

CLOSING IN:
MARINES IN THE
SEIZURE OF IWO JIMA

MARINES IN
WORLD WAR II
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

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





Closing In: Marines in the Seizure of Iwo Jima

by Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret)

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

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

To the east the 4th Marine Divi-

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

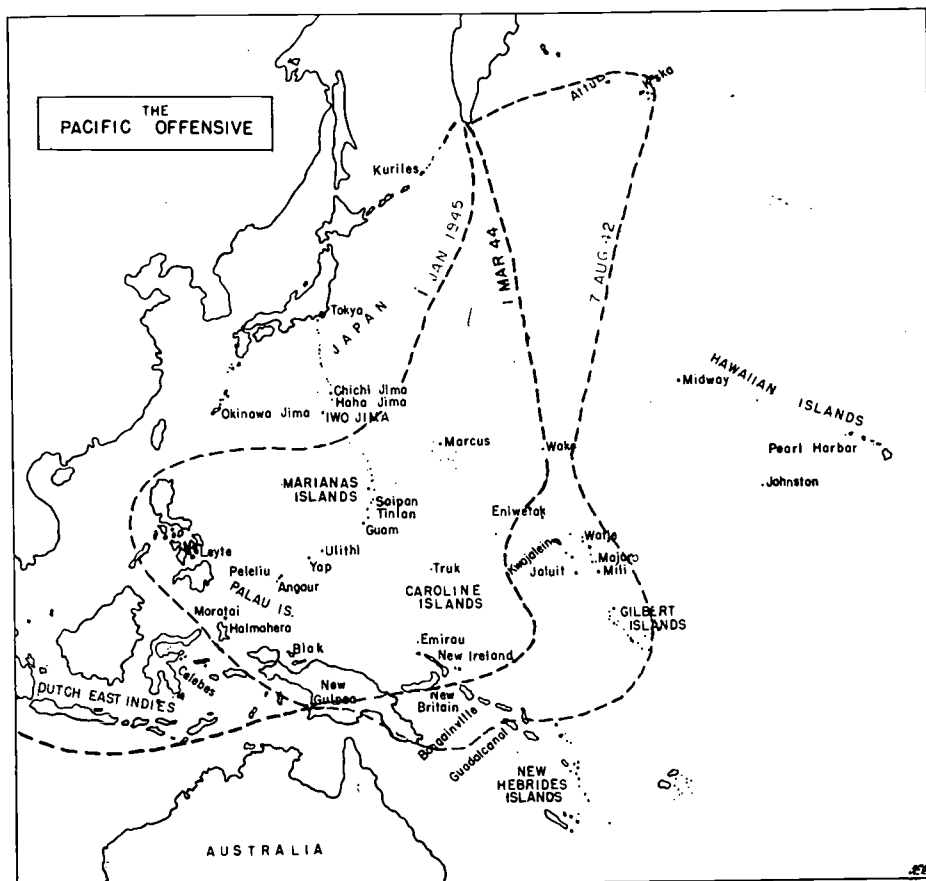
Along the western flank, the 5th Marine Division had just seized Nishi Ridge and Hill 362-B the previous day, suffering more than 500 casualties. It too had been up most of the night engaging a sizeable force of

infiltrators. The Sunday morning attacks lacked coordination, reflecting the division's collective exhaustion. Most rifle companies were at half-strength. The net gain for the day, the division reported, was "practically nil."

But the battle was beginning to take its toll on the Japanese garrison as well. General Tadamichi Kuribayashi knew his *109th Division* had inflicted heavy casualties on the attacking Marines, yet his own losses had been comparable. The American capture of the key hills in the main defense sector the day before deprived him of his invaluable artillery observation sites. His brilliant chief of artillery, Colonel Chosaku Kaido, lay dying. On this date Kuribayashi moved his own com-

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

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





Marine Corps Art Collection

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

mand post from the central highlands to a large cave on the northwest coast. The usual blandishments from Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo reached him by radio that afternoon, but Kuribayashi was in no mood for heroic rhetoric. "Send me air and naval support and I will hold the island," he signalled. "Without them I cannot hold."

That afternoon the fighting men of both sides witnessed a harbinger of Iwo Jima's fate. Through the overcast skies appeared a gigantic silver bomber, the largest aircraft anyone had ever seen. It was the Boeing B-29 Super Fortress "Dinah Might," crippled

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

headed back to its base in Tinian. The Marines cheered.

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

Assault Preparations

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

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

American servicemen had awaited the coming of the B-29s for years. The "very-long-range" bombers, which had become operational too late for the European War, had been striking mainland Japan since November 1944. Results proved disappointing. The problem stemmed not from the pilots or planes but rather from a vexing little spit of volcanic rock lying halfway along the direct path from Saipan to Tokyo—Iwo Jima. Iwo's radar gave the Japanese defense authorities two hours advance notice of every B-29 strike. Japanese fighters based on Iwo swarmed up to harass the unescorted Superforts going in and especial-

ly coming home, picking off those bombers crippled by antiaircraft (AA) fire. As a result, the B-29s had to fly higher, along circuitous routes, with a reduced payload. At the same time, enemy bombers based on Iwo often raided B-29 bases in the Marianas, causing some damage.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff decided Iwo Jima must be captured and a U.S. airbase built there. This would eliminate Japanese bombing raids and the early warning interceptions, provide fighter escorts throughout the most dangerous portion of the long B-29 missions, and enable greater payloads at longer ranges. Iwo Jima in American hands would also provide a welcome emergency field for crippled B-29s returning from Tokyo. It would also protect the flank of the pending invasion of Okinawa. In October 1944 the Joint Chiefs directed Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, CinCPac, to seize and develop Iwo Jima within the ensuing three months. This launched Operation Detachment.

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

compared the island to something out of Dante's *Inferno*.

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

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

As usual, "maintaining unremitting military pressure on the enemy" meant an accelerated planning schedule and an overriding emphasis on speed of execution. The amphibious task force preparing to assault Iwo Jima soon found itself squeezed on both ends. Hill and Blandy had a critical need for the amphibious ships, landing craft, and shore bombardment vessels currently being used by General Douglas MacArthur

in his reconquest of Luzon in the Philippines. But bad weather and stiff enemy resistance combined to delay completion of that operation. The Joint Chiefs reluctantly postponed D-day for Iwo Jima from 20 January 1945 until 19 February. The tail end of the schedule provided no relief. D-Day for Okinawa could go no later than 1 April because of the approach of the monsoon season. The constricted time frame for Iwo would have grave implications for the landing force.

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

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



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109649

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

happened to Harry Schmidt." Smith tried to keep out of Schmidt's way, but his subsequent decision to withhold commitment of the 3d Marines, the Expeditionary Troops reserve, remains as controversial today as it was in 1945.

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

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

I was the commander of all troops on Iwo Jima at all times. Holland Smith never had a command post ashore, never issued a single order ashore, never spent a single night ashore . . . Isn't it important from an historical standpoint that I commanded the greatest number of Marines ever to be engaged in a single action in the

entire history of the Marine Corps?

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

The V Amphibious Corps achievement was made even more memorable by the enormously difficult opposition provided by the island and the enemy. In Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi [see sidebar], the Americans faced one of the most formidable opponents of the war. A fifth-generation *samurai*, hand-picked and personally extolled by the Emperor, Kuribayashi combined combat experience with an innovative mind and an iron will. Although this would be his only combat against American forces, he had learned much about his prospective opponents from earlier service in the United States. More significantly, he could appraise with an unblinking eye the results of previous Japanese attempts to repel American invasions of Japanese-held garrisons. Heroic rhetoric aside, Kuribayashi saw little to commend the "defend-at-the-water's-edge" tactics and "all-or-nothing" *Banzai* attacks which had characterized Japan's failures from Tarawa to Tinian. Kuribayashi, a realist, also knew not to expect much help from Japan's depleted fleet and air forces. His best chances, he con-

cluded, would be to maximize Iwo's forbidding terrain with a defense in depth, along the pattern of the recent Biak and Peleliu defensive efforts. He would eschew coast defense, anti-landing, and *Banzai* tactics and instead conduct a prolonged battle of attrition, a war of nerves, patience, and time. Possibly the Americans would lose heart and abandon the campaign.

Such a seemingly passive policy, even that late in the war, seemed revolutionary to senior Japanese Army and Navy leaders. It ran counter to the deeply ingrained warrior code, which viewed the defensive as only an unpleasant interim pending resumption of the glorious offensive in which one could destroy the enemy with sword and bayonet. Even Imperial General Headquarters grew nervous. There is some evidence of a top-level request for guidance in defending against American "storm landings" from Nazi Germany, whose sad experience in trying to defend Normandy at the water's edge had proven disastrous. The Japanese remained unconvinced. Kuribayashi needed every bit of his top connections with the Emperor to keep from being summarily relieved for his radical proposals. His was not a complete organizational victory—the Navy insisted on building gun casemates and blockhouses along the obvious landing beaches on Iwo—but in general he prevailed.

Kuribayashi demanded the assistance of the finest mining engineers and fortifications specialists in the Empire. Here again, the island favored the defender. Iwo's volcanic sand mixed readily with cement to produce superior concrete for installations; the soft rock lent itself to rapid digging. Half the garrison lay aside their weapons to labor with pick and spade. When American heavy bombers from the Seventh Air Force commenced a daily pounding of the island in early December 1944, Kuribayashi simply moved every-

thing—weapons, command posts, barracks, aid stations—underground. These engineering achievements were remarkable. Masked gun positions provided interlocking fields of fire, miles of tunnels linked key defensive positions, every cave featured multiple outlets and ventilation tubes. One installation inside Mount Suribachi ran seven stories deep. The Americans would rarely see a live Japanese on Iwo Jima until the bitter end.

American intelligence experts, aided by documents captured in Saipan and by an almost daily flow of aerial photography (and periscope-level pictures from the submarine *Spearfish*), puzzled over the “disappearing act” of the Japanese garrison.

Trained photo interpreters, using stereoscopic lenses, listed nearly 700 potential targets, but all were hardened, covered, masked. The intelligence staffs knew there was no fresh water available on the island. They could see the rainwater cisterns and they knew what the average monthly rainfall would deliver. They concluded the garrison could not possibly survive under those conditions in numbers greater than 12,000 or 13,000. But Kuribayashi’s force was twice that size. The men existed on half-rations of water for months before the battle began.

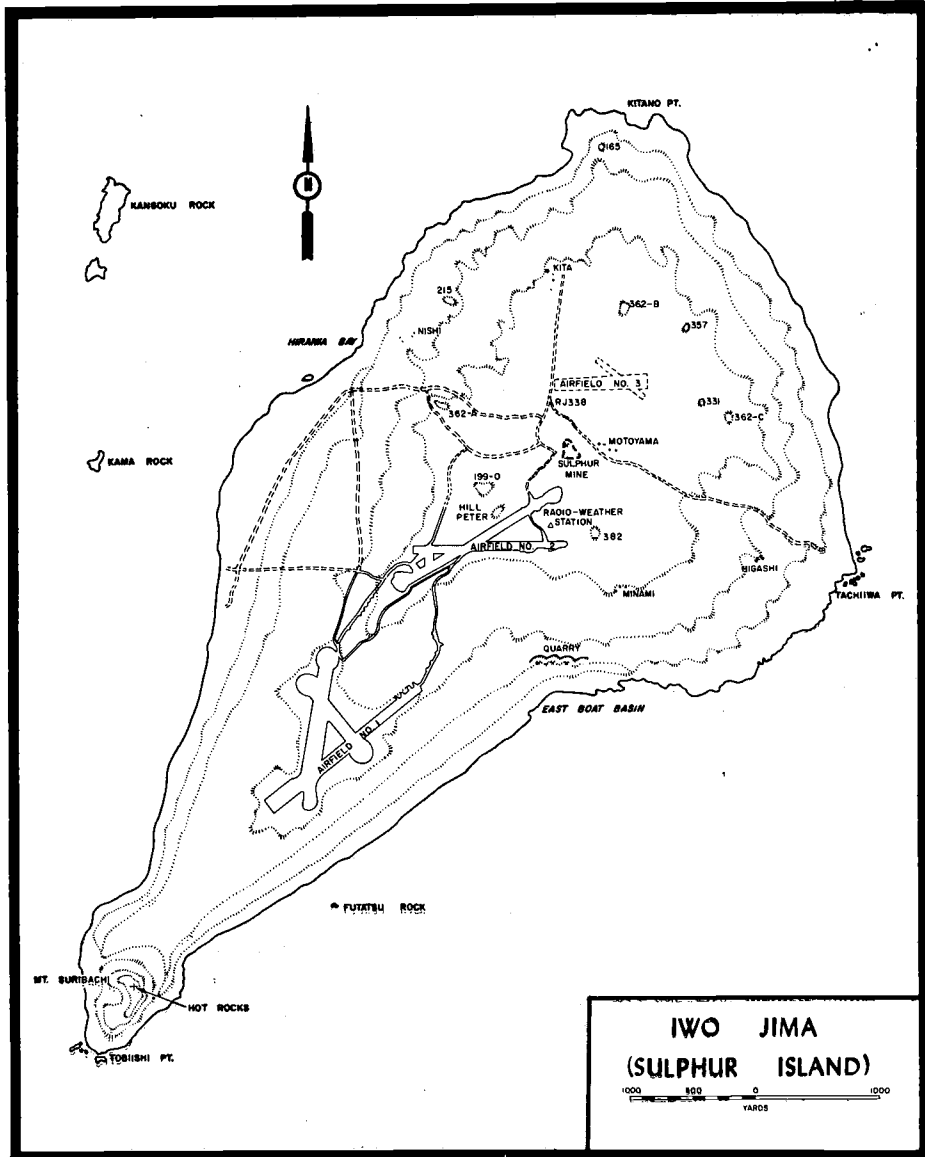
Unlike earlier amphibious assaults at Guadalcanal and Tarawa, the Americans would not enjoy either strategic or tactical surprise at Iwo

Jima. Japanese strategists concluded Iwo Jima would be invaded soon after the loss of the Marianas. Six months before the battle, Kuribayashi wrote his wife, “The Americans will surely invade this Iwo Jima . . . do not look for my return.” He worked his men ruthlessly to complete all defensive and training preparations by 11 February 1945—and met the objective. His was a mixed force of veterans and recruits, soldiers and sailors. His artillerymen and mortar crews were among the best in the Empire. Regardless, he trained and disciplined them all. As the Americans soon discovered, each fighting position contained the commander’s “Courageous Battle Vows” prominently posted above the firing apertures. Troops were admonished to maintain their positions and exact 10 American lives for every Japanese death.

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

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

E. L. Wilson

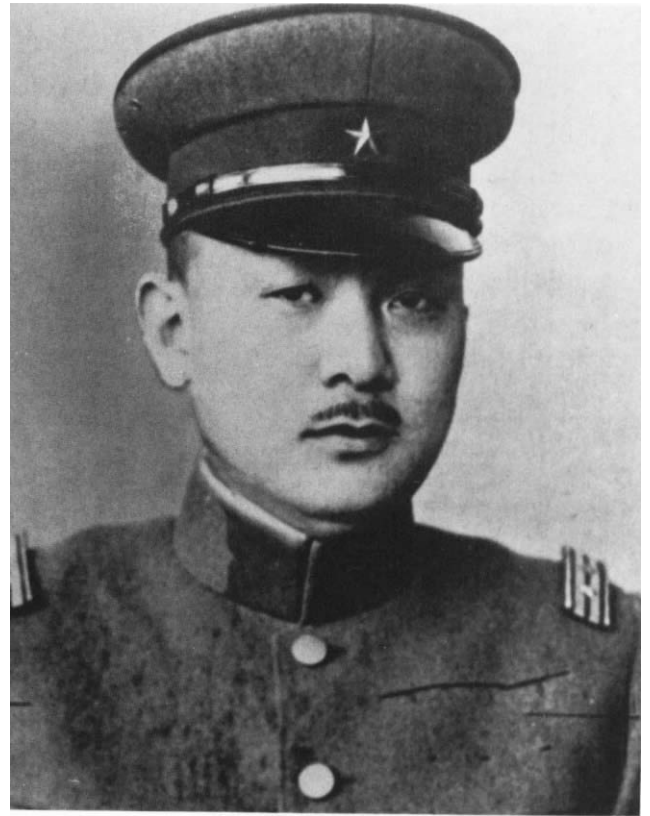


The Japanese Commander

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

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

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



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 152108
LtGen Tadamichi Kuribayashi, Imperial Japanese Army.

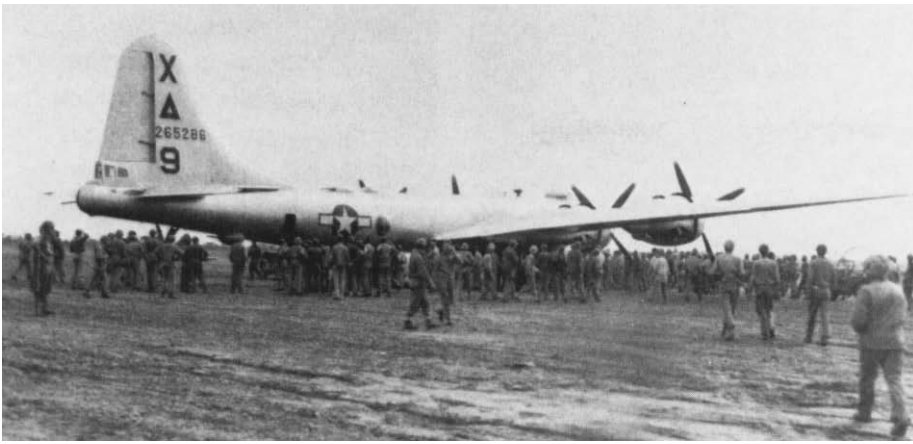
Doomed without naval or air support, Kuribayashi nevertheless proved to be a resolute and resourceful field commander. His only tactical error was to authorize the sector commander to engage the U.S. task force covering underwater demolitions team operations on D-2. This became a gift to the attackers,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

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

The physical separation of the three divisions, from Guam to Hawaii, had no adverse effect on preparatory training. Where it counted most – the proficiency of small units in amphibious landings and combined-arms assaults on fortified positions – each division was well prepared for the forthcoming invasion. The 3d Marine Division had just completed its participation in the

successful recapture of Guam; field training often extended to active combat patrols to root out die-hard Japanese survivors. In Maui, the 4th Marine Division prepared for its fourth major assault landing in 13 months with quiet confidence. Recalled Major Frederick J. Karch, operations officer for the 14th Marines, "we had a continuity there of veterans that was just unbeatable." In

neighboring Hawaii, the 5th Marine Division calmly prepared for its first combat experience. The unit's newness would prove misleading. Well above half of the officers and men were veterans, including a number of former Marine parachutists and a few Raiders who had first fought in the Solomons. Lieutenant Colonel Donn J. Robertson took command of the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, bare-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 112392

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

ly two weeks before embarkation and immediately ordered it into the field for a sustained live-firing exercise. Its competence and confidence impressed him. "These were professionals," he concluded.

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

The Guadalcanal veterans would only shake their heads at the abundance of amphibious shipping available for Operation Detachment. Admiral Turner would command 495 ships, of which fully 140 were amphibiously configured, the whole array 10 times the size of Guadalcanal's task force. Still there were problems. So many of the ships and crews were new that each rehearsal featured embarrassing collisions and other accidents. The new TD-18 bulldozers were found to be an inch too wide for the medium landing craft (LCMs). The newly modified M4A3 Sherman tanks proved so heavy that the LCMs rode with dangerously low

freeboards. Likewise, 105mm howitzers overloaded the amphibious trucks (DUKWs) to the point of near-unseaworthiness. These factors would prove costly in Iwo's unpredictable surf zone.

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

On Iwo Jima, General Kuribayashi

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

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

Two contentious issues divided the Navy-Marine team as D-day at Iwo Jima loomed closer. The first involved Admiral Spruance's decision to detach Task Force 58, the fast carriers under Admiral Marc Mitscher, to attack strategic targets on Honshu simultaneously with the onset of Admiral Blandy's preliminary bombardment of Iwo. The Marines suspected Navy-Air Force rivalry at work here — most of Mitscher's targets were aircraft factories which the B-29s had missed badly a few days earlier. What the Marines really begrudged was Mitscher taking all eight Marine Corps fighter squadrons, assigned to

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 413529





Col William P. McCahill Collection

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

the fast carriers, plus the new fast battleships with their 16-inch guns. Task Force 58 returned to Iwo in time to render sparkling support with these assets on D-day, but two days later it was off again, this time for good.

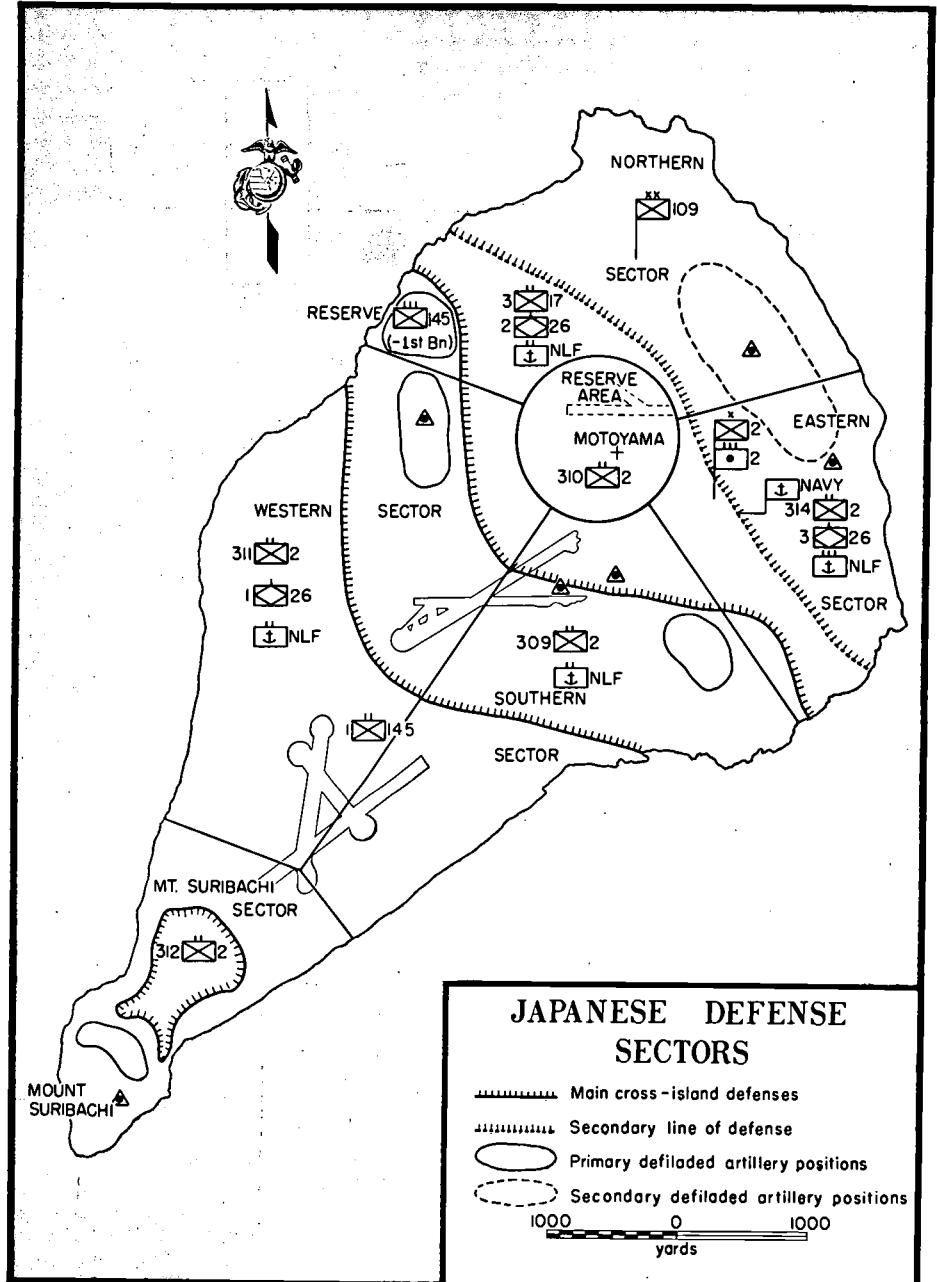
The other issue was related and it concerned the continuing argument between senior Navy and Marine officers over the extent of preliminary naval gunfire. The Marines looked at the intelligence reports on Iwo and requested 10 days of preliminary fire. The Navy said it had neither the time nor the ammo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

Lieutenant Colonel Donald M. Weller, USMC, served as the FMFPAC/Task Force 51 naval gunfire officer, and no one in either sea service knew the business more thoroughly. Weller had absorbed the lessons of the Pacific War well, especially those of the conspicuous failures at Tarawa. The issue, he argued forcibly to Admiral Turner, was not the weight of shells nor their caliber but rather time. Destruction

of heavily fortified enemy targets took deliberate, pinpoint firing from close ranges, assessed and adjusted by aerial observers. Iwo Jima's 700 "hard" targets would require time to knock out, a lot of time.

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

In effect, Iwo's notorious foul weather, the imperviousness of many



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

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

cruisers hurried in to blast the case-mate guns suddenly revealed on the slopes of Suribachi and along the rock quarry on the right flank.

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

On board Admiral Turner's flag-

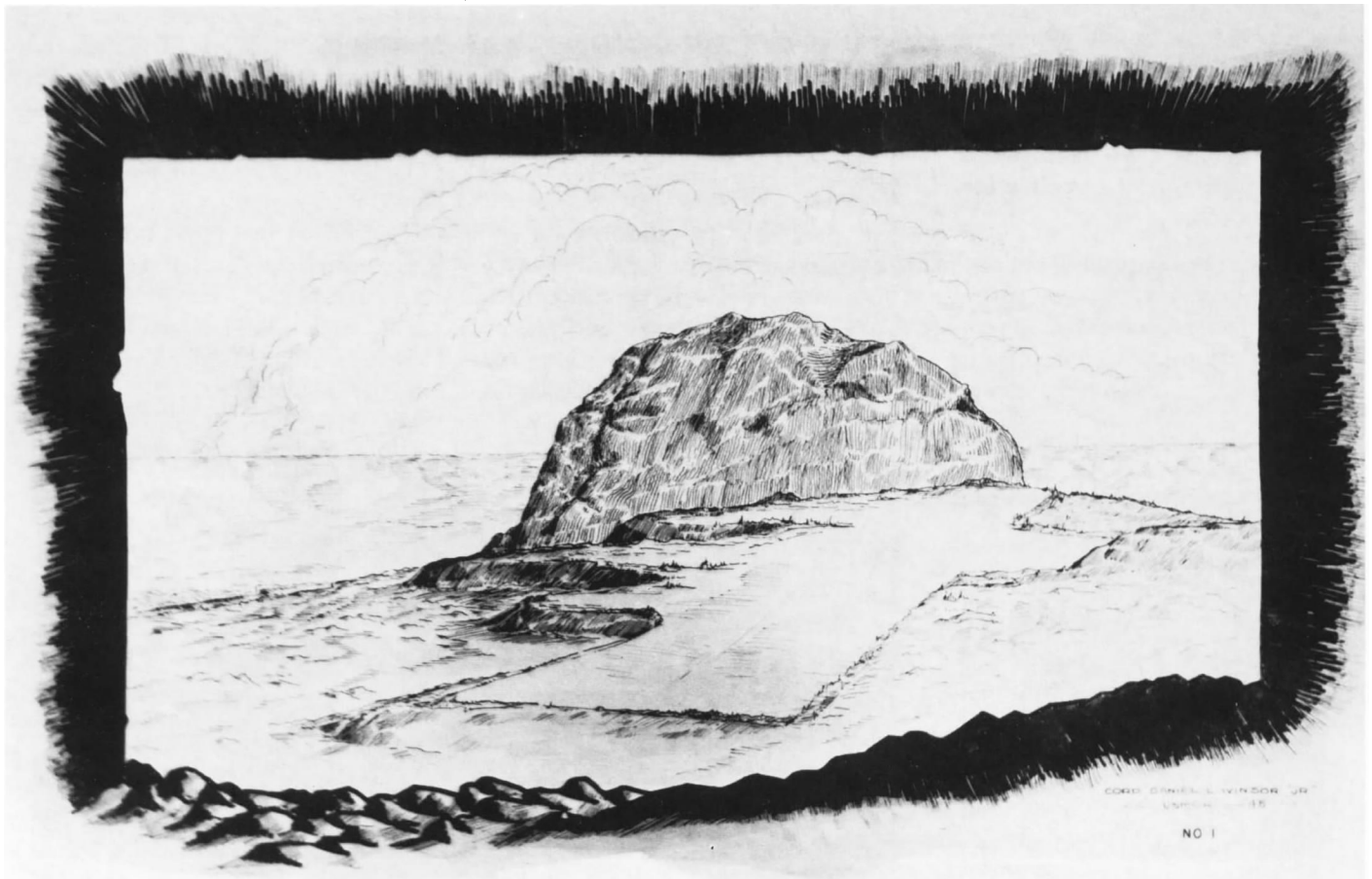
ship, the press briefing held the night before D-day was uncommonly somber. General Holland Smith predicted heavy casualties, possibly as many as 15,000, which shocked all hands. A man clad in khakis without rank insignia then stood up to address the room. It was James V. Forrestal, Secretary of the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

D-Day

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

Shore bombardment ships did not hesitate to engage the enemy island at near point-blank range. Battleships and cruisers steamed as close as 2,000 yards to level their guns against island targets. Many of the "Old Bat-

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



The Assault Commanders at Iwo Jima

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

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

General Erskine was 47 at Iwo Jima, one of the youngest major generals in the Corps. He had served 28 years on active duty by that time. A native of Columbia, Louisiana, he graduated

from Louisiana State University, received a Marine Corps commission, and immediately deployed overseas for duty in World War I. As a platoon commander in the 6th Marines, Erskine saw combat at Belleau Wood, Chateau-Thierry, Soissons, and St. Mihiel, during which he was twice wounded and awarded the Silver Star. In the interwar years he served in Haiti, Santo Domingo, Nicaragua, Cuba, and China. He attended the Army Infantry School and the Army Command and General Staff College. In World War II, Erskine was chief of staff to General Holland M. Smith during campaigns in the Aleutians, Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas. He assumed command of the 3d Marine Division in October 1944.

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

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

General Rockey was 56 at Iwo Jima and a veteran of 31 years of service to the Corps. He was born in Columbia City, Indiana, graduated from Gettysburg College, and studied at Yale. Like his fellow division commanders, Rockey served in France in World War I. He was awarded the Navy Cross as a junior officer in the 5th Marines at Chateau-Thierry. A second Navy Cross came later for heroic service in Nicaragua. He also served in Haiti and two years at sea. He attended the Field Officers' Course at Quantico and the Army Command and General Staff Course. He spent the first years of World War II at Headquarters Marine Corps in Washington, first as Director, Division of Plans and Policies, then as Assistant Commandant. In February 1944 General Rockey assumed command of the 5th Marine Division and began preparing the new organization for its first, and last, great battle of the war.

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

MajGen Harry Schmidt, USMC
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 11180



MajGen Graves B. Erskine, USMC
Marine Corps Historical Collection



MajGen Clifton B. Cates, USMC
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 38595



MajGen Keller E. Rockey, USMC
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A32295





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 14284

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

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

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

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

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

The Marines and sailors were anx-

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

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

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

Smith. The 3d Marine Division's 21st Marines would replace the 26th Marines as corps reserve, thus releasing the latter regiment to the 5th Division.

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

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

The choreography of the landing continued to develop. Iwo Jima would represent the pinnacle of forcible amphibious assault against a

heavily fortified shore, a complex art mastered painstakingly by the Fifth Fleet over many campaigns. Seventh Air Force Martin B-24 Liberator bombers flew in from the Marianas to strike the smoking island. Rocket ships moved in to saturate nearshore targets. Then it was time for the fighter and attack squadrons from Mitscher's Task Force 58 to contribute. The Navy pilots showed their skills at bombing and strafing, but the troops naturally cheered the most at the appearance of F4U Corsairs flown by Marine Fighter Squadrons 124 and 213 led by Lieutenant Colonel William A. Millington from the fleet carrier *Essex*. Colonel Vernon E. Megee, in his shipboard capacity as air officer for General Smith's Expeditionary Troops staff, had urged Millington to put on a special show for the troops in the assault waves. "Drag your bellies on the beach," he told Millington. The Marine fighters made an impressive approach parallel to the island, then virtually did Megee's bidding, streaking low over the beaches, strafing furiously. The geography of the Pacific War since Bougainville had kept many of the ground Marines separated from their own air support, which had been operating in areas other

than where they had been fighting, most notably the Central Pacific. "It was the first time a lot of them had ever seen a Marine fighter plane," said Megee. The troops were not disappointed.

The planes had barely disappeared when naval gunfire resumed, carpeting the beach areas with a building crescendo of high-explosive shells. The ship-to-shore movement was well underway, an easy 30-minute run for the tracked landing vehicles (LVTs). This time there were enough LVTs to do the job: 68 LVT(A)4 armored amtracs mounting snub-nosed 75mm cannon leading the way, followed by 380 troop-laden LVT 4s and LVT 2s. The waves crossed the line of departure on time and chugged confidently towards the smoking beaches, all the while under the climactic bombardment from the ships. Here there was no coral reef, no killer neap tides to be concerned with. The Navy and Marine frogmen had reported the approaches free of mines or tetrahedrons. There was no premature cessation of fire. The "rolling barrage" plan took effect. Hardly a vehicle was lost to the desultory enemy fire.

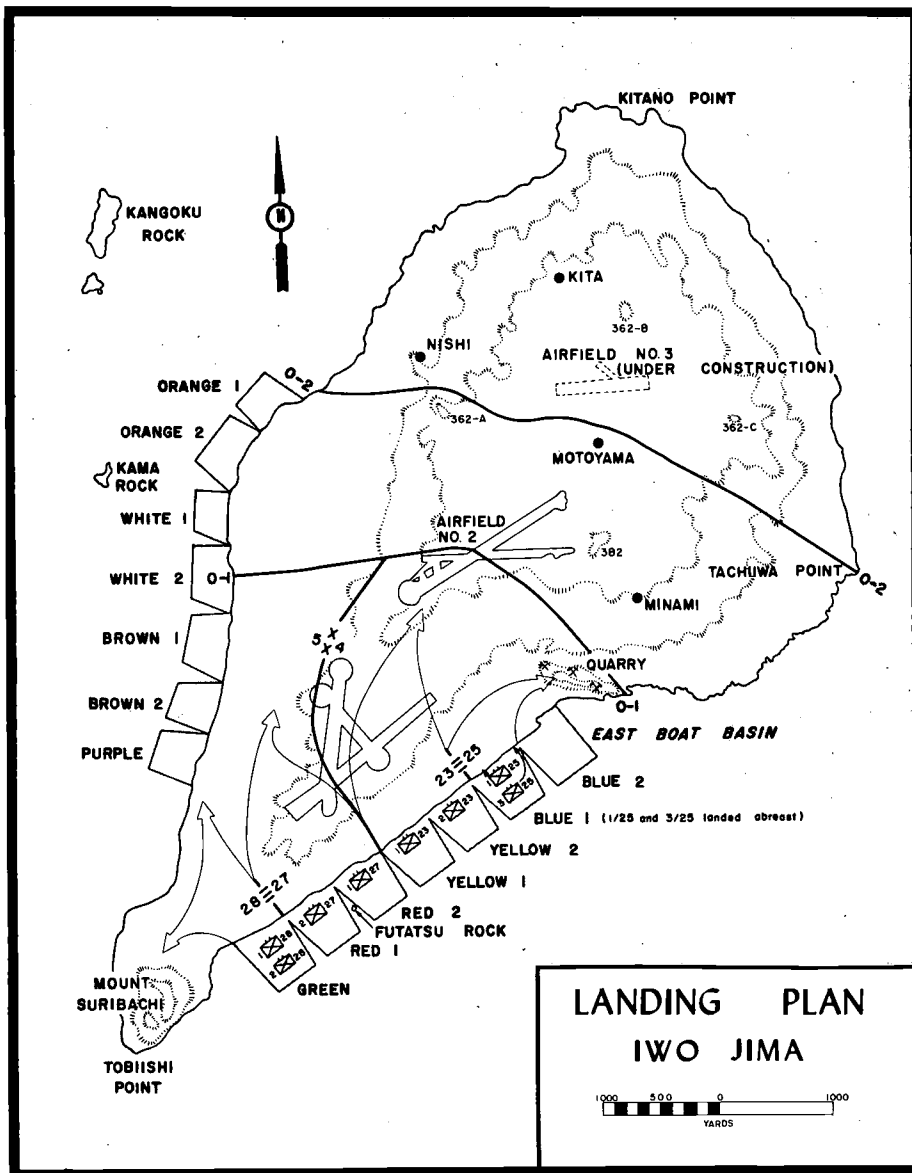
The massive assault waves hit the beach within two minutes of H-hour. A Japanese observer watching the drama unfold from a cave on the slopes of Suribachi reported, "At nine o'clock in the morning several hundred landing craft with amphibious tanks in the lead rushed ashore like an enormous tidal wave."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

The first obstacle came not from the Japanese but the beach and the parallel terraces. Iwo Jima was an emerging volcano; its steep beaches dropped off sharply, producing a narrow but violent surf zone. The

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

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109598





E. L. Wilson

soft black sand immobilized all wheeled vehicles and caused some of the tracked amphibians to belly down. The boat waves that closely followed the LVTs had more trouble. Ramps would drop, a truck or jeep would attempt to drive out, only to get stuck. In short order a succession of plunging waves hit the stalled craft before they could completely unload, filling their sterns with water and sand, broaching them broadside. The beach quickly resembled a salvage yard.

The infantry, heavily laden, found its own "foot-mobility" severely restricted. In the words of Corporal Edward Hartman, a rifleman with the 4th Marine Division: "the sand was so soft it was like trying to run in loose coffee grounds." From the 28th

Marines came this early, laconic report: "Resistance moderate, terrain awful."

The rolling barrage and carefully executed landing produced the desired effect, suppressing direct enemy fire, providing enough shock and distraction to enable the first assault waves to clear the beach and begin advancing inland. Within minutes 6,000 Marines were ashore. Many became thwarted by increasing fire over the terraces or down from the highlands, but hundreds leapt forward to maintain assault momentum. The 28th Marines on the left flank had rehearsed on similar volcanic terrain on the island of Hawaii. Now, despite increasing casualties among their company commanders and the usual disorganization of

landing, elements of the regiment used their initiative to strike across the narrow neck of the peninsula. The going became progressively costly as more and more Japanese strong-points along the base of Suribachi seemed to spring to life. Within 90 minutes of the landing, however, elements of the 1st Battalion, 28th Marines, had reached the western shore, 700 yards across from Green Beach. Iwo Jima had been severed—"like cutting off a snake's head," in the words of one Marine. It would represent the deepest penetration of what was becoming a very long and costly day.

The other three regiments experienced difficulty leaving the black sand terraces and wheeling across towards the first airfield. The terrain was an open bowl, a shooting gallery in full view from Suribachi on the left and the rising tableland to the right. Any thoughts of a "cakewalk" quickly vanished as well-directed machine-gun fire whistled across the open ground and mortar rounds began dropping along the terraces. Despite these difficulties, the 27th Marines made good initial gains, reaching the southern and western edges of the first airfield before noon. The 23d Marines landed over Yellow Beach and sustained the brunt of the first round of Japanese combined arms fire. These troops crossed the second terrace only to be confronted by two huge concrete pillboxes, still lethal despite all the pounding. Overcoming these positions proved costly in casualties and time. More fortified positions appeared in the broken ground beyond. Colonel Walter W. Wensinger's call for tank support could not be immediately honored because of trafficability and congestion problems on the beach. The regiment clawed its way several hundred yards towards the eastern edge of the airstrip.

No assault units found it easy going to move inland, but the 25th Marines almost immediately ran into a buzz-saw trying to move across Blue



Tracked landing vehicles (LVTs), jam-packed with 4th Marine Division troops, approach the Line of Departure at H-

hour on D-day. In the center rear can be seen the control vessels which attempted to maintain order in the landing.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC)110128

Beach. General Cates had been right in his appraisal. "That right flank was a bitch if there ever was one," he would later say. Lieutenant Colonel Hollis W. Mustain's 1st Battalion, 25th Marines, managed to scratch forward 300 yards under heavy fire in the first half hour, but Lieutenant Colonel Chambers' 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, took the heaviest beating of the day on the extreme right trying to scale the cliffs leading to the Rock Quarry. Chambers landed 15 minutes after H-hour. "Crossing that second terrace," he recalled, "the fire from automatic weapons was coming from all over. You could've held up a cigarette and lit it on the stuff going by. I knew immediately we were in for one hell of a time."

This was simply the beginning. While the assault forces tried to overcome the infantry weapons of the local defenders, they were naturally blind to an almost imperceptible stirring taking place among the rocks

and crevices of the interior highlands. With grim anticipation, General Kuribayashi's gunners began unmasking the big guns—the heavy artillery, giant mortars, rockets, and anti-tank weapons held under tightest discipline for this precise moment. Kuribayashi had patiently waited until the beaches were clogged with

troops and material. Gun crews knew the range and deflection to each landing beach by heart; all weapons had been preregistered on these targets long ago. At Kuribayashi's signal, these hundreds of weapons began to open fire. It was shortly after 1000.

The ensuing bombardment was as deadly and terrifying as any of the

H-hour at Iwo Jima, 19 February 1945.

Department of Defense Photo (USN) NH65311





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110109
Marines of the 4th Division pour ashore from their landing craft on Yellow and Blue Beaches on D-day. Enemy fire had not hit this assault wave yet as it landed.

Marines had ever experienced. There was hardly any cover. Japanese artillery and mortar rounds blanketed every corner of the 3,000-yard-wide beach. Large-caliber coast defense

guns and dual-purpose anti-aircraft guns firing horizontally added a deadly scissors of direct fire from the high ground on both flanks. Marines stumbling over the terraces to escape

the rain of projectiles encountered the same disciplined machine-gun fire and mine fields which had slowed the initial advance. Casualties mounted appallingly.

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

As soon as it hit the beach on the right side of the V Amphibious Corps line, the 25th Marines was pinned down by

accurate and heavy enemy fire. Meanwhile, landing craft, supplies, and vehicles pile up in the surf behind Marines.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110108





5th Division Marines land on Red and Green Beaches at the foot of Mount Suribachi under heavy fire coming from ene-

With bullets and artillery shells screaming overhead, Marines crawl along the beaches and dig into the soft volcanic ash

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111691

my positions overlooking the black sand terraces. The 28th Marines had not yet wheeled to the left towards Suribachi.

for cover from the deadly fire. Note the geyser of water as a shell lands close to a landing craft headed into the beach.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109618





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111115

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

3d Battalion, 25th Marines' entire Shore Fire Control Party.

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

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

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

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

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

The landing force suffered and bled but did not panic. The profusion of combat veterans throughout the rank and file of each regiment helped the rookies focus on the objective. Communications remained effective. Keen-eyed aerial observers spotted some of the now-exposed gun positions and directed naval gunfire effectively. Carrier planes screeched in low to drop napalm canisters. The heavy Japanese fire would continue

to take an awful toll throughout the first day and night, but it would never again be so murderous as that first unholy hour.

Marine Sherman tanks played hell getting into action on D-day. Later in the battle these combat vehicles would be the most valuable weapons on the battlefield for the Marines; this day was a nightmare. The assault

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

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110593



dered two battalions of the 24th Marines to land at 1400; the 3d Battalion, 24th Marines, followed several hours later. Many of the reserve battalions suffered heavier casualties crossing the beach than the assault units, a result of Kuribayashi's punishing bombardment from all points on the island.

Mindful of the likely Japanese counterattack in the night to come — and despite the fire and confusion along the beaches — both divisions also ordered their artillery regiments ashore. This process, frustrating and costly, took much of the afternoon. The wind and surf began to pick up as the day wore on, causing more than one low-riding DUKW to swamp with its precious 105mm howitzer cargo. Getting the guns ashore was one thing; getting them up off the sand was quite another. The 75mm pack howitzers fared better than the heavier 105s. Enough Marines could readily hustle them up over the terraces, albeit at great risk. The 105s seemed to have a mind of their own in the black sand. The effort to get each single weapon off the beach was a saga in its own right. Somehow, despite the fire and unforgiving terrain, both Colonel Louis G. DeHaven, commanding the 14th Marines, and Colonel James D. Waller, commanding the 13th Marines, managed to get batteries in place, registered, and rendering close fire support well before dark, a singular accomplishment.

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

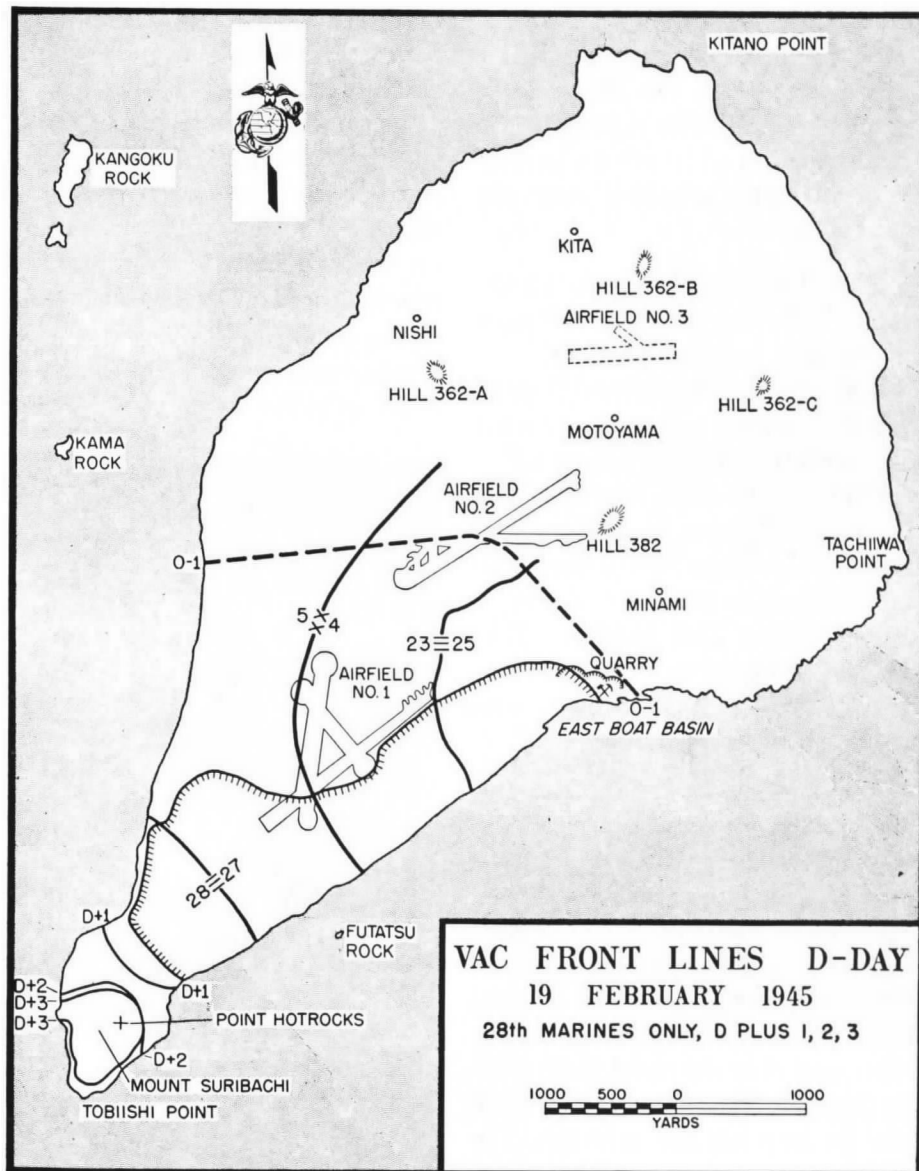


Marine Corps Combat Art Collection

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

hicles; casualties scattered all over." On the left center of the action, leading his machine gun platoon in the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines' attack against the southern portion of

the airfield, the legendary "Manila John" Basilone fell mortally wounded by a Japanese mortar shell, a loss keenly felt by all Marines on the island. Farther east, Lieutenant





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109601

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

Colonel Robert Galer, the other Guadalcanal Medal of Honor Marine (and one of the Pacific War's earliest fighter aces), survived the afternoon's fusillade along the beaches and began reassembling his scattered radar unit in a deep shell hole near the base of Suribachi.

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

The bitter battle to capture the Rock Quarry cliffs on the right flank raged all day. The beachhead remained completely vulnerable to enemy direct-fire weapons from these heights; the Marines had to storm

them before many more troops or supplies could be landed. In the end, it was the strength of character of Captain James Headley and Lieutenant Colonel "Jumping Joe" Chambers who led the survivors of the 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, onto the top of the cliffs. The battalion paid an exorbitant price for this achievement, losing 22 officers and 500 troops by nightfall.

The two assistant division commanders, Brigadier Generals Franklin A. Hart and Leo D. Hermle, of the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions respectively, spent much of D-day on board the control vessels marking both ends of the Line of Departure, 4,000 yards off shore. This reflected yet another lesson in amphibious techniques learned from Tarawa. Having senior officers that close to the ship-to-shore movement provided landing force decision-making from the most forward vantage point. By dusk General Hermle opted to come ashore. At Tarawa he had spent the night of D-day essentially out of contact at the fire-swept pierhead. This time he intended to be on the ground. Hermle had the larger operational picture in mind, knowing the corps commander's desire to force the reserves and artillery units

on shore despite the carnage in order to build credible combat power. Hermle knew that whatever the night might bring, the Americans now had more troops on the island than Kuribayashi could ever muster. His presence helped his division forget about the day's disasters and focus on preparations for the expected counterattacks.

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

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

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

Personnel accounting was a nightmare under those conditions, but the assault divisions eventually reported the combined loss of 2,420 men to General Schmidt (501 killed, 1,755 wounded, 47 dead of wounds, 18 missing, and 99 combat fatigue). These were sobering statistics, but Schmidt now had 30,000 Marines

ashore. The casualty rate of eight percent left the landing force in relatively better condition than at the first days at Tarawa or Saipan. The miracle was that the casualties had not been twice as high. General Kuribayashi had possibly waited a little too long to open up with his big guns.

The first night on Iwo was ghostly. Sulfuric mists spiraled out of the earth. The Marines, used to the tropics, shivered in the cold, waiting for Kuribayashi's warriors to come screaming down from the hills. They would learn that this Japanese commander was different. There would be no wasteful, vainglorious *Banzai* attack, this night or any other. Instead, small teams of infiltrators, which Kuribayashi termed "Prowling Wolves," probed the lines, gathering intelligence. A barge-full of Japanese *Special Landing Forces* tried a small counterlanding on the western beaches and died to the man under the alert guns of the 28th Marines and its supporting LVT crews. Otherwise the night was one of continuing waves of indirect fire from the highlands. One high velocity round landed directly in the hole occupied by the 1st Battalion, 23d Marines' commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Haas, killing him instantly. The Marines took casualties throughout the night. But with the first streaks of dawn, the veteran landing force stirred. Five infantry regiments looked north; a sixth turned to the business at hand in the south: Mount Suribachi.

Suribachi

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

ding "the mountain represented to these Marines a thing more evil than the Japanese."

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

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

caves, the first of hundreds the Marines would face on Iwo Jima.

The 28th Marines had suffered nearly 400 casualties in cutting across the neck of the island on D-day. On D+1, in a cold rain, they prepared to assault the mountain. Lieutenant Colonel Chandler Johnson, commanding the 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, set the tone for the morning as he deployed his tired troops forward: "It's going to be a hell of a day in a hell of a place to fight the damned war!" Some of the 105mm batteries of the 13th Marines opened up in support, firing directly overhead. Gun crews fired from positions hastily dug in the black sand directly next to the 28th Marines command post. Regimental Executive Officer Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Williams watched the cannoneers fire at Suribachi "eight hundred yards away over open sights."

As the Marines would learn during their drive north, even 105mm howitzers would hardly shiver the concrete pillboxes of the enemy. As the prep fire lifted, the infantry leapt forward, only to run immediately

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

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 109861





Colonel William P. McCahill Collection

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

into very heavy machine-gun and mortar fire. Colonel Harry B. "Harry the Horse" Liversedge bellowed for his tanks. But the 5th Tank Battalion was already having a frustrating morning. The tankers sought a defilade spot in which to rearm and refuel for the day's assault. Such a location did not exist on Iwo Jima those first days. Every time the tanks congregated to service their vehicles they were hit hard by Japanese mortar and artillery fire from virtually the entire island. Getting sufficient vehicles serviced to join the assault took most of the morning. Hereafter the tankers would maintain and re-equip their vehicles at night.

This day's slow start led to more setbacks for the tankers; Japanese antitank gunners hiding in the jumbled

boulders knocked out the first approaching Shermans. Assault momentum slowed further. The 28th Marines overran 40 strongpoints and gained roughly 200 yards all day. They lost a Marine for every yard gained. The tankers unknowingly redeemed themselves when one of their final 75mm rounds caught Colonel Atsuchi as he peered out of a cave entrance, killing him instantly.

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

The wreckage was indescribable. For two miles the debris was so thick that there were

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

Bad weather set in, further compounding the problems of general unloading. Strong winds whipped sea swells into a nasty chop; the surf turned uglier. These were the condi-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110319

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

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

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

Concern with the heavy casualties in the first 24 hours led Schmidt to commit the 21st Marines from corps reserve. The seas proved to be too rough. The troops had harrowing ex-

periences trying to debark down cargo nets into the small boats bobbing violently alongside the transports; several fell into the water. The boating process took hours. Once afloat, the troops circled endlessly in their small Higgins boats, waiting for the call to land. Wiser heads prevailed. After six hours of awful seasickness, the 21st Marines returned to its ships for the night.

Even the larger landing craft, the LCTs and LSMs, had great difficulty beaching. Sea anchors needed to

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

Marine Corps Combat Art Collection



maintain the craft perpendicular to the breakers rarely held fast in the steep, soft bottom. "Dropping those stern anchors was like dropping a spoon in a bowl of mush," said Admiral Hill.

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

Admiral Hill also worked with the Naval Construction Battalion (NCB) personnel, Seabees, as they were called, in the attempt to bring supply-laden causeways and pontoon barges ashore. Again the surf prevailed, broaching the craft, spilling the cargo. In desperation, Hill's beachmasters turned to round-the-clock use of DUKWs and LVTs to keep combat cargo flowing. Once the

DUKWs got free of the crippling load of 105mm howitzers they did fine. LVTs were probably better, because they could cross the soft beach without assistance and conduct resupply or medevac missions directly along the front lines. Both vehicles suffered from inexperienced LST crews in the transport area who too often would not lower their bow ramps to accommodate LVTs or DUKWs approaching after dark. In too many cases, vehicles loaded with wounded Marines thus rejected became lost in the darkness, ran out of gas and sank. The amphibian tractor battalions lost 148 LVTs at Iwo Jima. Unlike Tarawa, Japanese gunfire and mines accounted for less than 20 percent of this total. Thirty-four LVTs fell victim to Iwo's crushing surf; 88 sank in deep water, mostly at night.

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

While the 28th Marines fought to encircle Suribachi and the beachmasters and shore party attempted to clear the wreckage from the beaches, the remaining assault units of the VAC resumed their collective assault



Marine Corps Historical Collection

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

against Airfield No. 1. In the 5th Marine Division's zone, the relatively fresh troops of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, and the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, quickly became bloodied in forcing their way across the western runways, taking heavy casualties from time-fuzed air bursts fired by Japanese dual-purpose antiaircraft guns zeroed along the exposed ground. In the adjacent 4th Division zone, the 23d Marines completed the capture of the airstrip, advancing 800 yards but sustaining high losses.

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

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

would smother the area in a murderous blanket of fire.

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

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

The 28th Marines resumed its assault on the base of Suribachi, more slow, bloody fighting, seemingly boulder by boulder. On the west coast, the 1st Battalion, 28th Marines, made the most of field artillery and naval gunfire support to reach the shoulder of the mountain. Elsewhere, murderous Japanese fire res-



Colonel William P. McCahill Collection

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

stricted any progress to a matter of yards. Enemy mortar fire from all over the volcano rained down on the 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, trying to advance along the eastern shore. Recalled rifleman Richard Wheeler of the experience, "It was terrible, the worst I can remember us taking. The Jap mortarmen seemed to be playing checkers and using us as squares." The Marines used Weasels, handy little tracked vehicles making their first field appearance in this battle, to hustle forward flame-thrower canisters and evacuate some of the many wounded.

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

It rained even harder on the fourth morning, D + 3. Marines scampering forward under fire would hit the

deck, roll, attempt to return fire – only to discover that the loose volcanic grit had combined with the rain to jam their weapons. The 21st Marines, as the vanguard of the 3d Marine Division, hoped for good fortune in its initial commitment after relieving the 23d Marines. The regiment instead ran headlong into an intricate series of Japanese emplacements which marked the southeastern end of the main Japanese defenses. The newcomers

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

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

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

Captain Headley knew Chambers' sucking chest wound portended a grave injury; he sought to reduce his commander's shock until they could get him out of the line of fire. This took doing. Lieutenant Michael F. Keleher, USNR, now the battalion surgeon, crawled forward with one of his corpsmen. Willing hands lifted Chambers on a stretcher. Keleher

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

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110139





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110177

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

A lone Marine covers the left flank of a patrol as it works its way up the slopes of Mount Suribachi. It was from this

vantage point on the enemy-held height that Japanese gunners and observers had a clear view of the landing beaches.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A419744



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

There were two flags raised over Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima, but not at the same time. Despite the beliefs of many, and contrary to the supposed evidence, none of the photographs of the two flag-raising was posed. To begin with, early on the morning of 23 February 1945, four days after the initial landings, Captain Dave E. Severance, the commander of Company E, 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, ordered Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier to take a patrol and an American flag to the top of Suribachi. Staff Sergeant Louis R. Lowery, a *Leatherneck* magazine photographer, accompanied the patrol. After a short fire fight, the 54"-by-28" flag was attached to a long piece of pipe, found at the crest of the mountain, and raised. This is the flag-raising which Lowery photographed. As the flag was thought to be too small to be seen from the beach below, another Marine from the battalion went on board *LST 779* to obtain a larger flag. A second patrol then took this flag up to Suribachi's top and Joe Rosenthal, an Associated Press photographer, who had just come ashore, accompanied it.

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

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

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

Rosenthal took 18 photographs that day, went down to

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

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

Associated Press



ion, 28th Marines, and the 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, linked up at Tobiishi Point at the southern tip of the island. Recon patrols returned to tell Lieutenant Colonel Johnson that they found few signs of live Japanese along the mountain's upper slopes on the northside.

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

By Friday, 23 February (D + 4), the 28th Marines stood poised to complete the capture of Mount Suribachi. The honor went to the 3d Platoon (reinforced), Company E, 2d Battalion, 28th Marines, under the command of First Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier, the company executive officer. Lieutenant Colonel Johnson ordered Schrier to scale the summit, secure the crater, and raise a 54"x28"

American flag for all to see. Schrier led his 40-man patrol forward at 0800. The regiment had done its job, blasting the dozens of pillboxes with flame and demolitions, rooting out snipers, knocking out the masked batteries. The combined-arms pounding by planes, field pieces, and naval guns the past week had likewise taken its toll on the defenders. Those who remained popped out of holes and caves to resist Schrier's advance only to be cut down. The Marines worked warily up the steep northern slope, sometimes resorting to crawling on hands and knees.

Part of the enduring drama of the Suribachi flag-raising was the fact that it was observed by so many people. Marines all over the island could track the progress of the tiny column of troops during its ascent ("those guys oughta be getting flight pay," said one wag). Likewise, hundreds of binoculars from the ships offshore watched Schrier's Marines climbing ever upward. Finally they reached the top and momentarily disappeared from view. Those closest to the volcano could hear distant gunfire. Then, at 1020, there was movement on the summit; suddenly the Stars and Stripes fluttered bravely.

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

Three hours later an even larger flag went up to more cheers. Few would know that Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal had just captured the embodiment of the American warfighting spirit on film. *Leatherneck* magazine photographer Staff Sergeant Lou Lowery had taken a picture of the first flag-raising and almost immediately got in a firefight

with a couple of enraged Japanese. His photograph would become a valued collector's item. But Rosenthal's would enthrall the free world.

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

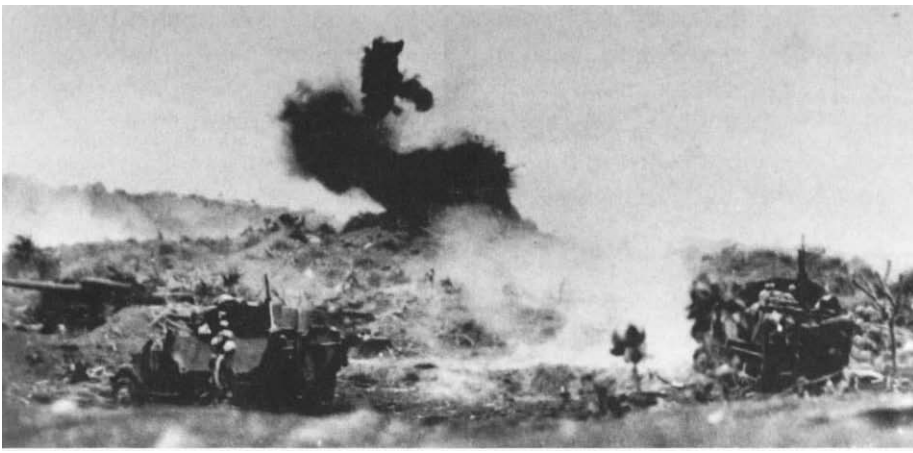
The Marines who raised the first flag were Lieutenant Schrier; Platoon Sergeant Ernest T. Thomas, Jr.; Sergeant Henry O. Hansen; Corporal Charles W. Lindberg; and Privates First Class Louis C. Charlo and James Michels. The six men immortalized by Joe Rosenthal's photograph of the second flag-raising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

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

The Drive North

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

For Kuribayashi, the unexpected early loss of the Suribachi garrison represented a setback, yet he occupied a position of great strength.



Marine Corps Historical Collection

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

He still had the equivalent of eight infantry battalions, a tank regiment, two artillery and three heavy mortar battalions, plus the 5,000 gunners and naval infantry under his counterpart, Rear Admiral Toshinosuke Ichimaru. Unlike other besieged garrisons in the Central Pacific, the two Japanese services on Iwo Jima functioned well together.

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

The Japanese defenders waiting for the advance of the V Amphibious Corps were well armed and confident. Occasionally Kuribayashi authorized company-sized spoiling

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

For the first week of the drive north, the Japanese on Iwo Jima actually had the attacking Marines outgunned. Japanese 150mm howitzers and 120mm mortars were superior to

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

most of the weapons of the landing force. The Marines found the enemy direct fire weapons to be equally deadly, especially the dual-purpose antiaircraft guns and the 47mm tank guns, buried and camouflaged up to their turrets. "The Japs could *snipe* with those big guns," said retired Lieutenant General Donn J. Robertson. The defenders also had the advantage of knowing the ground.

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

Close combat was rough enough; on Iwo Jima the stress seemed endless because for a long time the Marines had no secure "rear area" in which to give shot-up troop units a respite. Kuribayashi's gunners throughout the Motoyama Plateau could still bracket the beaches and airfields. The enormous spigot mortar shells and rocket bombs still came tumbling out of the sky. Japanese infiltrators were drawn to "softer tar-

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 111988



The Japanese 320mm Spigot Mortar

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

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

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

Kenneth L. Smith-Christmas



gets" in the rear. Anti-personnel mines and booby traps, encountered here on a large scale for the first time in the Pacific, seemed everywhere. Exhausted troop units would stumble out of the front lines seeking nothing more than a helmet-full of water in which to bathe and a deep hole in which to sleep. Too often the men had to spend their rare rest periods repairing weapons, humping ammo, dodging major-caliber incoming, or having to repel yet another nocturnal Japanese probe.

General Schmidt planned to attack the Japanese positions in the north with three divisions abreast, the 5th on the left, the 3d (less the 3d Marines) in the center, and the 4th on the right, along the east coast. The drive north officially began on D+5,

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

The Marines soon realized they were now trying to force passage through Kuribayashi's main defensive belt. The well-coordinated attack de-

generated into desperate, small-unit actions all along the front. The 26th Marines on the left, aided by the tanks, gained the most yardage, but it was all relative. The airfield runways proved to be lethal killing zones. Marine tanks were bedeviled by mines and high-velocity direct fire weapons all along the front. On the right flank, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander A. Vandegrift, Jr., son of the Commandant, became a casualty. Major Doyle A. Stout took command of the 3d Battalion, 24th Marines.

During the fighting on D+5, General Schmidt took leave of Admiral Hill and moved his command post ashore from the amphibious force flagship *Auburn* (AGC 10). Colonel Howard N. Kenyon led his



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 110604

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

9th Marines ashore and into a staging area. With that, General Erskine moved the command post of the 3d Marine Division ashore; the 21st Marines reverted to its parent command. Erskine's artillery regiment, the 12th Marines under Lieutenant Colonel Raymond F. Crist, Jr., continued to land for the next several days. Schmidt now had eight infantry regiments committed. Holland Smith still retained the 3d Marines in Expeditionary Troops reserve. Schmidt made the first of several requests to Smith for release of this seasoned outfit. The V Amphibious Corps had already suffered 6,845 casualties.

The next day, D + 6, 25 February, provided little relief in terms of Japanese resistance. Small groups of Marines, accompanied by tanks, somehow made it across the runway,

each man harboring the inescapable feeling he was alone in the middle of a gigantic bowling alley. Sometimes holding newly gained positions across the runway proved more deadly than the process of getting there. Resupply became nearly impossible. Tanks were invaluable; many were lost.

Schmidt this day managed to get on shore the rest of his corps artillery, two battalions of 155mm howitzers under Colonel John S. Letcher. Well-directed fire from these heavier field pieces eased some of the pressure. So did call fire from the cruisers and destroyers assigned to each maneuver unit. But the Marines expressed disappointment in their air support. The 3d Marine Division complained that the Navy's assignment of eight fighters and eight bombers on station

was "entirely inadequate." By noon on this date General Cates sent a message to Schmidt requesting that "the Strategic Air Force in the Marianas replace Navy air support immediately." Colonel Vernon E. Megee, now ashore as Air Commander Iwo Jima and taking some of the heat from frustrated division commanders, blamed "those little spit-kit Navy fighters up there, trying to help, never enough, never where they should be."

In fairness, it is doubtful whether any service could have provided effective air support during the opening days of the drive north. The Air Liaison Parties with each regiment played hell trying to identify and mark targets, the Japanese maintained masterful camouflage, front-line units were often "eyeball-to-