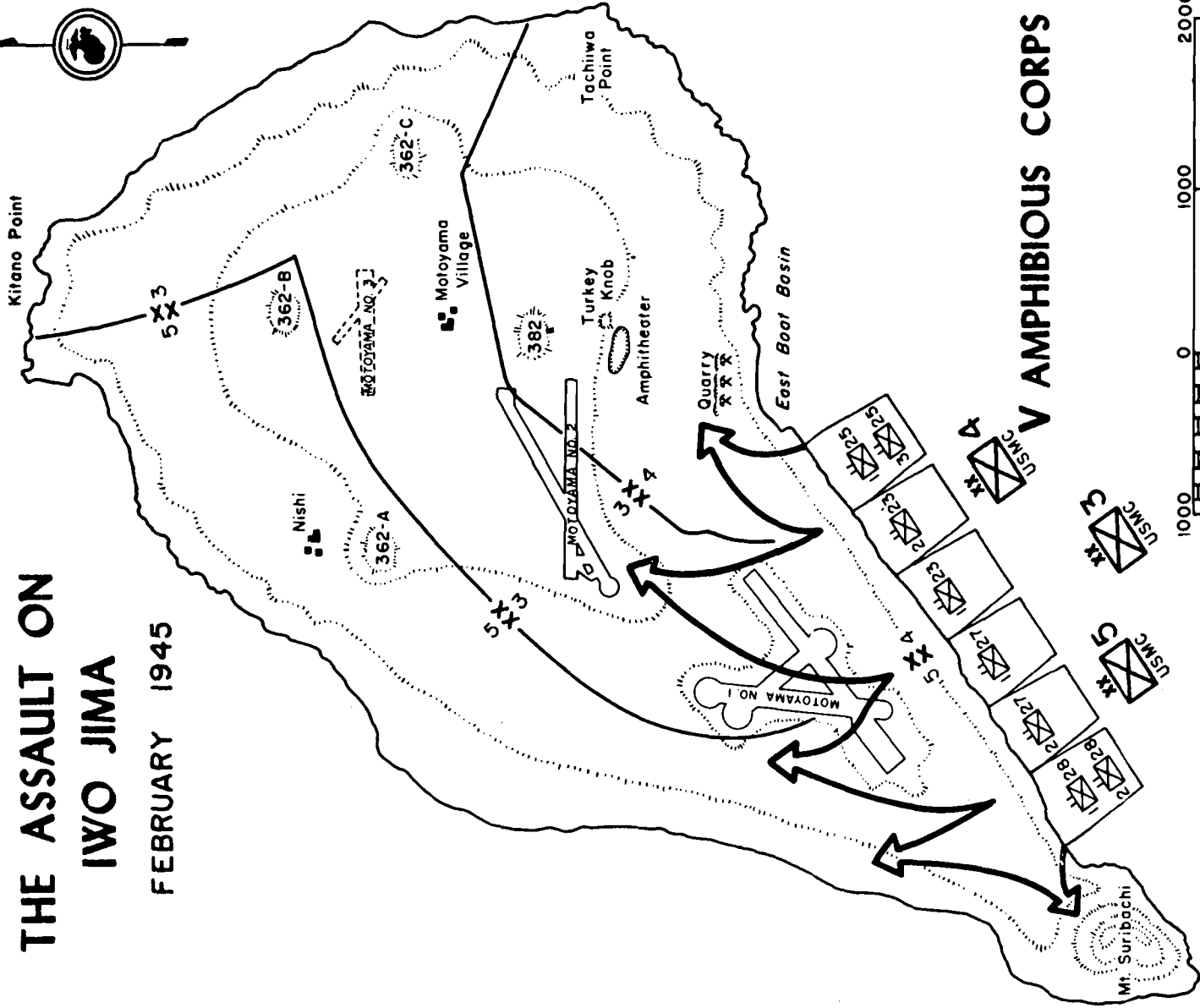


# THE ASSAULT ON IWO JIMA

FEBRUARY 1945



P. R. BREWER

*D-Day...*



Shortly before 2 a.m. on February 19, 1945, the Navy's big guns opened up on Iwo Jima again, signaling the beginning of D-Day.

During the night, attack force ships, carrying the combat-loaded 4th and 5th Marine Divisions, appeared off Iwo. The 4th and 5th would be assault units; the 3d would be held in reserve.

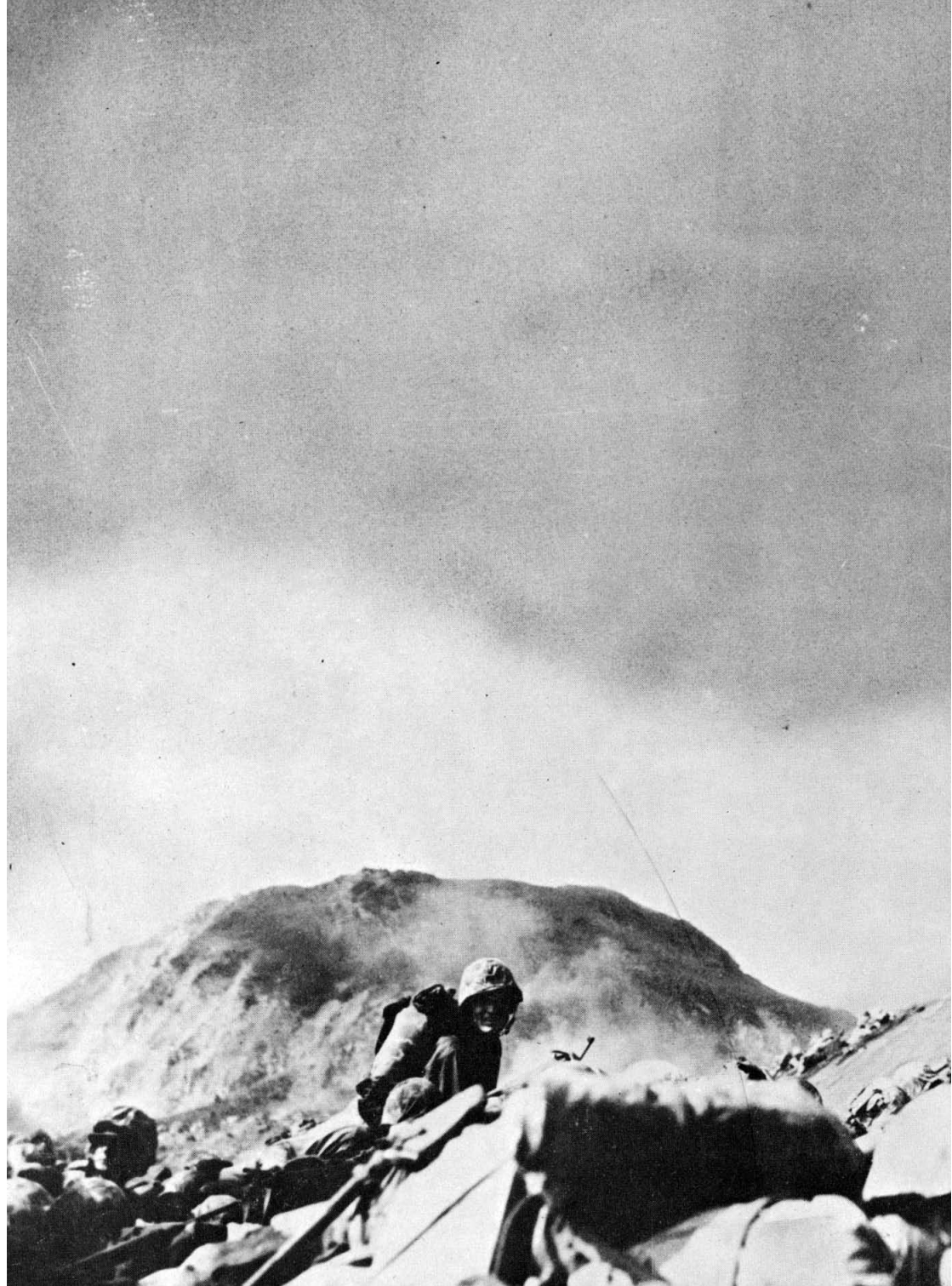
After more than an hour of naval bombardment, the fire was lifted, leaving Iwo smoking as if the entire island were on fire.

Both the Americans aboard their transports and the Japanese in their caves looked to the skies now. Seventy-two bomb-and-rocket-laden carrier planes screamed down on the smoldering island.

Close behind were 48 more fighters, including 24 Marine F4U Corsairs, intent on working over Iwo Jima with more bombs and rockets.

After the planes left, naval guns opened up again.

At 8:30 a.m., the traditional signal was passed throughout the fleet: **Land the Landing Force**. With that, the first wave of amphibious tractors (LVTs), loaded with Marines, headed for shore.





Once ashore, the Marines found that the loose, shifting volcanic ash slowed both man and machine.

Some of the LVTs were able to climb the steep embankment to reach the plain behind the beach. Others became hopelessly bogged down and were forced to disgorge the riflemen at the water's edge.

These men struggled up the embankment to the plain.

Surprisingly little fire was received, but the veterans of other battles among the assault troops knew the worst was yet to come.

The first wave managed to make it to the top of the embankment and set in a "ring of fire" to protect later waves. As the second wave began to move ashore, Kuribayashi gave the signal for his troops to open fire.

The effect of the sudden, intensive Japanese fire was both frightening and destructive. Hidden artillery positions and pillboxes opened up, spitting forth death at a wholesale rate.

In the face of the devastating fire, individual Marines began to take out Japanese positions with rifle fire, demolitions, flame throwers and hand grenades.

Tanks were called in. Most could not climb the embankment in the loose volcanic soil, but a few made it to the top. They immediately opened up with their 75mm guns, their sharp crack adding to the battle din.



The Japanese shifted their fire to the tanks, knocking out many. But the tanks had taken some of the fire off the Leatherneck riflemen. They had destroyed several pillboxes and allowed the Marines to move forward.

The 28th Marines charged across the island—their mission, to isolate Suribachi. By the end of the first day's fighting they had accomplished their mission and captured a portion of Airfield Number 1.

The 4th Marine Division beaches were the hottest. The 25th Marines had the objective of taking the Japanese strongpoint known as the Quarry, which threatened the right flank of the beachhead. Again and again the 25th launched frontal attacks, the only maneuver possible on Iwo.



It took the 3d Battalion of the 25th Marines all day, but in the end they overran the Quarry positions against determined resistance.

The landing beaches were a scene of confusion. Beachmasters and shore parties were attempting to land men in an orderly fashion, but the heavy fire made it impossible. Destroyed LVTs and landing craft littered the beaches and surviving coxswains landed their boats where they could, not worrying if the spot they selected was the correct one.

The beachmasters had the added responsibility of getting the wounded, now hobbling or being carried to the beaches, out to waiting ships and medical treatment.



During all this confusion the Japanese continued to drop an almost solid curtain of fire on the beaches, adding to the beachmasters' problems.

The people working on the beaches refused to give up, though, and got the most-needed supplies to men fighting on the front. The majority of this was hand-carried.

Casualties on the first day of the assault were heavy. The Marines lost 566 men killed and 1,755 wounded. Although the exact number of Japanese killed during the first day is not known, they lost heavily too.

Before D-Day was over Gunnery Sergeant "Manila" John Basilone, Medal of Honor winner on Guadalcanal, was killed leading his men in the charge across the island.

The first bloody day on Iwo Jima netted small gains—an indication of what was to come.



Marines from the two divisions dug in as much as possible as the light began to fail. They expected heavy counterattacking banzai charges to come with the night.

But the heroic, suicidal banzai charge was a luxury General Kuribayashi could not afford. One of his subordinate commanders, the one responsible for the Suribachi sector, requested permission to charge the 28th Marines standing astride Iwo. Kuribayashi refused the request.

On the second day the 28th Marines started a drive to the summit of Suribachi. They first encircled the base of the volcano. Meeting stiff resistance the regiment called in tanks to fire high-explosive shells point-blank into enemy strongholds.

