west coast became functional on D+11, but by that time the bulk of landing force supplies were on shore. General unloading ended the next day, releasing the vulnerable amphibious ships from their tether to the beachhead. Thereafter, ammunition resupply became the critical factor. On one occasion, well-aimed Japanese fire detonated the entire 5th Marine Division ammo dump. In another tense moment, the ammunition ship *Columbia Victory* came under direct Japanese fire as she approached the western beaches to commence unloading. Watching Marines held their breath as the ship became bracketed by fire. The ship escaped, but the potential still existed for a disaster of catastrophic proportions.

The 2d Separate Engineer Battalion and the 62d Naval Construction Battalion (Seabees) repaired and extended the captured runways. In short order, an entire Seabee brigade moved ashore. Marines returning to the beaches from the northern highlands could hardly recognize the place they had first seen on D-day. There were now more than 80,000 Americans on the small island. Seabees had bulldozed a two-lane road up to the top of Suribachi.

Communications, often maligned in earlier amphibious assaults, were never better than at Iwo Jima. Radios and handsets were now waterproof, more frequencies were available, and a variety of radio systems served the varying needs of the landing force. Forward observer teams, for example, used the back-pack SCR-610, while companies and platoons favored the SCR-300 “walkie-talkies,” or the even lighter SCR-536 “Spam Can” portables. Said Lieutenant Colonel James P. Berkeley, executive officer of the 27th Marines and a former communications officer, “At Iwo we had near-perfect communications, all any commander could ask for.” As the battle progressed, the Marines began stringing telephone lines between support units and forward command posts, wisely elevating the wire along upright posts to avoid damage by tracked vehicles.

Japanese counterintelligence teams expected to have a field day splicing into the proliferation of U.S. telephone lines, but the Marines

baffled them by heavy use of Navajo code talkers. Each division employed about two dozen trained Navajos. The 5th Marine Division command post established six Navajo networks upon arrival on the island. No one, throughout the war, insofar as anyone knew, was ever able to translate the Navajo code talkers' voice transmissions.

“Two Jima,” proof lithograph of two Navajo code talkers, by Sgt John Fabion.

Marine Corps Combat Art Collection



African-American troops played a significant role in the capture of Iwo Jima. Negro drivers served in the Army DUKW units active throughout the landing. Black Marines of the 8th Ammunition Company and the 36th Depot Company landed on D-day, served as stevedores on those chaotic beaches, and were joined by the 33d and 34th Depot Companies on D+3. These Marines were incorporated into the VAC Shore Party which did Herculean work sustaining the momentum of the American drive northwards. When Japanese counterattacks penetrated to the beach areas, these Marines dropped their cargo, unslung their carbines, and engaged in well-disciplined fire and maneuver, inflicting more casualties than they sustained. Two Marines, Privates James W. Whitlock and James Davis, received the Bronze Star. Said Colonel Leland S. Swindler, commanding the VAC Shore Party, the entire body of black Marines “conducted themselves with marked coolness and courage.”

News media coverage of the Iwo Jima battle was extensive and largely unfettered. Typical of the scores of combat correspondents who stuck with the landing force throughout the battle was Marine Technical Sergeant Frederick K. “Dick” Dashiell, a former Associated Press writer assigned to the 3d Marine Division. Although downright scared sometimes, and filled with horror often, Dashiell stood the test, for he wrote 81 front-line communiques, pounding out news releases on his portable typewriter on the edge of his foxhole. Dashiell’s eye for detail caught the flavor of the prolonged assault. “All is bitter, frontal assault, always uphill,” he wrote. He described how the ceaseless wind filled the air with fine volcanic grit, and how often the Marines had to stop and clean the grit from their weapons—and how naked that made any Marine feel.

Most Marines were exhausted at this point in the battle. Occasional hot food delivered close behind the front lines, or more frequently fresh fruit and milk from the nearby ships, helped morale some. So did watching more and more crippled B-29s soar in for emergency landings, often two or three a day. “It felt good to see them land,” said Sergeant James “Doc” Lindsey, a squad leader in Company G, 2d Battalion, 25th Marines. “You knew they’d just come from Tokyo.”



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 142845

From the viewpoint of Marine company commanders, having their own “artillery,” in the form of 60mm mortars, was a very satisfying matter. A 60mm mortar crew is at work, in a natural depression, lobbing round after round at enemy positions.

General Erskine came down with pneumonia during this period, but refused to be evacuated. Colonel Robert E. Hogaboom, his chief of staff, quietly kept the war moving. The division continued to advance. When Erskine recovered, Hogaboom adjusted accordingly; the two were a highly effective team.

Erskine had long sought the opportunity to conduct a battalion-sized night operation. It rankled him that throughout the war the Americans

seemed to have conceded the night to the Japanese. When Hill 362-C continued to thwart his advance, Erskine directed a pre-dawn advance devoid of the trappings of prep fires which always seemed to identify the time and place of attack. The distinction of making this unusual assault went to Lieutenant Colonel Harold C. “Bing” Boehm, commanding the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. Unfortunately this battalion was new to this particular sector and received the attack order too late the previous day to reconnoiter effectively. The absence of advance orientation notwithstanding, the battalion crossed the line of departure promptly and silently at 0500 and headed for Hill 362-C. The unit attained total surprise along its axis of advance. Before the sleepy Japanese knew it, the battalion had hurried across 500 yards of broken ground, sweeping by the outposts and roasting the occasional strongpoint with flamethrowers. Then it was Boehm’s turn to be surprised. Daylight revealed his battalion had captured the wrong hill, an intermediate objective. Hill 362-C still lay 250 yards distant; now he was surrounded by a sea of wide-awake and furiously counterattacking Japanese infantry. Boehm did what seemed natural: he redeployed his battalion and attacked towards the original objective. This proved very rough going and took much of the day, but before dark the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines stood in sole possession of Hill 362-C, one of Kuribayashi’s main defensive anchors.

Boehm’s success, followed shortly by General Senda’s costly counterattack against the 4th Marine Division, seemed to represent another turning point of the battle. On D+18 a patrol from the 3d Marine Division reached the northeast coast. The squad leader filled a canteen with salt water and sent it back to General Schmidt marked “For inspection—not consumption.” Schmidt welcomed the symbolism. The next day the 4th Marine Division finally pinched out Turkey Knob, moving out of The Amphitheater towards the east coast. The end seemed tantalizingly close, but the intensity of Japanese resistance hardly waned. Within the 5th Marine Division’s zone in the west, the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines, was reporting an aggregate casualty rate approaching 70 percent. General Rockey warned of a state of “extreme exhaustion and fatigue.”

The division commanders began to look elsewhere for relief of their shot-up battalions. In the 4th Marine Division, General Cates formed a provisional battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Melvin L. Krulewitch which

conducted a series of attacks against the many bypassed enemy positions. The term “mopping up” as applied to Iwo Jima, whether by service troops or subsequent Army garrison units, should be considered relative. Many pockets of Japanese held out indefinitely, well-armed and defiant to the end. Rooting them out was never easy. Other divisions used cannoneers, pioneers, motor transport units, and amtrackers as light infantry units, either to augment front-line battalions or conduct combat patrols throughout rear areas. By this time, however, the extreme rear area at Iwo had become overconfident. Movies were being shown every night. Ice cream could be found on the beach. Men swam in the surf and slept in tents. This all provided a false and deadly sense of security.

Not very far to the north, Lieutenant Colonel Cushman’s 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, became engaged in a sustained battle in extremely broken terrain east of the third airfield. The Marines eventually encircled the Japanese positions, but the battle for “Cushman’s Pocket” raged on. As the battalion commander reported the action:

The enemy position was a maze of caves, pillboxes, emplaced tanks, stone walls and trenches.... We beat against this position for eight continuous days, using every supporting weapon. The core—main objective of the sector—still remained. The battalion was exhausted. Almost all leaders were gone and the battalion numbered about 400, including 350 replacements.

Cushman’s 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, was relieved, but other elements of the 9th and 21st Marines, equally exhausted, had just as difficult a time. Erskine truly had no reserves. He called Cushman back into the pocket. By 16 March (D+25), Japanese resistance in this thicket of jumbled rocks ended. The 4th Marine Division, meanwhile, poured over the hills along the east, seizing the coast road and blasting the last Japanese strongpoints from the rear. Ninety percent of Iwo Jima now lay in American hands. Radio Tokyo carried the mournful remarks of Prime Minister Kuniaki Koiso, who announced the fall of Iwo Jima as “the most unfortunate thing in the whole war situation.”

General Smith took the opportunity to declare victory and conduct a flag-raising ceremony. With that, the old warhorse departed. Admiral Turner

had sailed previously. Admiral Hill and General Schmidt finally had the campaign to themselves. Survivors of the 4th Division began backloading on board ship, their battle finally over.



Marine Corps Historical Collection

After 24 days of the most bitter battle in the history of the Marine Corps to that date, on 14 March 1945, the colors were raised once again on Iwo Jima to signify the occupation of the island, although the battle was still raging in the north. The official end of the campaign would not be until 14 days later, on 26 March.

The killing continued in the north. The 5th Marine Division entered The Gorge, an 800-yard pocket of incredibly broken country which the troops would soon call “Death Valley.” Here General Kuribayashi maintained his final command center in a deep cave. Fighting in this ungodly landscape provided a fitting end to the battle—nine endless days of cave-by-cave assaults with flamethrowers and demolitions. Combat engineers used 8,500 tons of explosives to detonate one huge fortification. Progress was slow and costlier than ever. General Rockey’s drained and depleted regiments lost one more man with every two yards gained. To ease the pressure, General Schmidt deployed the 3d Marine Division against Kitano Point in the 5th Division zone.

Colonel Hartnoll J. Withers directed the final assault of his 21st Marines against the extreme northern tip of the island. General Erskine, pneumonia be damned, came forward to look over his shoulder. The 21st Marines could see the end, and their momentum proved irresistible. In half a day of sharp fighting they cleared the point of the last defenders. Erskine signalled Schmidt: “Kitano Point is taken.”

Both divisions made serious efforts to persuade Kuribayashi to surrender during these final days, broadcasting appeals in Japanese, sending personal messages praising his valor and urging his cooperation. Kuribayashi remained a samurai to the end. He transmitted one final message to Tokyo, saying “we have not eaten or drunk for five days, but our fighting spirit is still running high. We are going to fight bravely to the last.” Imperial Headquarters tried to convey the good news to him that the Emperor had approved his promotion to full general. There was no response from Iwo Jima. Kuribayashi’s promotion would be posthumous. Fragmentary Japanese accounts indicate he took his own life during the night of 25–26 March.

In The Gorge, the 5th Marine Division kept clawing forward. The division reported that the average battalion, which had landed with 36 officers and 885 men on D-day, now mustered 16 officers and 300 men, including the hundreds of replacements funneled in during the fighting. The remnants of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, and the 1st Battalion, 28th Marines, squeezed the Japanese into a final pocket, then overwhelmed them.

It was the evening of 25 March, D+34, and the amphibious assault on the rocky fortress of Iwo Jima finally appeared over. The island grew strangely quiet. There were far fewer illumination shells. In the flickering false light, some saw shadowy figures, moving south, towards the airfield.

General Schmidt received the good news that the 5th Marine Division had snuffed out the final enemy cave in The Gorge on the evening of D+34. But even as the corps commander prepared his announcement declaring the end of organized resistance on Iwo Jima, a very well-organized enemy force emerged from northern caves and infiltrated down the length of the island. This final spasm of Japanese opposition still reflected the influence of Kuribayashi's tactical discipline. The 300-man force took all night to move into position around the island's now vulnerable rear base area, the tents occupied by freshly arrived Army pilots of VII Fighter Command, adjacent to Airfield No. 1. The counterattacking force achieved total surprise, falling on the sleeping pilots out of the darkness with swords, grenades, and automatic weapons. The fighting was as vicious and bloody as any that occurred in Iwo Jima's many arenas.

The surviving pilots and members of the 5th Pioneer Battalion improvised a skirmish line and launched a counterattack of their own. Seabees and elements of the redeploying 28th Marines joined the fray. There were few suicides among the Japanese; most died in place, grateful to strike one final blow for the Emperor. Sunrise revealed the awful carnage: 300 dead Japanese; more than 100 slain pilots, Seabees, and pioneers; and another 200 American wounded. It was a grotesque closing chapter to five continuous weeks of savagery.

The 5th Marine Division and the 21st Marines wasted no time in backloading on board amphibious ships. The 9th Marines, last of the VAC maneuver units to land, became the last to leave, conducting two more weeks of ambushes and combat patrols. The 147th Infantry inherited more of the same. In the first two months after the Marines left, the Army troops killed 1,602 Japanese and captured 867 more.

[Sidebar ([page 37](#)):]

The Marines' Zippo Tanks

To the Marines on the ground, the Sherman M4A3 medium tank equipped with the Navy Mark I flame thrower seemed to be the most valuable weapon employed in the battle of Iwo Jima.

The Marines had come a long way in the tactical use of fire in the 15 months since Tarawa, when only a handful of backpack flame throwers were available to combat the island's hundreds of fortifications. While the landing force still relied on portable flame throwers, most Marines could see the value of marrying the technology with armored vehicles for use against the toughest targets. In the Marianas, the Marines modified M3A1 light tanks with the Canadian Ronson flame system to good effect; the problems came from the vulnerability of the small vehicles. At Peleliu, the 1st Marine Division mounted the improvised Mark I system on a thin-skinned LVT-4; again, vehicle vulnerability limited the system's effectiveness. The obvious solution seemed to be to mount the flame thrower in a medium tank.

The first modification to Sherman tanks involved the installation of the small E4-5 mechanized flame thrower in place of the bow machine gun. This was only a marginal improvement; the system's short range, modest fuel supply, and awkward aiming process hardly offset the loss of the machine gun. Even so, each of the three tank battalions employed E4-5-equipped Shermans during Iwo Jima.

The best solution to marrying effective flame projection with mechanized mobility resulted from an unlikely inter-service task force of Seabees, Army Chemical Warfare Service technicians, and Fleet Marine Force tankers in Hawaii before the invasion. According to Lieutenant Colonel William R. Collins, commanding the 5th Tank Battalion, this inspired group of field-expedient tinkerers modified the Mark I flame thrower to operate from within the Sherman's turret, replacing the 75mm main gun with a look-alike launch tube. The modified system could thus be trained and pointed like any conventional turret gun. Using napalm-thickened fuel, the "Zippo Tanks" could spew flame up to 150 yards for a duration of 55–80 seconds, both quantum tactical improvements.

Unfortunately, the *ad hoc* modification team had only sufficient time and components to modify eight M4A3 tanks with the Mark I flame system; four each went to the 4th and 5th Tank Battalions. The 3d Tank Battalion, then staging in Guam, received neither the M4A3 Shermans nor the field modifications in time for Iwo Jima, although a number of their “A2” tanks retained the E4-5 system mounted in the bow.

The eight modified Sherman flame tanks proved ideal against Iwo Jima’s rugged caves and concrete fortifications. The Japanese feared this weapon greatly; time and again suicide squads of “human bullets” would assail the flame tanks directly, only to be shot down by covering forces or scorched by the main weapon. Enemy fire and the rough terrain took their toll on the eight flame tanks, but maintenance crews worked around the clock to keep them functional.

In the words of Captain Frank C. Caldwell, a company commander in the 26th Marines: “In my view it was the flame tank more than any other supporting arm that won this battle.” Tactical demands for the flame tanks never diminished. Late in the battle, as the 5th Marine Division cornered the last Japanese defenders in “The Gorge,” the 5th Tank Battalion expended napalm-thickened fuel at the rate of 10,000 gallons per day. The division’s final action report stated that the flame tank was “the one weapon that caused the Japs to leave their caves and rock crevices and run.”

A Marine flame tank, also known as a “Ronson,” scorches a Japanese strongpoint. The eight M4A3 Shermans equipped with the Navy Mark I flame-thruster proved to be the most valuable weapons systems on Iwo Jima.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 140758



[Sidebar ([page 42](#)):]

Iwo's Fire Brigades: The Rocket Detachments

Attached to the assault divisions of the landing force at Iwo Jima were provisional rocket detachments. The infantry had a love-hate relationship with the forward-deploying little rocket trucks and their plucky crews. The “system” was an International one-ton 4×4 truck modified to carry three box-shaped launchers, each containing a dozen 4.5-inch rockets. A good crew could launch a “ripple” of 36 rockets within a matter of seconds, providing a blanket of high explosives on the target. This the infantry loved—but each launching always drew heavy return fire from the Japanese who feared the “automatic artillery.”

The Marines formed an Experimental Rocket Unit in June 1943 and first deployed rail-launched barrage rockets during the fighting in the upper Solomons. There the heavily canopied jungles limited their effectiveness. Once mounted on trucks and deployed to the Central Pacific, however, the weapons proved much more useful, particularly during the battle of Saipan. The Marines modified the small trucks by reinforcing the tail gate to serve as a blast shield, installing a hydraulic jack to raise and lower the launchers, and applying gravity quadrants and elevation safety chains. Crude steel rods welded to the bumper and dashboard helped the driver align the vehicle with aiming stakes.

Treeless, hilly Iwo Jima proved an ideal battleground for these so-called “Buck Rogers Men.” At Iwo, the 1st Provisional Rocket Detachment supported the 4th Marine Division and the 3d Detachment supported the 5th Division throughout the operation (the 3d Division did not have such a unit in this battle). Between them, the two detachments fired more than 30,000 rockets in support of the landing force.

The 3d Detachment landed over Red Beach on D-day, losing one vehicle to the surf, others to the loose sand or heavy enemy fire. One vehicle reached its firing position intact and launched a salvo of rockets against Japanese fortifications along the slopes of Suribachi, detonating an enemy ammunition dump. The detachment subsequently supported the 1st Battalion, 29th

[Sidebar ([page 44](#)):]

Amphibious Logistical Support at Iwo Jima

The logistical effort required to sustain the seizure of Iwo Jima was enormous, complex, largely improvised on lessons learned in earlier Marine Corps operations in the Pacific, and highly successful. Clearly, no other element of the emerging art of amphibious warfare had improved so greatly by the winter of 1945. Marines may have had the heart and firepower to tackle a fortress-like Iwo Jima earlier in the war, but they would have been crippled in the doing of it by limitations in amphibious logistical support capabilities. These concepts, procedures, organizations, and special materials took years to develop; once in place they fully enabled such large-scale conquests as Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

For the Iwo Jima operation, VAC had the 8th Field Depot, commanded by Colonel Leland S. Swindler. The depot was designed to serve as the nucleus of the shore party operation; the depot commander was dual-hatted as the Shore Party Commander of the Landing Force, in which capacity he was responsible for coordinating the activities of the division shore parties. The timing of the logistics support at Iwo Jima proved to be well conceived and executed. Liaison teams from the 8th Field Depot accompanied the 4th and 5th Divisions ashore. On D+3, units of the field depot came ashore, and two days after this, when VAC assumed control on shore, the field depot took over and the unloading continued without interruption.

The V Amphibious Corps at Iwo Jima used every conceivable means of delivering combat cargo ashore when and where needed by the landing force. These means sequentially involved the prescribed loads and units of fire carried by the assault waves; “hot cargo” preloaded in on-call waves or floating dumps; experimental use of “one-shot” preloaded amphibious trailers and Wilson drums; general unloading; administrative unloading of what later generations of amphibians would call an “assault follow-on echelon”; and aerial delivery of critically short items, first by parachute, then by transports landing on the captured runways. In the process, the Navy-Marine Corps team successfully experimented with the use of armored bulldozers and sleds

loaded with hinged Marston matting delivered in the assault waves to help clear wheeled vehicles stuck in the soft volcanic sand. In spite of formidable early obstacles—foul weather, heavy surf, dangerous undertows, and fearsome enemy fire—the system worked. Combat cargo flowed in; casualties and salvaged equipment flowed out.

Shortages appeared from time to time, largely the result of the Marines on shore meeting a stronger and larger defense garrison than estimated. Hence, urgent calls soon came for more demolitions, grenades, mortar illumination rounds, flame-thrower recharging units, and whole blood. Transport squadrons delivered many of these critical items directly from fleet bases in the Marianas.

Field medical support at Iwo Jima was a model of exhaustive planning and flexible application. The Marines had always enjoyed the finest immediate medical attention from their organic surgeons and corpsmen, but the backup system ashore at Iwo Jima, from field hospitals to graves registration, was mind-boggling to the older veterans. Moderately wounded Marines received full hospital treatment and rehabilitation; many returned directly to their units, thus preserving at least some of the rapidly decreasing levels of combat experience in frontline outfits. The more seriously wounded were treated, stabilized, and evacuated, either to offshore hospital ships or by air transport to Guam.

The Marines fired an unprecedented half million artillery rounds in direct and general support of the assault units. More rounds were lost when the 5th Marine Division dump blew up. The flow never stopped. The Shore Party used DUKWs, LVTs, and larger craft for rapid offloading of ammunition ships dangerously exposed to Iwo Jima's enemy gunners. Marine Corps ammunition and depot companies hustled the fresh munitions ashore and into the neediest hands.

Lieutenant Colonel James D. Hittle, USMC, served as D-4 of the 3d Marine Division throughout the battle of Iwo Jima. While shaking his head at the "crazy-quilt" logistic adaptations dictated by Iwo's geography, Hittle saw creative staff management at all levels. The 3d Division, earmarked as the reserve for the landing, found it difficult to undertake combat loading of their ships in the absence of a scheme of maneuver on shore, but the staff made valid assumptions based on their earlier experiences. This paid huge dividends when the corps commander had to commit the 21st Marines as a separate tactical unit well in advance of the division. Thanks to foresightful combat loading, the regiment landed fully equipped and supported, ready for immediate deployment in the fighting.

immediate deployment in the morning.

To augment the supplies coming across the beach, the 3d Division staff air officer “appropriated” a transport plane and made regular runs to the division’s base in Guam, bringing back fresh beef, mail, and cases of beer. The 3d Division G-4 also sent his transport quartermaster (today’s embarkation officer) out to sea with an LVT-full of war souvenirs; these were bartered with ship’s crews for donations of fresh fruit, eggs, bread—“we’d take anything.” General Erskine distributed these treats personally to the men in the lines.

Retired Brigadier General Hittle marveled at the density of troops funnelled into the small island. “At one point we had 60,000 men occupying less than three-and-a-half square miles of broken terrain.” These produced startling neighbors: a 105mm battery firing from the middle of the shore party cantonment; the division command post sited 1,000 yards from Japanese lines; “giant B-29s taking off and landing forward of the CP of an assault regiment.”

In the effort to establish a fresh-water distilling plant, Marine engineers dug a “well” near the beach. Instead of a source of salt water the crew discovered steaming mineral water, heated by Suribachi’s supposedly dormant volcano. Hittle moved the 3d Division distilling site elsewhere; this spot became a hot shower facility, soon one of the most popular places on the island.





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109635

Iwo Jima's Costs, Gains, and Legacies

In its 36 days of combat on Iwo Jima, the V Amphibious Corps killed approximately 22,000 Japanese soldiers and sailors. The cost was staggering. The assault units of the corps—Marines and organic Navy personnel—sustained 24,053 casualties, by far the highest single-action losses in Marine Corps history. Of these, a total of 6,140 died. Roughly one Marine or corpsman became a casualty for every three who landed on Iwo Jima.

According to a subsequent analysis by military historian Dr. Norman Cooper, “Nearly seven hundred Americans gave their lives for every square mile. For every plot of ground the size of a football field, an average of more than one American and five Japanese were killed and five Americans wounded.”

The fighting hardly over, grizzled, begrimed, and tired Marines solemnly display the spoils of war captured in a very long, difficult, and hard-fought battle.

Marine Corps Historical Collection



The assault infantry units bore the brunt of these losses. Captain William T. Ketcham's Company I, 3d Battalion, 24th Marines, landed on D-day with 133 Marines in the three rifle platoons. Only nine of these men remained when the remnants of the company reembarked on D+35. Captain Frank C. Caldwell reported the loss of 221 men from Company F, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines. At the end, a private first class served as platoon commander for Caldwell's merged first and second platoons. Elsewhere in the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, Captain Tom Fields relinquished command of Company D on the eighth day to replace the battalion executive officer. Rejoining his company at the end of the battle, Fields was sickened to find only 17 of the original 250 men still in the ranks. Company B, 1st Battalion, 28th Marines, went through nine company commanders in the fighting; 12 different Marines served as platoon leader of the second platoon, including two buck privates. Each division, each regiment, reported similar conditions.

As the extent of the losses became known in the press, the American public reacted with shock and dismay as they had 14 months earlier at Tarawa. This time, however, the debate about the high cost of forcibly seizing an enemy island raged in the press while the battle was still being fought.

The Marine Corps released only one official communique about specific battle losses during the battle, reporting casualties of nearly 5,000 men on 22 February. Five days later, at the insistence of press baron William Randolph Hearst, an early supporter of the MacArthur-for-President clique, the *San Francisco Examiner* ran a front page editorial bewailing the Marines' tactics and losses. "It's the same thing that happened at Tarawa and Saipan," the editorial stated, urging the elevation of General MacArthur to supreme command in the Pacific, because "HE SAVES THE LIVES OF HIS OWN MEN." With that, 100 off-duty Marines stormed the offices of the *Examiner* demanding an apology. Unfortunately, the Hearst editorial received wide play; many families of Marines fighting at Iwo Jima forwarded the clippings. Marines received these in the mail while the fighting still continued, an unwelcome blow to morale.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110599

The fighting continues and continues. For weary flamethrower operators Pvt Richard Klatt, left, and PFC Wilfred Voegeli the campaign is just one cave after another.

President Roosevelt, long a master of public opinion, managed to keep the lid on the outcry by emphasizing the sacrifice of the troops as epitomized by the Joe Rosenthal photograph of the second Suribachi flag-raising. The photograph was already widely renowned. FDR made it the official logo of the Seventh War Bond Drive and demanded the six flag-raisers be reassigned home to enhance popular morale. Regrettably, three of the six men had already been killed in subsequent fighting in the drive north on Iwo Jima.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff looked appraisingly at Iwo Jima's losses. No one questioned the objective; Iwo Jima was an island that categorically had to be seized if the strategic bombing campaign was ever going to be effective. The island could therefore not be bypassed or "leap-frogged." There is considerable evidence that the Joint Chiefs considered the use of poison gas during the Iwo Jima planning phase. Neither Japan nor the United States had signed the international moratorium, there were no

civilians on the island, the Americans had stockpiles of mustard gas shells in the Pacific theater. But President Roosevelt scotched these considerations quickly. America, he declared, would never make first use of poison gas. In any case, the use of poison gas on an area as relatively small as Iwo Jima, whose prevailing winds would quickly dissipate the gas fumes, became moot. This left the landing force with no option but a frontal amphibious assault against the most heavily fortified island America ever faced in the war.

Uncommon valor in a peaceful setting: this 4th Division Marine threatens the enemy even in death. His bayonet fixed and pointing in the direction of the enemy, he was killed by a sniper before he even got off the beach on D-day.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109624



On the other hand, seizure of Iwo Jima provided significant strategic benefits. Symbolically, the Marines raised the flag over Mount Suribachi on the same day that General MacArthur entered Manila. The parallel capture

of the Philippines and Iwo Jima, followed immediately by the invasion of Okinawa, accelerated the pace of the war, bringing it at long last to Japan's doorstep. The three campaigns convincingly demonstrated to the Japanese high command that the Americans now had the capability—and the will—to overwhelm even the most stoutly defended islands. Kyushu and Honshu would be next.

Iwo Jima in American hands produced immediate and highly visible benefits to the strategic bombing campaign. Marines fighting on the island were reminded of this mission time and again as crippled B-29 Superforts flew in from Honshu. The capture of Iwo Jima served to increase the operating range, payload, and survival rate of the big bombers. The monthly tonnage of high explosives dropped on Imperial Japan by B-29s based in the Marianas increased eleven-fold in March alone. As early as 7 April a force of 80 P-51 Mustangs of VII Fighter Command took off from Iwo Jima to escort B-29s striking the Nakajima aircraft engine plant in Tokyo. But the Army Air Force valued Iwo Jima most of all as an emergency landing field. By war's end, a total of 2,251 B-29s made forced landings on the island. This figure represented 24,761 flight crewmen, many of whom would have perished at sea without the availability of Iwo Jima as a safe haven. Said one B-29 pilot, "whenever I land on this island I thank God for the men who fought for it."

General Tadamichi Kuribayashi proved to be one of the most competent field commanders the Marines ever faced. He displayed a masterful grasp of the principles of simplicity and economy of force, made maximum use of Iwo's forbidding terrain, employed his artillery and mortars with great skill, and exercised command with an iron will virtually to the end. He was also a realist. Without hope of even temporary naval or air superiority he knew he was doomed from the start. In five weeks of unremitting pressure, the Americans breached every strongpoint, exterminated his forces, and seized the island.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 142434

With his buddies holding the four corners of the National Colors, the last rites for a fallen Marine are offered by the chaplain at a temporary gravesite in Iwo's black sand. Chaplains of all religious persuasions heroically ministered to all Marines and Corpsmen throughout the thick of the fighting at their own risk.

Iwo Jima represented at once the supreme test and the pinnacle of American amphibious capabilities in the Pacific War. The sheer magnitude of the task—planning the assault and sustaining of that many troops against such a formidable objective—made Operation Detachment an enduring model of “detailed planning and violent execution.” Here the element of surprise was not available to the attacker. Yet the speed of the American landing and the toughness with which assault units withstood the withering barrages astounded the Japanese defenders. “The landing on Iwo was the epitome of everything we’d learned over the years about amphibious assaults,” said Colonel Wornham of the 27th Marines. Bad as the enemy fire became on D-day, there were no reports of “Issue in doubt.” Lieutenant

Colonel Galer compared Iwo Jima with his Guadalcanal experience: “Then it was ‘can we hold?’ Here at Iwo Jima the question was simply ‘When can we get it over?’”

The ship-to-shore assault at Iwo was impressive enough, but the real measure of amphibious effectiveness can be seen in the massive, sustained logistical support which somehow flowed over those treacherous beaches. Not only did the Marines have all the ammunition and flamethrower refills they needed, around the clock, but they also had many of the less obvious necessities and niceties which marked this battle as different from its predecessors. Marines on Iwo had ample quantities of whole blood, some of it donated barely two weeks in advance, flown in, refrigerated, and available. The Marines also had mail call, unit newsletters, fresh water, radio batteries, fresh-baked bread, and prefabricated burial markers, thousands of them.

Iwo Jima featured superior inter-service cooperation. The Navy-Marine Corps team rarely functioned more efficiently. The blue-water Navy continued to earn the respect of the Marines, especially on D-2 when the flotilla of tiny LCI gunboats bravely attacked the coastal defense guns to protect the Navy and Marine frogmen. Likewise, the Marines welcomed the contributions of the Army, Coast Guard, Coast and Geodetic Survey, Red Cross, and the host of combat correspondents—all of whom shared both the misery and the glory of the prolonged battle.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111147

At the end of a very long fight, a Marine flamethrower operator pauses to light up.

LtGen Holland M. Smith, USMC, with his Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, chief of staff, Col Dudley S. Brown, surveys the wreckage along the landing beaches. Iwo Jima was Gen Smith's last battle. After this, he returned to his headquarters on Hawaii.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110635



Two aspects of the battle remain controversial: the inadequate preliminary bombardment and the decision to use piecemeal replacements instead of organized units to strengthen the assault forces. Both decisions, rendered in the context of several competing factors, were made by experienced commanders in good faith. Unavoidably, Iwo Jima's biggest cost to the V Amphibious Corps was the loss of so many combat veterans in taking the island. While the battle served to create a new generation of veterans among the survivors, many proud regiments suffered devastating losses. With these same units already designated as key components of the landing force against the Japanese home islands, such losses had serious potential implications. These factors may well have influenced General Holland Smith's unpopular decision to withhold the 3d Marines from the battle. From the perspective of an exhausted company commander on Iwo

Jima, Smith's decision seemed inexcusable, then and now; from the wider perspective of the commanding general, Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific, the decision makes more sense.

Whatever his shortcomings, Holland Smith probably knew amphibious warfare better than anyone. Of the hundreds of after-action reports filed immediately following the battle, his official analysis best captured the essence of the struggle:

There was no hope of surprise, either strategic or tactical. There was little possibility for tactical initiative; the entire operation was fought on what were virtually the enemy's own terms.... The strength, disposition, and conduct of the enemy's defense required a major penetration of the heart of his prepared positions in the center of the Motoyama Plateau and a subsequent reduction of the positions in the difficult terrain sloping to the shore on the flanks. The size and terrain of the island precluded any Force Beachhead Line. It was an operation of one phase and one tactic. From the time the engagement was joined until the mission was completed it was a matter of frontal assault maintained with relentless pressure by a superior mass of troops and supporting arms against a position fortified to the maximum practical extent.

We Americans of a subsequent generation in the profession of arms find it difficult to imagine a sustained amphibious assault under such conditions. In some respects the fighting on Iwo Jima took on the features of Marines fighting in France in 1918, described by one as "a war girt with horrors." We sense the drama repeated every morning at Iwo, after the prep fires lifted, when the riflemen, engineers, corpsmen, flame tank crews, and armored bulldozer operators somehow found the fortitude to move out yet again into "Death Valley" or "The Meatgrinder." Few of us today can study the defenses, analyze the action reports, or walk the broken ground without experiencing a sense of reverence for the men who won that epic battle.

Fleet Admiral Nimitz said these words while the fighting still raged: "Among the Americans who served on Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue," a sentiment now chiseled in granite at the base of Felix de Weldon's gigantic bronze sculpture of the Suribachi flag-raising.

Twenty-two Marines, four Navy corpsmen, and one LCI skipper were awarded the Medal of Honor for utmost bravery during the battle of Iwo Jima. Half were posthumous awards.

General Erskine placed these sacrifices in perspective in remarks made during the dedication of the 3d Marine Division cemetery on the embattled island:

Victory was never in doubt. Its cost was. What was in doubt, in all our minds, was whether there would be any of us left to dedicate our cemetery at the end, or whether the last Marine would die knocking out the last Japanese gunner.

[Sidebar ([page 50](#)):]

Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

Twenty-seven men received the Congressional Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity during the battle of Iwo Jima: 22 Marines, four Navy corpsmen, and one Navy landing craft commander. Exactly half of the awards issued to Marines and corpsmen of the V Amphibious Corps were posthumous. Within a larger institutional context, Iwo Jima represented more than one-fourth of the 80 Medals of Honor awarded Marines during the Second World War. This was Iwo Jima's Roll of Honor:

Cpl Charles J. Berry, 1/26, 3 March 1945^A

PFC William R. Caddy, 3/26, 3 March^A

LtCol Justice M. Chambers, 3/25, 19–22 February

Sgt Darrell S. Cole, 1/23, 19 February^A

Capt Robert Dunlap, 1/26, 20–21 February

Sgt Ross F. Gray, 1/25, 21 February

Sgt William G. Harrell, 1/28, 3 March

Lt Rufus G. Herring, USNR, LCI 449, 17 February

PFC Douglas T. Jacobson, 3/23, 26 February

PltSgt Joseph J. Julian, 1/27, 9 March^A

PFC James D. LaBelle, 1/27, 8 March^A

2dLt John H. Leims, 1/9, 7 March

PFC Jacklyn H. Lucas, 1/26, 20 February

1stLt Jack Lummus, 2/27, 8 March^A

Capt Joseph J. McCarthy, 2/24, 21 February

1stLt Harry L. Martin, 5th Pioneer Battalion, 26 March^A

Pvt George Phillips, 2/28, 14 March^A

PhM 1/c Francis J. Pierce, USN, 2/24, 15–16 March

PFC Donald J. Ruhl, 2/28, 19–21 February^A

Pvt Franklin E. Sigler, 2/26, 14 March

Cpl Tony Stein, 1/28, 19 February^A

PhM 2/c George Wahlen, USN, 2/26, 3 March

GySgt William G. Walsh, 3/27, 27 February^A

Pvt Wilson D. Watson, 2/9, 26–27 February

Cpl Hershel W. Williams, 1/21, 23 February

PhM 3/c Jack Williams, USN, 3/28, 3 March^A

PhM 1/c John H. Willis, USN, 3/27, 28 February^A

^A Posthumous



[Sidebar ([page 52](#)):]

Assault Divisions' Command Structures

As the 3d, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions conducted their final preparations for Operation Detachment, these were the infantry commanders who would lead the way at the beginning of the battle:

3d Marine Division

3d Marines	Col James A. Stewart
9th Marines	Col Howard N. Kenyon
1/9	LtCol Carey A. Randall
2/9	LtCol Robert E. Cushman, Jr.
3/9	LtCol Harold C. Boehm
21st Marines	Col Hartnoll J. Withers
1/21	LtCol Marlowe C. Williams
2/21	LtCol Lowell E. English
3/21	LtCol Wendell H. Duplantis

4th Marine Division

23d Marines	Col Walter W. Wensinger
1/23	LtCol Ralph Haas
2/23	Maj Robert H. Davidson
3/23	Maj James S. Scales
24th Marines	Col Walter I. Jordan
1/24	Maj Paul S. Treitel
2/24	LtCol Richard Rothwell
3/24	LtCol Alexander A. Vandegrift, Jr.
25th Marines	Col John R. Lanigan

25th Marines

COL JOHN R. LANGAN

1/25	LtCol Hollis U. Mustain
2/25	LtCol Lewis C. Hudson, Jr.
3/25	LtCol Justice M. Chambers

5th Marine Division

26th Marines	Col Chester B. Graham
1/26	LtCol Daniel C. Pollock
2/26	LtCol Joseph P. Sayers
3/26	LtCol Tom M. Trotti
27th Marines	Col Thomas A. Wornham
1/27	LtCol John A. Butler
2/27	Maj John W. Antonelli
3/27	LtCol Donn J. Robertson
28th Marines	Col Harry B. Liversedge
1/28	LtCol Jackson B. Butterfield
2/28	LtCol Chandler W. Johnson
3/28	LtCol Charles E. Shepard, Jr.

[Note: Of those infantry battalion commanders who landed on Iwo Jima on D-Day, only seven remained unwounded and still retained command at the battle's end.]



Sources

The official records of the V Amphibious Corps at Iwo Jima occupy 27 boxes in the USMC archives. Within this maze, the most useful information can be found in the “comments and recommendations” sections of the After Action Reports filed by the major units. The best published official account of the battle is contained in George W. Garand and Truman R. Strobridge, *Western Pacific Operations*, vol IV, *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II* (Washington: Historical Division, HQMC, 1971). Three other official accounts are recommended: LtCol Whitman S. Bartley, *Iwo Jima: Amphibious Epic* (Washington: Historical Division, 1954); Capt Clifford P. Morehouse, *The Iwo Jima Operation*, and Bernard C. Nalty, *The U.S. Marines on Iwo Jima: The Battle and the Flag Raising* (Washington: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, HQMC, 1960). Chapter 10 of Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), combines exhaustive research and keen analysis of the assault on Iwo. Three of the many postwar published accounts are particularly recommended: Richard F. Newcomb, *Iwo Jima* (New York: Bantam, 1982); Richard Wheeler, *Iwo Jima* (New York: Crowell, 1980); and Bill D. Ross, *Iwo Jima: Legacy of Valor* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1985).

The most comprehensive Japanese account is contained in Part II (“Ogasawara Islands Defense Operations”) in *Chubu Taiheyo rikugen sakusen (2)* [Army Operations in the Central Pacific, vol II], part of the *Senshi Soshō* War History Series. Of Japanese accounts in English, the best is Major Yoshitaka Horie’s “Explanation of Japanese Defense Plan and Battle of Iwo Jima,” written in 1946 and available at the Marine Corps Historical Center (MCHC).

The MCHC maintains an abundance of personal accounts related to Iwo Jima. Among the most valuable of these are the Iwo Jima comments in the Princeton Papers Collection in the Personal Papers Section. The Marine

Corps Oral History Collection contains 36 well-indexed memoirs of Iwo Jima participants. The research library contains a limited edition of *Dear Progeny*, the autobiography of Dr. Michael F. Keleher, the battalion surgeon credited with saving the life of “Jumping Joe” Chambers on D+3. The Personal Papers Section also holds the papers of TSgt Frederick K. Dashiell, Lt John K. McLean, and Lt Eugene T. Petersen. For an increased insight, the author also conducted personal interviews with 41 Iwo veterans.

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Colonel Alexander, an independent historian, wrote *Across the Reef: The Marine Assault on Tarawa* in this series. He is co-author (with Lieutenant Colonel Merrill L. Bartlett) of *Sea Soldiers in the Cold War* (Naval Institute Press, 1994) and the author of "Utmost Savagery: the Amphibious Seizure of Tarawa" (Naval Institute Press, pending). He has also written numerous feature essays published in *Marine Corps Gazette*, *Naval Institute Proceedings*, *Naval History*, *Leatherneck*, *Amphibious Warfare Review*, *World War Two*, and *Florida Historical Quarterly*.



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