

The Costly Victory at Iwo Jima Allowed the United States Air
Power to Conduct Strategic and Effective Bombing of the Japanese
Mainland.

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and Effective Bombing of the Japanese Mainland.

During World War II the United States launched a high-level bombing operation against Japan. After the capture of the Mariana Islands, the US 20th Air Force could mount a large-scale campaign against the industrial center of Japan. The only obstacle to this was the strategically important island of Iwo Jima that housed two airfields, with a third under construction, as well as a radar station that could give up to two hours warning of an impending raid. The Air Force needed to eliminate the fighter threat to their bombers and neutralize the radar station there. The island would also be useful as a refuge for damaged aircraft returning from raids, as a base for air-sea rescue flying boats and for P-51 long-range fighters to escort the B-29 bombers. On 3rd October 1944, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a directive to Admiral Nimitz to take Iwo Jima. The battle, which was described as the "most savage and costly battle in the history of the Marine Corps"

In order to understand Iwo Jima and Mount Surubachi more clearly, we must view some early developments of Japan. Modern Japan's foreign policy was shaped at the outset by its need to reconcile its Asian identity with its desire for status and security in an international order dominated by the west. The principal foreign policy goals of the Meiji period (1868-1912) were to protect the integrity and independence of the nation against Western domination and to win equality of status with the leading nation of the West by reversing the unequal treaties. Since fear of the western military power was the chief concern of the Meiji leaders, their highest priority was building up the basic requirements for national defense, under the slogan "Wealth and

Arms". An important objective of the military buildup was to gain the respect of the Western powers and achieves equal status for Japan in the international community.

Once created, the Meiji military machine was used to extend Japanese power overseas, for many leaders believed that national security depended on expansion and not merely a strong defense. Within thirty years, the country's military forces had fought and defeated imperial China in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). Ten years later, in the Russo-Japanese war Japan defeated tsarist Russia and won possession of southern Sakhalin as well as a position of paramount influence in Korea and southern Manchuria. By this time, Japan had been able to negotiate revisions of the unequal treaties with the Western powers and had in 1902 formed an alliance with the world's leading power, Britain. After World War I, in which it sided with the Western Allies, Japan, despite its relatively small role in gained possession of former German territories in the Pacific.

Between World War I and World War II, the nation embarked on a course of imperialist expansion, using both diplomatic and military means to extend its control over more and more of the Asian mainland. It began to see itself as the protector and champion of Asian interest against the West, a point of view that brought it increasingly into conflict with the Western power. When its aggressive policies met firm resistance from United States and its allies, Japan made common cause with the Axis partnership of Germany and Italy and launched into war with the United States and Western Alliance. In September 1940, with the permission of the Pro-Nazi Vicky government of France, Japan moved into northern Indochina, establishing a foothold in strategically important southwest Asia.

A few days later Japan signed a mutual defense agreement, the Tripartite pact, with Germany and Italy, putting it on a collision course with the United States. The German invasion

of the Soviet Union in June 1941 relieved the Japanese of the Soviet threat in East Asia. As a result, in July 1941 Japan decided to move its troops into Southern Indochina for possible operations against the oil-rich Dutch East Indies; the United States responded by freezing Japanese assets in the United States and imposing an oil embargo on Japan. Faced with a choice of submitting to United States demands for a return to the pre-1931 status quo or confronting the United States, Japan determined to strike out boldly. Beginning with a devastating attack against the United States fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, it quickly took advantage of superior air and naval power to occupy the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, and Singapore. An overland offensive brought Burma and Thailand under Japanese control, and a string of amphibious operations established Japan's control of the South Pacific. By mid-1942 Japanese forces appeared to be in control of most of their objectives.

It was at this point that the superior economic and industrial power of the United States began to turn the tide. In June 1942 the Japanese directed the bulk of their navy to Midway, a tiny atoll at the northern tip of the Hawaiian chain, expecting to destroy the rest of the United States Pacific fleet. Instead, the Americans, forewarned of the attack, used carrier-based aircraft to devastate the Japanese fleet. The United States counteroffensive had begun, in the South Pacific, Japanese forces evacuated Guadalcanal in February 1943. From there, revitalized United States and Allied forces retook most of the South Pacific islands occupied by the overextended Japanese forces. By June 1944, United States and Allied forces had reached Saipan, in the Mariana Island putting their bombers within range of the Japanese homeland. American forces continued to dominate World War II, Iwo Jima became vitally important to American bombers.

Iwo Jima, Japanese Iōjima, meaning "sulfur island", it is a volcanic island, part of the Volcano Islands (also known as the Ogasawara Islands), approximately 650 miles (1046 km)

south of Tokyo in the Western Pacific. Iwo Jima is about 5 miles long and 2.5 miles wide. It has an approximate area of 8 square miles (21 km²). It has a surface similar to the continent of South America. On the south western end of Iwo Jima is Mount Suribachi, an extinct volcano, rising above the earth surface 546 feet (166m). The northern part of the island however has hills with deep and narrow valleys along the coasts into steep cliffs and canyons.

The subdued relief of Iwo Jima made it a natural site for airfields during World War II. Not only is the volcanic morphology of Iwo Jima different than other island arc volcanoes, so is its composition. Iwo Jima lavas are unusually enriched in potassium and other related elements, and are known as 'shosohonites'. The soil on Iwo Jima was made up of gray volcanic ash. It was soft enough for the Japanese to easily dig deep underground defense positions.

The island is rimmed primarily by sandy beaches which exceed 656 feet (200 m) in width. However, several groups of rocks surround the northern half of the island, the largest is Kangoku Iwa (iwa is Japanese for rock) located one mile off the northwestern coast. The shoreline and approaches are constantly changing due to rough seas. The island is fully exposed to the open sea. To the south, on either side of the narrow part of the island, the beaches are generally unobstructed by offshore rocks and vary from 150 to 500 ft (46 to 152 m) in depth. Sand terraces of varying heights and widths hinder movement inland even for tracked vehicles. These terraces are caused by perpetual wave action and tend to change from time to time in size and location. On the north the beach is narrow and steep with many rocky shoals obstructing approach. Just behind these northeastern beaches the ground rises sharply to the northern plateau. The remainder of the northern coast is rough, with abrupt cliffs ascending directly from the water's edge. Violent storms cause radical changes.

The northern plateau (Motoyama) is roughly one mile (1.6 km) in diameter and the ground sloping to the coast from this elevation is rough, steep, and broken by wave cut terraces and rocky cliffs. The plateau itself is laced with chaotic gorges and ridges, the elevation being between 340 and 382 ft (104 and 116 m). Here the ground is rough and rocky; a jumble of scarred stone, with scattered clearings in the rock. In many places the ground is hot, with steam hanging over the fuming gray-brown sulfur vents. An airfield is situated on the top of Motoyama.

Sea and Swell - The mean wave height in the Iwo Jima region averages 5.5 ft (1.7 m) in winter (December to April) and approximately 3.0 ft (0.9m) in summer (May to November). Surf conditions at Iwo Jima even in normal weather are difficult for all classes of landing craft. The steep beaches cause the waves to come close inshore before breaking, so that most of their force is expended in a downward blow on the bows of incoming or beached small boats. An onshore wind greatly increases the severity of the surf, often making unloading on the windward side of the island precarious. The ocean in the Iwo Jima vicinity varies in temperature from a low of approximately 72 F in late winter to a high of approximately 84 F in late summer.

Iwo Jima lies just north of the tropics. Its weather is subtropical, with a cool season lasting from December through April and a hot season from May through November. Average temperatures range from 63 F to 70 F in the cool period to 73 F to 80 F during May to November. The prevailing winter winds are from the northeast, while the winds prevail from the east in summer. Relative humidity averages 75% to 85 % throughout the year. Rainfall averages 60 inches annually, with precipitation events typically on 5 to 10 days of each month. February is the driest month and May the wettest. Pacific storms typically track through this area from

December to June. Typhoons threaten the island in late summer, although they typically pass north of Iwo Jima.

Before the war approximately 1000 Japanese farmers lived on Iwo Jima. They grew cotton, sugar cane, cacao, coffee and vegetables. The soil permitted water to seep through so easily that there were no streams, making water very scarce. These people also mined sulfur, a nonmetallic yellow chemical element. However, they were removed before the war.

The choice between the two possible landing sites was not difficult. The southeast beach was better because February's prevailing winds from the northwest produce much higher waves on the northern shore. Even so, wave energy on the other beach could be hazardous for amphibious operations during severe weather. Additionally, because of cooler ocean temperatures no surrounding coral reef was present to break incoming waves. Although judged adequate, the landing site was far from ideal. Waves, ash, and terraces severely limited mobility. Landing crafts, pounded by heavy surf, faced the danger of broaching and swamping. Truck and jeeps sank axle-deep in the ash and were often abandoned in the soft volcanic material the size of buckshot. Even tracked vehicles had difficulties getting ashore and could be stopped completely by the difficult terrain. The volcanic ash made impossible to climb through with 100 pound packs carried by the Marines. The high angle of the slope made return fire very difficult during the initial landings.

The defender's plan was simple but effective. The beaches were to be lightly defended. Although the pillboxes were present on both shores, the Japanese considered these low-lying areas indefensible because of US air operations and naval gunfire superiority. Mount Suribachi and the low plateau to the northeast, however, were heavily fortified with commanding observation of the two obvious beach-landing sides. 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.

The Marines used three divisions, minus one regiment, which was organized as the Fifth Amphibious Corps. For most of the Campaign the divisions and regiment were disposed as third, fourth, and fifth division. The Fifth Amphibious Corps command team consisted of the following: Major General Harry Schmidt, Commanding; Brigadier General William W. Rogers; Chief of Staff, Colonel David A. Stafford, administration; Colonel Thomas R. Yancey; intelligence, Colonel Edward A. Craig, operations; and Colonel William F. Brown, supply. This was the largest Marine force ever to fight under a single command. General Schmidt was almost sixty-three years old prior to the Battle of Iwo Jima. He had previously earned the nickname of "Howling Mad Smith" during an incident in the Philippines.

On October 9, 1944, General Smith received Admiral Nimitz' order to prepare for Iwo Jima, and immediately set down a general outline of the campaign in a letter of two small pages; two days later this was given to General Schmidt, who would actually command the troops on Iwo Jima.

General Schmidt was on Guam, flew to Pearl Harbor with his staff, and the planning for the assault began on October 13, 1944. General Schmidt was fifty-eight years old from Nebraska, with nearly thirty-six years in the Corps. He had commanded the fourth Marine Division in the capture of Roi-Namur in the Marshall Islands, and of Saipan in the Marianas. Near the close of that campaign, he had been promoted to command the Fifth Amphibious Corps for the capture of Tinian.

Planning conditions for Iwo Jima were good. Both assault divisions were in the Hawaiian Islands: the Fourth Division at its permanent camp on the island of Maui, and the Fifth Division

at Camp Tarawa on the Island of Hawaii. The Third Division was on Guam reforming after the blood battle for the Island. The replacements were training hunting live Japanese still hiding, and in October alone bagged 617 of them.

The Fourth Division was getting ready for its fourth campaign within a year and had a leader who knew what combat was. Cliff Cates had quit the University of Tennessee Law School in the middle of his bar examinations to accept a Marine commission in World War I. From the time his pants were torn off by shrapnel, at Aisne-Marne in 1918, courage and stoic humor had been his hallmarks. Wounded at Soissons for about the third time, he remarked: "Better to be lucky than good-looking." In all, he had been wounded ten times and gassed and had once sent from the front a message that is now a classic in the Corps "I have no one on my left and only a few on my right. I will hold." General Cates' Assistant Division Commander for Iwo Jima was Brigadier General Franklin A. Hart, who had made the Dieppe raid as an observer with Lord Mounbatten and had commanded the 24th Regiment at Roi-Namur, Saipan, and Tinian.

The Fifth Division had never been in combat as a unit, but forty percent of its men had. The division formed up early in 1944 at Camp Pendelton, California, with General Rockey in his first combat command of World War II. He, too, had been through the hell in France at Chateau-Thierry in 1918, when the Marines fought as land soldiers to stem the German offensive. His assistant Division Commander for Iwo Jima was General Leo D. Hermle, former chief of staff of the second division.

General Erskine, who had gone to the Mexican Border as a boy trumpeter, now commanded the Third Division. He had fought at Soissons with Cliff Cates and had been hospitalized nine months with blast concussion. The Third, veterans of Bougainville and Guam, passed to Erskine's command after he spent two years as Howling Mad's chief of staff. At forty-seven,

Erskine was one of the youngest Generals in the Corps, and one of the toughest. General Schmidt's major strengths were that all his division commanders were combat veterans, in that they had seen battle in Saipan, Guam, and Tinian.

General Schmidt was never afraid of the outcome of the battle. He knew that they would win. But contemplation of the cost in lives caused him many sleepless nights.

Planning for the Battle of Iwo Jima presented few problems. It was mostly a matter of ordering troops, supplies, and ships. General Schmidt was able to announce his troop's assignments within six days after planning began, and all units were ordered to be ready for combat by December 15th. They were to land on the eastern beaches. Water was shallower on the western beaches, but prevailing north and northwest winds piled the surf higher there. The ground rose more gently on the western coast, and General Cates at one point proposed landing there. The eastern beaches with Suribachi jutting out at the bottom and sharp cliffs rising at the top would give the Japanese excellent fire straight up and down the beaches. Cates thought a landing just north of the high ground on the west coast might provide an entry to the central plateau at less cost. The terraces on the eastern beaches were sure to be a costly barrier, but the Navy did not like the water conditions on the west. The eastern beaches were chosen, with alternate plans for the western beaches if necessary. General Harry Schmidt may have been nicknamed "Howlin Mad Smith," but his staunch enemy during the Battle of Iwo Jima would prove to be worthy of his Samurai family ancestors.

Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, the Japanese commander of Iwo Jima, was brilliant. He was fifty three years old, and very tall for Japanese, nearly five feet nine inches tall. He weighed two-hundred pounds and had a potbelly. It would later be stated that his potbelly was "packed full of strong fighting spirit." He was in service for thirty years; Kuribayashi had

served all over the world. An aristocrat and a samurai, he was educated in Canada, and in 1928, as a thirty seven year old captain, he went to Washington as deputy military attaché, and for two years traveled throughout the country. General Kuribayashi later traveled to Fort Bliss, Texas, to study Cavalry training, and later in 1931 to Ottawa, as a military attaché. In his letters that was written to his wife from the United States, he stated that the United States is the last country in the world that Japan should fight. He felt that one should not underestimate the American's fighting ability. General Hideki Tojo of the Japanese Headquarters summoned General Kuribayashi to his office to receive the order to command the 109th Division in order to fight for Iwo Jima. He was told by General Tojo that he was the only General qualified and capable of holding this post. General Kuribayashi was honored. His views had never changed, and in this summer of 1944, he began to prepare for the American attack with full appreciation of what was ahead. Imperial General Headquarters decided that he would have the 109th Division, based at Chichi Jima, 140 miles north of Iwo Jima. General Kuribayashi command team consisted of the following: Chief of Staff, Colonel Tadashi Takaishi; fortifications, Colonel Monzo Yoshida; Operations, Lieutenant Colonel Tokiharu Nakao; supply, Lieutenant Colonel Takeo Nishikawa; and intelligence, Major Yasutake Yamanouchi. Major General Senda replaced Major General Ohsuga, commander of the II Mixed Brigade; he was well acquainted with infantry battle tactics. Colonel Takaishi, chief of staff, was an infantry officer, who was also acquainted with Infantry tactics, very energetic, and a poet. Lieutenant Colonel Nishi, commander of the XXVI Tank Regiment, was a baron, a cavalry officer, and a champion of Olympic horse games. All troops were to be diverted to Iwo Jima. The first unit to arrive was the 145th Regiment, approximately 2,700 soldiers under Colonel Masuo Ikeda. They were considered Japan's best soldiers. The largest forces were the 2nd Mixed Brigade, half of the 109th Division, about 5,000 troops.

Kuribayashi ordered the brigade down from Chichi Jima, under Major General Kotau Osuga, and they began arriving in July and August. They were not as well trained troops as the 145th Regiment.

Although, General Kuribayashi fell victim to Iwo Jima, his Japanese strategy of “no Japanese survivors” touches the heart of the Japanese sense of sacrifice of the individual for the greater good. General Kuribayashi had three major strengths, which caused many American casualties. He eventually realized that the Americans would take Iwo Jima, so he planned not to survive, each soldier had to kill ten Americans before they themselves were killed, and no foreign Army in Japan’s five thousand year history had trod on Japanese soil. He determined that he would make the Americans pay in as much blood as possible. General Kuribayashi made one fatal mistake, he allowed the Marines to get ashore with all the equipment they would need. I guess you could say that one of his strengths was also his weakness, his no Japanese survivor strategy cost the lives of all his soldiers.

General Schmidt and General Kuribayashi were both smart, fearless leaders with tough, hard as nails tempers. They both were great leaders with strategic expertise.

The initial planning for the battle of Iwo Jima started on 19 July, 1944 when the Chiefs of Staff ordered the island to be seized no later than February 1945.

In early October 1944 the United States Marines were directed to prepare for the assault of Iwo Jima.

Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander in-Chief Pacific, called together his admirals and generals to finalize war plans for the invasion of Iwo Jima. The meeting was held at the Headquarters Pacific Theater with; Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, who would command the battle, Vice Admiral Richard K. Turner, a tactical naval commander, and Lieutenant General

Holland M. (Howling Mad) Smith, commander of all marines in the Pacific theater, who would be placed in charge of the land operations to seize the island.

Among all things discussed at this meeting the one dominating topic was the pre-naval and air bombardments to support the marine landing forces. Lieutenant General Holland Smith drafted a landing plan that called for a 10 day naval fire preparation from seven battleships and nine cruisers. General Holland saw a distinct need for aerial bombardment of the islands airfields and Japanese strong points on Mount Suribuchi. General Holland viewed these as critical tasks to soften the defenses and ensure a successful marine landing. General Holland envisioned two navy battleships and air force bombers striking the island at unpredictable times in the months prior to the invasion and increasing the intensity of the attacks with the 10 day bombardment prior to D-Day.

The marine landing plan employed tactics that called for one marine amphibious Corps consisting of three marine divisions. The 5th Marine Amphibious Corps commanded by Major General Harry Schmidt was selected as the invasion force, the corps consisted of; the 3rd Marine Division commanded by Major General G.B. Erskins, the 4th Marine Division commanded by Major General C.B. Cates, and the 5th Marine Division commanded by Major General K.E. Rockey. Lieutenant General Holland's plan called for the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions to land on the Southeast side of the island on the beach named Green Beach. The 3rd Marine Division was to stay in the reserve and maintain combat power until the corps was prepared for its northward advance on the island. Lieutenant General Holland had the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions land abreast of each other with the 4th Marine Division to the north and the 5th Marine Division to the south.

Lieutenant General Holland plan was simple, secure the beach head, continue towards the main airstrip on the southern end of the island and secure it, once secured cross the island south of Mount Suribachi and isolate it from the remainder of the island. At this point the 3rd Marine Division would land and the three division would swing northward on a broad front to seize the remainder of the island. A key factor for the success of Lieutenant General Holland plan was to have the marine forces inflict heavy casualties on the Japanese soon or their operation would fail. The first priority of the invasion was to secure the beachhead; in order to do this the marine landing forces required 482 Light Amphibious Vehicle's (LAVS). These LAVs would carry eight marine battalions' into action at one time. The LAVs would place themselves on line in serials of 68 vehicles and make a 4000 yard dash for the beachhead under a veil of naval gunfire; if all went as planned the marines would land the first seven battalions within 45 minutes of the start of the invasion.

The Japanese defense plan began on June 30, 1944 with activation of the 109th Division and the appointment of Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi as its commander, putting him under the direct command of Imperial Headquarters. Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi defense assets include the II Mixed Brigade, commanded by Major-General Senda, and the XXVI Tank Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Nishi. Within the defense plan Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi had many battalion sized elements under his command. The Japanese defense plan of Iwo Jima was a complex plan of fortifications and a tunnel network 13,000 meters long connecting command and control centers with heavily armed and reinforced positions throughout the island. Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi developed a battle scheme that allowed the marines to land with minimum resistance. As the marines moved forward, they would encounter well planned strategic ambushes that placed massive fires on their positions at

close range; Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi was a master in the art of construction and concealment of defensive positions. These ambushes were designed to inflict large casualties on the advancing marines. Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi planned on using many of the natural elements in his favor in order to impede marine advances. The first feature was the terrain; Mount Suribachi's a volcanic mountain, which was the predominant feature on Iwo Jima. This mountain would allow the Japanese defenders to rain deadly fires down onto the marine positions on the beach head. At the mountains summit was a massive observation post, equipped with artillery spotting devices, deep within the mountain Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi had a 30 foot by 40 foot communications center constructed with reinforced concrete walls four foot thick, and a steel reinforced ceiling capable of withstanding naval shelling and air dropped 500 hundred pound bombs. There was also the loose volcanic soil. This soil composition would slow any marine progress and make it difficult for the marines to access and climb the foothills of Mount Suribachi. Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi used every available weapons asset to secure the island. He placed automatic anti-aircraft and dual anti-aircraft guns in a ring surrounding Mount Suribachi. He also had a series of 320 pill boxes built in the lower portion of the island to defend the main airfield. Throughout the island the General placed 46 artillery pieces 75mm or larger; twelve 320mm mortars; 65 medium and light mortars (150mm to 81mm); 33 naval guns (80 mm and above), many of which placed dual purposes of anti-armor and anti-personnel; 94 anti-aircraft guns (75mm or larger); and more than 200 20mm and 25mm anti-aircraft guns. Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi also had limited armor assets to include; 69 (37mm and 47 mm anti armor guns) and 12 light and 12 medium tanks. These weapons systems were carefully laid out in more than 750 well camouflaged gun emplacements that were with five foot thick concrete walls. These emplacements were designed to produce deadly interlocking

fields of fire that were designed to inflict heavy marine casualties. The General's mastery of construction and his ingenious use of available weapons systems at his disposal proved lethal to the marine forces during the invasion of Iwo Jima. The last part of Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi's defense plan was the order he issued to the Japanese defenders of Iwo Jima, "Every man is to think of his defensive position as his graveyard, and he will make it his duty to kill ten of the enemy before dying."

The first piece of the plan to defend Iwo Jima that was never to come about was the sinking of the island, but in September 1944 the island was inspected by Lieutenant-General Kuribayashi and it was determined that the disposal of the island would prove to be impossible, therefore requiring the defense of Iwo Jima.

The Assault on Iwo Jima was the result of a 16-month attack across the Pacific to within 660 miles of Tokyo. Iwo Jima was a critical link between the Marianas and Tokyo. Throughout the 16 months many enemy strongholds were bypassed and neutralized, Iwo Jima would be of such strategic importance that it could not be just bypassed or neutralized, it had to be seized. The island's location would serve as a much-needed base for the United States. During the 26-day battle over 70,000 U.S. Marines would face a force of over 20,000 Japanese in a very well-prepared and fought defense. The U.S. would send more marines into Iwo Jima than to any other battle. On Iwo Jima the U.S. Marines would put three years of battle experience in amphibious operations, weapons, and equipment to the ultimate test.

D-Day for the assault on Iwo Jima was February 19th 1945 after the longest and most intense shelling of any Pacific island during the war. Unfortunately the air and naval bombardment did not have the effect the U.S. planners had hoped for. Terrain was difficult and fighting was intense and very brutal. Marines were fighting above ground while the dug in

Japanese were fighting from concealed positions. There were no identified front lines and the Marines fought the battle inch by inch. On March 16th 1945 after 26 days of intense combat and over 25,000 U.S. casualties, Iwo Jima was finally considered secured.

Though the battle for Iwo Jima was tough and costly however, it was of incredible importance both strategically and to the morale and mindset of the Marines and the United States. The confidence the marines gained by defeating such a tough and determined enemy would pay off in battles to come. The confidence and pride from this battle extended past just the marines, it carried over to United States as a whole.

On the morning of February 23rd 1945 a platoon of marines climbed the steep trails to the summit of Mount Suribachi to raise the American Flag. By raising the flag a symbol of victory was sent to all marines who could see it. This symbol gave strength to the fighting men and struck a mental blow to the Japanese defenders.

Pictures of the flag raising were sent back to the United States, which fostered pride in the fighting forces. The picture had an enormous impact on the Nation. Three of the marines who raised the flag were sent back to the States to help sale War Bonds. The goal was to raise 14 billion dollars; they exceeded that goal by raising over 26 billion, a truly astonishing amount. The amount was well over \$100.00 for every man, woman, and child; to put it in perspective, a family of four lived comfortably on an annual income of \$1700.00. Over the decades the flag raising on Mt. Suribachi would come to symbolize the spirit of the Marine Corps.

Winning the costly battle for Iwo Jima not only raised the morale of the marines and the Nation but it established the critical U.S. base needed in that area. The United States used Iwo Jima as a base for its fighter aircraft. With the advent of new long range bombers, the U.S. fighters no longer had the range to provide the necessary support. By capturing the island and

basing fighters there, the long range bombers now had the fighter escort needed to attack into mainland Japan. On April 7th 1945, for the first time, Iwo Jima based fighters escorted B-29's into Japan.

Additionally, Iwo Jima was a location that shot-up and damaged planes could make emergency landings. The first emergency landing on Iwo Jima took place on March 4th 1945 when a damaged B-29 landed. The airplane landed while the fighting was still taking place. For nearly every day after, the island served as a haven for damaged bombers and crews.

In his book, Newcomb stated: "On June 7th, 102 B-29's landed on Iwo Jima, and on July 24th, 186 of the giant planes came in to the island. By the end of the war, 2,400 B-29's with 27,000 crewmen had used the Iwo Jima airfields. All of these men would have been lost had the island not been in American hands, but Admiral King's final report said that lives saved exceeded lives lost in the capture of the island itself (286).

Though the battle was a success and was of significant strategic importance the cost was high. There were many lessons to be learned. The difficult and brutal assaults on Iwo Jima placed a tremendous burden on the medical units and personnel. However, excellent medical attention was provided from the beginning to end of the battle. Small hospital ships (LST's) lying within 2,000 yards of the beaches played an important role in taking casualties from the beaches and getting them to the larger hospital ships. Distances from the front lines to the aid stations were short. However, it was a very dangerous movement due to heavy enemy fire. Weasels and Landing Vehicle Tracked (LVT's), which were small lightly armored vehicles, were critical in moving casualties to the beaches. Once roads were pushed forward jeep ambulances moved the bulk of thousands of casualties. Compared to heavy battle casualties other medical problems were light. This was primarily because U.S. forces understood that

diseases attributed to insects and other pests would run rampant if not controlled. Early application of DDT solutions and aggressive field sanitation resulted in no diseases occurring among the troops that could be tied to insects.

Supply issues were a never ending battle at Iwo Jima. Enemy fire, the volcanic ash, heavy surf and crumpled beaches made supply difficult. LVT's and DUKW's (vehicles that could float like a boat, but had wheels also), were critical in the first few days on getting supplies to the marines. They would float up to the beach then drive inland straight to the fight. Temporary shortages of ordinance spare parts and ammunition were re-supplied by air drops. This was the first time the Marine Corps extensively used air re-supply.

The battle on Iwo Jima gave new uses for Marston matting, which are hinged sections of pierced plank matting that could be placed on top of soft sand. The Marston matting provided the only usable roadways in the early days of the battle. This became so critical because the consistency and difficulty of the soil were never analyzed prior to the invasion. Another critical piece of equipment during the battle was the armored bulldozer. To summarize the importance of these two pieces of equipment Bartley states: "In the opinion of the Attack Force Beach Party Group Commander, Captain Anderson, USNR, the Marston matting and armored bulldozers contributed materially to the success of the landing and the moving of heavy equipment off the beaches, which would not have otherwise been accomplished without almost insurmountable hardship" (197).

Naval gunfire was only partly successful on Iwo Jima. This is largely due to the way the Japanese built their defenses. Japanese defensive positions were dug in very deep and smartly positioned and camouflaged to prevent being detected from the sea and air. Many marine officers knew from prior experiences in the Pacific that for the bombing to be effective fires had

to be deliberate and short range. Based off experience, marine officers requested repeatedly for additional bombing. Unfortunately, the Navy did not agree and limited the softening-up bombardment to only three days. The bottom line was that the Navy did not allow itself enough time to complete its mission.

The aircraft bombardment of the island did little to soften up the defenses of the Iwo Jima. Bad weather, excellent camouflage, and very heavy fortifications created problems for the aircraft. Additionally, the armament used by the aircraft was not sufficient. Bombs were too small to penetrate the fortifications, even when they scored a direct hit. Napalm, which was needed to burn off the enemy camouflage rarely ignited. The most effective aerial weapon was the 5-inch rocket, not because of its power, but due to its accuracy.

Artillery faced the same problem aircraft had with armament. The 105mm and 75mm were not suitable for the work on Iwo Jima. Even the 155mm had to strike a target ten to twelve times in the same spot to penetrate some of the fortifications. Also, forward observers could rarely see more than 200 yards to their front, making observed fires very difficult.

Casualties during the battle of Iwo Jima were very high. During the 26 day assault more than 28,000 Americans were casualties. Over 6,000 Americans were killed; over 19,000 were wounded in action and over 2,600 suffered from combat fatigue. Japanese numbers are estimated at over 20,000 killed and 1,083 taken as prisoners. The number of Japanese killed is so high because as part of their defensive strategy, no Japanese soldier was to be taken alive. Newcomb captures the cost of taking the 7 mile island by using the following quote: "This" said the Seabee boss, Captain Johnson, "is the most expensive piece of real estate the United States has ever purchased. We paid 550 lives and 2,500 wounded for every square mile of this rock, pretty expensive" (286).

During the battle bravery was the norm not the exception. As said by Admiral Chester C. Nimitz, "Among the Americans who served on Iwo Island, uncommon valor was a common virtue" (Bartley iii). Twenty-seven Medals of Honor were awarded to Marines and Sailors, many posthumously. More U.S. Marines earned the Medal of Honor on Iwo Jima than in any other battle in the United States history (www.iwojima.com).

The force composition of the U.S. Marines invading the island of Iwo Jima was approximately 70,000. This was made up by the 5th Amphibious Corps which included the 3rd, 4th and 5th Marine Divisions. The Japanese forces led by Lieutenant General Tadamishi Kuribayashi consisted of approximately 21,000 soldiers.

The first objective of the Marines was Mt. Suribachi located on the southern end of the island. Until Mt. Suribachi was taken the Japanese could fire on any position the Marines had established. The next Marine objective was the island's main airfield. To the Japanese leadership, the capture of Iwo Jima meant the battle for Okinawa, and the invasion of Japan itself, was not far off and that Iwo Jima must be held at all cost.

Initial bombardments of Iwo Jima actually began back in June of 1944 approximately 9 months prior to the actual invasion. Prior to the invasion, the 8-square mile island would suffer the longest, most intensive shelling of any Pacific island during the war. The 7th Air Force, working out of the Marianas, supplied B-24 heavy bombers for the Campaign. In addition to the air assaults on Iwo, the Marines requested 10 days of pre-invasion naval bombardment. However due to other operational commitments and the fact that a prolonged air assault had been waged on Iwo Jima, Navy planners authorized only three days of naval bombardment. Unfavorable weather conditions would further hamper the effects of naval bombardment.

Despite this, the invasion date was kept for the 19th of February 1945. The Japanese prior to the invasion had built 800 pillboxes and over 3 miles of tunnels on an island that was only 8 square miles in size. The island's volcanic ash made it impossible for Marines to climb through with 100 pound packs. Also prior to the invasion the beaches and slopes leading from the beaches had all been zeroed in by the Japanese gunners, along with mines placed all along the beachfront.

More than 450 ships massed off Iwo Jima as the H-hour bombardment pounded the island. Shortly after 9 a.m., Marines of the 4th and 5th divisions hit beaches Green, Red, Yellow and Blue abreast, initially finding little enemy resistance. Coarse volcanic sand hampered the movement of men and machines as they struggled to move up the beach. As the protective naval gun fire subsided to allow the Marine advance, the Japanese emerged from their fortified underground positions to begin a heavy barrage of fire against the invading force.

The 4th Marine Division pushed forward against heavy opposition to take the Quarry, a Japanese strong point. The 5th Marine Division's 28th Marines had the mission of isolating Mount Suribachi. Both tasks were accomplished that day.

On February 20th, one day after the landing, the 28th Marines secured the southern end of Iwo Jima and moved to take the summit of Mount Suribachi. Japanese soldiers entrenched in the mountain would have to be taken out by flame throwers and satchel charges. Marines even had to resort to setting fire to the ravines with gasoline to force the Japanese out. By day's end, one third of the island and Montoyama Airfield was controlled by the Marines.

On February 21st the Japanese used intense Kamikaze attacks to strike U.S. naval

invasion ships. The carrier Bismark Sea was sunk and the carrier Saratoga was also damaged. Fighting on the island is now reminiscent of the trench warfare of World War I. Daily gains measured in yards with long bitter fighting for each objective. On February 22nd Marines finally have Mt. Suribachi surrounded and begin to move up the face of the mountain.

By February 23rd, the 28th Marines would reach the top of Mount Suribachi and raise the U.S. flag. I will talk about the two separate flag raising a little later. The 3rd Marine Division joined the fighting on the fifth day of battle. These Marines immediately began the mission of securing the center sector of the island. Each of the three divisions fought hard to gain ground against a determined Japanese defender. The Japanese leaders knew with the fall of Mount Suribachi and the capture of the airfields, that the Marine advance on the island could not be stopped; however, they would make the Marines fight for every inch of land they won.

Lieutenant general Tadamishe Kuribayashi, commander of the Japanese ground forces on Iwo Jima, concentrated his energies and his forces in the central and northern sections of the island. Miles of interlocking caves, concrete blockhouses and pillboxes proved to be one of the most impenetrable defenses encountered by the Marines in the Pacific.

The Marines worked together to drive the enemy from the high ground. Their goal was to capture the area that appropriately became known as the "Meat Grinder." This section of the island included three distinct terrain features, which were the highest point on the northern island, Hill 382; an elevation known as "Turkey Knob," which had been reinforced with concrete and was home to a large enemy communications center; and the "Amphitheater," a southeastern extension of Hill 382.

The 3rd Marine Division encountered the most heavily fortified portion of the island in their move to take Airfield Number 2. As with most of the fighting on Iwo Jima, frontal assault was the method used to gain each inch of ground. By nightfall on the 9th of March, the 3rd Division reached the island's northeastern beach, cutting the enemy defenses in two.

On the left of the 3rd Marine Division, the 5th Marine Division pushed up the western coast of Iwo Jima from the central airfield to the island's northern tip. Moving to seize and hold the eastern portion of the island, the 4th Marine Division encountered a "mini banzai" attack from the final members of the Japanese Navy serving on Iwo Jima. This attack resulted in the death of nearly 700 enemy and ended the centralized resistances of enemy forces in the 4th Division's sector. The 4th Division would join forces with the 3rd and 5th at the coast on the 10th of March. One of the things that made the fight for Iwo Jima so hard was the fact that the Japanese did not employ Banzai attacks other than the one mentioned above. In earlier battles in the Pacific the Japanese would take hundreds and sometimes thousands of men and just line them up and charge the well prepared Marine forces and would be slaughtered easily. At Iwo Jima the Marines forces pretty much had to dig out the Japanese soldiers from below the ground which made Iwo Jima the bloodbath that it was.

A proud moment for those who worked so hard to gain control of the island was when the first emergency landing was made by a B-29 bomber on March 4th. Repairs were made, refueling was completed and the aircraft was off to complete its mission.

The Japanese attempted to launch a counter attack on March 8th between the 23rd and 24th Marine regiments. The attack was stopped because the Japanese were without

artillery support and were caught in the open by U.S. Marine artillery. The Japanese lost 650 men in this attack alone. Small pockets of resistance from the Japanese continued until the 25th of March. That night over 200 Japanese infiltrated behind U.S. lines. Legend has it that General Kurbayashi led the attack. The next morning over 250 Japanese lay dead around the Marines lines. That was the end of the resistance and the island was declared secure on the 26th of March, 1945.

There were two flag raisings during the battle for Iwo Jima. The first took place at 8 a.m. on the 23rd of February, a patrol of 40 men from 3rd Platoon, E Company, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines, led by 1st Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier, assembled at the base of Mount Suribachi. The platoon's mission was to take the crater of Suribachi's peak and raise the U.S. flag.

The platoon slowly climbed the steep trails to the summit, but encountered no enemy fire. As they reached the top, the patrol members took positions around the crater watching for pockets of enemy resistance as other members of the patrol looked for something on which to raise the flag.

At 10:20 a.m., the flag was hoisted on a steel pipe above the island by First Lieutenant Harold Schrier, platoon leader, Sergeant Ernest Thomas, platoon sergeant, Corporal Charles Lindberg, and Private First Class James R. Nicel. This symbol of victory sent a wave of strength to the battle-weary fighting men below, and struck a further mental blow against the island's defenders.

Just three hours later one of the most famous photographs in our history was taken by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal. A patrol was dispatched to raise another larger flag on top of Mount Suribachi. Joe Rosenthal's photo would earn

him many awards including the 1945 Pulitzer Prize. The Marines who helped raise this flag over Iwo Jima were Mike Strank, who was killed on March 1st when hit by a mortar. Harlon Brock was also killed on the 1st of March by mortar fire. Franklin Sousley was killed on the 21st of March. Ira Hayes survived the war but was a broken man and died in 1955 after a night of drinking. As Ira drank his last bottle of whiskey he was crying and mumbling about the loss of his good buddies at Iwo Jima. Rene Gagnon who died in 1979 and John Bradley a Navy Corpsman who won the Navy Cross for heroism and died in 1994 at the age of 70. The photograph taken by Joe Rosenthal's will always remain as one of the most inspiring photo's of valor in U.S. and Marine Corps history.

The battle for Iwo Jima was the Marine Corps most bloody fight up to that time in the Pacific. Twenty-seven Medal of Honor's were awarded to Marines and sailors, many posthumously more than were awarded for any other single operation during the war.

In the final analysis of the battle for Iwo Jima the Naval bombardment of only 3 days leading up to the invasion was far shorter than what was required. The Marines had requested 13 days of pre-landing bombardment but were denied this request because of commitments to General MacArthur's campaign in Luzon. Although even with the extra bombardment it still may not have made a difference. The Japanese were well prepared and their positions were mostly underground. The U.S. intelligence had underestimated the Japanese strength on the island by as much as 70 percent. The change in Japanese tactics were never contemplated because of earlier invasions on Saipan, Peleliu and Tarawa. These had early Banzai attacks that were easily defeated and turned the tide in each invasion. This would not be the case with Iwo Jima. The nature and the difficulty of the soil on the island was never examined before the invasion. The Marines

were weighted down with their equipment and could hardly move in the molten ash that the island was composed of.

The Battle of Iwo Jima was an American victory but a costly one. U.S personnel killed was 6,821, with 19,217 wounded. The Japanese losses were even worse with approximately 20,000 killed and 1,083 taken as Prisoners of War.

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