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 know as "Cushman's Pocket."

*"The Grenade," an acrylic painting on canvas by Col Charles H. Waterhouse.*
Marine Corps Combat Art Collection

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.

Schmidt's problems of fire support

# 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 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 anti-aircraft gunners managed to down one of the "Grasshoppers," Marines from all points of the island mourned.

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.

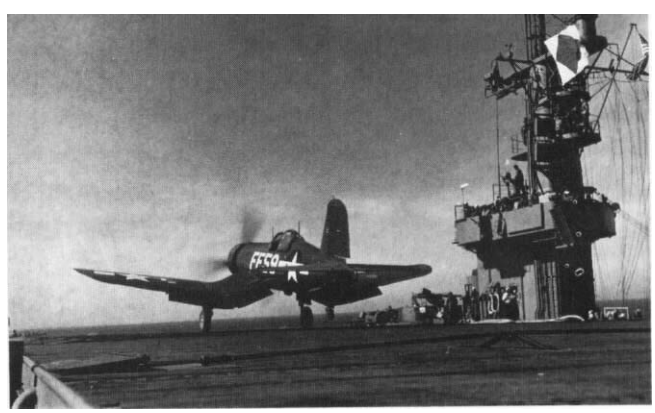
On 8 March, Marine Torpedo Bomber Squadron (VMTB) 242 flew in to Iwo Jima from Tinian to assume responsibility for day and night anti-submarine patrols from the departing escort carrier force.

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."

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

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 262047



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

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.*

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.

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.

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.

*"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

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.*

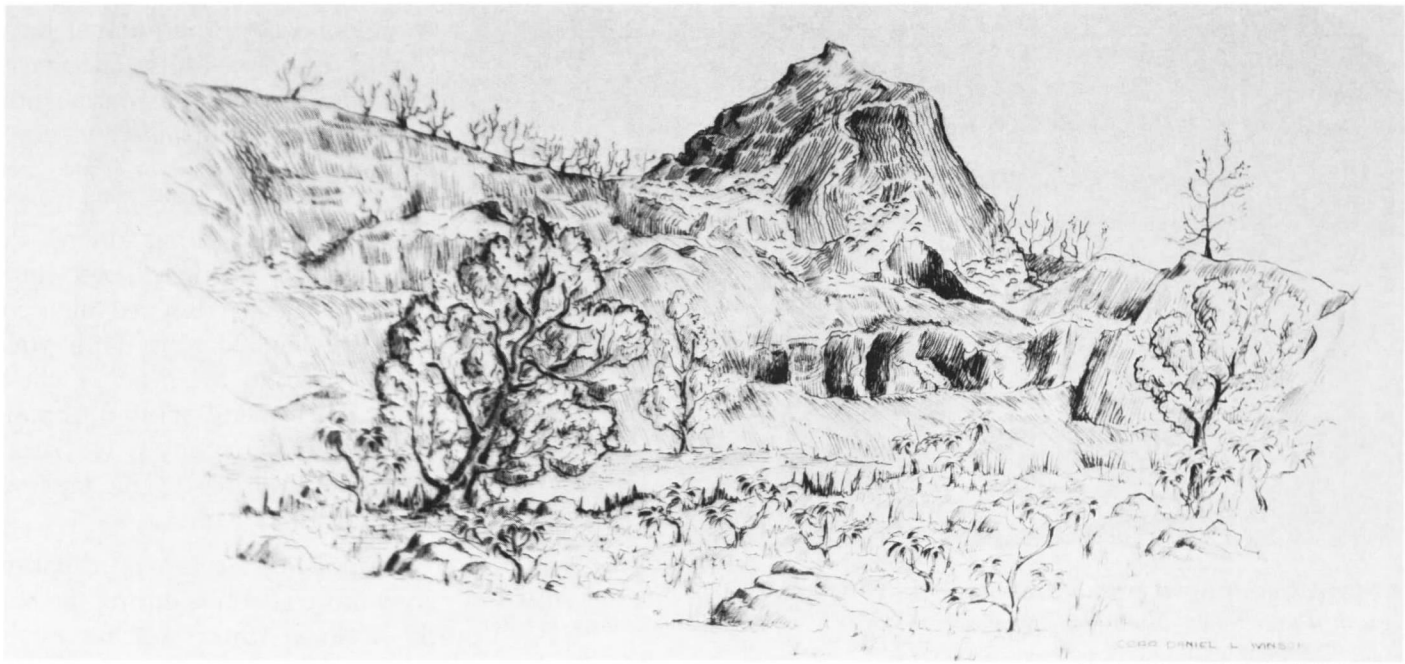
This was the afternoon the first crippled B-29 landed. In terms of American morale, it could not have come at a better time. General Schmidt ordered a general standdown on 5 March to enable the exhausted assault forces a brief respite and the opportunity to absorb some replacements.

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.

Holland Smith may have known the overall statistics of battle losses



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

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.*

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.

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.

## *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 nearsighted 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.' "

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,

*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

# 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 1 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 interservice 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 1 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 1 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-thrower proved to be the most valuable weapons systems on Iwo Jima.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 140758

Marine Corps Combat Art Collection

*"The Target," by Col Charles H. Waterhouse.*

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.

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

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110902

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

Iwo Jima, a casualty rate twice as high as bloody Saipan.

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.

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

*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

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 frontlines.*

Jima." Canter was evacuated to a hospital ship, thence to hospitals in Guam, Hawaii, and the States. His war had ended.

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.

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."

*"Iwo Jima," proof lithograph of two Navajo code talkers, by Sgt John Fabion.*
Marine Corps Combat Art Collection

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 watch-

# 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 4x4 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, 28th Marines' advance to the summit, often launching single rockets to clear suspected enemy positions along the route.

As the fighting moved north, the short range, steep angle of fire, and saturation effect of the rocket launchers kept them in high demand. They were particularly valuable in defilade-to-defilade bombardments marking the final punctuation of pre-assault prep fires. But their distinctive flash and telltale blast also caught the attention of Japanese artillery spotters. The rocket trucks rarely remained in one place long enough to fire more than two salvos. "Speedy displacement" was the key to their survival. The nearby infantry knew better than to stand around and wave goodbye; this was the time to seek deep shelter from the counterbattery fire sure to follow.

*The positions from which rocket troops launched salvos of 4.5-inch rockets became very unhealthy places, indeed, as Japanese artillery and mortars zeroed in on the clouds of smoke and dust resulting from the firing of the rockets.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111100

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.*

ing 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."

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

# 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.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109635

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 back-up 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.

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.

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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.

## *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 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.

*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

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 claque, 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

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.*

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.

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.

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

*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

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 interservice 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

# 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*
PFC William R. Caddy, 3/26, 3 March*
LtCol Justice M. Chambers, 3/25, 19-22 February
Sgt Darrell S. Cole, 1/23, 19 February*
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*
PFC James D. LaBelle, 1/27, 8 March*
2dLt John H. Leims, 1/9, 7 March
PFC Jacklyn H. Lucas, 1/26, 20 February
1stLt Jack Lummus, 2/27, 8 March*
Capt Joseph J. McCarthy, 2/24, 21 February
1stLt Harry L. Martin, 5th Pioneer Battalion, 26 March*
Pvt George Phillips, 2/28, 14 March*
PhM 1/c Francis J. Pierce, USN, 2/24, 15-16 March
PFC Donald J. Ruhl, 2/28, 19-21 February*
Pvt Franklin E. Sigler, 2/26, 14 March
Cpl Tony Stein, 1/28, 19 February*
PhM 2/c George Wahlen, USN, 2/26, 3 March
GySgt William G. Walsh, 3/27, 27 February*
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*
PhM 1/c John H. Willis, USN, 3/27, 28 February*

*Posthumous

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111147

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

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.

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

*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

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.

## 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 |
| 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).

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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 Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret), served 29 years on active duty in the Marine Corps as an assault amphibian officer, including two tours in Vietnam. He is a distinguished graduate of the Naval War College and holds degrees in history from North Carolina, Georgetown, and Jacksonville. He is a life member of both the Marine Corps Historical Foundation and the Naval Institute, a member of the Society for Military History, the Military Order of the World Wars, and the North Carolina Writers' Workshop.

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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